

**Testimony over Time
The Fascist Rebellion in Bucharest in Words and Pictures
(January 21–23, 1941)**

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Abstract: If until the outbreak of World War II the anti-Semitic manifestations were generally limited to verbal abuse and in isolated acts of physical violence, the alliance with Nazi Germany created the framework for the implementation of the anti-Semitic policies. The pogroms in Romania described in various books were also immortalized in photos. The photographs taken by the Jewish community reveal a vivid picture of the atrocities committed. This study aims to present the human losses, the moral and physical trauma, and also Jews' property devastation during the fascist rebellion in Bucharest reflected in the scientific works and in photos.

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Preliminary Ideas

A fragment in Emil Dorian's personal diary describes the tense reality of the year 1938 when a major change was about to happen in the life of the Jewish communities all across Europe: "The stifling atmosphere of anticipation for events and grave news was thickening like a dense smoke through which one cannot figure out anything. It's got so far, that every piece of news seems possible. One cannot tell fact from fiction anymore. Logic has disappeared in unfolding events. Hope becomes insensitivity, and your Christian friend cannot comfort you anymore." In truth, facts are coming together in a catastrophic way: "in Germany the fire hatred continues, in Poland the anti-Semitic hatred gets the government's blessing, in Austria the Jews are being exterminated, and in Hungary the Jewish project becomes law which means starving the Jews based on arithmetic."¹

The Holocaust marks a turning point not only in the history of Jewish communities, but in European history as well. The Jewish communities of all European countries during WWII went through "a great tragedy, one of the greatest, if not the greatest of the 20th century"², which marked "a radical rupture not only in the

¹ Emil Dorian, *Jurnal din vremuri de prigoană* (A diary in times of persecution) (Bucharest: Hasefer, 1996), 38.

² Aurel Vainer and Dorel Dorian, eds., *Holocaust 1940–1945. Suferințe, compasiune, solidaritate* (Holocaust 1940–1945. Suffering, compassion, solidarity) (Bucharest: Scrib, 2009), 79.

Jews' history, but also in the European history of civilization, in general. All spheres of human creativity had to be redefined, taking into consideration, more or less knowingly, the impact of this phenomenon on the mentality and life of the Western world.”¹ For the Romanian Jews, it was also a century of extreme demographic changes, this community facing a population increase towards the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th, but the Holocaust first and the territorial losses later, led to a dramatic decrease in population in a very short period of time. This demographic fluctuation, but also the historic events changed forever the relationship of this minority with the Romanian state and the Romanian people as well as “the general image of the Jewish ethnicity in Romania. Not only the demographic trend underwent new stages and developments, unknown till then, but even in its essence, this category of population transformed itself profoundly, modifying its principal coordinates of existence, valid for this territory along history.”²

One of the great injustices the Jewish population was exposed to during WWII was a total lack of help from the allied countries, which, in spite of the Jewish support for the cause, simply left this community at the mercy of the German Nazi aggression: “The European Jewish world had no allies. At the trying time, Judaism was alone, and when its leaders from around the world realized that, they went into shock.”³ An ally of Germany in the first stage of the war, Romania was no exception, despite the fact that her material resources, geographic position and, very importantly, Hitler's respect for Gen. Ion Antonescu, could have taken a different position. The alliance with Nazi Germany was a move that justified Romania's desire to retrieve her lost territories (North Bucovina, Bessarabia, Transylvania, South Dobrogea), but also Gen. Ion Antonescu's belief that communist Russia was a real threat to our state security.⁴ An ample anti-Semitic propaganda and manipulation campaign took place in the army to depict the Jews as responsible for “the mistreatment, and even the death of some Romanian soldiers during the retreat of 1940”.⁵ Just like in other stages of history, the Jews were used as scapegoats this time around again. For authorities it was the easiest way because prejudice and stereotypes were widespread and very common in the “collective subconscious”. The defeat in the battlefield of WWI found a perfect explanation in the character “slated” for the Jews: fear, cowardice, lack of patriotism, treason, espionage. All these stereotypes would be used in the anti-Semitic campaign in preparation for the Pogrom of Iași. A serious matter was that this kind of attitude was not only adopted by the army, but also condoned with internal memos that the Jewish soldiers should be carefully watched as potential traitors “all being inclined to

¹ Sandu Frunză, *Dumnezeu și Holocaustul la Elie Wiesel. O etică a responsabilității* (God and the Holocaust at Elie Wiesel. An ethics of responsibility) (Bucharest: Contemporanul, 2010), 43.

² Silviu Costache, *Evreii din România. Studiu de geografie umană* (Jews in Romania. A study in human geography) (Bucharest: Editura Universității din București, 2004), 109–111.

³ Raul Hilberg, *Exterminarea evreilor din Europa* (The extermination of Jews in Europe) vol. 2 (Bucharest: Hasefer, 1997), 165.

⁴ Tom Gallagher, *Furtul unei națiuni. România de la comunism încoace* (The stealing of a nation. Romania after communism) (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2004), 53.

⁵ Elena Chiriță, *Holocaust. Destine la răscruce* (Holocaust. Fates at the crossroad) (Bucharest: Editura Universitară, 2013), 190.

espionage and treason”. There were secret orders to position the machineguns as to open fire on the Jews in case they were about to flee to the enemy.¹ Under these conditions, the Jews had no chance of acceptance into the Romanian society, except for freedom of religion.

