

# THE ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE OF THE JEWS IN CONSTANȚA

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## Abstract

*The Jews in Constanța played an active role in the cultural and economic development of the city, complying with the suggestions and taking advantage of the opportunities of the urban community and official policy. From the late XIX-th century until around 1930, the number of the Jewish community members rose – both in number and as economic power. Although the commercial activity and banking are at core, the real estate should not be overlooked, as they left numerous traces in the public and private space of the city.*

*The specific feature of the Jewish religion has led to building synagogues, schools, public baths, and a cemetery. The social status of merchants and bankers, intellectuals (lawyers, journalists, doctors, chemists, teachers, historians, librarians, architects, painters, actors, etc.) required and adequate representation of both the professional space and the residential one. The Jews have contributed to building the historic fund of Constanța; today, a number of representative buildings became monuments of architecture.*

*It is an unfortunate fact that the present Jewish community of Constanța has 59 members only, which included those of Mangalia - many of them had been assimilated and only a few purely Jewish ethnics. In these conditions, the problem of protecting the architectural heritage is a task beyond the current influence of community. The saving of this Jewish architectural heritage, found on the Romanian soil, requires extensive inter-institutional programs that can identify technical and financial means.*

**Keywords:** *Architectural heritage, the Jewish community in Constanța, synagogues.*

## 1. The history of Jewish community in Constanța

### 1.1. How Jews settled in Constanța, rising and dissolution of the community

During the ancient times, the Greek colonies on the Black Sea coast included plenty of Jews. At the end of the 4th century, the Greek colony of Tomis, there was a Greek funerary inscription that mentioned the name of a wine merchant Alexandrian, most likely a Jew – "*Seppon, wine merchant of Alexandria.*"<sup>1</sup> It can be assumed that there were Hellenized Jews among the Alexandrian people in Tomis. It is however possible that Jews lived in the ancient Tomis prior to the IV-th century. "*The conclusion of the classicist Carol Blum regarding the missionary work of Apostle Andrew in the Pont shows a suggestive Jewish presence in this space: « Without a prior existence of the Jewish colonies on the coast of Pontus*

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*Euxinus, Andrew apostolate would not have been possible ».*<sup>12</sup> The actual settlement of the Jews in Dobrogea dates from the middle ages, while developing the commercial road linking Constantinople and Krakow, and when Jews merchants dominated the trade between the Bulgarian and Danubian lands. *"Their role in this trade was noticed by Historian Nicolae Iorga, who wrote in The History of Romanian Trade: « it was only the Jews who were passing on these roads before 1480, coming straight from Constantinople »."*<sup>3</sup>

Between late antiquity and the modern Romanian state constitution, medieval *Constanța* or *Kustendje*, was a modest village. It may be implied that the Jew traders had contacts with the locality in that period. They are known records of foreign travelers through the Muslim Dobrogea that mention the existence of Jews in localities as Silistra, Callatis (Mangalia), Babadag, Macin, living together with Christians and Muslims.

The Ashkenazi Jews came to Constanța during the Russian-Turkish War (1806-1812), accompanying the Russian army as suppliers. The withdrawal of Turks left open a prosperous business that offered outstanding prospects and opportunities. In 1828, Ashkenazi Jewish colony was founded in Constanța. Shortly thereafter, in 1830, a second Jewish colony is established in Constanța, the Sephardic Jews from Anatolia.<sup>4</sup> It is almost certain that Sephardic Jews, as Turkish citizens, had carried out previous business in Kustendje (Constanța).

*Ion Ionescu de la Brad*, traveling to Dobrogea in 1850, provides important data about the ethnicity of the area. From 15,764 families registered in the districts of *Tulcea, Isaccea, Măcin, Hârșova, Baba* (Silistra County), *Küstendje, Mangalia, Balcic, Bazargic* (Varna County), he also identifies 119 Jewish families.

The Jews in Dobrogea and the ones living in Constanța are also mentioned by *Dr. Camille Allard*, who stated that the mission supervised by engineer *Leon Lalanne*, who was building the Constanța-Râșova way in 1855, attracted besides Romanians *"all peoples from the Orient"* - Russians, Kazakhs, Turks, Bulgarians, Armenian, Jews.

In a well-documented paper, *Al.P.Arbores*<sup>5</sup> draws attention to the powerful movements of people and reconfiguration of their territorial distribution in the 18th and 19th century, due to the political will, wars, and redistribution of territories: colonization, withdrawals. The Turks were compelled to leave the territories, colonizations are made with Germans, Gagauzs, Tatars, Bulgarians, Macedonians, *Ashkenazi Jews*; after 1878, many Romanians come to Dobrogea, mainly shepherds from Transylvania.

Thus, *"in 1856, Constanța is described as having not more than three thousand inhabitants, of whom there were 500 Greek merchants; Mangalia had 1,000 inhabitants Bulgarian Muslims ...In 1857 Constanța had 4,000 inhabitants according to H.O.Killmeyer"*<sup>6</sup>, and Tulcea, in 1863, had 22,000 inhabitants, of whom 1,500 were Jews.<sup>7</sup>

At the same time, there in were 179,000 people in the entire Dobrogea, of whom 19,750 were living in the Constanța-Medgidia zone and in the neighboring villages, along with about 35,000 settlers Tatars and Circassians. It should be noted that Jews were numbered with the natives.

As shown by the registers at the City Hall of Constanța, the population consisted of 5,203 inhabitants in 1880: 1,804 Tatars, 1,543 Greeks, 410 Turks, 348 Bulgarians, 279 Romanians, 234 Jews, 175 Armenians, 37 Austrians, 32 Britons, 29 Germans, 12 Hungarians, 8 Russians, 3 Serbs, 289 other nationalities.

The December 1894 Census recorded for Constanța a number of 10,419 inhabitants, including 2,519 Romanians, 2,460 Greek, 2,202 Muslims (Turks and Tatars), 1,060 Bulgarians, 855 Jews, 559 Armenians, 332 Germans, 181 Hungarians, 109 Italians, 51 French, 45 Britons, 33 Russians, 5 Dutch, 4 Serbs, 4 Montenegrins.

In *Ioan Georgescu's* studies regarding the growth of Constanța population, by ethnies, for over a period of 18 years (1880-1897), it is found that, during 1895-1897, *121 Jews* settled in Constanța.<sup>8</sup> After a researcher contemporary to the era, *Gregory Gr. Dănescu*, there were "the Greek, the Jew, and the Armenian, who are fussing among this crowd, searching for a way to make some money".<sup>9</sup>

In 1905, the number of inhabitants in Constanța was 15,777, including 9,165 Romanians, 2,327 Greeks, 1,315 Muslims (Turks and Tatars), 831 Bulgarians, 812 Jews, 610 Armenians, 309 Germans, 217 Italians, 105 Britons, 95 French, 1,306 other nationalities.<sup>10</sup>

In 1916, as a direct consequence of the development of Constanța into the most important Romanian Black Sea port, the city's population grew from 33,918 inhabitants, of whom 21,971 Romanians, 2,815 Muslims (Turks and Tatars), 2,326 Greeks, 1,728 Bulgarians, 1,092 Jews, 1,002 Armenians, 649 Britons, 642 Germans, 518 Italians, 175 French, 1,000 other nationalities.<sup>11</sup>

Romania entered the war in 1916, aiming for state unity; there were many Jews in Constanța who had joined the Romanian troops deployed on the Dobrudja front, where the Third Army was stationed. Among the young people registered for the quota in 1916 were: *Cohan Iano, Terchel Avram, Sapira Itic, Bercovici Dragobert, Hazani Samuel, Leon Avram Cohn, Avram Iosif Itic Gheldman, Marcu Adolf Famblat, Jaques Moise Rosanis, Jacob David Isac, Saul Terchel Lazar, Marcus Bercu Bercovici, David Nisim Gabai, Ruben Solomon, Naftali Menasi Avram, Jacob Isac Delarena, Itac Mendel, Isac Ilie Holdstein, Israil Iosif Samovici* and others.<sup>12</sup> There were killed Jews also in the battle.

