

Encyclopedia of the Jewish Communities
From their Foundation until after the WWII Holocaust

ROMANIA

Volume I – Moldavia
(Pages 29 - 38)

**“Botosani” - Encyclopedia of Jewish
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Botosani

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N.B. Kehillah will be used where reference is to the Organized Jewish Community. Kehillah is the name given to Jewish communal organizations in Eastern Europe. The role and authority of the Kehillah varied greatly, depending on location and historical period. At times a Kehillah would have quasi-governmental authority over both the Jewish Kehillah and its relationship with the Gentile community.

N.B. Eretz Yisrael will be used instead of Land of Israel. Israel itself will be used to denote the State of Israel from its establishment in 1948

Botosani

A district town in the northern Moldavia region, on a side track of the railroad line connecting Bucharest and Cernuati (Chernovitz). It is a short distance from the Bukovina border, about 30 km east of Suceava and 120 km west of the Prut river, which marks the border with Bessarabia. In Jewish sources (Aramaic) Botosani is a place of dwellings on the Jijia river and on the Sitna river and on springs. Formerly an important center of trade with Poland, and from the 15th century and on, a center of trade with grain and cattle in Moldavia and also of trade with Bessarabia.

Jewish Population

Year	Number	% of Jews in the general population
1800	1,400	
1809	2,444	
1812	1,477 families	10.7
1838	9,880	
1859	13,123	
1899	14,817	51.0
1910	15,000	
1939	11,840	36.6
1942	15,502	53.0
1947	19,550	

Until the End of World War I

The beginning of the Jewish Settlement in Botosani in the 16th century

Tombstones from 1540 were found in the old Jewish cemetery. The Romanian historians, who studied the town's history, A. Gorovei and Tiberiu Crudu, pointed out that in the 17th century the Jewish settlement in Botosani was in dire straits. In Hebrew literature Botosani's Jewish Kehillah is mentioned in the Responsa of the "MaHaram (Meir b. Gedaliah) written in

Lublin, in 1615, and afterward in the later Responsa of the Bach. (Yoel Sirkes, 1561-1640).

From a document signed by Prince Yon Nicolai Mavrocordat in 1745, one can surmise that the Jews were considered to be “city-folk,” i.e. the city’s citizens, a status that Jews did not gain in any other European realm. Thus they were equal in privileges and in obligations to all the town’s residents and even took part in administering the town. These privileges were also approved in a document signed by Prince Matei Ghica in March 12, 1754.

During the Turkish-Russian war (1768-1774), the Jewish settlement in Botosani suffered from the Ottoman military and the Rabbi was murdered.

A document from 1769 notes that in Botosani resident-merchants were active, trading in honey, bulls for slaughter and sale, etc. Towards the end of the 18th century, large weekly fairs for cattle trade took place.

Despite the high-ranking status of the Jews of Botosani, clashes did occur every now and then between them and the local population. In 1783, they were libeled with a blood libel; in 1817 they were in a conflict about enlarging the cemetery; Prince Calimachi ordered an inquiry and finally announced (on May 12, 1817) that the cemetery was 200 years old and that the “Jewish Guild” is allowed to bury its dead there. The prince also denied the Christian residents’ request to prohibit the Jews from drawing water from the well, arguing that the “Jews had always been considered equal to all the other residents.”

During the days of the Greek rebellion (1821), Botosani Jews were spared from the calamity that the rebels inflicted on Jews everywhere else. They fought shoulder to shoulder with the Romanian army and succeeded in driving the attackers away.

The Social and Economic Structure

Count Fida Von Karaczay, who passed through the place in 1818, tells that Jews were allowed to grow beards— a privilege given only to boyars and priests; that they are dressed like the Turks and that their trading reached to Leipzig and Brody, trade which included foodstuffs, crafts of Saxon origin, Russian furs, beeswax and tobacco.

