

Research Article

A History of the Jews of Oradea

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Abstract

In his book, the historian Antonio Faur from the University of Oradea, draws a history of the Jews of Oradea on the eve of Holocaust, during their persecution, ghettoization and deportation. Although between 1940-1944, the Jews of North-West Transylvania were under Hungarian rule, their condition was worse than of the remaining Jews from the Kingdom of Romania. They were deported to German and Polish concentration camps. In modern epoch, the Jews of Transylvania constituted a civilizing factor for the Austrian Empire, being in a tight alliance with the Hungarian aristocracy. But on the eve of anti-Semitism, once with the rise of fascism and numerous clausus law, Hungarians delimited from Jewish influences. An anti-Jewish legislation was introduced in Hungary, after the outburst of the Second World War. In North-West Transylvania, there were a few Romanian ethnics who helped the Jews to escape from certain death, sometimes by emigrating in the Kingdom of Romania. Jewish contribution to Transylvanian culture, values, architecture, literature are underlined by the author Antonio Faur. The lessons that can be drawn by the readers of this book, it is that multiculturalism and tolerance would be more than helpful in order to build better European society.

Keywords

Jews, Holocaust, Hungarians, Romanians, Ethnie, Anti-Semitism, Ghetto, Deportation

1. Introduction

The book *Ghetoul din Oradea (1944). O scurtă istorie/ The Ghetto from Oradea (1944). A short history*, was published at the Printing House Editura Mega, Cluj-Napoca, 2022. In the part of *Introduction*, Antonio Faur quotes Alain Besançon that defined the *shoah* as a genuine manifestation of genocide of humans against other ethnic group. He tries to define racism and hatred towards another race, final solution. Also, Alain Besançon offers a view of ensemble on two totalitarian systems, communism and Nazism, making a comparison, and considering that the martyrdom of European Jews during the

Holocaust is a unique fact in European history. [2] The author shows that, in Hungary, occupied by Nazis after March 19, 1944, it followed the deportation and death of 437000 of Jews in the camp of Auschwitz-Birkenau. 131000 of these Jews were of origin from Northern Transylvania.

In Bihor County, 30000 of Jews from Bihor were closed in ghettos from Oradea and deported to death camps Auschwitz and Birkenau, shows the author. [6] The author reveals the final aim of his book, namely to reflect on the tragedies of the past in order that these atrocities to never happen again.

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Received: 4 March 2026; Accepted: 14 April 2026; Published: 29 April 2026



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2. Chapter I

Chapter I is entitled *Contents and definitions of the term ghetto*. The author Antonio Faur points out that, during Holocaust, hatred against the Jews reached the situation of paroxysm [6]. The author offers the definition of the explicative Dictionary of Romanian language concerning the term ghetto, considering it as a quarter of a city where in certain countries Jews had to live [6]. In Christian Europe, ghetto has to separate the areal inhabited by Jews from Christians. In Antiquity and Middle Age, the Jews formed *Jewish quarters*. During the centuries XII-XV, the Jews were perceived as a *corpus separatum*, considers the author, tolerated by the Christian majorities. Antisemitism had at its base the accusation that Jews killed Jesus Christ. The most popular ghettos, shows Antonio Faur, were found in cities such as Praga, Roma, Trieste, Frankfurt on Main. During the XIIIth century, the Jews pass from *Jewish quarters* to *ghettos*, reveals Antonio Faur.

Later on, during the French Revolution from 1789, it was enacted the Declaration of human rights and citizen and it began a process of emancipation of Jewry in France, being granted to them the citizenship in 1791. Later on, in time, the process of the emancipation of Jewry in Europe, knew a counter-alternative, rasism and modern antisemitism. The ghettos were created in Eastern Europe and the divided Poland, occupied by Germans starting with 1939. In Northern Transylvania, the ghettos were, some of them, ghettos of concentration that had as target to gather all Jews from the neighborhoods together in order to deport them later on to Nazi camps of extermination, in our case to Auschwitz, explains Antonio Faur [6]. The ghettos represented only a stage in the way to implement final solution.

