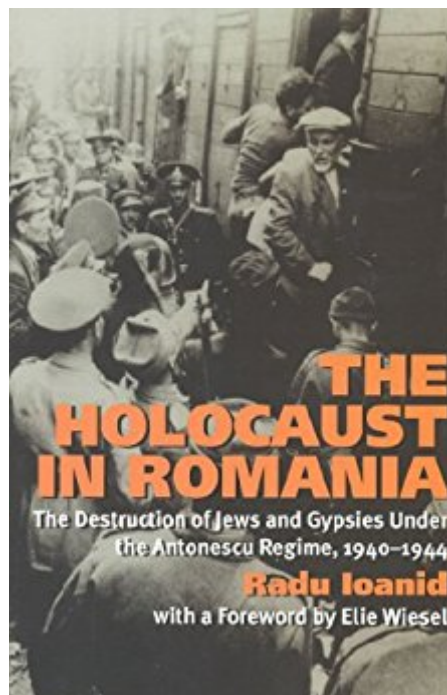




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The Holocaust In Romania: The Destruction Of Jews And Gypsies Under The Antonescu Regime, 1940-1944



Synopsis

In 1930, 757,000 Jews lived in Romania; they constituted the third largest Jewish community in Europe. Today not more than 14,000 Jews live in Romania, most of them elderly. The record of the Holocaust in Romania includes many curious chapters of support and betrayal, but they have been largely unavailable until now. Radu Ioanid's account based upon privileged access to secret East European government archives, is an unprecedented analysis of heretofore purposely hidden materials. Archival records, published and unpublished reports, memoirs of survivors, letters—Mr. Ioanid uses all these elements to build an accurate perspective on Romanian policies of racism, anti-Semitism, and Jewish extermination during the regime of Ion Antonescu. The publication of *The Holocaust in Romania* is timely as well as important, for there is now in Romania a growing effort to deny the government's role in the tragedy. Mr. Ioanid sheds light on the reality of the persecutions, the cruelty of the perpetrators, their blatant opportunism and endless cynicism. The story is one of destruction and survival; of German dissatisfaction with Romanian ad hoc violence; of an elusive national policy and the strategies of Romanian authorities that allowed 300,000 Romanian Jews to survive the war. "Invaluable...monumental...no comparable work in any language has documented this important history with the thoroughness, skill, and analytical sophistication this book demonstrates."—Leo Spitzer, Dartmouth College. Published in association with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. With 8 pages of photographs.

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Customer Reviews

Radu Ioanid's *The Holocaust in Romania: The Destruction of Jews and Gypsies Under the Antonescu Regime, 1940-1944* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee Publishers, 2000), has received well-deserved high praise from Elie Wiesel. Wiesel writes in the Foreword: "do not hesitate to say it: Radu Ioanid merits the recognition of all those who are interested in that history which has so lamely become known as the Holocaust. His work treats an unfortunately little-known subject: the tragic fate of the Jewish communities in Romania. Only a few historians, such as the great Raul Hilberg or Dora Litani, among others, have addressed it in their works. In fact, Radu Ioanid often leans upon them, but his work explores more fully the Evil that reigned in Transnistria, between the Bug and Dnister, the two great rivers in Ukraine. His work, based as it is on material from unpublished archives, thus constitutes a new contribution to this field." (vii). Ioanid is one of the first scholars to address the thorny subject of the Holocaust in Romania. Aside from Raul Hilberg, who covers the destruction of Jews throughout Europe including Romania, Jean Ancel (*The History of the Holocaust in Romania*, University of Nebraska Press, 2012) and Denis Deletant (*Hitler's Forgotten Ally*, Palgrave MacMillan Publishing, 2006) also subsequently covered this topic at length. Radu Ioanid, however, paved the way for research focusing on the Holocaust in Romania. His book is very important, not least of all because the Holocaust is denied or minimized by many in Romania: strangely enough, not only by the fringe political elements--Nazi or neo-Nazi sympathizers--but also by many conservative and even mainstream Romanians. The main reasons for Holocaust denial in the country are complex, however, three factors come to mind: 1) Ion Antonescu, Romania's authoritarian, pro-Fascist leader, has been rehabilitated as a nationalist hero, 2) some consider the Jews of Bessarabia and Bukovina who perished in the Holocaust not Romanian, but Ukrainian (even though they were under Romanian occupation during the Holocaust) and perhaps most importantly 3) Romania has a unique and ambivalent history towards its Jewish population during the Fascist era. It is the country that collaborated with Germany and doomed to death between 250,000 to 290,000 Jews (mostly those living in Bukovina and Bessarabia) while at the same time being one of the European countries with most Jewish survivors: about 375,000 Jews living in Wallachia, Moldavia and Southern Transylvania made it alive through the end of WWII. Those who want to absolve Ion Antonescu and the country in general of responsibility for the massacre of Jews in Romania have to contend with Radu Ioanid's