However, most of Botosani Jews were not merchants due to the heavy concentration of Armenian merchants, who were active there alongside Greek and Turkish merchants. As a result, Jews were mostly craftsmen. In several crafts only Jews worked. From the 1832 census, we learn that 40% of the craftsmen in the town were Jews. Only Jews were hatters, makers of donkey sacks for farmers or water carriers. According to that census, there were in Botosani 98 Jewish tailors in contrast to 32 Romanians and 3 Armenians; 29 Jewish shoemakers in contrast to 92 Romanians; 22 Jewish butchers in contrast to 10 Romanians; and 15 Jewish goldsmiths in contrast to 2 Romanians. In 1900, the number of Jewish craftsmen in Botosani reached 90%. Among the Botosani Jews were also those with liberal professions, mostly physicians and lawyers. However, there were also many poor Jews, who inhabited the “poor quarter.”

In that period Jews were not allowed to join the official trade unions supervised by the bishops; Christians were not allowed to employ Jewish apprentices, so that Jews had their own craft unions: craftsmen-carpenters, tailors, shoemakers, metalworkers, and blacksmiths, who were organized in a union named “Zvat,” whose offices were located in a special building. In 1832, there were in Botosani 63 trade unions, among them 14 Jewish ones. The Christian unions wanted to keep the privilege of having exclusivity in some of the professions, according to privileges they received from the church hierarchy, but they were not always successful. For example, in 1852, the guild of Christian furriers turned to the Moldavian Prince, Gregorio Alexandru Ghica, protesting that Jewish furriers had arrived in Botosani. They asked him to forbid the Jews from working in this trade, but the prince denied the request.

The Jewish merchants were organized in the “commercial club” (founded in 1893).

From the time of their organizing, at the beginning of the 20th century, trade unions listed as corporation (or cooperatives), accepted Jewish craftsmen though they were not given voting rights. The union’s leadership was solely occupied by Christians.

In 1908, a cooperative Jewish bank was founded in Botosani with 231 members called Botosani. In 1911, a saving and loan bank was founded with 87 members. There was also a Hebrew printing house owned by Azriel

Grinberg, which was known throughout Romania for its prayer books and calendars.

Beside their trades (fields of endeavor) the Jews participated in all city affairs and influenced every aspect of the city's public life.

In 1827, a group opposing the existing municipal system was organized. In addition to the boyars and the priests in the group, there were also several Jews. They submitted a plan to the prince asking inclusion in the city's management of representatives of the boyars and also of the merchants according to their nationality: Romanians, Greeks, Armenians and Jews. In 1828, the prince approved the plan and a council was established that included two representatives of the Jewish merchants.

In 1832, the Russian "Organic Articles of Organization" canceled all these rights. From that point on, only Christians could become council members. However, in official ceremonies, such as receptions for nobility and such, representatives of Jewish nationality took part, holding Torahs and over their heads a chupah.

Organization of the Kehillah

The first public body that coordinated part of the Kehillah's functions was the "Chevrah Kadishah" (the ritual burial society) and a notebook from 1740 was preserved. According to the tradition, a former notebook became lost during the Russian-Turkish war of 1730. According to the Kehillah's notebook from 1777, there was one Rabbi, one cantor, 2 slaughterers and one beadle.

At the same time, the Kehillah operated as a Jewish guild. After the liquidation of the guild, several attempts were made to reorganize, but failed because of quarrels among the Rabbis (see below). In 1893, the Kehillah received an article of organization, but after a short time it broke up again. Between 1909 and the end of World War I, there was no organized Jewish Kehillah in Botosani.

Organizations and Institutions

In the period when the organized Kehillah was inactive, its functions were

divided among different societies and organizations. The Jewish hospital in Botosani was at first a “Hekdesh” (shelter), founded in 1817 for those sick, mentally ill, crippled, beggars and the elderly. In 1863, the hospital moved to a separate building rented for the purpose, in 1877 a new building was built for the hospital, and in 1906- another new building. It had a very good reputation and the Romanian peasants preferred that hospital to the governmental one, saying that the Jewish physicians were more dedicated and humane.