After the formation of the Romanian national state at the end of 1918, and during the inter-war period, the status of Jews in Romania changed. The Jewish social rights were recognized by granting them the Romanian citizenship, thus achieving the transition to a modern democracy.

As a result, the number of Jews increased. As shown in the 1928 Census, in Constanța there is a population of 72,462 inhabitants, of whom 49,102 Romanians, 3,666 Muslims (Turks and Tatars), 6,266 Greeks, 2,135 Jews, 3,751 Armenians, 7,542 other nationalities.<sup>13</sup>

However, the alarming political situation that developed in Germany in the '30s, leads to a decreased number of Jews. Thus, at the census in 1930, approx. 1,667 Jews were registered in Constanța.

After the National-Socialist German Workers Party took over Germany in January 1933, the Jews held in Constanța, on April 5, 1933, a protest "against anti-Semitic excesses in Germany. At seven p.m., a religious service was officiated at the Israelite Temple in Rosetti Street and the Spanish Temple in Mircea

*Street. Almost all of the Jewish population of Constanța took part in these religious services. There were no speeches held."*<sup>14</sup>

At the end of the inter-war period, in 1938-1940, which corresponds to the dictatorship of *King Carol II*, the Romanian authorities are powerless vis-à-vis the political events on the continent, which will decisively influence the internal politics. The Jews will be again taken through the political marginalization and social exclusion. This period is carefully analyzed in the volume of the Historian *Carol Iancu - Jews in Romania, 1919-1938. From emancipation to marginalization*, published in Bucharest by the Hasefer Publishing House in 2000.

It is evident that the Jews in Constanța shared the fate of the co-religionists in Romania. It should be mentioned that the Romanian authorities allowed the Jews to organize themselves for emigration. The fact is evidenced in a secret note – "*private-confidential*", submitted on July 22, 1938 issued by the Security Police to the Prefecture of Constanța: "*Please take measures so that the indicators put up at all premises of the neozionist and Zionist centers should also include the purpose 'emigration center' to explain the activity of these centers to the public opinion.*"<sup>15</sup>

Since 1940, the Romanian government has adopted a series of measures to counteract a possible aggression coming from the surging of the hostilities in Europe. The start of the war with the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941, turned the city and port of Constanța into the main target for the Soviet aviation and navy.

During this period, the Jews, victims of the anti-Semitic laws, were still assisted in their efforts to emigrate and Romania remained "*the most important place of illegal Jews embarking. They left for Palestine on the ships from the ports of Constanța, Sulina, Tulcea, and Brăila.*"<sup>16</sup>

According to the existing data in the archives, the Jewish emigration through the port of Constanța took place with difficulty and sometimes disastrous but rhythmic between 1940 and 1944.

*"There were several ships with the Jewish emigrants: 9 large vessels (Darien II, Struma, Milka, Maritza, Belasitza, Kasbek, Bülbül, Mefküre, and Morina) - four of them (Darien II, Milka, Maritza, and Belasitza) with two exits from the port - and 15 small vessels; the number of Jews who came from Romania as above can be documented as of 4,846."*<sup>17</sup>

During the post - war time, the change of political regime, reorganization and restructuring of the social-economic environment and the formation of the state of Israel were the decisive factors that led to an increased immigration flow from Romania; in other words, the Jewish Community in Constanța now numbers (2011) *59 members* only, including those in Mangalia - many of them had been assimilated and only a few were ethnic. The President of the *Jewish Community in Constanța* is Professor *Carol Friedman, PhD*, and its headquarters is at 3 Sarmisegetuza Street, municipality of Constanța.



Image 1: The headquarters of the Jewish Community of Constanța – 3 Sarmisegetusa Street.

## 1.2. The Jews involvement in the economic life of Constanța

Trading was the main activity of the Jews in Constanța, in a close competition with Greeks and Armenians. The Jews in Constanța played an active role in the cultural and economic development of the city, complying with the suggestions and taking advantage of the opportunities of the urban community and official policy. For this reason, there are many recordings about their work in the archives of municipality - requests, participation in auctions, award of contracts – as well as in the media of that time.

On July 16, 1879, *Meer Feinstein* rented a place in the Ovidiu Square, Traian Street area, near Ione's coffee house. During the meeting under number 157 in August 1879, the City Council approves the lease, for six francs a month, *"for a barren place, located between the coffee house (Ione), the property of Mrs. Rachel Levenson, and the State warehouses, where currently the soldiers' barracks of regiment number 5 are."*<sup>18</sup>

On February 24, 1881, *David Birnfeld*, who did not exactly comply with the contractual obligations, won the auction regarding the placement of 50 street lamps; consequently, the City Council held a meeting on March 26, 1881, to discuss this issue:

*"The Council meeting on March 26, 1881, presided by Mayor Panait Holban, in the presence of the deputy Hafuz Regep and counselors George Caridia, Ion H. Stoian, Odiseea Despoti, Gebrail Frenchian, Zat Celebi (Abdul Selim and Solomon Japhet were absent) the non-compliance of entrepreneur David Birnfeld were examined, in terms of the city lighting contract."*<sup>19</sup>

In 1888, we will find *David Birnfeld* again, an important tinsmith of the city, coming with a new offer to provide for the street lamps.<sup>20</sup>

In 1890, *David Lazar* in Constanța asked the City Hall to register his tinsmithery firm.

