

# AT THE „MARGIN” OF THE ROMANIAN PRE-MODERN SOCIETY. THE JEWS

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**Abstract:** This paper shows the attitudes of Romanian society regarding to the ethic category considered at the social margin. In this case were, for example, the Jews, “excluded”. Towards those “marginalized”, Romanian society in the 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> centuries did not show the “Christian pity”. Its attitudes were argued by the religious convictions ideas and by the transferring clichés from Western Europe to Eastern Europe.

**Keywords:** Social attitudes, Mentality, Pre-modernity, History, Religion.

**R**eligious and social forms framed in the 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> centuries the attitudes, behaviours and feelings that ensured the unity and acknowledgement of the Romanian community members, beyond whom the Other was formed, different by will or by conjuncture. This shapes the concept of *society’s margin*,<sup>1</sup> tolerated or persecuted, depending on the circumstances created by the events of each age. On this margin, if not beyond it, *in the ranks of the excluded*, were those of another religion, who were accepted with difficulty by the orthodox community, if at all: *the Jews* (sometimes called by the Romanians „*ovrei*”, „*jidovi*”).

Representing a quite complex identity, created by the attitudes they give rise to in others,<sup>2</sup> the Jews were constantly positioned at the margin of the Christian world, especially on religious grounds. Clearly, this attitude was fed by the economic success of the Jews, the highly enterprising nature, the endogamy and by the cultural and religious traditions. These helped raise barriers against social and cultural dialogue on both sides, the Christian and the Mosaic world.

Generally, the attitude towards the Jews was developed by the religious reasons, they were always considered “punished by God”. The central episode that argues this “punishment” of Jews is done by the Bible: Judas’s betrayal and the crucifixion of Jesus. In this episode, the Jews themselves sealed their fate, bringing upon themselves God’s “blood curse”.

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<sup>1</sup> Le Goff, 1970.

<sup>2</sup> To see Lebrun, 1967 and Martin, 1998.

This justification of a religious nature was preserved in the discourses and the legal documents of the age. Here is an example from *Cazania* [*Homily*]: “O, vicleşugul Jidovilor și vrăjmași și fără de omenia lor! O rod rău și îndărătnic, căci nice ca pietrele nu sunteți. Catapeteasma bisericii s-a rupt pre mijloc, iar voi nu vă umiliți. Gropile se deschisără și inima voastră nu se obidui, Soarele și luna întunecară și voi nu ați înțeles că iaste Dumnezeu, ce voi, după lucru vostru veți lua și vă veți duce în locul cel de munci, unde-i gătit vouă, împreună cu Iuda și acolo în veci că veți munci pentru faptele voastre ce ați făcut asupra Dumnezeului nostru”<sup>3</sup> [Oh, the treachery of the Jews both enemies and without humanity! Oh, evil and stubborn progeny, for you are less than the stones. The iconostasis has broken in half and you do not humble yourselves. Holes opened in the earth and your heart did not grieve, the Sun and the moon darkened and you did not understand that there is God, and that you will receive as you have done and you will go to the place of torment that is prepared for you, together with Judas and there you will forever toil for your deeds that you perpetrated against our God]. For this reason, the Jews were considered “the most sinful”, and they become “worthy of Hell’s torments”<sup>4</sup>. But, in the ecclesiastic discourse the reminder of the “Jewish sin” can preserve the animosity against the Jews in the consciousness of the Christian. However, even more than that, it occasioned a revitalization of the Christian feelings, rather than the necessity of isolating the Jews.

