

Simon Geissbühler (ed.)

Romania and the Holocaust

Events – Contexts – Aftermath

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Table of Contents

Simon Geissbühler	
Introduction	7
Mariana Hausleitner	
Jewish-Communist Gangs in Czernowitz?	
The Origin and Impact of a Constructed Enemy Stereotype	17
Henry L. Eaton	
The Story Created Afterward: Iași 1941	41
Alti Rodal	
A Village Massacre: The Particular and the Context	59
Kai Struve	
Anti-Jewish Violence in the Summer of 1941	
in Eastern Galicia and Beyond	89
Witold Mędykowski	
The Pogroms in the Former Soviet Occupation Areas	
in the Summer of 1941	115
Sarah Rosen	
The Djurin Ghetto in Transnistria	
through the Lens of Kunstadt’s Diary	131
Gali Tibon	
Two-Front Battle: Opposition in the Ghettos	
of the Mogilev District in Transnistria 1941–44	151
Diana Dumitru	
Challenging Stalinist Justice:	
A Review of Holocaust Crimes after 1953	171
Tuvia Friling	
The International Commission on the Holocaust in Romania:	
A Personal “Behind the Scenes” Perspective	191

Michael Shafir	
Public Discourse and Remembrance: Official and Unofficial Narratives	203
Simon Geissbühler	
What We Now Know about Romania and the Holocaust— and Why It Matters	241
Contributors	267

Introduction

Seventy-five years ago, on July 2, 1941, Romanian troops and the allied German Eleventh Army launched offensive combat operations on the southern front against the USSR (Operation München), crossing from Romania into Northern Bukovina and Bessarabia.¹ On July 3, 1941, Romanian troops reached the village of Ciudei close to the Romanian-Soviet border. Moses Eisig, a young Jewish man from Ciudei, ran away in time. He first hid with a local peasant who told him—invoking the propaganda stereotype of Judeo-Bolshevism—that the Romanians were “mad at the Jews” because the Jews were all Communists and had blown up a bridge—when in fact the Soviets had destroyed it during their retreat a few days earlier. Moses then fled into the woods. There he “heard such a tremendously loud echo that the whole woods trembled. That’s when they shot all our people. ... We thought they were shooting men, but not women and children like that.”² Sneaking back into the village a few days later, he found it deserted and destroyed, and Jewish property looted by villagers.³ As he recounted, “The windows were gone! The doors were gone! The bricks were missing. And you couldn’t see a dog, or a cat. No people! Nothing!” Survivors later detailed what had happened. The Romanian troops, with the help of locals,⁴ had herded some of the village’s Jews together and summarily shot them all: “[Not] everyone had the luck to get a bullet in the heart or in the head. My father and my brothers and sister had to watch their own children dying. And the children had to watch how their parents died.” Other Jews were slain by villagers and

1 Operation München did not start on June 22, 1941, as it is sometimes assumed, but on July 2. See: Hans-Jacobsen, Adolf (ed.) (1965). *Kriegstagebuch des Oberkommandos der Wehrmacht*. Frankfurt am Main, p. 504; Bundesarchiv Freiburg/Breisgau, RH/19/I (71).

2 Eisig, Moses (1998). *Yizkor Book for the Martyrs of Ciudin*: www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/Chudyn/chu001.html (accessed on March 15, 2016).

3 Oral history interview with Constantin Padure (2011), in United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM), RG-50.575*0103.

4 Oral history interview with Constantin Burla (2011), in USHMM, RG-50.575*0104.

peasants who joined in the massacre. Around 500 Jews were killed in Ciudei in early July 1941.⁵

Seventy-five years ago, at the end of July 1941, in the small town of Zhabokrych in Romanian-controlled Transnistria in today's southwestern Ukraine, German and Romanian military units drove approximately 600 Jews, among them many women and children, into cellars and shot them.⁶ A little girl, Manya, survived the mass shooting:

In July 1941, the German army entered the town, followed by the Romanian army. The Jews were ordered to gather in five cellars where the Romanian soldiers proceeded to shoot them. Manya lost consciousness. When she awoke, she saw that her mother had been killed. Her father had survived. Manya and her father hid in the cellar until nightfall. They then escaped to the forest but after a week, starving and cold, they returned. A few days later, they were herded into the town ghetto, where they lived under grueling conditions in one apartment with several other families. One day, the police ordered both adults and children back to the cellars to remove the bodies of those killed in the massacre. The bodies were in a terrible state of decomposition, and the horrified prisoners were forced to bury them in a mass grave. Manya identified her mother's body by the red boots she had been wearing. She and her father managed to bury her in a grave near their house.⁷