Romania had become a satellite state of Germany, opportunistic, and the destiny of her Jewish population depended entirely on the participation to the war. As a result, Romania was obligated to respond to the Nazi murderous policy towards the Jews in the same way as Germany. This opportunistic attitude can also be found in the behavior of the general population on this issue: “In their attitude towards Jews, Romanians showed the same opportunistic ambiguity.”² With political pragmatism set aside, the tragic events that took place between 1940 and 1944 were a dark page in our national history. The Jews of Romania were subjected to the same inhuman treatment as in the rest of Europe, only the methods of torture were different: “The Holocaust in Romania was different in terms of development and the number of victims, compared to other countries where it was run by the Germans themselves and took the ugliest forms possible (Ukraine, Belarus, Poland, Hungary, Germany). The massacre in Romania lacked scientific organization and extermination technology, like gas chambers and crematoria to get rid of the corpses. People were either beaten to death or suffocated in train cars whose vents were deliberately closed. In some cases, they were selected at random from a marching column on the way to a concentration camp and executed for their clothes to be sold to the highest bidder.”³

Without denying political responsibility, some voices consider that “there is no collective guilt or innocence, and, even if there were, nobody could be guilty or innocent”, as governments and countries take upon themselves the moral responsibility for “their good deeds or evil actions.”⁴ One of the representative personalities of the Jewish community in Romania, Elie Wiesel, says that the past has to be a lesson of life that allows us not to repeat the mistakes, while memory may be the foundation that a new conscience can be built on. It would not have the wit to give us all the answers, but, combined with responsibility, it is “an important part for what we agree to be a common future.”⁵ To keep this memory alive, it is necessary “to find some decisive answers for the understanding of the human being and Western civilization, but, at the same time, it means raising an incomparably bigger number of questions that may not find an answer.”⁶

¹ Andrei Oișteanu, *Imaginea evreului în cultura română. Studiu de imagologie în context est-central-european* (The image of the Jews in Romanian culture. A study in imagology in a Central and Eastern European context), 3rd ed. (Iași: Polirom, 2012), 306–7.

² Hilberg, *Exterminarea evreilor din Europa*, vol. I, 655–68.

³ Matatias Carp, *Holocaust in Rumania. Facts and documents on the annihilation of Rumania's Jews. 1940–44* (Budapest: Primor Publishing Co., 1994), 27.

⁴ Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann în Ierusalim. Un raport asupra banalității răului* (Eichmann in Jerusalem. Report on the banality of evil) (Bucharest: Editura All, 1997), 323–4.

⁵ Frunză, *Dumnezeu și Holocaustul la Elie Wiesel*, 141.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 59.

The Holocaust in Romania had some specifics, ridden with “contradictions and paradoxes”. The victims of the rebellion in Bucharest were few, compared to the pogroms during the war. Just like in neighbouring countries, Hungary and Bulgaria, the Jews were living in territories claimed by other countries (Bessarabia, North Bucovina, Transylvania). Compared to other European countries, where there was no communication between the Jewish community leaders and the state, in Romania “the lines of communication remained open and these leaders, in person or through petitions, were in permanent contact with authorities.”¹ In the early 40’s, there were two Jewish organizations in Romania: The Union of the Romanian Jews (led by Wilhelm Filderman) and The Jewish Party (led by Theodor Fisher).² Once the war broke out, and the anti-Semitic laws got stiffer, the role of the two organizations became essential for the defence and safety of the community.³ The Federation of the Union of Jewish Communities (FUJC) was in charge for the communication between Jews and the state. As long as at the helm of FUJC was Wilhelm Filderman, the totalitarian state had no leverage and no means of propaganda inside this union. In order to gain full control over it, on 16 December 1941, FUJC was declared illegal by decree.⁴ Between 1940–1944, “the Romanian authorities negotiated with Wilhelm Filderman, then with Gingold, and finally, again with Filderman, based on the success or defeat of the German army on the battlefield.”⁵ The disappearance of FUJC did not bring Filderman’s activity to a halt, who, in spite of the imposed limitations, “remained the principal representative of the Romanian Jewish community.”⁶ The dissolution of FUJC was a result of an initiative signed by Radu Lecca and the pressure of an SS counsellor, Richter. Marshall Ion Antonescu signed the decree, but he also created the Jewish Council.⁷ The historian Shimon Schafermann analyzed psychologically Ion Antonescu’s reactions to pressure and influence and concluded that his hesitation and some other times his harshness in dealing with the Jewish community came from his relationship with Nazi Germany, as this was going up and down all the time. Ion Antonescu was trying hard to keep some independence from Berlin, but, at the same time, stay the course of anti-Semitism without hurting too bad the feelings of his former high school classmate, Wilhelm Filderman to whom he was doing favours because he respected him for his intelligence in his defence for his people. Against all odds, Ion Antonescu managed to maintain a balancing act, fulfilling his obligations toward Hitler, but also understanding the hard times the Jewish community had fallen into. Wilhelm

¹ Radu Ioanid, *Evreii sub regimul Antonescu* (Jews under the Antonescu regime) (Bucharest: Editura Hasefer, 1997), 399.

² Ibid., 9.

³ Tuvia Friling, Radu Ioanid and Mihail E. Ionescu, eds., *Raport final* (Final report) (Iași: Polirom, 2005), 226.

⁴ Lucy S. Dawidowicz, *Războiul împotriva evreilor. 1933–1945* (The war against the Jews) (Bucharest: Editura Hasefer, 1999), 349.

⁵ Hilberg, *Exterminarea evreilor*, 674.

⁶ Friling and Ioanid and Ionescu, *Raport final*, 218.

⁷ Hilberg, *Exterminarea evreilor*, 689–90.

Filderman knew that Ion Antonescu had the pride and ambition “to solve the Jewish problem on his own and not led by others”.¹

Romania was at the time a sovereign state that today bears the entire responsibility for the actions that targeted the Jews. “Secondly, the assassination of Jews under Romanian administration was not only the result of planned extermination, but also the result of mass-deportation.”²

As far as Ion Antonescu’s personal policy toward the Jews is concerned, it can be judged as different from Europe’s, unfolding over two periods: 1941–1942 (the elimination of the Jewish population from Bessarabia and Bucovina, with survivors deported to Transnistria), and 1943–1944 (a fairer treatment for the Jews of the Old Kingdom and their unofficial help to emigrate to Palestine). One of Ion Antonescu’s statements during his postwar trial, partially true, reads: “If the Jews are alive in the Old Kingdom today, it’s because of Antonescu”. It is true that those who managed to survive the assassinations, purges, and random violence at the hands of murderous legionnaires did so because Ion Antonescu called it off. On the other hand, Ion Antonescu is responsible for the death of the Jews from Bessarabia and Bucovina, and their deportation to Transnistria: “The Jews of Romania owe both their life and death to Antonescu.”³ The change of attitude between 1943 and 1944 can be justified by the same opportunism that had made Ion Antonescu sign an alliance with Hitler. An excellent strategist, Ion Antonescu anticipated the fate of the war and he was trying to secure his place at the negotiation table. His bargaining chips were again the Jews. The second explanation may be that of rampant corruption in the Romanian society. In Andrei Șiperco’s opinion, there was also a third explanation: “the true humanitarian feelings typical to the Romanian nation even in the murky time of war.”⁴ In our opinion, this can be partly true if we consider the events in and around Bucharest, where violence against Jews was not as common as in other areas of the country.