In the internal acts and documents, the will of the one issuing them was strengthened by threats, which became legal formulas, being quite often employed by the political power, as well as by individuals. Also called curses, these threats sealed the fate of the person who would think of dismissing them: “De veți călca și veți rupe această carte a domniei mele (...) să-i ucidă aici trupul lui și să aibă parte cu Iuda și Arie la un loc”; ”cine se rușinează și rupe și ia aciastă milă și ajutor, fie domn, fie boier, sau orice o mai fi și nu caută la acest hrisov al domniei mele, acela să fie de trei ori blestemat și afurisit de stăpânul domnul nostru Iisus Hristos și de 318 sfinți părinți și să aibă parte de Iuda și cu ceilalți necredincioși”<sup>5</sup> [If you go against or break this missive of my lordship may his body be killed henceforth and may he have the same lot of Judas and Arius]; [who is ashamed and breaks and takes this pardon and aid, be it lord, or boyar, or whatever he may be and he does not pay heed to this charter of my lordship, may he be thrice damned and accursed by Our Lord Jesus Christ and by the 318 Holy Fathers and may he share the fate of Judas and the other nonbelievers]. Therefore, in the eternal life, the guilty will join the betrayers of Christ, repugnant figures for any Christian, and will share the same negative reputation: “În veacul viitor sufletul lui să fie cu Iuda și cu de trei ori blestematul Arie, care au strigat asupra sângelui domnului mântuitorului nostrum Iisus „ia-l și răstignește-l”, sângele lui asupra lor și asupra copiilor lor, aceasta este și <va fi>în veci, amin”<sup>6</sup> [in the ages to come may his soul be with Judas and with

<sup>3</sup> *Cazania*, 87.

<sup>4</sup> Oișteanu, 2001, 181-183.

<sup>5</sup> The same mentions, sometimes identical mentions to many documents of the *DIR*. For example, *DIR*, 1951, doc. no. 110, 105 and doc. no. 87, 161.

<sup>6</sup> *DIR*, 1956, doc. no. 244, 197.

the thrice cursed Arius, who screamed against the blood of our Lord saviour Jesus “take him and crucify him”, his blood be upon them and their children, today and forever, Amen].

“The sin of Judas and Arius”, it itself a *Self-Ethno curse* frequently repeated in the curse formulas. This fact shows that the Romanian society was open to respecting the Christian tradition, kept the Bible texts and the synodal decisions, not to the theological debates.

The curse, in this formula, remains valid for a long time in the Romanian community and the guilty obtain a negative reputation that attracts Christian resentment: “să-l spargă și să fie proclēt și afurisit de 318 sfinți părinți de la Nicheia și să aibă cinstea Iudii și a Ariei”<sup>7</sup> [may he be broken and be anathema and cursed by the 318 Holy from Nicaea, and may he have Judas and Arius privilege”. “Și să fie blestemat în veacul acesta și afurisit de Domnul Dumnezeu și de cei 318 sfinți părinți de Dumnezeu purtători, cari au blestemat pe Arie cu erezia lui și să aibă aceeași parte cu dânsul și cu Iuda, care au răstignit pe Hristos și ca ucigaș de sfinți, să fie supus judecării și focului veșnic și la strașnica judecată să-i fie potrivit însuși sfântul ierarh făcător de minuni Nicolae din. Această poruncă a domniei mele să fie neclintită în anii și neamurile veșnice, așa precum mai sus cu blestem am dat de veste și am întărit aceasta, ca să se păzească neschimbat de cei ce vor fi vlastelini după noi, ci să întărească și să înnoiască”<sup>8</sup> [and may he be damned in this age and cursed by our Lord God and by the 318 Holy Fathers who bear God’s Spirit, who cursed Arius with his heresy and may he have the same fate with him and with Judas, who crucified Christ and as murderer of saints, may he be subjected to the judgement and eternal fire and at the terrible judgement may the Holy Hierarch and miracle worker Nicholas from the Mira of Lichia himself be against him. May this decree of my lordship be unyielding for the ages and people to come, as I above have announced with a curse and strengthened it, so that it may be preserved unchanged by those who will become lords after us, and be strengthened and renewed].

By employing such formulas, the curse remains eternal, and the culprit also gains a bad name that attracts Christian resentment. The “curse of Judas”, itself an ethnic curse, can demonstrate that Romanian society proved its inclination towards respecting Christian tradition, preserved by synod decisions, rather than for theological, explanatory debates.