In 1833, the women's society called “Aid to Birthing Women” was founded. (After World War I, when a maternity ward opened in the Jewish hospital, the society continued its aid to the ward, under the supervision of the Kehillah.)

In 1892, a society for helping school children was founded under the name “Izvorul Viejia” (Fountain of Life), giving aid to 200-220 needy boys each year. Other aid institutions active in Botosani were: an old people's home (founded in 1908 by the “Lumina Vietii” –Light of Life – organization, and renovated in 1935); a restaurant for the boys and girls of the two schools; a restaurant of the professional workers society “Zvat;” and a soup kitchen where tea was provided for the poor.

Education

In 1865, in Botosani a new school for boys was founded, one of the first in the country, whose headmaster was the famous intellectual Hillel Kahana. (See below) In 1866, the school had 14 teachers and 438 pupils. A school for girls was founded in 1896. In 1905, with the support of The Jewish Colonization Association special buildings were built for the two schools. They both received yearly aid from the Alliance Israelite Universelle.

Religious education was also very developed. In 1889, there were in Botosani 32 “Cheders” with 2,000 pupils. Before the outbreak of World War I there were also a kindergarten and a vocational school for girls. A “Talmud Torah” was founded in 1908, and in 1910, 500 boys and girls studied there. (In the same year, 511 students attended the school for boys and 464 the school for girls.) Initially the “Talmud Torah” did not have a building of its own and its students studied in the synagogue until a building was built for it in 1917.

Two outstanding educators were active in Botosani, the brothers Zvi Eliezer Teler and Israel Teler, both Galician, who were famous for their activities and writings.

In 1912, the Journal of the Romanian Teachers Association was published and edited by Scarlet Albrecht.

Rabbis and Personalities

Botosani was always a place of Torah; there were two synagogues and 60 prayer houses. The Beit Hamidrash (higher institution of Jewish learning) named after “Rabbi Yoshki” was a meeting place for Torah scholars where the daily page of Talmud was studied.

Among the well-known Botosani Rabbis were: Rabbi Marco Ben Simon, appointed by Prince Alexander Jon Mavrocordat in 1783 as the representative of the Chacham Bashi, (Chief Sephardic Rabbi of the Kehillah appointed by the Ottoman Emperor) in order to “collect the taxes and to rule and judge according to Jewish law;” Rabbi Haim Tirer (born in 1760), son of the famous Rabbi Shlomo of Chernovitz, author of “Fountain of Living Waters” and “The Order of Sabbath” and “Gates of Prayer” and known in the Hassidic circles as a genius, a Tzaddik (a supremely righteous person) and a wonder-worker. He went to Eretz Yisrael and passed away in Safad (1813). His home and beit midrash still exists in Botosani. Other famous Rabbis were: Rabbi Moshe Alter Barb, (born in Botosani, died in Bakau in 1873), a Yeshiva head and son-in-law of the well-known Tzaddik Rabbi Shalom Friedman, from Rozin. His books include: “The Words of Moses” (Lemberg 1876, Rabbi Shalom Taubes 1825-1885); author of “Questions of Shalom” (Zolkiev 5629, Lemberg 5649); his son, Rabbi Haim Taubes, who also published Responsa, “Shalom’s Life” (Lemberg 5654; Dorochovit 5663); Rabbi Yehudah Aryeh Leibush Frenkel (b. 1886) in Bucecea, served as a Rabbi in Botosani from 1907 and founded “Talmud Torah.” He was a descendant of the Baal Shem Tov and the Tzaddik of Berdichev, (died in Botosani in 1917); Rabbi Chanoch Zilberfarb, born in Lithuania in 1890 settled in Botosani in 1816; with his father-in-law, Rabbi Moshe Moscovici, who headed a Hassidic court. After his father-in-law’s death, Rabbi Zilberfarb became head of his own Hassidic court, between 1929-1944. He immigrated to Israel in 1947.