The Romanian anti-Semitic governance had begun in 1867 and covered half a century, a period in which 196 anti-Semitic laws were passed, denying the Jewish population’s basic civil liberties.⁵ Gen. Ion Antonescu, a lawful man, but also his ruling body, were this way able to justify their actions and find moral comfort at the same time. The legislation during WWII created the legal basis that made possible deportation, eviction, expulsion, and internment of Jews in ghettos. It was according

¹ Teșu Solomovici, *România Judaică. O istorie neconvențională a evreilor din România. 2.000 de ani de existență continuă* (Judaic Romania. An unconventional history of the Jews in Romania. 2000 years of continuous existence) (Bucharest: Editura TEȘU, 2001), 434–5.

² Dennis Deletant, *Transnistria: Câteva considerații despre semnificația acesteia pentru Holocaustul din România*, in Viorel Achim, Constantin Iordachi, coords., *România și Transnistria: Problema Holocaustului. Perspective istorice și comparative* (Bucharest: Curtea Veche, 2004), 162.

³ Ioanid, *Evreii sub regimul Antonescu*, 373.

⁴ Andrei Șiperco, *Ecouri dintr-o epocă tulbură. Documente elvețiene 1940–1944* (Bucharest: Editura Hasefer, 1998), 15.

⁵ Carp, *Holocaust in Rumania*, 122–3.

to this legislation that the entire population of Bessarabia and the majority of Bucovina were deported.¹

Limiting political, civil and economic rights of the Jews was not new to this part of the world. It had begun before WWI and culminated with the anti-Semitic legislation passed by the Octavian Goga and Alexandru Cuza government (28 December 1937-February 10, 1938).² All governments between world wars supported and implemented anti-Jewish legislation and decrees, and “whatever the Goga government had left unfinished was picked up by the Gigurtu administration”, namely Decree 2650/1940, stipulating that “Romania belongs to Romanians” and “defending the blood is the moral basis for the recognition of the supreme political rights”.³ Legislation passed over a few years was in fact a real program to reorganize the Romanian society so that the Jews would be not only pushed out of political, social and economic activities, but also “hurt in their civic and human dignity”.⁴ Between the two world wars the national minorities (Jews and Hungarians) were perceived as enemies, so branded even by influential political leaders.⁵

The next fateful moment for the Romanian Jews was the nomination of Ion Antonescu as head of government, nicknamed “The Leader” on September 4, 1940.⁶ There was only one more step to take over the entire country and on September 14, 1940 King Mihai signed the decree by which Romania became “a national Legionnaire state”, run by Gen. Ion Antonescu and the Legion Movement was the only legally recognized political force in Romania.⁷ Under these terms, the Constitution and all legislation had to be adapted to the new political reality.⁸ This absolute power in the hands of a single person meant the concentration of both the legislative and executive powers into one. Starting with 1940, Ion Antonescu passed anti-Semitic legislation that according to Hannah Arendt was “the harshest in Europe even compared to Germany’s.”⁹ In contrast to the religious anti-Semitism of the legionnaires, Ion Antonescu’s anti-Semitism was based on political, economic, and social reasons. In case the legionnaires were in power for the long run, this legislation could have been stiffened, applying the German model.¹⁰ Ion

¹ Ioanid, *Evreii sub regimul Antonescu*, 49.

² Iacov Geller, *Rezistența spirituală a evreilor români în timpul Holocaustului (1940–1944). Viața economică, educația și cultura, asistența socială, religia, rabinatul, salvarea refugiaților și emigrarea în Israel* (The spiritual resistance of Romanian Jews during the Holocaust (1940–1944). Economic life, education and culture, social services, religion, the Rabbinate, saving the refugees, emigration to Israel) (Bucharest: Editura Hasefer, 2004), 11.

³ Solomovici, *România Judaică*, 347.

⁴ Lya Benjamin, ed. and Sergiu Stanciu, coord., *Evreii din România între anii 1940–1944*. (The Jews in Romania between 1940 and 1944), Vol. 1, *Legislația antievreiască* (Anti-Judaic legislation) (Bucharest: Editura Hasefer, 1993), XX.

⁵ Daniel Hrenciuc, *Dilemele conviețuirii: Evreii din Bucovina (1774–1939)* (Dilemmas of cohabitation: Jews in Bucovina) (Iași: Editura Tipo Moldova, 2010), 8.

⁶ Geller, *Rezistența spirituală*, 11.

⁷ Benjamin and Stanciu, *Evreii din România...*, 61.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁹ Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann în Ierusalim. Un raport asupra banalității răului* 208.

¹⁰ Ioanid, *Evreii sub regimul Antonescu*, 388.

Antonescu's policy regarding the Jews depended on the geographical area where the Jews lived, in some distant provinces or in Romania proper (called The Old Kingdom). His policy was strategic. He admitted that some categories of Jews had contributed to the country's development and emancipation. He really saw "their usefulness for the Romanian state", especially in the army. We dare say that Ion Antonescu's anti-Semitism was not extremist.¹ It is true that Ion Antonescu installed a military dictatorship because under his command the country had to be prepared for the oncoming war with Russia and reunification with Bessarabia and Bucovina, lost earlier through Russian ultimatum. He was a soldier. His anti-Semitic stand meant to play along with Hitler the fanatical legionnaires "whom he actually despised. This was a big chance for the Jews!"² His anti-Semitic position had its roots in the nationalist doctrine peddled in the media by journalists, writers and intelligentsia. It took 10 years (1930–1940) to sell to the masses this new ideology, based on hatred and discrimination, rather than peace and understanding. The idea of an ethnically pure state penetrated all levels of communication, and to make matters worse, even education, which, as we know, starts in the family and continues in school. The ideas of purity, "the nostalgia of essence", "the quest for perfection", "aspiration for purity" were some of the catchwords widely publicized by the propaganda machinery set into motion for political gain.³