Today, Zhabokrych is a nondescript, rundown village on the Ukrainian periphery. The brick synagogue still exists, but it was closed long ago and is used for other purposes. The modest Holocaust memorial in Zhabokrych is pictured on the cover of this volume.⁸

These are the stories of two survivors of the Holocaust perpetrated by Romanians or in Romanian-controlled territories during the Second World War. From the summer of 1941 onward, Romania pursued at its own initiative the mass killing of Jews in the territories it controlled. By the end of June 1941, approximately 13,000 Jews were killed in the Romanian city of Iași and in the death trains from that city. When the Ro-

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- 5 Ioanid, Radu (2000). *The Holocaust in Romania*. Chicago, p. 96f.; Ancel, Jean (2011). *The History of the Holocaust in Romania*. Lincoln/Jerusalem, p. 223.
 - 6 Vinokurova, Faina A. (not dated). *The Holocaust in Vinnitsa Oblast*: www.rtrfoundation.org/webart/UK-arch-d2.pdf (accessed on May 22, 2016).
 - 7 Yad Vashem (ed.) (2007). *Bearing Witness. Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Day 2007*: www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/remembrance/2007/brodeski-titelma.n.asp#!prettyPhoto (accessed on May 23, 2016).
 - 8 Geissbühler, Simon (2014). *Once Upon a Time Never Comes Again. The Traces of the Shtetl in Southern Podolia (Ukraine)*. Bern, pp. 106–110.

manian army invaded the Soviet Union on the southern front at the beginning of July 1941, thousands of Jews were exterminated in Northern Bukovina and Bessarabia by Romanian troops and local people.⁹ This first wave of violence with up to 43,500 victims was followed in autumn 1941 by large-scale deportations of Jews from Southern and Northern Bukovina as well as Bessarabia to camps and ghettos in Transnistria. Many perished on the deportation marches, many more in the following years in the camps and ghettos. Tens of thousands of Jews were massacred by Romanian units in and around Odessa. Overall, more than 300,000 Jews of Romanian and of Soviet or Ukrainian origin were murdered in Romanian-controlled territories during the Second World War.

This volume sheds light on the events, the contexts, and the aftermath of this under-researched and lesser-known chapter of the Holocaust. The fact that Romania was “Germany’s major ally on the eastern front after 1941 [and] the only other state to generate an autonomous policy of the direct mass murder of Jews” is little known.¹⁰ Seventy-five years after these events, this book gives much-needed impetus to research on the Holocaust perpetrated by Romanians and in Romanian-controlled territories.

The idea to publish this volume about Romania and the Holocaust was born at the one-day symposium “The Holocaust in Romania—Revisiting Research and Public Discourse” on October 29, 2015, at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem. The symposium showed that considerable progress has been made in recent years in researching the Holocaust perpetrated by Romania. It has been positively noted that young historians, also Romanians, are now doing research on Romania and the Holocaust. Different organizations, research groups, and individuals are working on specific aspects of Romania and the Holocaust. Also, Romania is currently (2016–17) holding the presidency of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA), which is another positive step.

At the same time, however, the event in Jerusalem once more revealed that much work is still to be done. Under the Communist regimes, recognition of the Holocaust was all but impossible. The Shoah indeed

9 Geissbühler, Simon (2013). *Blutiger Juli. Rumäniens Vernichtungskrieg und der vergessene Massenmord an den Juden 1941*. Paderborn.