Botosani's Kehillah experienced a bitter rift among its Rabbis, when a

separate Rabbi was chosen for the new section of the city. The conflict, which began in 1889, peaked during the period of Rabbi M. Mairson's term. He was a great scholar and a cantor, possessed of a beautiful voice and the public was drawn to him. Things reached the courts and continued even after Rabbi Mairson moved to Vienna and was replaced by Rabbi Leibush Mendel Landau. Rabbi Landau was an enlightened (in the sense of the Haskalah, the enlightenment movement that spread through East European Jewry in the 19th century) man and an active Zionist, and in 1898, founded in Botosani a Zionist society (Herzl mentions him in his memoirs). Rabbi Schmelner, who presided in the new section of the city, was a popular orator liked by the crowd from the “poor quarter.” The rift continued until 1921, when one head Rabbi was chosen for the two parts of the city – Rabbi Dov Burstein. (See below)

By the end of the 19th century, Rabbi Elazar Cohen Schechter arrived, author of “Kinat Sofrim (Writer’s Envy).

Another person, who influenced the Kehillah's life, was the intellectual Hillel Kahana. Born in Stanislav in 1821 and arrived in Botosani in 1860. In 1864, at his initiative, they began to build a school for boys, of which he was appointed headmaster. He founded a branch of “Alliance Israelite Universelle” (All Israel are Friends) and an office of B’nai B’rith, which was reorganized in 1908 and named “Hillel” after him. He published articles in Hebrew and a geography book “Glilot Haaretz” (Parts of the Aretz), which was printed in Bucharest in 1880 and again in Botosani in 1901. He passed away in 1901.

Among the known personalities from Botosani one can count H. Sanielevici, a literary critic (born in Botosani in 1875); the poet Adrian Vereia (1876); and the poet Enric Furtuna (1881).

A young man, Zvi Yoseph Leibovici, who died in 1885 at the age of 22, published his play, “Broken Pride” or “The Fault of Overweening Pride” “An Idyll On Life in Eretz Yisrael,” in Botosani.

Persecution of the Jews

Towards the end of the 19th century, the number of Jews in Botosani grew due to the constant deportation of Jews from the villages and the hamlets of

the region, which were conducted according the orders of the Interior Ministry in the years 1881-1882, 1884, 1892-1893. In 1892 alone, the number of deported Jews reached 600. The Jews were allowed to lease manors and be occupied in farming, but not to live in the villages as was written in a special circular printed by the district's chief. In several places the farmers asked that the Jews remain, but the chief gathered them and incited them against the Jews. In order to stir the emotions even more, the authorities staged a blood libel (1883) that brought a surge of tumults. During that same year, several Jews were deported for being socialists or for being Austrian citizens.

Persecution of the Jews in Botosani continued and became a permanent feature of life. In 1887, when a fire broke out in the Jewish neighborhood and 800 houses were ruined, including the big synagogue, 5 batei midrash and the building housing the “Talmud Torah,” the fire fighters refused to help the Jews in putting out the fire.

In 1890, a Congress of the Christian Students took place in Botosani, and the students attacked the Jews.

In 1896, a translation of “The Jewish State” (by Theodore Herzl) appeared in Botosani. The translator, a student by the name of M. Spinner, was arrested by the police and released only after a great deal of effort.

In 1900, several groups of immigrants left Botosani by foot (“fusgeyers”). They published newspapers in Romanian, “Pedestrii” and “Infrajirea.”

During the farmer's rebellion of 1907, the Jews of Botosani suffered terrible losses. The rebellion started in Botosani district, where Jews leased many manors. On March 4th and 5th 1907, 1500 farmers from the surrounding villages attacked the city. From the inns, where they became drunk, they came out to loot and rob Jewish stores and their dwellings. Christian dwellings were marked with white crosses on the walls and windows to prevent their being attacked. The rioters destroyed and ruined everything in their path and put the looted goods onto carts. Twenty synagogues and 2 schools were also looted. The main street where the stores of the Jewish merchants were located looked after they were finished as one witness said, “like after a bomb.” The stores stayed closed for a long time and the Jews did not dare go out of their homes. In that riot 2 Jews were killed and some children, many were wounded and 1,614 Jewish families were injured.