The anti-Semitic legislation and measures came in 3 categories: 1. Purges (the expulsion of Jews from official positions or state jobs, school and college students from the education system in an attempt to "Romanize" it) 2. Confiscation (of property both commercial or housing, the annulment of business licenses and driving permits) 3. New taxation laws on this ethnicity (plus forced labour for community benefit, and mandatory contribution with goods, like clothing, etc.).⁴

The worst year for the persecution of Jews was 1941, when anti-Semitism broke out into all aspects of daily life: economic, judicial, social, moral, religious. Moreover, in some areas like Dorohoi or Iași, random killings, pogroms and deportation peaked. In spite of all these, half the Jewish population managed to survive.⁵ The legionnaires' rampage engulfed the entire country and targeted not only the Jews.⁶ These acts of vandalism and violence were tolerated by Ion Antonescu from the fall of 1940 till January 1941, when his political cooperation with the Legion was about to end. According to Marius Mircu, Ion Antonescu's desire to remove the Legion from the government was necessary because they wanted to overthrow the government and run the country by themselves: "When

¹ Friling, Ioanid and Ionescu, *Raport final*, 115–6.

² Solomovici, *România Judaică*, 354–5.

³ Victor Neumann, *Istoria evreilor din România. Studii documentare și teoretice* (The history of Jews in Romania. Documentary and theoretic studies) (Timișoara: Editura Amarcord, 1996), 212–3.

⁴ Arendt, *Eichmann în Ierusalim*, 351–2.

⁵ Lya Benjamin, Dumitru Hincu, Harry Kuller, Ioan Șerbănescu, eds., 1941. *Dureroasa fracturare a unei lungi conviețuiri* (1941. The painful fracture of a long cohabitation) (Bucharest: CSLER, 2001), 7.

⁶ Marius Mircu, *M-am născut reporter!* (I was born a reporter!) (Bucharest: Editura Cartea Românească, 1981), 386.

Antonescu realized that the legionnaires pushed beyond the limits of anti-Semitism and now they were attacking the Romanian commerce and industry, hinting directly at the exclusive power in the state, he decided that time had come to take action against them.¹ This point of view is shared also by the central press that says, “their thought and purpose were to get their hands on the entire power”. Two newspapers, *Acțiunea* (*The Action*) and *Universul* (*The Universe*), ran 3 copies of documents that back up this theory: the establishment of the legionnaire police, the transfer of arms from the Ministry of Interior to the Legion, and the letter by Ion Zelea Codreanu that read: “I’m so much against these phony legionnaires like Horia Sima”.² Ion Antonescu’s first measure to anger the legionnaires was the elimination of the position of “Romanization Commissar” from the administration. Their immediate reaction was to ask for his resignation. Events are precipitating with the assassination of German Major Döring, the dismissal of the minister of interior Gen. C. Petrovicescu and the chief of police, Al. Ghica. As expected, the legionnaires reacted violently. They holed up in a few official buildings: State Security, Prefecture, their own, Iron Guard, Public Guards Patrol Barracks and on the evening of Jan. 21, 1941, the rebellion began in full swing.³ Marius Mircu considers the assassination of the German Major Döring “a «fortunate» event” that served Gen. Ion Antonescu a good reason to dismiss two important leaders, “the chief of state security and the chief of police, who were main public figures supporting the legionnaires, even providing them with guns.”⁴ With the rebellion underway, the rebels also took over the official radio station and printing houses so that the general’s appeals to public order never reached the public.⁵

It has been repeated over and over that the difficulty of getting the truth about the Holocaust was because it was too complex an event. For John K. Roth the difficulty lies in the “inability of words” to describe in comprehensive images the psychological trauma, the despicable scenes of random violence, and the humiliation of fellow man by man that the Jews had to go through. The idea is completed by Elie Wiesel who says that “the human mind cannot fathom and fit that kind of reality into a rational, explanatory, and coherent system”.⁶ The many books written on the topic by historians offer detailed accounts of the horrific events, marked by torture, pillage, looting, arson, beatings, and humiliation. To complete the picture, there are personal memoirs and diaries, very accurate and emotional, written by the lucky ones, the victims who lived to talk about this human tragedy. These are personal experiences that flash events and emotions of those who lived them – a year in a

¹ Ibid., 385.

² “*Rebeliunea a fost premeditată și pregătită demult*” (“The rebellion has long been premeditated and prepared”) *Acțiunea* 124 (1941): 3; “*Rebeliunea a fost premeditată și pregătită de mult*”, *Timpu* 1345 (1941): 1.

³ Ioanid, *Evreii sub regimul Antonescu*, 73–4.

⁴ Mircu, *M-am născut reporter!*, 380.

⁵ Jean Ancel, *Contribuții la istoria României. Problema evreiască*, (Contributions to the history of Romania. The Jewish problem) vol. I, 1933–1944 (Bucharest: Editura Hasefer, 2003), 407.

⁶ Frunză, *Dumnezeu și Holocaustul la Elie Wiesel*, 45.

blink and a blink in a year. Back to back, these events seem surreal. Life lived in daily routine pulverized by the outbreak of a pogrom followed by deportation to concentration camps. Terrifying moments that look impossible for a contemporary world. But it was real. It actually happened. Where the words become unreliable or unable to resonate, the still photograph comes in to drive the message home. “A picture is worth a thousand words” – the saying goes. But how about a picture that is worth an entire book? Because that’s what comes to mind when you see smouldering ruins that a day before was a suburban grocery store or a clearing in the woods of Jilava full of corpses strewn about the place? We live in an era oversaturated with information which allows us little time to read ample studies in a society driven by images. If we talk about the “Facebook” generation, the fascination with images that capture their attention is overwhelming. Regardless of the language they speak or their education level, a picture’s message is understood by everybody. Moreover, technology of today allows its users to share instantly information and images with peers wherever they may live on the planet. In the same way, even those who are not keen on history, may find useful to know that there was a Holocaust in Romania, and sooner or later will take an interest in the details of this moment in the troubled times Romania went through in those years. The black and white pictures, original and uncensored, possibly more expressive than colour pictures, are vivid proof that, at times, life may come down to this kind of event. Without any words, the faces or the bodies of those people relay their pain and bewilderment at what happened to them, and even some sort of resignation to it. The pictures that show burned synagogues, ransacked homes and looted stores with broken windows and doors, deliver a powerful message that cannot be denied. The visual impact delivers the message loud and clear that atrocities were committed there, an impact more powerful than any words. If in the case of a written account the reader may think that the facts are exaggerated, the pictures leave no room for doubt because the picture “speaks” by itself. Set these pictures side by side in a slide show and we get the terrifying film of an entire tragedy. The rebellion of Bucharest was captured in many pictures, both official and private, and the way they were taken also reveals the attitude of the photographer towards the events. In official photographs one can see that the man behind the camera took the pictures in such a way as not to harm the prestige of the totalitarian regime. The violence and devastation against the Jews are not to be found in this category. The relevant pictures for our study can be found in the unofficial gallery where reality prevailed and nobody tried to fix them.