10 Snyder, Timothy (2015). *Black Earth. The Holocaust as History and Warning*. London, p. 229.

was a taboo for almost 50 years, and Romania was no exception. In fact, having been a close ally of Nazi Germany and having implemented the mass murder of Jews autonomously, Romania felt an even more acute urge to draw a veil of silence over its inglorious past. The breakup of the Soviet bloc and the end of the Ceaușescu regime did not lead to a comprehensive reassessment of Romanian history or a broad evidence- and research-based critical reevaluation of Romania's role in the Second World War and the Holocaust. The fascist ghosts of the past, and especially questions concerning collaboration with Nazi Germany and the Holocaust perpetrated by Romania, remained untouched. Fascism was presented as an alien, German concept and Romania as a victim, innocent of any wrongdoing or crime.¹¹ The so-called revisionist school is still relatively influential in Romania. It minimizes and trivializes Romanian crimes during the Second World War in general and Romania's responsibility for the Holocaust in Northern Bukovina, Bessarabia, and Transnistria in particular.¹²

But there is also a vast gap between scholarly research and public knowledge about the Holocaust in Romania. Not even a third of the respondents in a poll commissioned by the Elie Wiesel Institute in Bucharest in 2015 believe that the Holocaust also happened in Romania.¹³ Among the meager 28 percent who admit that the Holocaust also took place in Romania, 69 percent see Germany as the main culprit of the Holocaust in their country. Only a tiny minority among Romanians is therefore prepared to acknowledge the historical fact of who the main perpetrators were in the killing of more than 300,000 Jews of Romanian and of Soviet or Ukrainian origin in Romanian-controlled territories during the Second World War: the Romanians themselves.

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- 11 Cioflâncă, Adrian (2004). A "Grammar of Exculpation" in Communist Historiography: Distortion of the History of the Holocaust under Ceaușescu, *Romanian Journal of Political Sciences* 2: 29–46.
 - 12 Shafir, Michael (2014). Unacademic Academics: Holocaust Deniers and Trivializers in Post-Communist Romania, *Nationalities Papers* 42(6): 942–964; Geissbühler, Simon (2012). Staring at the Past with Eyes Wide Shut: Holocaust Revisionism and Negationism in Romania, *Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs* VI(3): 127–135.
 - 13 Institutul Național pentru Studiarea Holocaustului din România "Elie Wiesel" (INSHREW) (ed.) (2015). *Sondaj de opinie privind Holocaustul din România și percepția relațiilor interetnice*. Bucharest.

The German historian Armin Heinen claimed in 2007 that the Romanian historiography of the Holocaust had reached approximately the state of research in Germany in the mid-1960s.¹⁴ Methodologically, many Romanian studies on the Holocaust have indeed been and remain descriptive and positivistic.¹⁵ They do not take into account the state of international research on the Holocaust in general and do not work with specific research questions and theses. The research controversies about the nature of the Nazi dictatorship in general and the Holocaust in particular that Ian Kershaw so aptly summarized already in 1985, or later debates, for example, between Daniel Jonah Goldhagen and Christopher Browning, or the discussion surrounding the publications of Timothy Snyder seem to have had only a marginal, if any, impact on Romanian researchers and on research about Romania and the Holocaust.¹⁶ International research on the Holocaust in Romanian-controlled territories remains relatively scarce to this day too. Little is published on the topic in English-language scholarly journals. There is also a lack of coordination between different groups and scholars dealing with the topic; and new findings and research results should be better and more rapidly communicated within the scholarly community and to a broader public, as well as be made available in Romania, Ukraine, and the Republic of Moldova.

But there has been some progress. Radu Ioanid's *The Holocaust in Romania*, published in 2000, and the Final Report of the International Commission on the Holocaust in Romania, published in English in 2005, are crucial synoptic works and important starting points for further research.¹⁷ These publications have helped to break the "recurring cycle of official denial."¹⁸ They have been complemented in the last few years by

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- 14 Heinen, Armin (2007). *Rumänien, der Holocaust und die Logik der Gewalt*. München, p. 34.
- 15 Ursprung, Daniel (2010/2011). Geschichtsschreibung und Vergangenheitsbewältigung in Rumänien. Von den Mühen des Umgangs mit zeitgeschichtlichen Themen, *Südost-Forschungen* 69/70: 358–388.
- 16 Kershaw, Ian (1985). *The Nazi Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives of Interpretation*. London; Browning, Christopher (1993). *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland*. New York; Goldhagen, Daniel Jonah (1996). *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust*. New York.
- 17 Ioanid 2000; International Commission on the Holocaust in Romania (ed.) (2005). *Final Report*. Iași.
- 18 Shapiro, Paul A. (2015). *The Kishinev Ghetto 1941–1942. A Documentary History of the Holocaust in Romania's Contested Borderlands*. Tuscaloosa, p. 91.