It is to be noted that in a number of instances the Jews opposed the rioters with force and on some of the streets they fought with the disorderly mob, who were at times joined by Romanian soldiers. The head of the district forbade the army units from protecting the Jewish quarter claiming that he could not allow Christians to risk their lives by protecting Jews.

After the outbreak of World War 1, a number of refugees from Bukovina arrived in Botosani. On January 12, 1915, the police deported the refugees.

Nonetheless, during that time a lively series of cultural activities continued.

The Zionist movement was extremely active in Botosani. Already in 1882, the Hebrew monthly "Haor" (The Light) was published there, dedicated to the idea of the national revival in Eretz Yisrael. The editors were Zvi Elazar Teler and D. Zilberbusch. A newspaper reporter Avraham Feler was a delegate from Botosani to the eleventh Zionist Congress in Vienna (1913).

Between Two World Wars

Social and Economic Structure

In the years 1918-1919, after the conferring of "Emancipation," 9,380 of Botosani's Jews were granted equal rights.

Botosani Jews took an active part in the public life of their city. In 1921, there were 4 Jewish members among the 15 city council members. In 1922, the municipality allocated 95,000 lei for the Kehillah's schools. In 1930, the vice-mayor was a Jew. Likewise another Jewish member served on the city council chosen by the Liberal party.

In 1931, the Jewish party in Botosani got 883 votes out of 1,900 of the Jewish voters who voted. After the elections, the authorities persecuted Jewish merchants on different pretexts, but the real reason was retribution for their voting for the Jewish party. In spite of that, the Jewish voters continued to vote for the Jewish party, and in 1938, that party received 929 votes. The Zionist Party participated three times in the elections to the Parliament and received 90% of the Jewish votes in the district.

In the Kehillah census of 1937, we learn that among Botosani Jews there were 758 craftsmen, 625 merchants, 522 peddlers, 33 industrialists, 52 owners of small plants, 33 owners of farms, 116 with liberal professions, 157 clerks and temporary workers and 197 laborers and porters.

The Kehillah's Activities

After the World War the Kehillah reorganized, but faced many financial difficulties, mainly budgetary, because 70% of its people did not pay taxes and they had to make do with the indirect taxes, such as the tax on meat.

In 1930, the Kehillah founded a clinic headed by Dr. Tauber, who also served as chairman of the Kehillah. In 1937, a special building was built for the clinic, which in the first seven years of its existence provided medical treatment to 95,599 people. The district's head allocated 50,000 lei a year for the clinic. A surgical and maternity ward was built in the hospital. In 1929, facilities were added for an old people's home with space for 60 men and women.

During that time, a cooperative small-loans bank was opened by "Joint" (Joint Distribution Committee) a bank, which served an important role in the town's social and economic life. It had a special department for charity. There was also a society dedicated to providing support for young women, "Frajia" (fraternity), founded in 1930.

In 1932, the Kehillah was formally recognized according to the new laws pertaining to Kehillahs.

Before the outbreak of World War II, the Kehillah had, besides the hospital and the old people's home, two schools, two synagogues and about 70 houses of prayer.

Rabbis.

The Kehillah's Rabbi at that time was Rabbi Dov Burstein, who was one of the leaders of the "Mizrachi" (Orthodox Jewish Zionists) in Romania. He published several books, including "The Book of Wisdom and Ethics" (Botosani 5792). Another book on "Ritual Slaughter in the Light of Science" (1938) was a response to the book by Dr. G. Radulescu-Calafat against ritual slaughter. He served in his role until 1950 and then immigrated to Israel,

where he serves as chief of the rabbinical court of Tel Aviv-Yafo. (1969).

Education

Between 1918 and 1940, 7,036 boys and 6,038 girls studied in the two schools of the Kehillah. The boy's school had 7,036 students and the girl's school 6,038. In 1929, a new building was built for the "Talmud Torah."

In 1931, the Kehillah founded a vocational school for girls whose main subject was sewing.