Picture is a modern means of manipulation of the public opinion. Success in manipulation depends on the ability of the man behind the camera to impress his target-public with pictures that relay powerful emotions like: fear, terror, and panic because the impact triggers the attention of one of the principal senses – the eye. Focusing puts the viewer right into the situation making him identify with the subjects.

There are numerous pictures with the devastation of Dudești and Văcărești suburbs (burned synagogues, private stores and property) or the killings in Jilava Woods. Matatias Carp was one of those who knew history had to be recorded and did just that between 21–23 of January, 1941. So did F. Brunea-Fox and Marius Mircu who published the pictures of the Romanian Holocaust. Worldwide, the

Holocaust is the subject of over 20 million pictures, making it one of the best documented events ever.¹ In spite of all this, in different books we see only the same pictures. Modern technology allows us to process them digitally and soon we will have unlimited and free access to all of these documents of historic importance.

The present study intends to show only specific aspects of the atrocities committed during the fascist rebellion of Bucharest, namely those in the photographs made by eyewitnesses. The study also presents briefly the historic context, but does not insist on the forces that generated the event and what this represented in terms of number of victims and who was responsible. Those are complex issues and will be debated in other ample studies.

The Rebellion in Bucharest

Bucharest was an exception in terms of the Jewish community due to the large concentration of prominent personalities who were part of the Romanian cultural elite (writers, journalists, actors, etc.), and also professional associations (bankers, lawyers, medical doctors, etc.) Fully aware that culture played a major role in the life of a society and was appreciated properly, these important people who had been excluded from public life by anti-Semitic laws, joined the new legal formations: The Community and The Jewish Central. This concentration of forces allowed some normalcy in carrying out life on an everyday basis, cultural and spiritual, and also some organized resistance to purges, discrimination, and persecution.² The Pogrom of Bucharest was illustrated in the works of quite a few Jewish intellectuals like Mihail Sebastian, F. Brunea-Fox, Emil Dorian, Matatias Carp, Alexandru Şafran, Marius Mircu, who lived through the terror of those days and witnessed firsthand the violence and devastation of the legionnaires. For F. Brunea-Fox, Matatias Carp and Marius Mircu these moments were forever engraved in their memory because they saw the terrifying events unfolding with their own eyes, whether those were the massacre in the Jilava Woods, at the Bucharest slaughterhouse, or on the streets of the capital city. For example, F. Brunea-Fox, a master of words with great impact, describes what he saw at the slaughterhouse: “The Jews, picked up in the middle of the night in their homes, dragged there and slaughtered like animals. The long knife like a sword that used to give me the chills in the past, sharp like a razor blade, slits the throat in a blink of an eye”. The victims lifted up and hanged in the hooks “to drip”.³ There are two clues to show that the victims at the slaughterhouse were executed: entry bullet wounds at the head and neck and the fact that all victims’ hands were tied behind their back.⁴ To add insult to injury, the “butchers” tagged

¹ Marianne Hirsch, *The Surviving Images: Holocaust Photographs and the Work of Post Modernity*, <http://www.fsf.ane.ru/attachments/article/157/mar%20f.pdf> (accessed September 24, 2014).

² Friling, Ioanid and Ionescu, *Report final*, 225.

³ F. Brunea-Fox, *Oraşul măcelului. Jurnalul rebeliunii şi al crimelor legionare* (The city of slaughter. The Diary of the legionnaires’ rebellion and crimes) (Bucharest: Editura Hasefer, 1997), 78.

⁴ Matatias Carp, *Cartea neagră. Fapte şi documente. Suferinţele evreilor din România 1940–1944*, vol. 1. *Legionarii şi rebeliunea* (Bucharest: Atelierele Grafice SOCEC&Co., S.A.R, 1946), 231.

their victims with the message “Kosher meat”.¹ An act of humiliation that was not strange to the Jews who seemed to have gotten used to or so thought their tormentors. These thought that the weak resistance the Jews put up in the mayhem was a sign of cowardice or guilt. This misinterpretation reveals a lack of judgment and a criminal drive to hurt people. The pictures taken there do not show what happened during the events, but show the shocking consequences that need no explaining. Words just can’t do it. Reading the expressions on those faces who in the last moments of their lives cried out a booming “Why?” will be heard over centuries. Nowadays people are exposed to a fabricated violence of “make believe” (in movies, mass-media, or electronic games) that is simply unimpressive, but a still picture in black and white showing a mass murder, irrational and aimless sends shockwaves through the universal conscience.

The Rebellion of Bucharest took place between January 21–23, 1941, in 3 areas: Jilava Woods, Bucharest Slaughterhouse, and residential areas², and had two components: one against the Romanian state authority and one against the Jews with the help of local “hooligans”³, who, “animated by a zest for destruction [...] set on fire entire residential blocks in Bucharest (Dudești, Văcărești), kill hundreds of people at the slaughterhouse, in the adjacent woods, in the street and in homes.”⁴ The legionnaires proved themselves very ingenious when it came to methods of torture, not common to all of them, except for their pleasure to inflict pain and death to their victims.⁵ Mihail Sebastian is bewildered by the people’s violent behaviour: “What really makes you freeze, especially in the mass carnage in Bucharest, is the absolute beastly ferocity of how things were carried out. This comes out even in the neutral official communiqué [...] But what is told by the word of mouth is a lot more frightening than the official press release.”⁶ The victims were forced to drink a mix of salt, petrol, gasoline, and vinegar and then denied access to the bathrooms. During the so-called investigations (with no official charges as these were innocent people rounded up from their homes) they were stripped naked and beaten to a pulp. The children were tortured in front of their parents. “The lucky ones” – those who made it out alive – were released after two days only with their shirts on, barefoot, through the snow to go to their homes that were devastated and burned.⁷ On January 21, 1941, 200 Jews were brought to the legionnaires’ centre on Călărași Avenue where all their belongings were confiscated and they were forced to march up and down the stairway between the cellar and the attic “under a rain of strikes, as on every step there was a legionnaire with a whip or an iron rod.” Torture was also going on in a room where the Jews were beaten with whips and iron rods over their naked bodies. Then they were split into two groups. The first was taken to Străulești where they

¹ Mihail Sebastian, *Jurnal 1935–1944* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1996), 299.