In 1894, at the request of school directors, authorities bought *"six bowls of zinc with several taps, closed with lids and placed on basins"* as an order placed directly with *Solomon Israil*, tinsmith, for 60 lei/piece.<sup>21</sup>

In a document dated April 9, 1880, signed *Hafuz Regep*, which gives the list of people holding spaces (timber stores) rented from the English Company, we find among others the Jews *Isac Faion*, *Isac Vaisimberc*, and *Luis Moscovici*; a second list includes homes rented by *Enri Harris*, director of the company; among tenants, *Enri Senac* and *A.Licen*.<sup>22</sup>

As for the arrangement of baths, a committee is established – made up of *Agop Tomasian*, *Dr. Georgescu*, *Solomon Yaphet*, *Bohor Seni*, *Vasile Murelli*, and *M.Miloşev*, to collect the necessary amounts for their planning; *Farul Constanţei* newspaper informed the public about this committee.<sup>23</sup>

*"The glamorous life of the city is more animated during the carnival season of 1890-1891, through the masked ball oorganized by Simon Luttvah."*<sup>24</sup>

In 1891, *Perla Grimberg* requests and receives approval *"to open a hotel without alcoholic drinks and a pub in this city, on Tetis Street."*<sup>25</sup>

In 1894, *Perla Grimberg*, whom we know is the entrepreneur of *Concordia Hotel*, requests and is approved, to use the salons of this hotel to organize masked balls during the future carnival.<sup>26</sup>

During the summer of 1893, in the Independence Square, *"Conrat Dihler put up... « an American target with weapons », thus anticipating, regardless of season and weather, the passion of locals for crackers ... In the same area, in 1893, there was the Shop of Ready-made Clothes of Maurice Hornstein ... Since the spring of 1914, 4 Ovidiu Street, the restaurant and Paradis garden, under the direct supervision of I. Langberg ..."*<sup>27</sup>

*"In October 1893, David Şapira asked for an « authorization to open in this city, at 6 Ovidiu Street an establishment named Şaff Saloon, a Cafe Chantant and also to hold a masked ball during the carnival »."*<sup>28</sup>

*Paul Goldştein* in Sulina, asked Constanţa Court to enter in the Register of individual firms, his company for trading, agency for ships and transport. The Court issued the document.<sup>29</sup>

*Dumitru Giorfia and Filip Bercovici*, both from Constanţa, asked Constanţa Court to enter in the Register of the companies the companies trading raw and processed animal skins, located in Constanţa.<sup>30</sup>

In a table compiled by Constanţa City Hall in April 1930, the names of those who own a beach lot or a trading site on the *Trei Papuci* beach, we find Bernhard Fridman, with a rent of 2,500 lei and other 500 lei.<sup>31</sup>

*"Constanţa was hosting a great shop with souvenirs, oriental gifts, glasses, jewelry, silverware, clocks, located on Carol Street (now, Avenue Tomis), whose owner was P. Şapira « Provider of the Royal Court » and one of the outstanding representatives of the Jewish Community in the city."*<sup>32</sup>

*"... a member of the Şapira's, Pincus, was the President of the Israelite Community in 1910, on whose name he asked the permission to (re) build the Temple on C.A.Rosetti Street, « Provider of the Royal Court », he already had in 1897 a famous clock and jewelry shop at Carol Street number 46 (then) at the ground floor of a three-storey building; on the southern fire wall of the building, which can be seen*



from afar, front view, the passers-by were and still are informed about the name, reputation and his abilities (artistically, technical, marketing).

The meetings in this area of the city, as well the location of the points of interest, were held in relation to Șapira – as shown in 1903, in Ovidiu magazine – « its show windows charm you stop in front of them, no matter how fast you are walking ». After opening two other stores - one in the Ovidiu Square and other for « an easier access for the upper district of the city », near Lascaridi's shop, Picus Șapira gives a clock to the City Hall, as a gift, that was showing the exact time from its tower to the people passing by it." <sup>33</sup>



Image 2: Constanța - the southern fire wall of the great building store of P. Șapira.



Image 3: Constanța – Carol Street in 1953.  
(currently Tomis Avenue).



Image 4: Constanța – epoch image.  
Independenței Square  
(currently Ovidiu Square).

Some Jews had settled in the city and were working as private doctors or pharmacists. Alexandru I. Heldenbusch, a famous pharmacist, schooled in Bucharest and Paris, founded in Constanța the first "medical drugstore" in the province of Dobrogea. <sup>34</sup>

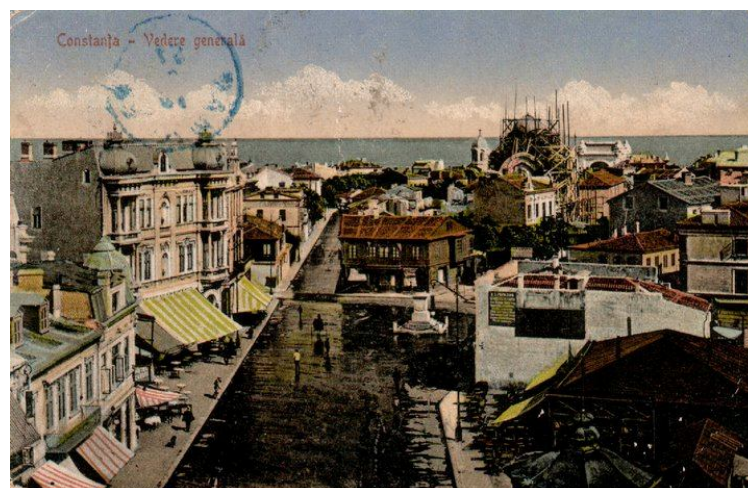


Image 5: Constanța – cards showing views in the peninsula at the beginning of the 20th century.

At the end of the 19th century, Constanța began to develop as a port to the Black Sea and the role of the City Council became very important. In this context, as an eloquent evidence of Jewish involvement and co-interest in the development and modernization of the most important Romanian city of the sea, many Jews became counselors.

Thus, at the Council meeting on July 1, 1880, names like *Bohor Seni*<sup>35</sup> was mentioned, and at the one on September 9, 1880, *Solomon Japhet*.<sup>36</sup> On December 15, 1888, the Jew *Moise Rosanis* was appointed for the City Council of Constanța. At that time, the Mayor was *Panait Holban* (1880-1891).

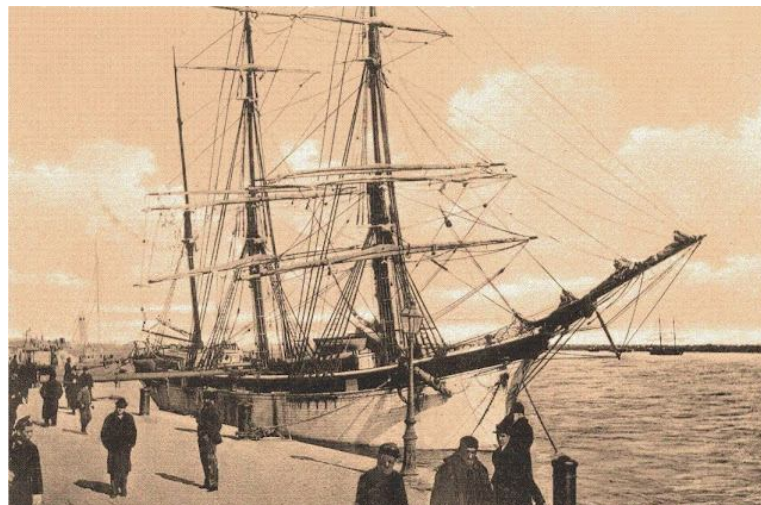


Image 6: Port of Constanța in 1900.