A "Reading Club" begun before World War I, maintained a public library with 15,000 volumes and a special department for Yiddish books. The library located in its own building was created and managed by the gymnasium (high school) students, who were not allowed to enter the Romanian gymnasium's library. The Reading Club also organized lectures about Jewish subjects. In 1935, the Club fell into the hands of the communists, who exploited it for political purposes. The Club disintegrated in 1937, resulting from the pressure of the persecutions of the ruling powers, and the books were divided between the gymnasium library and the municipal library.

The Zionist Movement was very active during that time. There were several youth movements: "The Zionist Youth" and "B'nei Akiva." Near the city there was also a place for training "chalutzim." Groups of "chalutzim" worked on property owned by Jews.

Persecution of The Jews

The Cuza Party was strong in the city and under its influence Jews were persecuted.

In 1922, the Yiddish theatre of Kanapof came to visit the city, but anti-Semitic hooligans interrupted the show and the performance had to be cancelled. Eight of the hooligans were arrested, and immediately freed.

In 1926, a farmer murdered a Jew with his shears. The head of the anti-Semitic party, Professor A.Z. Cuza came specifically to Botosani to serve as

the defending counsel at the trial. He argued that the murder was a nationalistic act and called on all Romanians to see it as a model. The farmer was acquitted. In the same year, an anti-Semitic newspaper appeared in Botosani by the name, Chemaria (the calling). Its Slogan was written under the main headline: “Do Not Buy From The Kikes. Hate Them. They Are A Disaster To The Nation.” The newspaper spread among other things the libel that Jewish bakers put poison into the bread they sell to Christians.

In 1932, the police forbade Jews from speaking Yiddish in the streets.

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The Holocaust

The terror in Botosani began with the establishment of the “green house” of the legionnaires, (originally named the Legion of the Archangel Michael, later the Iron Guard) when they came to power prior to September 1940. That house was used as a headquarters, where they decided on all the anti-Semitic activities and where Jews, who were caught on the streets, were tortured when they disobeyed the nightly curfew. Sometimes Jews received a summons to report to the authorities after 6 pm and were arrested on their way, brought forcefully to the “green house,” and brutally tortured.

Restrictions and bans were enacted in Botosani as in other Romanian cities. Only the Jewish physicians, especially the dentists – there were no Christian dentists – continued taking care of the Christians despite the official ban. The city's residents and even the farmers from the vicinity did not forgo their medical care and the Jewish doctors during the nighttime hours had to get to their sick with a police escort.

In November-December 1940, the legionnaires robbed Jewish property. One day all the fabric in Jewish textile stores was robbed. When the nationalization rules were publicized (October 5th and November 17, 1940), the legionnaires seized the moment to confiscate Jewish property that was not included in the rules pertaining to nationalization.

In addition, the obligation to give away clothing burdened Botosani's Jews greatly. There were thousands of poor in the city, who could not endure it, and the Kehillah had to buy clothes for more than 1,000 people so they could give it to the authorities. Nonetheless, many, unable to fulfill the edict, were

arrested judged and found guilty under law. Only after the “Center of the Jews in Romania ” handed over to the authorities a sum of a hundred million lei, were they acquitted, together with 44,000 other “criminals” in the country.

Forced Labor began according to law in December 1940, but Botosani's Jews, from age 15 to 70, had to perform hard labor in the city and its environs prior to then. They engaged in forced labor on the roads, the railways and the dams of Iasi, Falcui and Braila districts. In 1940-1943, the Jewish gymnasium students were forced to sweep the snow and ice from the streets, under the instruction and supervision of their teachers.

A much more severe regimen befell those, who worked in Edineti and Atachi in Bessarabia, on various projects for the army and built a bridge over the Dniester River. Some of them were seized in 1944 by the advancing Russian armies and placed in captivity. They returned home only after many years of being prisoners of war. The tanners among the Jews of Botosani were handed over by the authorities to the German army and brought to Transnistria, to Moghilev, where they worked for the soldiers on the front.