² Geller, *Rezistența spirituală a evreilor*, 34.

³ Alexandru Șafran, *Un tăciune smuls flăcărilor. Comunitatea evreiască din România 1939–1947. Memorii* (Bucharest: Editura Hasefer, 1996), 62.

⁴ A. Simion, *Regimul politic din România în perioada septembrie 1940–ianuarie 1941* (Cluj: Editura Dacia, 1976), 253.

⁵ Jean Ancel, *Contribuții la istoria României*, 422.

⁶ Sebastian, *Jurnal*, 299.

⁷ Carp, *Cartea neagră*, 219–24.

were beaten for two days in a row, stripped naked and released. Those in the second group were taken to Jilava Woods and shot dead.¹ Their corpses were mutilated by grave robbers who “used knives to pry jewellery and golden teeth off their victims’ fingers, ears and mouths”.² One of the few survivors of the massacre at Jilava Woods was rabbi Zvi (Herş) Guttman.³ His tragedy was reported by historians over and over. It says that in the beginning, when the hell broke loose, he ignored the noise of mayhem outside of his Văcăreşti home, thinking that it wouldn’t touch him, as some incidents of vandalism against Jewish property had happened before: “No Jewish resident of the capital city, locked inside his home as soon as the machine gun fire erupted knew that this was all planned in advance and a major objective of the rebellion – the most vindictive and the bloodiest – was the pogrom”. The tension became unbearable the moment they realized the final objective of their tormentors was to kill them: “I kept cool as much as I could for the sake of the boys, and they, poor guys, were biting their lips to muffle their moaning”.⁴ Rabbi Zvi (Herş) Guttman was picked up from his home together with his two sons Iacov and Josef who were killed in Jilava Woods.⁵ The father held his sons’ hands until their last beat of life, “their pulse was slower and slower until it stopped.”⁶ When he woke up from his faint in the snow of the Jilava Woods, rabbi Zvi Guttman “saw the legionnaires pulling off the rings on the dead bodies, the watches and golden teeth”.⁷ teeth”.⁷ He then met some farmers who were there to take the goods left behind by legionnaires. “Mercifully”, these “let him go and even told him which direction to take to avoid falling again into the hands of those beasts from the city hall”.⁸ Seriously shaken up, he had to face not only the despair for the loss of two sons, but also the criminal conduct of those who were supposed to protect him under the law. He was arrested again, taken to Jilava Woods again with 7 fellows, shot at but missed. He escaped just to be picked up the third time, taken to the city hall where he was beaten and his beard pulled, then, as if his tormentors got tired of this rabbi who didn’t want to die, they let him go. He went back to Jilava woods and tagged his sons’ bodies so that they could be easily identified.⁹

¹ Ioanid, *Evreii sub regimul Antonescu*, 76–7.

² Carol Iancu, *Shoah în România. Evreii în timpul regimului Antonescu (1940–1944). Documente diplomatice franceze inedite* (Shoah in Romania. Jews in the time of the Antonescu regime [1940–1944]. Unpublished French diplomacy documents) (Iaşi: Polirom, 2001), 113–7.

³ Brunea-Fox, *Oraşul măcelului*, 96.

⁴ J. Alexadru, L. Benjamin, D. Brumfeld, A. Florean, P. Litman, S. Stanciu, coords., *Martiriul evreilor din România 1940–1944. Documente şi mărturii* (The martyrdom of Jews in Romania 1940–1944. Documents and testimonies) (Bucharest: Editura Hasefer, 1991), 76–83.

⁵ Geller, *Rezistenţa spirituală a evreilor români*, 35.

⁶ Carp, *Cartea neagră*, 229.

⁷ Iancu and Iosif Guttman, *Slove de martir... publicate de părintele lor Rabin H. Guttman* (Martyr’s words... published by their parent, Rabbi H. Guttman) (Bucharest: Editura Hasefer, 2008), 425.

⁸ Brunea-Fox, *Oraşul măcelului*, 100–4.

⁹ Carp, *Cartea neagră*, 229–30.



Corpses of the victims killed in Jilava Woods – collections.yadvashem.org/photosarchive/eng-us/52466.html (accessed September 22, 2014).



Corpses of the Jews killed after they were robbed of all belongings

collections.yadvashem.org/photosarchive/eng-us/29731.html (accessed September 22, 2014).



Corpses of the Jews Killed in Jilava Woods

collections.yadvashem.org/photosarchive/eng-us/85481.html (accessed September 22, 2014).



Jews killed in Jilava Woods –
collections.yadvashem.org/photosarchive/eng-us/5854513.html
(accessed September 22, 2014).

