
BOOK REVIEWS

CAROL IANCU

Alexandru Şafran and the Unfinished Shoah in Romania. Collection of documents (1940-1944),

Hasefer Publishing House, Bucharest, 2010

KNOWN AS ONE of the most renowned specialists in the history of Jews from Romania, with an impressive and thorough work, professor Carol IANCU (Paul Valéry University, Montpellier) published, in the second half of 2010, an impressive book of documents (belonging to the period 1940-1944) dwelling on the activities of the Chief Rabbi Alexandru Şafran, thus completing, with new information and points of view, his important monograph regarding the same personality which was published in 2008, under the suggestive title: (Hasefer Publishing House, Bucharest, 2008, 394 p.). It is, no doubt, remarkable the persistence with which the historian Carol Iancu dealt with the reconstitution, in the spirit of an obvious scientific evidence, of the life of a spiritual leader who played an active role in the years of World War II by defending and saving the Jews from Romania. The book has a (signed by Dr. Aurel Vainer, member of the Romanian Parliament and the president of the Jewish Community Federation in Romania) and a (thanks to Professor Marga, Rector of “Babeş-Bolyai” University in Cluj-Napoca); hence it results that, indeed, Alexandru Şafran was a “personality of reference” not only in the Jewish histo-

ry but also in Romania’s history between 1940-1947, when he was the Chief-Rabbi of the country, then became the great Rabbi of Geneva (for almost six decades, between 1948-2006, where he wrote a significant philosophical and religious work, as stated in the author’s of the book we are reviewing.

From a remark made by the author in the Introduction, we learn that the Jewish Community Federation in Romania “did not have any documents concerning the activity of the spiritual leader of the Romanian Jews ...in the years of the World War II” (p. 23). The circumstances in which “the entire correspondence of the Chief Rabbi” Alexandru Şafran, both with the Romanian state and the province communities, has disappeared are still unknown. Therefore, the following legitimate question arises: what happened to these documentary sources of exceptional value for the reconstruction of “the different traits of a character who went far beyond the duties of a religious leader, who gained the status of a genuine spiritual and political leader?” Eventually, the historian Carol Iancu reconciled (probably temporarily) with the idea of “the irreparable loss of these correspondences” and made considerable efforts to cover such a documentary information “gap” which, moreover, has been found in other places. His perseverance in carrying out his research made him the discoverer of a “rich and varied” documentary material, to be precisely, about 320 texts which “reflect Alex-

andru Șafran's multiple concerns". These testimonies (gathered in a volume for the very first time) confirm, together with revealing Alexandru Șafran's personality, the significant role he played in "supporting the protection and rescue of the Romanian Jews" (p. 116).

The publication of the "document collection" (from the years 1940-1944) is done in impeccable scientific conditions, so that a significant amount of information about Alexandru Șafran have been revealed to the scientific world, in a rigorous manner; it undoubtedly "completes" the biography of this personality who is representative for the history of the Jews in Romania. The document corpus is preceded by a text written by the author (of about 100 pages), which contains an Introduction (p. 23-27), comments on Al. Șafran's "itinerary" (from Bacău to Bucharest) (p. 28-30), on the "unfinished Shoah" in Romania and "its timetable" (p. 30-38) and the activities of the Jews' spiritual leader in Romania (in the period comprised between 1940 and 1944) in the "light" of the documents (found in archives, periodicals, and based on some memorial testimonies (p. 39-116). It is about turning into fruition (and integration) the information comprised in the documentary sources which he published in the second part of his book.

Hence, after he drafted – as usual – a "comprehensive introductory study", he included "several categories of documents" (i.e. 190) in the most significant part of the book, (p. 185-362), as follows: various notes and reports (from the archives of the General Directorate of Police, Special Intelligence Service, Bucharest Security Service, British Intelligence Service and Jewish Community Federation in Romania), letters written by some perso-

nalities (Andreea Cassulo, René de Weck, Charles Kolb, Vladimir Steiger, A.L. Zissu, Wilhel Fildermann and Alexandru Șafran), as well as Alexandru Șafran's unpublished texts (sermons, reports, speeches).

All these add to the journalistic materials (from the fourth and fifth part of the volume, p. 365-434) published in the Romanian press (in six periodicals, among which we mention) and the foreign one (six German and English publications). It is about a total of 97 articles (or parts of them), from which 50 were published in the Romanian periodicals and 47 in the foreign press (English, German, French and Hebrew). Of a particular interest are the references made to Alexandru Șafran's personality (by some intellectuals who knew him) which "cast light in the shadow areas", or, in other words, "where the written evidence was missing or there was too little" (p. 26). Facsimiles or some archive documents, newspaper articles, memorial testimonies are inserted at the end of the book.

It is obvious, even from the brief overview of the content, that we are presented with an outstanding work, written following the most demanding requirements in the field and which is an important contribution to the knowledge of the Jews' fate in Romania (between 1940-1944) and, of course, of the struggles of an authentic spiritual leader to improve their fate and "help them to survive during a tragic time from utter terror and terrible injustice".

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