### 1.3. The Jewish institutions and organizations in Constanța

In the year 1896, the *Vestry of Israelite Community in Constanța* was founded. The minutes including its setting up specifies that, for the purpose of "managing the interests of the Israelite



*Community in Constanța, the undersigned Israelite inhabitants in this city elected today, September 18, 1896 (5657) a Vestry, made up of the following eight co-religionists, as follows: M. Bujes - President, Ilie Avram - vice-President, L. Hazan - cashier, H.S. Koldengreber - vice-president, Moise Simon, Avram Rosenberg, Z. Weinstok, Solomon Farcas and four deputies: I. Goldstein, M. Baratz, I. Bercovici, B. Bercovici."*<sup>37</sup>

The first article of the Statute contained the mission of the Ashkenazi rite Israelite Community: "to care for the maintenance of its religious, cultural, and charitable establishments, possibly to establish new philanthropic settlements."<sup>38</sup> Article 11 stated "the powers and duties of the Vestry"<sup>39</sup>, which are, *inter alia*, "to provide charity aid for those without means or help, coming from other places, to help them relocate elsewhere, and take part in philanthropy and humanitarian objectives in the Romanian Homeland."<sup>40</sup>

Students and young Jews, animated by the Zionist spirit taking off, founded in January 1900, Zionist reading circles; they are probably the authors of the "*Plecăm*" publication, issued in June of the same year. Later, on July 21, 1906, "*Juna*" was founded in Constanța - a society that intended to help immigrants who were leaving for Palestine.



Image 7: He-Ḥaluts Zionist members in Poland and Russia, on the road to Palestine, Constanța, Romania, 1923 (Ghetto Fighters Museum / Israel).



Image 8: Navons family - Sephardic Jews having connections with Bulgaria, at Ernestine pledge (third from right), Constanța, Romania, 1919 (Centropa).

In 1921 the Sacred Society of the Rite Spanish Jewish - *Bekur-Hulim Rehița* is established, which will include: President - *Ilie Seni* (a well-known name in Constanța from *Baruch Seni* - local counselor since 1879 and *Isaac A. Seni* - the procurator of *J.G.A. Alleon*, (a street was named after him for several decades), Vice President - *Haim Benun*, secretary - *Silberstein Hoffuer*, censors - *Ilie Israel* and *Jacques Gabay*, members - *David Levy*, *I. Benjamin*, *Albert Veisi* and *Iosef Franzi*.<sup>41</sup>

The elections organized in the Western Rite Israelite Community of Constanța, under the leadership of an Interim Committee comprising *A. Companitz* (President), *Calmis Ghinsberg* (Vice-President), *M. Lipovici* (treasurer), and *A. Șapira* and *Osias Weinstock* (members),<sup>42</sup> led to the election of a new leadership, on May 7, 1922. The new leadership of the Israelite Community of Western Rite was made up of: President - *Baruch Grünberg*, Vice-Presidents - *Albert Theiler*, and attorney *C. Ghinsberg*, Honorary Secretary - *Albert Herscovici*, Treasurer - *P. Strumscki*, auditor - *M. Auerbach*, President of the Temple -

*Pincu Schapira*, President of the Sacred House - *A. Companeitz*, President of the School Committee - *Dr. L. Rosenblat*, with members *Z. Kafrisen*, *D. Cupcik*, lawyer *H. Leibovici*, *S. Peritovici*, *B. Edelstein*, *L. M. Ghinsberg*, *H. Spigler*, *S. Pincovici*, *M. Lipovici*, *H. Birnfeld*, *Leon Ghinsberg*, *B. Ginsberg*, *M. Bercovici*, *M. Militeanu*, *S. Wind*, *W. Schwartz*.<sup>43</sup>

*The Spanish rite Israelite Community* elected its new Management Committee on April 1, 1922. The President of this community was elected in the person of *Iosef Jerusalmy*, Vice-Presidents - *Salom Tuvy*, and *Iontov Baruch*, treasurer - *Jacques H. Menahim*, Secretaries - *Costică Jerusalmy*, *Bension Matatia*, and *Isac Delareina-Gabaym*, auditor - *Angelo Seni*, and members - *Jacob Navon* *Albert Viesi*, and *Jacob Farin*.<sup>44</sup>

As a proof for good understanding between the local authorities and the leadership of the two Jewish communities in Constanța, the requests of these communities in terms of being awarded funds for maintaining the israelite school were honored in 1925.<sup>45</sup>

In 1939, the *Jewish Ashkenazi Community* had two schools in Constanța - one for boys and one for girls, while the *Jewish Sephardic Community* had only one.

At its beginning, the Jewish cult organization was only limited to the authorization of functioning for synagogues and houses of prayer, and the one for Rabbis and their assistants. In compliance with the *Law for the general policy of cults*, published in the Official Gazette no. 9 on April 22, 1928, the Jews were recognized as a historical confession, which will later compile an operational status.

Currently, the Jewish Community of Constanța relations with the local administration are good.

A number of Jewish companies, most from Israel, were encouraged to participate in the economic life of the city.

## **2. The architectural heritage of the Jewish Community in Constanța**

### **2.1. The Jewish district and the Jewish activity in the real estate sector**

The presentation of Constanța that the historian Doina Păuleanu wrote in the middle of 19th century provided important data related to space location and relation with the contemporary landmarks:

*"The city was included in the peninsula part, starting from where the current local post Office is (today, the Museum of Folk Art, o.n.) to near the port. Oborul used to be where the City Hall is now. The Girls' Lycee 'Domnița Ileana' is now on Traian Street, where used to be the manor, the caimacan's residence – the Sultan's military mandate ... The city was fortified with fortress walls, whose gates were located about where the Greek Church and the Girls' Lycee are now. The central part of the peninsula was the commercial district - around 1835-1840, the Armenians had their neighborhood, Cealic Mahale, towards the Dudaia; where their church is today, the Jews toward the Center, the Greeks to the port, the Turks, Romanians and Bulgarians about where Sturza Street is now. Around 1850, the town look changed, those who had returned from other parts of the Dobrogea (where they had fled during the enemy invasions) had built new houses. The best looking house in Constanța in 1850 was the one belonging to the Jew merchant Bohor Seni in Traian Street, formerly Socacgi Mahmudie. It was the first house with a storey, a real luxury at that time. Constanța had two streets back then: Mahmudie Socacgi (now, Traian Street) and Sultan Hamam Socagi (Carol Street)."*<sup>46</sup>

The commercial buildings of the old Jewish neighborhood are today included in the protected areas classified in the List of Historical Monuments / 2010 in two urban sites: the *Central Commercial Area* and the *Peninsular Zone of Constanța*.

In terms of the sustained and spirited activity of the Jews in the real estate sector, this was also taking place in the central area perimeter, with a large number of requests for rentals, building and demolition permits, all recorded in the archives. They help us have an exact delimitation of the locality inhabited by Jews and the location of each of them. In the documents, when a property is bounded, the neighbors are also listed.

Their examination leads to a clear conclusion about the Jewish district: in Constanța, the Jews were living together in good neighbourhood relations with the other ethnic groups in the population of the city, namely Turks, Greeks, Romanians, Armenians and even Bulgarians.

