

## The Holocaust in Romania and the Denial of History

The Holocaust in Romania, 1940-1944, is an abundantly documented chapter in the history of Europe's larger tragedy. Ironically, it is not yet reflected in Romania's history books, school manuals, and curricula and thus is faintly known by the country's population at large.

Historical documents reveal that in 1940, General Ion Antonescu (later self-promoted to the rank of Marshal), Romania's Fascist dictator and Hitler's open ally, stated that not only was he in favor of expelling Jews but also that "there has never been a more suitable time in history to get rid of the Jews, and if necessary, you are to activate machine guns against them." He added, "I don't mind if we appear in history as barbarians." (See bibliography, *Burning Ice*, p. 51.)

The subsequent anti-Semitic laws and organized genocide by Romanian authorities took the lives of hundreds of thousands of Romanian Jews (mostly from Northern Bukovina and Bessarabia) and of 25,000 Romanian Gypsies through extensive massacres as well as deportations to over 200 ghettos and concentration camps where people died of hunger, disease, exhausting work, random executions, and systematic extermination. In addition, Jewish properties and businesses were robbed and destroyed, synagogues were burned, cemeteries desecrated, women raped and killed, and surviving children left as orphans.

During the same period, the Jewish population of Moldova, Wallachia, and Southern Transylvania (Northern Transylvania was occupied by Hungarian Fascist forces), under control of Bucharest authorities, was compelled to forced labor and special taxation for the war. Jews were expelled from schools and workplaces, prohibited from professional activities, and in a myriad of ways deprived of a decent living. Others were deported or killed in local pogroms or random executions. In Bucharest, for example, many Jews were killed in a slaughterhouse, then hanged on hooks with the inscription, "Kosher Meat."

Despite the evidence from historical records and Holocaust survivors whose numbers dwindle every day, rightist political forces in Romania have recently tried to rehabilitate the image of Antonescu, portraying him in books as a national hero because of his efforts to regain the territories of Bukovina and Bessarabia from the Soviet Union. Monuments have been erected to him. As recently as June 2003, according to an official Romanian Government statement, "there was no Holocaust inside Romanian borders between 1940 and 1944," but after strong protests from inside and outside Romania, especially in Israel (with a large population of Romanian Jewish Holocaust survivors), the Romanian government reversed its position. In October, President Ion Iliescu announced the formation of a commission (headed by Elie Wiesel, himself a Holocaust survivor) to examine and establish the facts regarding the systematic murder of Romanian Jews during the Holocaust and to disseminate its findings in Romania and abroad. On October 10, 2004, Romania officially marked Holocaust Day for the first time. President Iliescu recognized the victims and how the truth had been obstructed in the past. In many high schools symposiums were organized to

focus on the history and significance of the Holocaust.

The above vignette and the annotated bibliography that follows are meant to honor a group—the survivors of the Nazi Holocaust in Romania and elsewhere, whose courageous witness represents an effort to make sure such atrocities never happen again. The youngest of these survivors are now nearing 70, and it is our responsibility to ensure that after they are gone, the world does not forget. And in the names of these survivors, it is our responsibility to identify our own generation's genocides in Bosnia, Rwanda, Sudan, and other regions and to prevent future genocides from taking place.

For the benefit of English-language readers, the following are books in English meant for initial research purposes; additional resources on the Holocaust in Romania are available in Romanian, Hebrew, Yiddish, German, Hungarian, Russian, French, and Italian.

### The Holocaust in Romania

Ancel, Jean, ed. *Documents Concerning the Fate of Romanian Jewry During the Holocaust*. Jerusalem: Yad Vashem; New York: Beate Klarsfeld Foundation, 1986. 12 vols.

This set contains documents from Romanian archives, anti-Jewish legislation, histories, surveys of ethnic relations, statistical data, and other materials, published in Romanian, English, French, German, and Hebrew.

Braham, Randolph, ed. *The Tragedy of Romanian Jewry*. New York: Rosenthal Institute for Holocaust Studies, City Univ. of New York, 1994. 388 pp.

This is a collection of essays dealing with various facets of Romanian history during World War II, the Antonescu regime, the Holocaust years, the Communist regime, and the treatment of the Holocaust in textbooks. The book features contributions by noted Romanian-American scholars.

Braham, Randolph. *The Romanian Nationalists and the Holocaust: The Political Exploitation of Unfounded Rescue Accounts*. New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1998. 250 pp.

This study confronts Romanian nationalists who glorify the record of the Antonescu regime and who deny the tragedy that befell Romanian Jewry during World War II.

Butnaru, I. C. *The Silent Holocaust: Romania and Its Jews*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1992. 236 pp. Illus. with photos.

With a foreword by Elie Wiesel, this volume covers anti-Semitism and the Holocaust in Romania, deportations to Transnistria, official government policies, ethnic relations, and how some Romanians helped Jews during that period.