3. Chapter II

Chapter II is entitled *The Historical context of the organization of the ghettos from Northern Transylvania*. In the context of Holocaust, disappeared by murdering the Jewish population, 30% of the inhabitants of the city of Oradea. In Oradea, there have been murdered 85-90% of the total Jewish population, [6] The author Antonio Faur says that almost a half of the total population of the County of Bihor was ceased by Romania to Hungary by the genuine Diktat of Viena of August 30, 1940, this territory representing 43591 kmp and a population of 2,5 million inhabitants. [6] It followed 4 years when Northern Transylvania was under Horthyst occupation (until October 1944). Also, the historian Antonio Faur offers Figures of the deceased Jews from the occupied Northern Transylvania as a consequence of Holocaust (131 000 of Jews from the total number of Jews in 1940 in Northern Transylvania of 160 000) [6]. Also, Tamás Stark in the article *Hungarian Jewry in the time of Holocaust and after the war*, provides data about the number of Jews in Hungary in 1945 (including the territories from 1940-44, Subcarpathian region, Northern

Transylvania, territories from Slovakia and Southern Hungary), remaining thus 365.000 of Jews among whom 224 000 liberated Jews and 141 000 returned Jews [20].

In interwar period, in the aftermath of Holocaust, the Hungarian authorities tried to limit the presence of Hungarian Jews in public life. They tried to limit the number of Jewish students in Hungarian universities starting with the years 1920, namely *the law numerus clausus*. The idea of final solution installed in Hungary a decade before of Hitler [6]. But the Jews were still confident in the Hungarian state and even after the apparition in Hungary of the first anti-Semite laws they remained confident. Even, on the eve of their deportation to Auschwitz-Birkenau, they believed that they will be only used to work in agriculture [6].

In Germany, Hitler acceded to power in January 1933, paving the way of rasism and revisionist policy in Europe. The anti-Jewish laws were accelerated by outburst of the war with Soviet Union, in 1941. [6] Firstly were deported the Jews who were not Hungarian citizens. The Jews without Hungarian citizenship were deported to Eastern Poland. In the same time, it was introduced the forced labor for Jewish inhabitants of Hungary, namely in Hungary or on the Eastern front where they worked heavily, in very difficult conditions [6].

4. Chapter III

Chapter III is entitled *Central Ghetto from Oradea (May-June 1944)*. The author Antonio Faur shows that the authorities tried to disinform Jewish population with the view of ghettoization. Areas that were subjects for Jewish deportation was Northern Transylvania and Maramureş. [6]. In Oradea, there were two ghettos that were some concentration camps and also transit camps. Antonio Faur shows that, in Hungary, the Hungarian Jews became, starting with March 19, 1944 (the moment when Hungary was occupied military by Nazis), the subject of extermination (especially the Jews from Eastern Hungary) [6]. In Northern Transylvania, the ghettos lasted approximately one month, shows the historian Antonio Faur, starting with May 1944 until June 1944. In Oradea, there was a small ghetto where the Jews were accommodated in a wood repository building. Also, in Oradea, there was a larger ghetto created since May 3, 1944, established in the old Jewish quartier around the Sinagogue from Mihai Viteazul street. The Jews were pursued to move in the two ghettos having a luggage not more heavy that 50 kilograms with them, and leaving aside the rest of their goods. [6] Their abandoned properties were later on robbed. Kálár Gábor and Vágy Zoltán, in the study *The economic annihilation of the Hungarian Jews, 1944-1945*, underlines that, the anti-Jewish legislation in Hungary was supported not only by the Fascist Germans, but also by several Hungarians that dreamed at Jewish property. Local population robbed, also, the Jewish property. [9] The smaller ghetto, containing approx. 8000 of Jews was situated in the areal of Cazărmiu Square, near the river Crişul Repede, near the wood repository Mezey (close to Decebal Bridge) [6] The