It is noticed that the sanctions of curses intend to provoke many problems in the life of the guilty and to change his destiny.

Losing the divine protection, the guilty dies physically and also his soul. Naturally, the sanctions imposed by the ruler, decisively delivered, were also used by the latter in the interest of his governing, so as to strengthen central power. Therefore, the recording of the curse in official documents can be an overbidding on the part of the lord to underline the divine nature of his decisions and his duty to exercise his legal prerogatives in the name of divinity.

Next to the fundamental *sin of deicide*, a series of accusations circulated about the Jews, most of them being connected, even remotely, to religious convictions. M. I. Dimont, analyzing in time and in space the status of the Jews, draws the conclusion that the main

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<sup>7</sup> *DIR*, 1951, doc. no. 12, 12.

<sup>8</sup> *DIR*, 1951, doc. no. 266, 295-296.

accusations which had provoked numerous persecutions in the Occident world were the *ritual killing* and the *deseccation of the wafer*.<sup>9</sup> In this reason, Andrei Oișteanu,<sup>10</sup> starts from Romanian traditional culture, added the following accusations: hagiocide (the killer of the holy), iconocide<sup>11</sup> (killer of icons) and infanticide (killer of babies). For example, in the Romanian space were a few cases of ritual murder, but in the 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries, like the occidental models (during the 12<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> centuries). The accusation of ritual killing is an effect of transferring this cliché from Western Europe to Eastern Europe.

In the Romanian extra – Carpathian space, Oișteanu related two cases in the 18<sup>th</sup> century: one at Piatra Neamț (1710), when “five Jews were lynched and twenty-two more were chained”<sup>12</sup>. The second case is more known, this took place in 1726, when four Jews from Onițcani (Orhei) were accused for a ritual murder: killing of a child. Since the victim was a five-year old child, the accused were judged by the ruler of Moldova Voevoda Mihai Racoviță himself.<sup>13</sup> The event drew the attention of the chroniclers of the time, it was related by Ion Neculce,<sup>14</sup> by Pseudo Amiras<sup>15</sup> and by the Ghiculești’ Chronic.<sup>16</sup> It is singular in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and nothing similar was discovered in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. From the recordings of the chroniclers, as well as from other texts, it becomes clear that the event is an instigation that the ruler uses to extort money from the Jews, since he was in great need and he was threatened with relegation („mazilire”). Finally, due to the interventions of the Jews in Constantinople, the Ottoman authorities obtain the release of the four.<sup>17</sup> Most probably, it is a case of the authorities using for the first time in Moldavia a stereotype that was widely spread in Eastern Europe at the time.

There is a single major cultural reference, connected to the icon of the Mother of God, which was stabbed before it was brought to Wallachia by a Jew. Since blood spurted from the icon, the Jew was frightened and he believed in Christ, being baptized “with his whole family”. The legend came with the icon, being then repeated in other works. One should take into account, however, that this tradition is fluid and influenced by the propaganda of various poles of influence.

Other texts also recorded the discrimination of the Jews by the Christians with no emotional overtones.<sup>18</sup> The *Letopisețul Cantacuzinesc*, for example, settled for naming the Jews “pagans”<sup>19</sup>, without detailing the reasons and deeds behind this labelling.

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<sup>9</sup> Dimont, 2004, 244, 255.

<sup>10</sup> Oișteanu, 1998, 205-207.

<sup>11</sup> Oișteanu, 1998, 204, 205.

<sup>12</sup> Oișteanu, 1998, 210.

<sup>13</sup> Oișteanu, 1998, 211.

<sup>14</sup> Neculce, 1987, 315.

<sup>15</sup> *Cronica anonimă*, 101.

<sup>16</sup> *Cronica Ghiculeștilor*, 134.

<sup>17</sup> I. Neculce, who belief in the reality of the fact. He seen sad because the Prince did not punished the Jews, 1987, 315). As the chronicle written about the Jews shows that Neculce known this stereotype.

<sup>18</sup> To see the perspective of Castaldini, 2010, 35u.

