

Encyclopedia of the Jewish Communities
From their Foundation until after the WWII Holocaust

ROMANIA

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Podul Iloaiei

Map Coordinates: 47° 13' North - 27° 16' East

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N.B. Kehillah will be used where reference is to the organized Jewish community. Kehillah is the name given to Jewish communal organizations in Eastern Europe. The role and authority of the Kehillah varied greatly, depending on location and historical period. At times a Kehillah would have quasi-governmental authority over both the Jewish community and its relationship with the Gentile community.

Podul Iloaiei: A small town on the Bahlui River in the Moldavia region, Iasi district. Podul Iloaiei is 25 kilometers northeast from the district's town railway crossroads.

Jewish Population

Year	Number	% of Jews in General Population
1831	284	50.0
1838	480	
1859	996	
1899	1,962	67.9
1910	1,859	

1930	1,601	40.2
1941	1,454	37.0
1947	300	

Until the Outbreak of WWII

The town was first called Podul-Leloeai, after the Jewish woman Lea, who in the first half of the 17th century owned there an inn. In this inn people could rest and change horses, the carters who were on their way from Iasi to Roman or from Targu-Frumos to Iasi. This woman built a bridge on the Bahlui River in order to connect her inn to the post office on the other bank.

In 1810, several Jews settled in Podul Iloaiei and suggested to Hatman Palade, the owner of the Totoseti manor, to build a town near the bridge. Other local manor owners asked that the town should be built on their land. But, Palade was the first one to get a license from Prince Calimachi (1818) and since then it was called by its new name. Five years afterwards the man, who managed Palade's manor, got an authorization from Prince Ionita Sturza to carry out the license. In the same year (1823), his neighbor, Serban Negel, the owner of Scobaneti manor, also got a building license. On top of the regular conditions, the Jews were allowed to keep a butcher's shop and to sell bread and bagels. The manor's owner committed himself to give them lots that were exempt from tax for two synagogues, two flats for the slaughterers, a ritual bathhouse and a cemetery. In 1823, Prince Sturza obliged the butchers to sell also kosher meat. On June 17th 1824, the owner of Scobaneti manor signed a contract with ten Jewish grocers allowing them to sell all their merchandize, apart from alcoholic drinks and bread, which they were banned from selling to the Christians, but to Jews only. Moreover, Jews were not permitted to house Christians in their inns. They were forced to give up their previous citizenship, and only for tax purposes they were considered foreign citizens. Those restrictions deterred many Jews from settling in Negel's manor.

In 1839, N. Cantacuzino, who bought Scobaneti manor, got a new license from Prince Sturza that had no restrictions. In spite of this, the Jewish settlement developed mainly on a part of another manor, Totoesti, where from 1928 and on had two synagogues in contrast to only one in Scobaneti. In 1864 the place got a status of a village, and in 1833 it was suggested to give it a status of a town, but was rejected by the parliament, in order not to give other Jews the formal possibility to settle there.

Most of the Jews of Podul Iloaiei were occupied in trade, craft and craftsmanship. Among them there were bakers, furriers, shoemakers and blacksmiths. A few were fishers, fishing in fishponds and in the Rivers Bahlui and Bahluieti. Several owned mills on the riverbanks. In 1910 there were: 187 traders, 15 tailors, 20 shoemakers, 8 blacksmiths, 3 carpenters and 175 with other professions.

Since 1899, the children were educated in the congregation's school. In 1910, 91 boys and 56 girls studied there. In 1915, the building of the school was finished and in 1926 a Hebrew kindergarten was also established.

Two famous Rabbis lived in Podul Iloaiei. In the years 1868-1878, Rabbi Gedaliahu Aharon presided (1814-1878), who was a Hassidic Rabbi from a distinguished lineage. One of the town's slaughterers, Rabbi Eliyahu, wrote down the Torah and Hassidic words he heard from him and published them under the name of "Chen Aharon (Iasi, 1910), 30 years after the Rabbi's death.

In the eighties of the 19th century, Rabbi Zvi Hirsh Landman presided. He became famous for writing a book by the name, "The Copious Tears" (1885), about three very well known Hassids who died at that time.

The first branch of the Zionist movement in Podul Iloaiei was a one of the "Chovevei Zion" (1894). In 1919, a branch of "Bnei Zion Dr. Hertzal" was also opened with 50 members. Two Hebrew courses were organized and 10% of the congregation's income was donated to "Keren Hakayemet for Israel."

Podul Iloaiei Jews suffered from quite a lot of persecutions and humiliations. In 1907, peasants broke in and ruined the town. The Romanian army retreated on March 13th and in its footsteps 700 agitated peasants stormed in, robbed, and murdered. Their leaders were the mayor and his deputy. Fifty Jewish stores were robbed and the robbers carried away their loot in carts. No Jewish home remained intact and many were injured. There was fear of a general massacre and only a cavalry battalion that was sent to the place in the last moment stopped the pogrom.

During World War I Jews were taken to forced labor camps and tortured. Two of them were murdered by flogging.

In the times between the two World Wars, the Jews maintained a normal congregation life. In 1921, a leadership was elected for the first time by free elections and the Zionist list got most of the votes. In 1922, the Podul Iloaiei congregation received an allocation from the municipality for the Jewish school. In 1932, the congregation got a formal status as a legal entity.

During the Holocaust

On June 30th 1941, a train with the survivors of the Iasi pogrom arrived in Podul Iloaiei. On the way, 1,194 of them died and in some of the carts no one survived – everybody suffocated. When the doors opened, the dead fell out, clusters of people holding each other. Gangs of Gypsies and peasants swooped down on them and stripped their clothes and even rooted out their golden teeth. About 700 survivors, still alive, were brought to the synagogue and afterwards to the Jewish homes.

In 1941, the first order to expel all the Jews from Podul Iloaiei was issued, but cancelled because of the efforts of the Jewish Congregations Society in Bucharest. At last in April 1942, all the Jewish population was expelled, about 1500 people. The

police sealed the flats and the stores. The expelled were brought to Iasi and housed in the synagogues. The congregation supported them.

After the war only about 300 Jews returned to Podul Iloaiei.

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Sources

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Picture – page 199: Rabbi Ben-Zion Moskovitz "Baal Mofet" (in the center), a descendant of Rabbi Meir Mifremislein, was killed in Iasi at the beginning of WWII, when Iasi was bombed, together with all his family. (The collection of Haim Rabunson).