In March 1879, *Solomon E. Manguli*, residing at 533 Elizabeth Avenue, wishes to have some repairs carried out inside his house, and the engineer *I. Teodoreini* finds compatibility between personal interests and those of the City Hall he represents.<sup>47</sup>

On April 27, 1879, another Jew, *David Michel*, requests and then receives an approval to build a kiosk on the seashore.<sup>48</sup>

*Aspasia Slafcevici* in Constanța sold to the Jewish Community Constanța, through *Isac Faian*, *Seni* and others, a building on a 1,180 square meter land, located in Mircea Street, for 8,000 new lei. The act has been authenticated and entered in the Constanța Court records on June 17, 1884.<sup>49</sup>

On March 19, 1890, *Avram Prezenti* requested, through his procurator Dimitrie Teohari, an authorization for a shop with a door and tall windows facing the street.

In 1894, *Alice Wegener* was given the permission to build, at 11 Pescarilor Street, a house carefully and correctly proportioned.<sup>50</sup>

In 1896, *Iacob Zucher*, received authorization for a two-storey house, simply built in Grivița Street, with the ground floor meant for commercial activities.<sup>51</sup>

At the same time, around 1900, the *Birnfeld* and *Gruber* houses are mentioned in the Traian Street.<sup>52</sup>

The Alleon family in Constanța was one of the Jewish families a part of the legend. *“The father, Antoine, friend with Mihail Kogălniceanu in Paris, a Jewish banker with illuminist ideas, morally and financially supported the Romanians leaders during the 1848 Revolution, the son of Jean Gerard Amede, residing in Constantinople, came to Constanța between 1880-1881; here, he bought and then built a number of buildings, which do not cover the surface of an entire neighborhood area, which had been assigned to him, along with « the constructions erected on it, between the Traian Street in the east, V. Canarache alley to the west, Sulmona Street to the north and Petru Rareș Street to the south », next to*

*the Gambeta Hotel in the Ovidiu Square ... The impact of Alleen's personality on the strongly coloured structure of town made durable impressions in the Jewish district - charming neighborhoods in close proximity to the English one, which sometimes is confused with - where a street with original buildings and a similar history was called Alleen for a while, Synagogue and then C.A.Rosetti ...*

*Gheorghe I. Auneanu reminds twice the young Alleen in his evocations, a rare fact, only meant for the chosen ones: Former, in connection with Nicolache Macri, a port captain before and after 1878, « an outstanding intellectual, very much loved among the townspeople and with connections to Constantinopoli » (On the same site where his magnificent house had been, naturally demolished, the Pariano house was built rose after WWI - Ion Jalea Museum today ...), and our character was « a great banker » and latter, in connection with the street that had been called after him for a while « where there were old plank-made houses; between 1882 and 1883, the houses of Aleon began to be built »..”<sup>53</sup>*

In 1881, the banker *Jean Gerard Alleen* wished to build a house thus brought the Greek architect *Pelopidas D.Couppa* from Constantinople. The piece of land he chose was at 7 C.A.Rosetti Street; the construction began in 1882 and was finished in 1884.

On October 6, 1882, an approval was required for building a construction with basement, ground floor and first floor, from *Alleen's* procurator, *Isac A.Seni*. The plans accompanying the application present an elegant building with Doric columns to support the entrance entablement. The four windows, symmetrically placed on either side of the entrance, had embossed platbands.

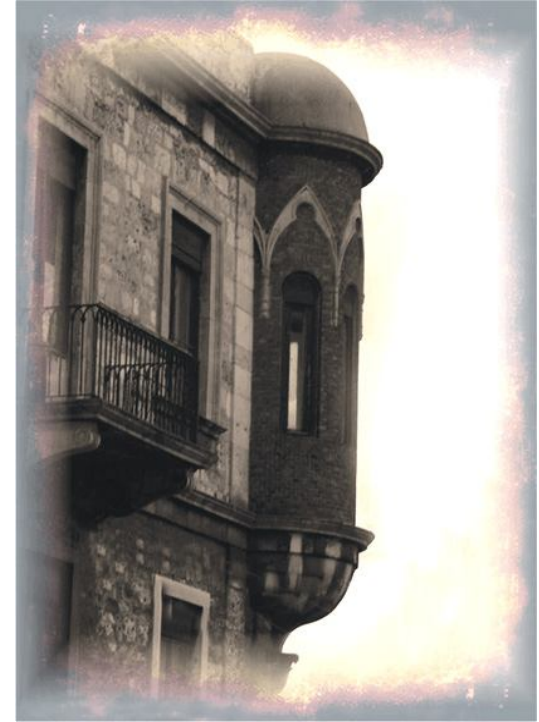
On March 25, 1883, changes have been made to the plan – the building was multi-staged and enlarged, the porch disappeared and was reduced to one bearing column in each corner of the main facade in C.A. Rosetti Street. The two columns at the door and all the windows narrow columns turned into rectangular platbands. There will be five windows, under which cornice capitals leaning against the wall are found, reminding of the original column. The facade towards the sea extends to both levels with one stone bay having simple rectangular windows.

On August 29, 1883, the blueprint appears (it helps complete the construction), in an eclectic style with Victorian and Gothic Venetian elements. So does the suspended tower. The building that now includes a semi-basement, mezzanine floor, a floor, partial loft, is made of stone, with two main facades. The facade facing the V.Canarache Alley has an asymmetrical composition; on the left side, there is a corner balcony (bowindow) in the Venetian style, and on the right, a loft with fronton.

At that time, the building was called the *English House*.

Currently, *Alleen House*, a historical monument included in the List of Historical Monuments /2010 under position No. 548, code CT-II-I-02837, is taken by S.N.C.F.R. Constanța, being used for offices and company housing.





*Image 9: Alleon House – vintage pictures.*



*Image 10: Alleon House - 2008, 2010.*



Image 11: Alleen House – detail, 2011.

In March 1905, *Alexandru Logaride* (he belonged to the grain traders group, alongside *Baruh Seni* and others, whom *George I. Auneanu* had found in Constanța, on his and Romanian administration's arrival, in November 1878) required the demolition of the building held in the Independence Square, which had previously belonged to *Bercovici*.<sup>54</sup>

*The Leizer Hazen house in Mircea cel Mare Street was built in 1882: "... a house that has its long side on Mircea Street and the short one in depth. Four simple windows and then three similar doors, will solve the construction with no hassle and suits itself to the intended purpose: the trade and the tiled roof in two gradients communicate an extreme simplicity, next to parsimony; the building has been preserved until today<sup>55</sup>; in 1924, we have here the Halcanssi perfume shop<sup>56</sup>."*<sup>57</sup>

In *Constanța and Techirghiol: 1924, illustrated guide for visitors*, authors, Theodor Ionescu and I.N.Duployen mentioned the presence in the building (same building or next) of a French laundry, perhaps a sign of neighboring with the French Street.<sup>58</sup> Later on, the *Restaurant and "Dobrogea" Summer Garden* opened here.



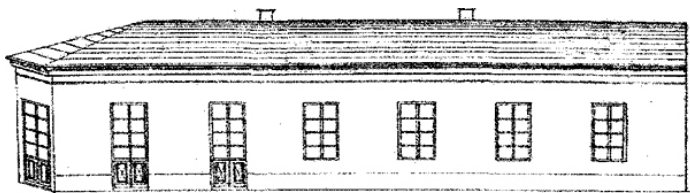


Image 12: Leizer Hazen House.