Jews that had to live in these ghettos had their own form of organization being led by a *Judenrat* (*Jewish council*). The Jews received food and medical assistance for free. There was a lack of minimum hygiene in the ghettos. The Jews from the ghettos were surveilled by special units of police and gendarmes. [6] Several acts of violence and terror were committed in the ghettos. The bigger ghetto from Oradea was the largest ghetto from Hungary and Northern Transylvania where there were gathered 27000 of Jews from the city of Oradea and Northern Bihor County. [6] In the smaller ghetto from Oradea lived 8000 of Jews from Northern part of Bihor County. [6] In 1946, shown the historian Antonio Faur, the Jewish survivors of the ghettos from Oradea were invited to Cluj by People's Court from Cluj for their testimony against Horthyst war criminals. [6] When the Jews of Hungary became aware of the peril of Holocaust, they tried to organize actions of salvation of the Jews such as the change of identity, to run in other places, to hide in different places, to pass illegally the boundary in Romania. [6] Romanian and Hungarian Christians often helped the Jews from Hungary and Oradea in their actions of salvation. It was a network of people who falsified documents for the Jews revealed by a journal from Northern Transylvania. Also, the Polish Jews from Oradea organized actions to save themselves. Several authors, sometimes of Jewish origins, described, in their writings, these attempts of Jews to save themselves from Holocaust. Mihai Marina, Romanian official in Maramureş provides data about the Jews from here. He was also General consul at the Consulate of Romanian Kingdom from Oradea during 1941-1944. In this quality, he has special ways to inform himself about the condition of Jews from Northern Transylvania that was ceased to Hortyst Hungary as a consequence of the Diktat from Vienna from August 30, 1940. [6] He describes the condition of Jews from here in his *Memories*. Although the Jews from Northern Transylvania were a product of Hungarian schools, Holocaust affected them directly. The racial laws had negative consequences upon Jewish population found under Hungarian administration. Antonio Faur makes a brief description of the local actions organized by the Jews in order to avoid the distroyal of their community, described in the writings of the diplomate Mihai Marina. One of the aspects signaled by Antonio Faur, is the fact that it was a group of Romanians that helped the Jews to cross the boundary from Hungary to Romania, especially in the localities of Sântelec and Felcheriu [6]. The author Antonio Faur shows that the phenomena of rescuing the Jews becomes more and more extended, a target area for these escapes being the Southern part of Bihor county, situated on Romania's territory and these escapes were favorized by the General Romanian consul Mihai Marina and his employees from General Consulate of the Kingdom of Romania from Oradea. [6] The support of a part of the Romanian population from Northern Transylvania towards these Jews, deprived from their rights is a well-known fact. To help these escapes, there were used the car of the consul Mihai Marina and

viceconsuls Anghel Lupescu and Ion Romaşcan [6] These diplomats showed a drop of humanity in the midst of the Holocaust atrocities by saving these Jews, concludes the author Antonio Faur.

In the day of May 3, 1944, the vice-mayor Gyapay László, by an ordonance, forbid to the Jews who were wearing a yellow star to live their houses and apartments and to declare their goods to the Mayor's office. [6] Only between the hour 9 and 10, the Jews could live their houses to buy ailments and necessary things. Eva Heyman, in her diary, provides interesting details about the ghettoization of the Jews from Oradea.

The report of the council Mihai Marina, informing on the situation of the Jews from Northern Transylvania, was based on the *memories* of the escaped Jew, Miksa Kupfer, and a research report about the activities from Kosice, Northern Transylvania and Hungary. [6] When the report of the Romanian consul was finished, the report was revealed to the Romanian Ambassador to Switzerland, Vespasian V. Pella who was impressed by the information contained by the report. He promised to show this report to the International Red Cross. The author Antonio Faur considers that the report of the council Mihai Marina is a document of equal importance with the diary of the Jewish girl, Eva Heyman, considering them as two exceptional documents for the history of the Jews [6].

The author Antonio Faur mentions the fact that, the deportation of the Jews from Northern Transylvania, found under Hungarian administration, was organized between April and June 1944, excepted from the deportation being only the Jews of Budapest. [6] The Hungarian prime-minister, Döme Sztójay, was solving by deportation the Jewish "question" in Hungary, being thus deported 440.000 of Jews found under Hungarian administration. They were deported with the train, in wagons for animals, in the concentration and extermination camp from Auschwitz-Birkenau [6].

The author Antonio Faur mentions that there were a few Jews who escaped from death during Holocaust, either they got hidden, either Jews escaped from working camps from Northern Transylvania. Most of the Jews of Oradea and Bihor County, shows Antonio Faur, were deported to Auschwitz Birkenau and, from here, they spread often in other concentration camps. [6]. During the trip with the death trains, the Jews understood that their faith was far from good. Once arrived to Auschwitz, it followed the selection of people capable to work. Antonio Faur provides Figures of the deportees from Northern Transylvania, namely 131639 deportees and among whom 26-39000 were sent to gas chambers. [6] Only 16-24000 survived. Elders, mothers and children who could not bring any profit to the Reich were sacrificed, firstly.

On the eve of liberation, the North Transylvanian Jews could not enjoy the joy because of the deportation. They were victims of the Holocaust from Hungary. Jewish Democratic Commite welcomed the returned Jews in the railway of Oradea. They were mostly received in the Jewish hospital from Oradea, being informed about the Jewish survivors. It was organised a Hostel of Deported Girls and the boys were offered

accommodation in a Hostel of 100 beds and also were provided the meals. It was also organised a Commission that looked for deportees who tried to gather the Jews on the train itinerary Oradea-Cracovia-Prešov. As a consequence, there were recuperated 4500 of Jews from Northern Transylvania [6].