From a report to the “Center of the Jews in Romania ” it is clear that 8,000 of Botosani's Jews worked in forced labor. There were 4,000 of them outside of Botosani: 1,500 in Bessarabia, 120 in Husi, 90 in Macin, 40 in Chernovitz, 30 in Tiraspol, 20 in Baltji, 30 in Iasi and 2,000 were scattered around the region.

Arrests and Deportations.

On June 26, 1941, following an order of the Interior Ministry, 20 Jews were jailed –mostly Rabbis and ritual slaughterers – as hostages and it was announced that with every Russian bombing, two of them would be executed. In July 1941, the number of hostages reached 50-60. They were held in two rooms in the Jewish school and at last moved to the big synagogue. The district's prefect (mayor) announced that 500 of Botosani's Jews would be executed if a spy were found among them.

On July 3, 1941, the Interior Ministry cancelled the regulation that required affixing the mark of Jewish identity. Nevertheless the military headquarters in Botosani ordered on August 14th of the same year: that “Jews of all genders and ages must wear on the left side of the chest a six cornered star

made of yellow fabric with a diameter of 7 cm on a black background.

On September 8, 1942, 42 Jews were deported to Transnistria suspected of communism.” A few of the deported were sent – following a selection in Tiraspol – to Vapniarca, a special concentration camp in Transnistria, the rest were sent to Mostovoi ghetto in the Berezovca district, where they were shot on Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement), September 22, 1941, by the SS and by the local Romanian gendarmes. In the second half of September, another 18 young Jewish men were deported to Mostovoi. In October 1942, the lawyer, B. Rorlich, was accused of “inciting the population to emigrate to Eretz Yisrael.” The number of Botosani Jews deported to Transnistria reached 148.

The Kehillah's Activities

Despite the difficult situation, Botosani’s Kehillah did major work in assisting the needy, especially the refugees. Many of the Polish refugees, who fled to Romania after the German conquest of Poland (September 1939), arrived in Botosani and the Jews received them hospitably. Among them were several persons from the Zionist leadership of Poland, who were invited to stay in the home of one of the Kehillah's leaders. The needy among them received money from the Kehillah so they could move on. Others got permission to settle in Botosani. The Kehillah created a special department dedicated to the aid of the forced laborers and gave them food and clothing.

With the breakout of the Romanian-Soviet Union war, a new calamity fell upon the Jews of northern Moldavia, who were deported from the villages to the district’s big cities. All the Jews from Sulita, Bocecie, Frumusica, Ripicen, Heci-Lespezi, Targu-Frumos, Liorda, Falticeni and Focsani were deported to Botosani, including the Admor (an acronym for Adonenu Morenu v'Rabbenu our Master, Teacher and Rabbi) of Focsani and his hassidim. From a report to the “Center of the Jews in Romania” it is clear that in November 1941, there were in Botosani 1,091 Jews from Sulita, 1,547 from Stefanesti, 697 from Bocecei, 568 from Frumusica, 130 from Ripicen, and 206 from Mihaileni. The refugees numbered about 11,000 and all of them were a burden on the Botosani's Jews, who were already exhausted. Most of the men, the breadwinners, had already taken for work as forced laborers. The deported, who were allowed to take very little with them, were robbed by the army and by local Romanians. Botosani's Jews

treated them as brothers. Each Jewish home, all the synagogues and the schools were opened wide to the refugees. The soup kitchens operated around the clock. The Kehillah organized a help committee with delegates of the Kehillot of those deported. The Zionist leadership was especially active in these aid activities. Hundreds and thousands needed free food from the soup kitchen, beside those who could afford to eat at some kind of an inexpensive restaurant.

The number of needy increased steadily. In 1940 the Kehillah aided 2,450 people, in 1941 – 6,246, and in 1942 – 7,228.

The officials of the deported Kehillahs, especially the Rabbis and the ritual slaughterers, remained at their posts. A rabbinical court was established with all the Rabbis of the exiled kehillot, headed by Rabbi Burstein from Botosani.