On January 24, 1941, authorities started picking up the corpses by military trucks to take them to the city morgue where their relatives – men, women, and children – were waiting to identify them. They were looking in desperation to “naked, cut, and mutilated bodies”, hoping that their dear ones were not among them.¹ The mutilated bodies, hard to recognize, were showing torture as their cause of death: “Jaques Costin’s brother could hardly be identified by his relatives. He had only in the head four bullet holes. The lawyer Beiler was bullet ridden and his throat slit.”² According to Marius Mircu’s reports, people were staying in line to enter the morgue “where the victims were exposed for identification.”³ On that same day, people travelling along Bucharest-Ploiești road saw dead bodies around Băneasa, stripped of their clothes and mutilated.⁴



Corpses of the murdered
Jews at Bucharest Morgue

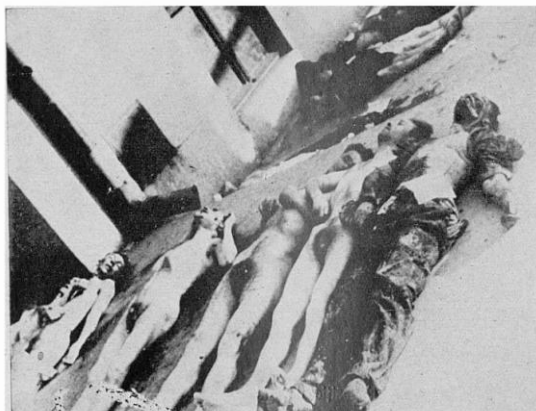
–
collections.yadvashem.org/photosarchive/eng-us/5854513_29183.html
(accessed September 22, 2014).

¹ Ibid, 78–9.

² Sebastian, *Jurnal*, 297.

³ Marius Mircu, *M-am născut reporter!*, 393.

⁴ Hilberg, *Exterminarea evreilor...*, 672.



The Morgue of Bucharest – Matatias Carp, *Cartea Neagră. Fapte și documente. Suferințele evreilor din România 1940–1944, vol. I: Legionarii și rebeliunea* (București: Atelierele Grafice SOCEC&Co., S.A.R., 1946), 82.



The Morgue of Bucharest – <http://collections.yadvashem.org/photosarchive/en-us/6081906.html> (accessed September 22, 2014).



Mutilated Corpse – <http://collections.yadvashem.org/photosarchive/en-us/59450.html> (accessed September 22, 2014).

Cronica anilor risipiți (*The Chronicle of Wasted Years*), by Serge Moscovici, describes the reality of the Bucharest streets in those days of nightmare, filtered through his own sensitivity. The carefully picked words depict the atmosphere of the year 1941, and succeeds to get his message across to us about the fright and the panic of those peaceful people whose lives were turned upside down

in a blink of an eye: “Fright, the helpless fright before violence that one could watch becoming harder and harder to control [...]. It seemed that fearful eyes were looking at me from all the windows. Stores were hastily boarded up, waiting for a new wave of terror. [...] Volunteer informers were pointing out Jewish stores and homes to the looters. [...] a little farther down the street, stones started flying and baseball bats swinging at a few pedestrians, all in a middle of a frightening mayhem. [...] The entire street smelled like fire burning [...]. The buildings looked like devastated by bombs. Many of them were blackened by smoke. Smoke was coming out from the windows of stores and homes alike. And cohorts of bandits were on a rampage, while occasional pedestrians passed by with their heads down”. This image makes a striking contrast with that of the looters who seemed to be revellers “at a popular and cruel party”.¹ Right from the start of the rebellion, within 24 hours, the feeling that took over the entire Jewish community was fright: “it was a night of terror [...] From the tiny window of the attic I saw Dudești Avenue (it was close) towards Văcărești Avenue the sky was red”. That night shops and homes were set on fire “on both sides of the streets the front and the inside of the buildings were still smouldering. All shops (Jewish) were destroyed and looted of their goods”.²



Ransacked book store and shop on Dudești Avenue, No. 78 – https://www2.landesarchiv-bw.de/ofs21/bild_zoom/zoom.php?bestand=20946&id=1304422&screenbreite=1440&screenhoehe=852 (accessed September 22, 2014).



Looted Jewelry Store on Văcărești Avenue – https://www2.landesarchiv-bw.de/ofs21/bild_zoom/zoom.php?bestand=20946&id=1304408&screenbreite=1440&screenhoehe=852 (accessed September 22, 2014).

¹ Solomovici, *România Judaica*, 360–1.

² Mircu, *M-am născut reporter!*, 391.



Looted cookware store on Văcărești Avenue –
https://www2.landesarchiv-bw.de/ofs21/bild_zoom/zoom.php?bestand=20946&id=1304405&screenbreite=1440&screenhoehe=852 (accessed September 22, 2014).



Burned down store on Văcărești Avenue –
https://www2.landesarchiv-bw.de/ofs21/bild_zoom/zoom.php?bestand=20946&id=1304411&screenbreite=1440&screenhoehe=852 (accessed September 22, 2014).



Looted drug store on Văcărești Avenue –
https://www2.landesarchiv-bw.de/ofs21/bild_zoom/zoom.php?bestand=20946&id=1304412&screenbreite=1440&screenhoehe=852 (accessed September 22, 2014).

The attacks against the Jewish suburbs started at the same time. Within a few hundred yards one could see the devastation inflicted: ransacked homes, Jews marching under armed escort, temples still burning.¹ The suburbs of Dudești and

¹ Carp, *Cartea neagră*, 77.

Văcărești, inhabited mainly by Jews were lying in shambles: “What happened in Văcărești, Dudești and neighbouring areas cannot be described ...There is no need to. All one has to do is enumerate the horrific murders, the destruction and the pillage. But even this wouldn’t be enough as more and more crimes are discovered every day. [...] We know the number of the dead and the missing, but the exact number will never be known or the maddening details of the fright before the end came. The devastating fury didn’t spare anybody and anything...store after store with windows and doors shattered, smouldering buildings, a desolate and empty landscape, nobody could say what was there before.”¹ Even four days after the rebellion was crushed, after the first cleanup, “the view was still overwhelming” to a visitor: “The disaster was in Văcărești and especially in Dudești. There was no house or shack untouched, ransacked, looted and burned. Try to imagine the suburb burning Wednesday night while the marauding gangs were shooting people crazed by fright.”²



Home of Bellina Dr.
Wolfshaut Dudești
Avenue no. 59 – Matatias
Carp, *Cartea Neagră. Fapte și documente. Suferințele evreilor din România 1940–1944, vol. I: Legionarii și rebeliunea* (București: Atelierele Grafice SOCEC&Co., S.A.R.,1946), 220.



Dining room of a home Col.
Prero St. no. 11 – Matatias
Carp, *Cartea Neagră. Fapte și documente. Suferințele evreilor din România 1940–1944, vol. I: Legionarii și rebeliunea* (București: Atelierele Grafice SOCEC&Co., S.A.R.,1946), 221.

¹ Dorian, *Jurnal din vremuri*, 146.