The condition of Jews started to change at the beginning of the year 1944. They survived until then, but there were cases when they started to be murdered as the case of the Jews without citizenship from Kamenet-Podolsk (1941) and in Yugoslavia. Also, during forced labor, several Jews died. In March 19, 1944, Germany invaded Hungary and the condition of Jews changed into worse. Antisemitism reverberated in Hungary, later on. They started debates on how to solve the Jewish question and how to apply "the final solution". During the governance of Döme Sztójay, the Jews found under Hungarian administration were subject of ghettoization and deportation, with the exception of the Jews from Budapest. [6] There were brought to ghettos and deported 440000 of Hungarian Jews in Polish concentration camps. After the war, in 1946, the Hungarian officials, guilty for crimes against humanity, were judged and condemned to death for their crimes [6].

Antonio Faur points out that, the Holocaust from Hungary happened faster than the Holocaust from Romania, but it developed with an amazing speed. [6]. While during the period of time April 1919 and September 1940, in Oradea there was an atmosphere of ethnical and confessional tolerance, after 1940 Jews started to change their status into worse. [6] The Anti-Semitism reverberated and the contribution of Jews to the development of the city of Oradea was no more acknowledged. In 1944, the Jews from Oradea were deprived of their goods, brought to ghettos and, later on, deported in Poland.

The author Antonio Faur tries to do a comparative perspective between the journal of Anna Frank and the journal of Eva Heyman. The author mentions that the journal Anna Frank was published internationally and enjoyed a large audience, while Eva Heyman is a symbol for the Eastern part of the continent. The journals contained events developed during the years 1940-1944 in Netherlands and Northern Transylvania. [6] The parents of the girls entered in property of the journals and published them. The girls had approximatively a similar age, 13 years old, when they wrote their diaries. Eva Heyman wrote her diary in the ghetto of Oradea. The journal describes the life of the Jews in the ghetto from Oradea. She writes how they tortured wealthy Jews in the beer factory Dreher to reveal where they hid their fortunes. The condition of Jewish women in the ghetto was precarious, writes Eva Heyman in her Diary. Eva Heyman thought that the Christian inhabitants of Oradea could have stopped the deportation and ghettoization of Jews but they did not do it. [6] On the other hand, we have the journal of Anna Frank, while her family had to hide from Nazi terror in a house of Amsterdam, where her father had a business, but on August 1, 1944, they had been arrested by the German police. They were forced to leave in a concentration camp for transit for Jews. Anna Frank wrote her Diary in a

form of letters for an imaginary friend, Kitty. The diary of Anna Frank is a remarkable documentary source. Like the archives, the two journals represent first hand sources in the history of Holocaust having a stronger impact upon their readers. [6] Last, but not least, in the study of the ghettoization and deportation of the Jews from Oradea, important is also the journal of Tereza Mozes, *Decalog în sângeat/ Bloody Decalogue*. [15] The author was deported to several concentration camps including Auschwitz, loosing several members of her family in the midst of Holocaust, remaining after the war in Romanian communist states and having her own family in spite of all persecutions [15]. Haraszi György reveals that in the extended Hungary during the Holocaust from the total number of 825 000 of Jewish ethnics died more than 40% in Budapest and 75% of the Jews from the country. [5, 8] Ránki Vera shows that, 600 000 of Jews, namely 2/3 from the total number of Hungarian Jews died during the Holocaust and, they saw the Red Army as a liberating force that freed them from fascism, unlike Hungarians who feared the Soviet Army. [17] Many of the atrocities of the Holocaust were revealed later on by the Romanian press, especially during the years 1945-1948, shows Harry Kuller. (the Romanian Jewish press focused on the situation of the Jews during the war, included the Jews deported in Transnistria, the robberies and crimes of the adepts of Adolf Hitler, the anti-Jewish legislation) [11].

5. Chapter IV

Chapter IV is entitled *Modalities of conservation of the memory of the ghettoized and deported Jews from Oradea*. The author Antonio Faur speaks about the contribution of the Jews from Oradea from the end of XIXth century and during interwar period to the urban and economic development of the city of Oradea up to the year 1940. [6] The contribution of the Jews of Oradea to the architecture of the city is a real fact revealed of the existence of Vulturul Negru complex (Black Eagle Complex). The Jews of Oradea are represented nowadays by the Jewish Community of Oradea asserts Antonio Faur. Jewish religious and other imobiles are administered by this community. They also organize manifestation in the honor of the victims of Holocaust yearly. A part of Jewish cultural architectural patrimony of Oradea was restored in 2012, including the Palaces Stern and Moskovics Miksa, the House Darvas-La Roche or the Palaces Vulturul Negru and Moskovics. Three Sinagogues were restored, including the Orthodox Sinagogue from Mihai Viteazul Street. It was opened to the large public the Museum of History of the Jews from Oradea and Bihor County. Last but not least, the author Antonio Faur mentions the conferences organized in the honor of deported Jews and for the commemoration of the victims of Holocaust under the auspices of the University of Oradea in partnership with prestigious international universities and academic institutions from Romania and Europe.