Education

In October 1940, when the governmental schools closed for the Jewish teachers and pupils, the congregation founded two additional high schools for boys and girls together. On the number of pupils there, we can learn from the following table:

Year	The Kehillah's Elementary	Gymnasium schools Torah	Commercial Gymnasium	Talmud
1940	452	180	118	140
1941	797	170	109	120
1942	1,078	215	130	122
1943	1,050	132	78	130

The growth in the number of pupils was a consequence of the entrance of children of the refugees to the Kehillah's schools and not only because Botosani's children were expelled from the government schools. The school's classes operated in 15 prayer houses, set aside for this purpose.

Due to the devotion of both teachers and students, these schools became the center of Jewish national life. Besides religious studies and Hebrew, they

also learned the history of the Jewish people. The students also volunteered in all the aid activities.

In the spring of 1944, 186 of Transnistria's orphaned children were brought to Botosani. A few were scattered in homes, but most were housed by the Kehillah in a school building on Dochia Street under the supervision of a youth movement man. Some of the youth movements, especially B'nai Akivah and Hashomer ha-Tzair did not stop their activities throughout the holocaust. (According to a report sent to Richard Lichtheim in Geneva, those youth movements operated in the synagogues). A "club" for Hebrew was active, though with interruptions. The youth prepared themselves for self-defense and obtained weapons (used later by the civilian guards in the days of the retreat of the Romanian and German armies from the Russians).

On March 7, 1944, with the approach of the Russian army, the city was totally evacuated of all civilian and military institutions and also of most of the Romanian population. Only a few units of the German army and one Romanian unit was left, comprised of prisoners, who were sent to the war front to serve out their punishment, among them many legionnaires. The German soldiers began to catch Jews on the streets and sent them to dig anti-tank ditches. Some of those Jews lost their lives. The head of the Kehillah tried to plead with the Germans and suggested that the Kehillah itself would supply daily a certain number of Jews, and with that arrangement additional sacrifices were prevented.

After some time, the remaining armed units retreated from the city. Groups of army deserters, and mobs began to plunder the city. As a result, the Kehillah took over all the functions of the municipality, the prefecture (mayor's office), and the administrative tasks abandoned by the government. A civil guard was on watch day and night. The Kehillah helped the sick in the public hospital and in the public old people's home abandoned by the government, and took upon itself the responsibility for those two institutions. The Kehillah also took over the task of registering the population and all births and the deaths of the entire population. Lost German soldiers from the famous division, "Adolph Hitler," came to the Jews of Botosani pleading for a slice of bread.

The Russian army entered Botosani on April 4, 1944, and the city was surrendered officially by the head of the local office of the "Center of the Jews in Romania." That same night, a delegation of the Kehillah came to the

Russians; in the absence of Romanians, Jews were appointed to all the public roles and the commander of the Russian army told the Jews not to turn the city to a “Jewish republic.”

After the War many of the Jews deported from the surrounding villages settled in Botosani, as well as refugees from Transnistria and those from regions that later became part of the Soviet Union (especially northern Bukovina and Bessarabia). After several years most of them immigrated to Israel.

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Captions to Photos

Page 31: A Matzo (unleavened bread) bakery (the collection of Haim Rabinson).

Page 32:

Interior the synagogue “Simches Shul”

The religious studies school “Derech Politza”

“Frankl’s Schul” synagogue

“Yiddische Schul” synagogue

Page 33:

“Dov Yaske’s Schul” synagogue

“Michoele’s Etkes Schul” synagogue

“Hoiche Schul” synagogue

Page 34: Rabbi Landau

Page 35: Tehilim (Book of Psalms) readers and mourners waiting at the entrance to the cemetery. (the collection of Haim Rabinson)

Page 36: A letter from the local branch of the “Center of the Jews in Romania ” to the “Center of the Jews in Romania ” in Bucharest about the 30 Jews, who were arrested for not paying the special taxes.

Page 37: A decree from the regional military command in August 1941, which ordered the Jews to wear the yellow mark.

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