new studies, for example, by Jean Ancel and Vladimir Solonari.¹⁹ Certain topics such as the Iași massacres, with over 13,000 victims at the end of June 1941, as well as the camps and ghettos in Transnistria have at last received the scholarly attention they deserve.²⁰

This volume presents new research on Romania and the Holocaust. All the contributions assembled here are original texts that have not been published before. *Mariana Hausleitner* exposes the myth that the Jews were responsible for the “national disgrace” in the summer of 1940 when Romania had to retreat from Northern Bukovina and Bessarabia due to the Soviet ultimatum. There were some abuses of fleeing Romanians also by young Jews, but they are neither quantitatively nor qualitatively

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- 19 See, for example: Solonari, Vladimir (2007). Patterns of Violence: Local Population and the Mass Murder of Jews in Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina, July–August 1941, *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 8(4): 749–787; Solonari, Vladimir (2009). *Purifying the Nation: Population Exchange and Ethnic Cleansing in Nazi-Allied Romania*. Baltimore; Solonari, Vladimir (2010). The Treatment of the Jews of Bukovina by the Soviet and Romanian Administrations in 1940–1944, *Holocaust and Modernity* 2(8): 149–180; Ancel, Jean (2005). The German-Romanian Relationship and the Final Solution, *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 19: 252–275; Ancel 2011; Chioveanu, Mihai (2008). Death Delivered, Death Postponed: Romania and the Continent-Wide Holocaust, *Studia Hebraica* 8: 136–69; Chioveanu, Mihai (2012). The Dynamics of Mass Murder. Grasping the Twisted Decision-Making Process behind the Romanian Holocaust, *Sfera Politicii* 2(168): 25–36; Deletant, Dennis (2012). Ion Antonescu and the Holocaust in Romania, *East Central Europe* 39: 61–100; Geissbühler, Simon (2014). “He spoke Yiddish like a Jew”: Neighbors’ Contribution to the Mass Killing of Jews in Northern Bukovina and Bessarabia, July 1941, *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 28(3): 430–449.
- 20 Voicu, George (ed.) (2006). *Pogromul de la Iași (28–30 iunie 1941)—prologul Holocaustului din România*. Iași; Eaton, Henry (2013). *The Origins and Onset of the Romanian Holocaust*. Detroit; Ofer, Dalia (1993). The Holocaust in Transnistria. A Special Case of Genocide, in Dobroszycki, Lucjan and Jeffrey S. Gurock (eds.). *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union*. New York, pp. 133–154; Deletant, Dennis (2003). Transnistria: soluția românească la “problema evreiască”, in *Despre Holocaust și Comunism. Anuarul IRIR, vol. 1, 2002*. Iași, pp. 79–101; Golbert, Rebecca L. (2004). Holocaust Sites in Ukraine: Pechora and the Politics of Memorialization, *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 18: 205–233; Mihok, Brigitte (2009). Orte der Verfolgung und Deportation, in Benz, Wolfgang und Brigitte Mihok (Hrsg.). *Holocaust an der Peripherie. Judenpolitik und Judenmord in Rumänien und Transnistrien 1940–1944*. Berlin, pp. 71–80; Vynokurova, Faina (2010). The Fate of Bukovinian Jews in the Ghettos and Camps of Transnistria, 1941–1944: A Review of the Source Documents at the Vinnytsa Oblast State Archive, *Holocaust and Memory* 2(8): 18–26; Baum, Herwig (2011). *Variante des Terrors. Ein Vergleich zwischen der deutschen und der rumänischen Besatzungsverwaltung in der Sowjetunion 1941–1944*. Berlin.

comparable to the murder of Jews by the Romanian military and the bloody pogroms in Dorohoi and Galați in the summer of 1940. In fact, the alleged Jewish-Communist gangs in Czernowitz and elsewhere, which neatly fitted the “thesis” of Judeo-Bolshevism, were an invention of the Romanian propaganda machine to create a scapegoat and justify violence against the Jewish population.

In his contribution, *Henry Eaton* meticulously analyzes the Iași pogrom at the end of June 1941. More than 13,000 Jews were killed in this pogrom and in the death trains. Eaton disentangles the web of lies, falsified statements, and half-truths that were “created” to cement the idea that Romania was not responsible for the Holocaust in Romanian-controlled territories during the Second World War in general and the Iași pogrom in particular.