6. Result

The book published by Antonio Faur brings in front of the readers a true page of the existence of the Jews from Oradea and Bihor County on the eve of Holocaust. It is an important historical contribution of a university Professor of the University of Oradea, a friend of Jewish Community and an outstanding historian of our city.

7. Discussion

Hungarian and Romanian ethnics showed feelings of hostility towards the Jews during the Hungarian occupation of North-West Transylvania during 1940-1944. But there are also Romanian ethnics members that helped Jewish community members to escape most often in the Old Kingdom of Romania, where it seems that the persecutions were not so harsh as in occupied North-West Transylvania. After the war, most of the Jews of Romania emigrated (mainly in Israel) and at the Romanian Revolution from 1989, were still in Romania, merely a few thousands of Jews. So not the Jews brought and consolidated the communism in Romania, as it is often invoked, because most of them emigrated during communism, a fact revealed also by Lya Benjamin, explaining that the emigration of Jews in Israel in the communism years in Romania, happened in three waves: the first wave 1948-1953 when emigrated 1/3 of Romanian Jews, the second wave 1954-1964 when other third part of Romanian Jews emigrated in Israel, and the last third of the Jews from Romania emigrated in Israel after 1965. [3] Tamás Stark provides the total number of emigrants in Palestine during 1945-1948 and for the time 1946-1948, we have a total number of 61023 of immigrants. During 1946-1955, shows Stark, arrived in Israel 17 000 of persons from Hungary and 124500 from Romania. [21] Last but not least, the Figures provided by Professor Ladislau Gyemant of the remaining Jews in Romania in 1947 is of 412 312 Jews, almost a half of the Jewish population here being decimated during the war. [7]. Harry Kuller, shows that, after the war, Romanian Jews oscillated between integration and immigration, they did not bring the communism in Romania, but they could not prevent its installation. [13] Some Jews opted out for communism in order to be protected by the new regime is the opinion of Harry Kuller. [12] The Romanian Jewish community tried after the Second World War to come back to normality after the years of persecutions. [19] Antisemite feelings continued to reverberate, also, in the Eastern communist Block, even after the war, two examples being process Slanski (when General secretary of Communist party from Czechoslovakia, Rudolf Slanski is arrested together with 13 accused most of them being Jews) and white gowns affaire (when some Jewish doctors of Soviet Union are accused by the death of certain Soviet leaders) [18]. The existence of antisemitism in Romania, also, after the Second World War, is underlined also by Jean Ancel, the communists trying to use the returned Jews to impose its dominance in Romania. [1] Victor Karady,

describes, from a larger sociological perspective, the situation of European Jewry after 1945, considering that in communist space, the Jewish private propriety was too less returned to Jewish owners, a lot of non-Jews remaining in property. [10] Also, Peter Meyer et al. approaches the problem of returning back of the Jewish property in Hungary and Romania. And, especially in the extended Hungary, the returned Jews found their apartments occupied by the favorites of the Nazis and their stores robbed. [14] A very important aspect, a fact revealed by the author Randolph Braham, is the fact that many Romanian intellectuals used the problem of Holocaust for political purpose. They considered that in Romania the persecution of the Jews was less harsh than in Hungary. The Romanian Nationalists, showed Randolph Braham rehabilitated the role of Ion Antonescu, they almost consider him as a patriot and deny his antisemite policy during the Second World War, they allow the existence of statues with the Marshal focusing only on positive aspects of his policy [4].

8. Conclusion

It is very hard to make an account of the Holocaust times, to see how hatred against the Jews led to the destruction of Jewish community from Europe in terms of millions. Andrei Oișteanu underlines the prejudices that existed in Romania space, with examples from popular and cult literature, wondering if the Romanian proverbial tolerance can be put under question mark [16].

And it is important, to look back, not only in anger, but with the intention of bringing a “better governance” for the present times, which to protect European and world ethnicities, to defend the rights of the citizen as Jean Jacques Rousseau and the French Revolution foresaw more than two hundred years ago.

Author Contributions

Anca Oltean: Conceptualization, Data curation, Methodology, Resources

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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