thoroughly researched and compelling evidence to the contrary. Ioanid describes the pogrom in Iasi that occurred in June 1941 as "one of the most savage pogroms of WWII" (The Holocaust in Romania, 63). Iasi was a divided city: half of its population was Jewish (about 50,000 out of 100,000 people), yet at the same time it was also the center of anti-Semitic, Fascist political activity (the Iron Guard headquarters). During the Iasi pogrom over 10,000 Jews were beaten, shot, robbed, raped and/or murdered. Hundreds of people were stuffed into boarded up "death trains" (about 100 persons to each car) that traveled aimlessly for days on end without food or water provisions. Most of them died of suffocation, thirst or starvation. The degradation of the Jews' humanity is almost indescribable. As Ioanid points out, "At one stop the inmates were permitted to drink from a pond where pigs wallowed; several fainted and drowned right there, others perished later from the ensuing gastrointestinal infections" (85). Antonescu not only allowed this to happen, but, according to Ioanid, he sent an order requiring that Jewish women and children be included in this "Action". Moreover, unlike the German crimes against humanity, which were largely hidden by Hitler from the native population, the violence in Iasi was perpetrated in plain sight of the Romanian people, many of whom participated, alongside the goons from the Iron Guard and government officials, in the lootings, beatings and murders of Jews. As Ioanid elaborates, "The mob's cruelty and greed took the form of truly shocking torture, rape, killing and robbery, all continuing earlier precedents but achieving spectacular new heights of barbarism" (62). The pogrom in Iasi, however, pales by comparison "at least in magnitude" to the Holocaust in Bessarabia and Bukovina, which began in June 1941 and resulted in over 300,000 deaths from forced deportations (to Transnistria), beatings, shootings, starvation and disease. Antonescu used the fact that Northern Bukovina had been briefly controlled by the Soviet Union (in June 1940) to charge the Jewish inhabitants of both Bukovina and Bessarabia with collaboration with the Red Army and target them for mass deportation and murder. Although most of the Jews of Regat (Moldavia, Walachia and Southern Transylvania), being considered "Romanian Jews", were spared from the Holocaust, Ioanid reminds us of significant exceptions: "about thirteen thousand Jews were murdered during the pogrom in Iasi, then the Moldavian capital" | During deportations from Dorohoi about twelve thousand Jewish inhabitants were sent to Transnistria, at least one half of which perished" (111). Furthermore, the Iron Guard killed 125 Jews in the Bucharest pogrom. Will those who do not wish to believe that the Holocaust occurred in Romania, or that Ion Antonescu's policies were largely responsible for it, be persuaded by Ioanid's careful study of the subject? Probably not. Historical evidence rarely sways ideological beliefs. But that is not the book's main

purpose. This history of the Holocaust in Romania establishes the facts, to commemorate the victims and allow the survivors who want to know what happened access to the truth. Claudia Moscovici, Holocaust Memory

This is not an easy book to read. Page after page, the reader will be punched in the face by the utter barbarity of the persecution and extermination of the victims by a regime whose reactions ranged between schizophrenia and unexpected "tolerance." Radu Ioanid has done exhaustive research and has mustered a mass of documentation. He delivers harrowing stories of individuals and families suffering torture and death in the hands of executioners who rival and often outdo their German Nazi allies. Ioanid methodically examines the phases of the killing of Jews and gypsies and provides detailed background, both political and social. Of particular interest is the push-and-pull between Antonescu and his German Nazi friends -- the former won't be told "what to do with my Jews" and the latter demand the expeditious resolution of the "resettlement" operation. In the end, approximately half the prewar Jewish population survives (756,000 prewar, 375,000 in 1945). I knew very little about the fate of Romania's Jews. Ioanid's book delivers a full education on this horrific instance of the Holocaust. And as in other European countries, Romania failed to punish fittingly if not all at least the majority of the murderers. As Ioanid says "In actuality, the postwar [communist] regime went easy on the mass of genocidal anti-Semites, condemning them to relatively minor sentences and often granting early amnesties." The Romanian communists obviously borrowed a leaf from West Germany's shameful book of dealing with its own murderers. A solid account based on full documentation.

World War II and its prelude in the Balkans was especially vicious. Yet the Balkan history of this conflict is not well-known even to many people well-read in World War II history. This excellent book is meticulously researched, which does make it a bit dry at times, but the author conscientiously names many of the victims so that the impact of the destruction of Balkan Jewry at a person by person level is immediately felt-- the dead are not merely numbers, but people with names, families, occupations. They were caught in an inescapable trap in most instances. To its eternal shame, the Catholic Church in Romania is all too complicit in the persecution; in fact, the antisemitic party was locally known as The Legion of St. Michael the Archangel and its members as "legionnaires," a ploy cynically designed to attract idealistic Romanian Catholic youth to its ranks. Romania's history, especially the history of its vulnerable minority populations (mainly Jews and gypsies) is little known to American readers. Antisemitism in Romania was of long-standing prior to the Hitler era, but

seemed to be something that resident Jews learned to manage to some degree until the end of the 19th century when antisemitism and violence toward Jews took a sharp upturn. Until the present day, Romanians have remained in ignorance of what really happened just prior to and during the war, although just recently the government seems to be making the beginning of a shift toward acknowledging real history instead of the usual cant that has been typically presented in Romanian schools and universities since the war. There aren't many good histories of what really went on in the Balkans during the Hitler era, so this book is a valuable addition to the library of any student of the war, of the Holocaust, and/or of the Balkans.

I read this book as part of my research on the fate of my great aunt and her family in Noua Sulita, Romania. It was a difficult read in that I had no prior context for the events described but I made it through the book and learned a great deal about the circumstances surrounding their murder in the Holocaust. Thanks for writing it!

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