Image 13: The Mircea cel Bătrân Street – The Restaurant and Dobrogea' Summer Garden (across the street from the Sephardic Temple).

On the left side of *Mircea cel Mare* Street, there is a series of houses built in the late 19th century and the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup>, for double purpose: a ground floor for business and superior floor for living. The neoclassical structure, adapted to the Balkans area, can be easily noticed in the layout floor, not altered by the intervention of the successive owners who have enlarged and (possibly) increased the number of access doors facing the street, at the level of required alignment.

In 1895, *D.Bujues*, probably the father of *M.Buj(u)es* (the future President of the Israelite Community, who will initiate the building of the synagogue in C.A.Rosetti Street, in 1907), requested an authorization to open, at 1 *Mircea cel Mare* Street, "*a confectionery establishment with Turkish delight and halva factory*"; the Mmayor responded to the Prefect that the petitioner "*is known in this city and enjoys a good reputation; also he is a voter*"; then, the authorization was granted.<sup>59</sup>

In 1881, the Hotel Gambetta at 1 Roman Street, erected in 1879<sup>60</sup>, was given in the possession of banker *Jean Gerard Amede Alleon*. "*The banker, who had heavily invested in land and buildings, bought the hotel in 1881, without knowing its flaws and finally gave up on a new consolidation. On its place, there will be built in 1913, following the plans of architect C.Michăescu, the hotel, and the headquarters of the Mercur Cooperative Society, which later became the premises of the Marmorosh-Blank and National Banks.*"<sup>61</sup>

*Anghel Păunescu*, an architect and the designer of the Great Synagogue, also designed several private residences in Constanța, where the most well-known is the *Magrin House* in Mangalia Street, *Dr. Băcleșianu Houses* in Carol Street (now Tomis Avenue) and *Theodoru House* in the Muzelor Street (now Tudor Vladimirescu). "*In full compliance with the desires of the beneficiary, the buildings designed by this architect, some of them still standing in the upper town, prove a big concern for comfort and respectability of the owners, defining the particulars of the urban style that signifies the will of recovery of the neo-Romanian way, and integration into a building vocation in a neoclassical or Balkan type. His projects - careful, well designed, adapted, propose solutions with mainly decorative elements taken up by other builders, forming unifying and charming accessories.*"<sup>62</sup>

## 2.2. The religious and funerary heritage of the Jewish Community in Constanța

In 1866, the Israelite Community in Constanța (numbering several hundreds of Jews) still had a synagogue and later a school for students called Spaniards. In 1872, we will see a house of prayer for the Jews called Poles.

In 1878, when the Romanian authorities settled in Constanța (23rd of November), there were four Christian churches (Greek, Armenian, Catholic and Bulgarian), several mosques and **two synagogues**, one founded in 1866 "*for the « Spanish » Jews*", and another in 1872, "*for the Jews called « Polish »*".<sup>63</sup>

At the end of the 19th century, the two Israelite communities are growing, hence it will be necessary to build new larger religious buildings and more representative. The two new buildings of the Jewish faith receive authorisation of functioning via the Regulation published in the Official Gazette No. 26 on May 4, 1903: the Sephardic Temple at 18 Mircea Street, built between 1903 and 1905, and the Ashkenazi Synagogue at 2 C.A.Rosetti Street, built between 1910 and 1914.

The two worshipping buildings, the *Sephardic Temple* and the *Ashkenazi Synagogue* had been open before the Second World War.

In 1989, under the regime of Ceaușescu, the *Sephardic Temple*, in the Gothic-catalan style, was demolished.

Currently, the only synagogue in Constanța - the Great Synagogue (Ashkenazi), is in an advanced stage of deterioration, being abandoned and ransacked, in a real danger of collapse.

### THE GREAT SYNAGOGUE – The Ashkenazi Synagogue

The Ashkenazi Synagogue, located at 2 C. A. Rosetti Street, corner with Petru Rareș Street, in the Peninsula of Constanța, was built on the site of an earlier synagogue, erected in 1867/1872, in the place of an older synagogue, built after a firman of Sultan Abdul Azis.<sup>64</sup>





Image 14: Great Synagogue in Constanța – the satellite view.

The construction began in 1910, after the *Spanish Rite Temple Israelite* (Sephardic Temple) in Mircea Street.<sup>65</sup> The first steps for the new construction began as early as 1907, made by the President of the community - *M. Bujes*.

In 1908, he asked for the permission to build the foundations. The building permit was not granted because of the complaints made by the City Hall's technical department concerning the strength of the dome and of the galleries.

In 1910, the President of the Israelite Community in Constanța, *P. Șapira*, requested the City Hall "the due authorization to build a temple on the property of Israelite Community of Constanța, Rosetti Street corner with Petru Rareș", according to a document in the archive.<sup>66</sup>

The authorization was issued on April 10, 1910, the blueprint was developed by the architect *Anghel Păunescu*, who will replace the dome with a semi-cylindrical vault "intended to express the same seduction of the curved space."<sup>67</sup>

It seems that the building was finished in 1914.

The monumental building, in a chaldean style, situated at an intersection, is structured by three horizontal registers: base, ground floor, floor. The windows and the stone ornamental doors are of a Moorish influence. The three aisles are heavily marked on the outside. The richly decorated interior, according to the Jewish tradition, was also painted.

Here is how the edifice is described, during the 1990s, by the architects *Aristide Streja* and *Lucian Schwarz*, in their famous book "Synagogues in Romania":

"The openings of doors and windows have their top frames of Moorish influence, on the ground floor in a horseshoe shape, and upstairs in trilobite forms .... The Central aisle raised and vaulted contains the men's entrances, and the lateral aisles, horizontally leveled, contain the women's entrances. The

horizontal cornices and those arched to the tympan are outlined by the festooned profiles. The TORAH ARK ensemble (ARON KODEȘ), 8 m in height, which dominates the large assembly hall, is detaching itself on the background with some grooved glass windows, with a rich and traditional decoration. The galleries reserved for women spread out on the west, north, and south sides. The Great Synagogue in Constanța is a building of an impressive architectural value.”<sup>68</sup>

In *“Constanța and Techirghiol, illustrated guide for the visitors”* - published in 1924, Th. Ionescu and I.N. Duployen describe the Temple building as: *“To the right of the Lyceum, from Tomis Street, Rosetti Street starts, where the Israelite Temple is, of an oriental rite, a beautiful, imposing and well maintained building... a monumental building in a Chaldean style. A wonderful interior, with massive colonnades, two galleries.”*<sup>69</sup>

Currently, the only synagogue in Constanța - the *Great Synagogue*, is in an advanced stage of degradation, being abandoned and ransacked, in a real danger of collapse.

From the entire synagogue, there are only three full walls left, fractured diagonally. The roof was destroyed, so were the majority of colored glass windows. The walls still preserve intact Jewish symbol - Star of David.

Although the entrance to the synagogue is not forbidden, even though the synagogue is in danger of collapse, the access is impossible because of the packs of dogs in front of it.