² Sebastian, *Jurnal*, 295.



Bedroom of a home on Col. Prero St. no. 11 – Matatias Carp, *Cartea Neagră. Fapte și documente. Suferințele evreilor din România 1940–1944, vol. I: Legionarii și rebeliunea* (București: Atelierele Grafice SOCEC&Co., S.A.R., 1946), 221.



Vandalized home – <http://collections.yadvashe m.org/photosarchive/en-us/14665.html> (accessed September 22, 2014).

It is important to know how the information spread: “All acquaintances who met in the street were sharing information about murders and looting. And as far as torture, beating and maiming are concerned the list is infinite and contains the entire record of real dementia – Jews forced to drink gasoline mixed with salt, crosses carved in flesh, beatings and murders committed by women and so on and so on.”¹ Since there was no official communiqué on the events, rumours were making the rounds all over the city: “I found out from Alice that last night, Văcărești and Dudești were set on fire. It seems that the same thing happened on Rahova Avenue and many other parts of town”.²

The attacks were not limited to people, shops, and homes. Being symbols of this ethnic group, the synagogues were also targeted, all at the same time. The assault on the Coral Temple was carried out at the time service was going on inside

¹ Dorian, *Jurnal din vremuri*, 147.

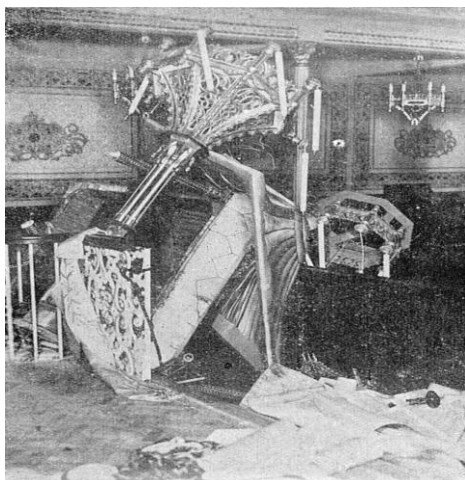
² Sebastian, *Jurnal*, 291.

and everybody in there was picked up at gun point, taken to Jilava Woods and shot. Another synagogue, one of the most beautiful in Europe, Cahal Grande, was burnt to the ground during the Bucharest rebellion.¹ The destruction of these important symbols was well orchestrated because the perpetrators of this anti-Semitic wave of violence wanted to strike at the heart of this community and destroy



The Spanish Temple on Negru Vodă

St. – Matatias Carp, *Cartea Neagră. Fapte și documente. Suferințele evreilor din România 1940–1944, vol. I: Legionarii și rebeliunea* (București: Atelierele Grafice SOCEC&Co., S.A.R., 1946), 214.

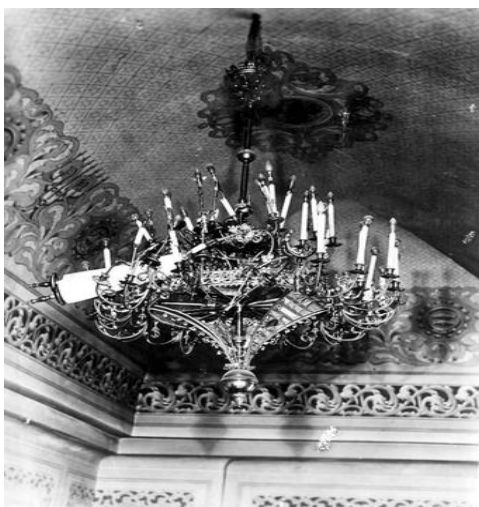


Damaged Pulpit of the Great Synagogue – Matatias Carp, *Cartea Neagră. Fapte și documente. Suferințele evreilor din România 1940–1944, vol. I: Legionarii și rebeliunea* (București: Atelierele Grafice SOCEC&Co., S.A.R., 1946), 217.

¹ Friling, Ioanid and Ionescu, *Raport final*, 112–3.



Destroyed Tora Papirus –
collections.yadvashem.org/photosarchive/eng-us/13900.html (accessed September 22, 2014).



Devastated Synagogue –
<http://collections.yadvashem.org/photosarchive/en-us/14496.html>
(accessed September 22, 2014).

The attacks on the synagogues and homes were carried out by the legionnaires, but for looting and destruction of the stores the locals jumped in. Beside of being a criminal act, this also resulted in driving this social category into poverty because the small shop was their only source of income. Not even the poor Jews from the outskirts were spared. They were robbed too.¹

Ion Antonescu's intervention would have saved lives and property, but he chose to stand idle for "political reasons".

Conclusions

¹ Ancel, *Contribuții la istoria României*, 435.

The Bucharest Rebellion was a tragic event in the life of the Jewish community in this country, ignored by some or encouraged by others who took active part in the violence and pillage. Besides the material loss inflicted by rioters, a lot more painful and contemptible was the loss of life, the torture, and the humiliation inflicted between 21 and 24 January 1941, a dark page in Romanian history. It is a clip of history we are not proud of, but it should remind us of our moral duty not to repeat it and pass this as a vow to the generations to come. A poll ordered by the Elie Wiesel National Institute for the Study of the Romanian Holocaust, published in April 2007, showed that “less than a quarter of the Romanian population knows that during WWII the Jews were victims of an anti-Semitic and criminal policy. The poll also showed that those who had information about the Holocaust thought that it was about loss of civil rights and loss of liberty. Extermination and the pogrom, as manifestations of the Holocaust scored very low.”¹ Chances are that from 2007 to present these data may have sunk even deeper. Taking into consideration the virtual world that the young live in and the lack of time adults live with, we think that the still photograph becomes essential in communication. A picture may have a more powerful impact than a text, needs no explaining and can be understood by all, regardless of the level of education. Moreover, in digital times the access to information of more people than ever before makes it a success in the preservation of history, especially that part that we do not want to repeat.

¹ Lya Benjamin, Alexandru Florian and Anca Ciuciu, eds., *Cum a fost posibil? Evreii din România în perioada Holocaustului* (How was it possible? Jews in Romania in the time of the Holocaust) (Bucharest: Editura Institutului Național pentru Studierea Holocaustului din România “Elie Wiesel”, 2007), 8.