Alti Rodal's article is an outstanding example of a micro-study of localized eliminationist violence.²¹ She looks at the massacre of Jews in the village of Borivtsi in Northern Bukovina that was planned and organized by the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN). It is micro-studies like these that are needed to better understand the contexts, the dynamics, and the perpetrators of the mass murders of Jews in many villages and small towns throughout Northern Bukovina and Bessarabia.

What happened in the summer of 1941 in Northern Bukovina and Bessarabia were by no means isolated and unique events, as *Kai Struve* shows in his reconstruction of the anti-Jewish violence in about thirty cities and small towns as well as in a number of villages during July 1941 in eastern Galicia. He makes the distinction between three main contexts of the violence: the retrieval of murdered prison inmates, punishments and executions by OUN-B (group led by Stepan Bandera) insurgents, and the violent excesses of units of the *Waffen-SS*. Struve compares eastern Galicia with other Eastern European regions and argues that deadly violence against Jews from the side of the local population emanated mostly from insurgent groups whose aim was to remove or punish alleged supporters of Soviet rule and to establish their own nation-states. *Witold Mędykowski* complements Struve's contribution by looking at the

21 Kallis, Aristotle (2007). “Licence” and Genocide in the East: Reflections on Localised Eliminationist Violence during the First Stages of “Operation Barbarossa” (1941), *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism* 7(3): 6–23.

same events in the summer of 1941 from another point of view and against a different theoretical background.

Sarah Rosen and *Gali Tibon* take a closer look at the ghettos in Transnistria. They are interested in the complex relations between different Jewish groups within the ghettos, on the one hand, and between the Jewish ghetto population and the Romanian authorities and the local Ukrainian population, on the other. Rosen concentrates on the Djurin ghetto and bases her research mainly on the diary of Lipman Kunstadt. Tibon discusses the Jewish opposition to the established Jewish leadership in the ghettos of the Mogilev district in Transnistria. *Diana Dumitru* looks at how Holocaust crimes in Romanian-controlled territories were reviewed after Stalin's death in 1953. Even if some of the reviews showed that there were inconsistencies and even legal faults in the previous investigations, in the overwhelming majority of cases, the Soviet prosecutors had little or no reason at all to assume that convicted criminals were in fact innocent. *Tuvia Friling* was one of the co-vice chairs of the International Commission on the Holocaust in Romania and one of the editors of its Final Report. He gives, for the first time, a personal insight into the inner workings of and the conflicts within the Commission and discusses its main conclusions and recommendations.

Michael Shafir dissects the public discourse in Romania. He distinguishes between the official versus unofficial memory of the Holocaust and its remembrance, and shows that there is indeed an official and an unofficial narrative. The unofficial narrative is still surprisingly widespread and influential in Romania and extends deep into the political mainstream. To conclude, I give a short overview of ten insights to be gained from research into the Holocaust perpetrated by Romanians and in Romanian-occupied areas. What we can learn from the history of Romania and the Holocaust matters because it complements, sharpens, and broadens our understanding of the origins and the background, the contexts, the perpetrators, collaborators and bystanders, the victims, and the aftermath of the Holocaust.

While Romania remains a laggard with regard to dealing with the past, there have been—as I underlined earlier—some positive developments, also in comparison with other Eastern European countries, some of which have regressed in recent years when it comes to confronting their role as allies or collaborators of Nazi Germany in the Second World

War and in the Holocaust. International research and pressure, increased and broader education in schools and universities, the educational efforts of civil society and state institutions, as well as Romania's presidency of the IHRA are factors that can, in the medium and long term, undermine the widespread attitude of wanting-not-to-know.

Pierre Nora has rightly emphasized that "there must be a will to remember."²² Remembrance and the will to deal with one's past should not be imposed primarily from the outside and from above. But researchers, Romanian and international, can and should more forcefully contribute to change by exposing again and again the historical facts, as we reconstruct them on the basis of the available sources, even though—or especially because—they are everything but pleasant. This volume is a small contribution to that effort seventy-five years after the Holocaust in the east was unleashed.

22 Nora, Pierre (1989). *Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Memoire, Representations* 26: 7–24.