On the left and right side of the building, there are new buildings; whose construction has only weakened the *“skeleton”* left standing.



Image 15: Great Synagogue of Constanța - main facade.



Image 16: Great Synagogue of Constanța - view along the C.A. Rosetti Street to Petru Rareș Street.





*Image 17: Great Synagogue of Constanța - overlooking the intersection of Rosetti and Petru Rareș Streets.*



*Image 18: Great Synagogue of Constanța - view along the Petru Rareș street.*



*Image 19: Great Synagogue of Constanța – an interior view of the current decay condition.*



*Image 20: Great Synagogue of Constanța - interior view.*



Image 21: *Great Synagogue of Constanța - inside view, 2011.*



Image 22: *Great Synagogue of Constanța - inside view, 1996.*

Only 16 years ago, during 1995-1996, the local residents said that religious services could be held in the synagogue. Once abandoned, without a security guard hired to watch it, the building was ransacked of anything that was not nailed down. The tenants of the neighboring house, who had put a chain to the gate and a few dogs in the yard, were the only ones to make sure and prevent homeless people take shelter inside the building.

The list of synagogues in Romania published in the journal "*Seventy Years of Existence. Six hundred years of Jewish life in Romania. Forty years of partnership FEDROM – JOINT,*" published by the Federation of Jewish Communities of Romania in 2008, stated that the *Great Synagogue of Constanța* was no longer in operation.

To restore and consolidate the synagogue, extremely qualified workforce is needed, generous funding and the desire to save one of the emblematic buildings belonging not only to the Jewish Community but also to Constanța. A few years ago, the Jewish Community of Constanța tried to save the *Great Synagogue* in Constanța. An architect from Bucharest, *Robert Tauwinkl*, developed a project to consolidate and repair the building of worship, which is in the archives of the County Department for Culture, Cults, and Heritage of Constanța. The architect even obtained the certificate of urbanism. A few steps on, things got stalled when it came to money; the building restoration costs a lot, beyond the financial power of a community that does not even have a Rabbi any longer.



## THE ISRAELITE TEMPLE OF SPANISH RITE - SEPHARDIC TEMPLE

The Israelite Temple of Spanish Rite, dating from 1866, is located on a piece of land on Mircea Street, a donation from Ismail Kemal Bey.<sup>70</sup>

Near this piece of land, *Aspasia Slafcevici* from Constanța sold to the Jewish Community in Constanța, through *Isac Faian, Seni*, and others, a building on a 1,180 sqm land, located on Mircea Street, for 8,000 new lei. The Act has been authenticated and entered into Constanța Court records on June 17, 1884.<sup>71</sup>

The City Hall in Constanța granted to the Jewish Community in the city, the permit for building the construction of the *Israelite Temple of Spanish Rite*, at 18 Mircea Street, at the intersection with Sulmona Street, on May 24, 1903. The building conditions are specified in the authorization, namely: building alignment to the street, respect for the property, a three-storey structure - the ground floor, first floor and loft, with a built surface of 1,117,5 sqm, with a maximum height of 17.4 m from the sidewalk to the cornice; the building will be made of stone or brick, the doors shall have a minimum height of 4.00 m and 2.2 m width, the windows can be opened on the outside if at a height of 2.2 m from the sidewalk, a roof made of metal or tile, brick chimneys for each stove.<sup>72</sup>

According to a document written in Romanian and Hebrew languages, preserved in the archives of Constanța, the date of beginning the construction of the temple was *"the year one thousand nine hundred and three on the day of Wednesday of the month May 28, hours 3 p.m ..... under the glorious reign of His Majesty King Carol I and Her Majesty Queen Elisabeta and Their Royal Highnesses Prince Ferdinand and Princess Maria, the first Counselor of the Throne Mr. Dimitrie Sturza, Constanța County Prefect Mr. Scarlat Vârnav and Mayor of the town Mr. Christea Georgescu ..."*<sup>73</sup>

The financing of building this place of mosaic worship was provided by *"generous people here and our fellow believers in various cities,"* as described in the document. A show with the play *Manase* by Ronetti-Roman - the band led by Al. B. Leonescu took place for the fundraising purposes on March 13, 1904.

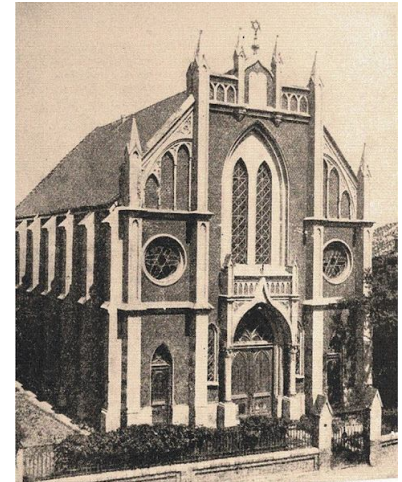
The Israelite Temple of Spanish Rite at 18 Mircea Street was built in a Gothic-Catalan style, following the blueprints of Austrian architect *Adolf Lintz* and decorated by painter *Moritz Finkelstein*.

According to some sources, the works were completed in 1905, and others think 1908.

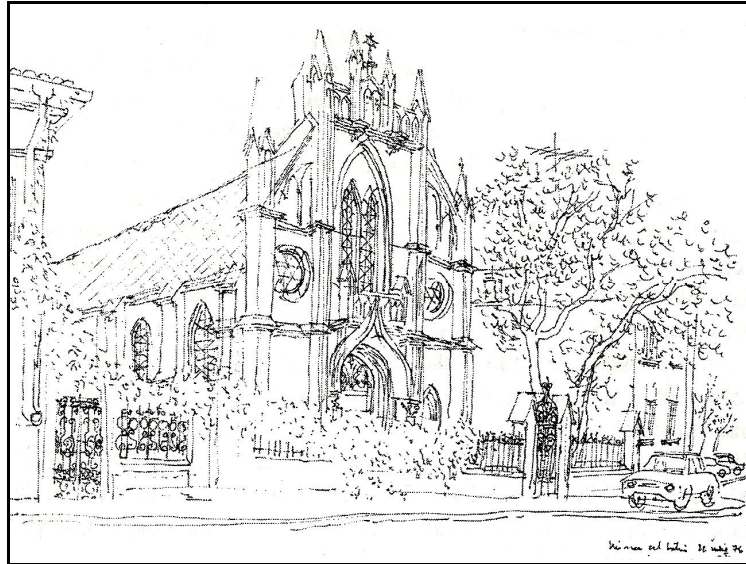
The Guide *"Constanța and its surroundings"* describes the building as: *"A Gothic building with austere shapes (...) today an architectural monument, built in 1908 on the basilica-type plan. The front of the main aisle has pointed arch with a high dome. The small white niches, with pointed arches and pinnacles emphasize the rhythm of elegant buttresses of the façade, giving the visitor the impression of a stern solemnity. The two rosettes with laced lobes, behind which the colored windows are glowing, bring more decorations to the main façade."*<sup>74</sup>



*Image 23: Aerial view of Mircea Street with the Sephardic Temple.*



*Image 24: Vintage Images of the Sephardic Temple at 18 on Mircea Street.*



*Image 25: The Sephardic Temple – drawing by Cik Damadian, owned by the Art Museum in Constanța.*

The impressive Israelite Temple of Spanish rite went through much deterioration during the Second World War, when it was converted into an ammunition warehouse for a while. Later on, it was affected by earthquakes and a decrease in the number of parishioners, in the wake of the exodus to Israel, after 1945; hence, the temple has not been properly maintained. Disagreements among officials and the management of the community to give another purpose to the building left the beautiful architectural monument to continuously deteriorate.