Carmelly, Felicia. ***Shattered 50 Years of Silence: Voices of the Tragedy in Omania and Transnistria***. Scarborough, Ont.: Abbeyfield Publishers, 1997. 506 pp. Illus. with maps and photos.

Carmelly addresses anti-Semitic persecutions during the 1939-1944 period, including the deportations of thousands of Jews from Bessarabia and Bukovina to ghettos and labor camps in Transnistria.

Carp, Matatias. ***Holocaust in Romania: Facts and Documents on the Annihilation of Romania's Jews, 1940-1944***. New York: Primor Publishing, 1994 (reprinted in 2000 by Simon Publishers). 339 pp. Trans. from Romanian.

Carp's work offers original archival materials, eyewitnesses, court documents, official laws, military orders and correspondence, and other materials, with a foreword by Alexandru Safran, former Chief Rabbi in Romania during the war.

Fischer, Julius S. ***Transnistria: The Forgotten Cemetery***. South Brunswick, N.J.: T. Yoseloff, 1969. 161 pp.

Fischer describes Jewish deportations to Transnistria (part of Ukraine at the time) under Romanian and German administrations and genocide in concentration camps.

Hilberg, Raul. ***The Destruction of European Jews***. New Haven, Conn.: Yale Univ. Press, 2003. 3 vols.

Originally published in 1961, this is an in-depth, expanded edition based on newly uncovered archival materials from Eastern Europe with new information about the annihilation of Jews from various countries (including Romania) during World War II.

Ioanid, Radu. ***The Holocaust in Romania: The Destruction of Jews and Gypsies Under the Antonescu Regime, 1940-1944***. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee/The Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2000. 352 pp. Trans. from French.

This outstanding and comprehensive study based on recently released documents from Romanian archives reveals cruelty expressed on many levels of Romanian society. The author is director of the International Archival Programs Division at the Jewish Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. Foreword by Elie Wiesel.

Jagendorf, Siegfried. ***Jagendorf's Foundry: Memoir of the Romanian Holocaust, 1941-1944***. New York: HarperCollins, 1991. 209 pp. Illus. with photos.

Amid persecution and deportation to Transnistria, the author describes his actions to save Jews by employing them in his foundry.

Safran, Alexandru. ***Resisting the Storm—Romania 1940-1947: Memoirs***. Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1987. 464 pp. Trans. from Hebrew.

The former Chief Rabbi of Romania, currently residing in Switzerland, sheds light on the Holocaust years in Romania and Holocaust survivors. Includes facsimiles of documents in Hebrew, Romanian, and French.

Shachan, Avigdor. ***Burning Ice: The Ghettos of Transnistria***. Boulder, Colo.: East European Monographs; New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1996. 510 pp.

Shachan offers an extensive study of the Jewish ghettos in Transnistria—their administrations, policies of genocide, and victims.

### **The Holocaust in Northern Transylvania (under Hungarian rule)**

Braham, Randolph, ed. ***Genocide and Retribution: The Holocaust in Hungarian Ruled Northern Transylvania***. Boston: Kluwer, 1983. 260 pp. Illus. with maps.

Braham's collection of essays covers the Jewish Holocaust in this Hungarian Fascist-occupied region from 1940 to 1944 and the war crimes trials of 1946.

Carmilly, Moshe. ***The Road to Life: The Rescue Operation of Jewish Refugees on the Hungarian Border in Transylvania, 1939-1944***. New York: Shengold, 1994. 198 pp. Illus. with photos.

This volume describes the persecution of Jews, massacres, and deportations in Northern Transylvania as well as efforts to rescue Jews crossing the border to Romanian-ruled Southern Transylvania.

Halivini, David. ***The Book and the Sword: A Life of Learning in the Shadow of Destruction***. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1997. 197 pp.

This is the story of a Holocaust survivor and scholar living under Hungarian fascist rule during World War II.

Isacovivi, Salomon. ***Man of Ashes***. Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1997. 180 pp.

A Holocaust survivor deported from Northern Transylvania to the Auschwitz extermination camp tells his story.

Wiesel, Elie. ***Night***. New York: Hill & Wang, 1958. 109 pp. Trans. from French.

The first and still best known narrative by a Holocaust survivor, this story of a young teenager experiencing deportation and life in a series of concentration camps has been reissued in several editions and translated into numerous languages. The author is a winner of the Nobel Peace Prize for his writings and other efforts on behalf of victims of genocide around the world.

*A Final Note:* I believe that in discussing the Holocaust experience in this region, we must mention that there were many non-Jewish Romanians (and Hungarians) who, under very difficult circumstances and at great risk to themselves, helped Jews escape and survive. Elie Wiesel remarked, "We must know these good people who helped Jews during the Holocaust, we must learn from them, and in gratitude and hope, we must remember them." For more information on these deeply humanitarian and noble people, called Righteous Gentiles Among the Nations, see this author's article in *MultiCultural Review*, December 2003, pages 26-30. 