<sup>19</sup> *Letopisețul Cantacuzinesc*, 129.

Even in the public acts or in the judicial acts of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the Jews were mentioned in the curses, these were the old Jews (who are in the testamentary texts).<sup>20</sup> However, their threat remained present, and thus the Jews, as well as the other non – Christian populations had to be kept at the society’s margin, the attitudes which will be develop in the social discourse. This positioning, though, can be corrected. For example, on the 12 September 1704 Misail the Mitropolitan of Suceava and bishops from Roman, Rădăuți and Huși, and the boyars attest the tax exemption of the Moldavian monasteries dedicated to the Holy Sepulchre, and he also mentions the bequests in the shape of guest houses for foreigners who “cu mijlocul aceștia milostenii pururea se împlânzescu acele fără credință neamuri și se biruescu vicleșugurile ereticilor și să păzește casa Dumnezeuului lui Iacob”<sup>21</sup> [by means of this benefaction all those faithless peoples are always tamed and the ploys of the heretics are undone and the house of Jacob’s God is guarded].

Beyond the negative image of the Jew, built for religious reasons, the social marginalization of the Jews was quite obvious, systematically organized, but without the negative affective component, as it was sometimes as in the West. This impression is argued in the juridical texts, such as, the following aspects:

– „cine vrea să fie preot nu contează a cui rudă este, doar la evrei”<sup>22</sup> [who wants to be a priest, it does not matter whose kin he is, only for Jews];

– „când se pedepsește cel ce a rănit pe altul (....) ce zice vrăciul vom crede pentru rană, măcar de nu s-ar jura sau de ar fi vrăciul evreu, jidov sau de altă lege”<sup>23</sup> [when he who has harmed another is punished, we shall have believe the words of the healer about the wound, even though he may not swear upon it or if the healer be a Jew, Hebrew or of another faith];

– „ovreianul va veni după greșeală în credința creștinească și se va boteza acela nu se va certa nicidecum sau se va certa pe acea greșeală asta după cum voiește judecătorul”<sup>24</sup> [the Jew will come after the error to the Christian faith and he will be baptized and he will not be scolded at all or he will be scolded for that error as the judge sees fit];

– „ovreiuul dacă se va boteza se va face preot”<sup>25</sup> [the Jew if he will be Christian baptized he can be a priest]; „ovreiuul dacă va veni după greșală în credința creștinească și se va boteza nu se va certa”<sup>26</sup> [the Jew if he became Christian and he will be baptized, he will not be punished].

That, generally, the “biblical Jew” the theologians refer to was not mistaken for the “real Jew” is proven by the fact that in the 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> centuries “nici o informație de epocă nu descrie persecuții în masă ale evreilor sau pogromuri, în acest sens lumea medievală

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<sup>20</sup> The first community of the Jews is formed in the time of Prince of Wallachia Constantin Brâncoveanu (1688-1714). The Jews were numerous in the Romanian Principates, as the foreign travels noticed. To see Castaldini, 2010, 36, 41-46.

<sup>21</sup> *Documente privitoare la istoria orașului Iași*, 2000, doc. no. 275, 233.

<sup>22</sup> *Îndreptarea legii*, Glava No. 93, 126.

<sup>23</sup> *Îndreptarea legii*, Glava No. 249, 249.

<sup>24</sup> *Îndreptarea legii*, Glava No. 369, 347.

<sup>25</sup> *Îndreptarea legii*, Glava No. 78, 115.

<sup>26</sup> *Îndreptarea legii*, Glava No. 369, 347.

românească deosebindu-se net de aceea vest europeană<sup>27</sup> [no information from the age describes mass persecutions of the Jews or pogroms, the Romanian medieval world being pointedly different from the Western European in that respect].

Thus, the exclusion of the Jews from the community was neither complete, nor final. By receiving Christian baptism, their Jewish origin was no longer an impediment to the integration of the novice in the community.

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<sup>27</sup> *Îndreptarea legii*, Glava No. 180.