*Image 26: The Sephardic Temple at 18 Mircea Street – details of interior damage: framework, arches and vaults, parietal.*

Later on, the Temple was abandoned and became not functional, hence it was demolished in 1989. On the site of the former Sephardic Temple at 18 Mircea Street; in a total dissonance with



the historic peninsular space, an LPG station is located on a vacant land invaded by weeds. Unfortunately, nothing will remind us any longer of the former edifice of worship



*Image 27: The current site situation of the former Sephardic Temple on Mircea cel Bătrân Street.*

Across the street, on a piece of land emptied from historical buildings, a hotel complex was built.



*Image 28: the hotel complex – Mircea cel Bătrân Street.*

## THE JEWISH CEMETERY

The Jewish Cemetery was established in the second half of the XIX-th century, and according to some other sources, in 1854.<sup>75</sup>

In 2009, local counselors of the municipality of Constanța voted on the erasing the position 223 of HCLM No. 223 526/2008 regarding the appropriation and approval of the inventory assets belonging to the area of the municipality of Constanța. From that date on, *the Jewish Cemetery*, with an inventory value of 591,082.46 lei, is no longer administered by the local authorities, but by the Federation of Jewish Communities of Romania, in Bucharest.



The last known burial ceremony was for the attorney *Beno Katz* (December 2005).

The land on which cemetery is located is an urban area with a specific purpose - 4 Bărăganului Street, with the Orthodox cemetery (at 2 km in continuation) and the Muslim cemetery.

The Jewish cemetery is surrounded by residential areas.

The enclosure is made of prefabricated concrete panels and the gate entrance is marked with the Jewish symbols.



*Image 29: Portal of entry in the Jewish Cemetery in Constanța.*

The additional buildings are in a poor condition in terms of their maintenance.

A part of the cemetery is covered in vegetation, which creates a natural pious environment of silence; however, its abundance suggests rather the lack of permanent maintenance, which can easily lead to the degradation of monuments.

The cemetery is still functional, but it needs maintenance and a permanent monitoring. Recently, the graveyard fence has collapsed and had to be rebuilt.



*Image 30: The Jewish Cemetery in Constanța – annexes and overview.*



*Image 31: The Jewish Cemetery in Constanța – tombstones.*

The small number of community members, as well the lack of direct descendants of people buried here resulted into the degradation of the tombstones. However, those belonging to outstanding personalities of the community are carefully maintained.



*Image 32: The Jewish Cemetery in Constanța – the funerary monuments of personalities.*



Many of the funerary monuments were made of precious materials, granite, limestone and sandstone, and slate, true art works, adorned with decorative metal and carved elements. The inscriptions are in Hebrew, Yiddish, German, Hungarian, and Romanian.

A series of memorials are to be found in the Jewish Cemetery in Constanța.

Here is the monument of the Scout *Mozes Herman Moise* (16 years old), who was part of "Ovidiu" Cohort in Constanța – he died on August 20, 1916 to the Hospital campaign no.312B (Școala Normală Constanța) "due to the enemy aircraft bombs, while transporting the injured to hospital." <sup>76</sup>

Another hero is *Norbert D. Davidson*, who died on October 23, 1918 "aged 26, in the line of duty." <sup>77</sup>

Another monument was built in "the pious memory of the heroes fallen FOR THEIR HOMELAND between 1916-1918", by *Esther and Avram Companeitz* to honor the Jewish heroes: *Mordi Kaner, Jak Navon, Leon Feldmann, Jean Weinstok, Ozias Marcoff, David Gabay, Jacob Israel, Jancu Marcu, Aron Lifschitz, Salomon Lifschitz, Samuel Bittmann, Jacob Delareini, Avram Terckel, Moise H. Mozes, Benjamin Schatzman, David Ițic, Haim Ellmann, Rafail Ellmann.*



Image 33: The Jewish Cemetery in Constanța, Monument to the fallen heroes during World War I.



Fig.34. The Jewish Cemetery in Constanța, The monument of Abraham and Ester Companeitz.

At the cemetery, there are also memorials to victims of the pogrom and Jewish soldiers fallen during the WWII.

### 3. Personalities of the Jewish Community in Constanța

Among the Jewish personalities of Constanța are: *Solomon Avraam Rosanes* - Historian, *Carol Blum*, Latin teacher at Mircea cel Bătrân Lycee, the first librarian of the Public Library of Constanța, 1931-1934, established by the Decision taken by the Municipal Council on February 16, 1931 which becomes operational by Order no. 27-369 on July 9, 1931 of the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs (Minister Nicolae Iorga); left to Israel and became Academician; *Sady Herșcovici* - Director of Public Library of Constanța during 1954-1957, *Harry Goldstein* - Architect; *Nicolae Vermont* (1866-1932), a Jewish painter, contemporary and even pupil of the famous Nicolae Grigorescu, who converted to Christianity.

The Jewish physicians, well-known in Constanța, have not been a few; information about their activities are to be found in the archival documents: *W. Goldinberg*, *B. Moisevici Tatarschi*, *A. Rapaport*, *S. Haimovici*, *Leon Rozenblatt*, *Ed. Bernfeld*.<sup>78</sup>

In 1916, the *Dobrogea Jună* journal on 2 March informed that "*Dr. Goldenberg returned to Constanța, resuming his home consultations at 17 bis D. A. Sturza Street, (attorney Benderly houses)*"<sup>79</sup> "*The other day, it was announced in error that Mr. Dr. Goldenberg would be the doctor for the entire cooperative Mercury, mainly the restaurant. But, the Direction of the establishment asked us to retract this announcement and say that Mr. Dr. Rozenthal would be the one fulfilling the duties above.*"<sup>80</sup>

#### Illustration list

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28. Hotel complex – Mircea cel Bătrân Street  
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29. Portal of entrance into the Jewish Cemetery in Constanța  
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30. The Jewish Cemetery in Constanța – annexes and overview  
Photo: Assoc. Prof. PhD. Arch., Nicoleta Doina Teodorescu, 2011.
31. The Jewish Cemetery in Constanța – tombstones  
Photo: Assoc. Prof. PhD. Arch., Nicoleta Doina Teodorescu, 2011.
32. The Jewish Cemetery in Constanța – the funerary monuments of personalities  
Photo: Assoc. Prof. PhD. Arch., Nicoleta Doina Teodorescu, 2011.
33. The Jewish Cemetery in Constanța, Monument to fallen heroes during WWI  
Photo: Assoc. Prof. PhD. Arch., Nicoleta Doina Teodorescu, 2011.
34. The Jewish Cemetery in Constanța, Monument of Abraham and Ester Companeitz  
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