

ANTONIO FAUR

Romania, an „Open Gate” to Save the Jews April-August 1944) from Hungary and Northern Transylvania: Documentary Contributions

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IN HIS latest work entitled *România, „poartă deschisă” pentru salvarea evreilor (aprilie-august 1944) din Ungaria și Transilvania de Nord: contribuții documentare (Romania, an „Open Gate” to Save the Jews (April-August 1944) from Hungary and Northern Transylvania: Documentary Contributions*, Antonio Faur, a historian from Oradea, suggests a generous topic for historical investigation referring to the tragic situation of the Jews in Hungary and Northern Transylvania – in the dramatic year 1944 – when Horthy’s authorities were enforcing the monstrous Nazi “final solution” aiming at exterminating the Jews etc.

The rich literature dedicated to the Holocaust has been mainly concerned with the way in which the Nazis and their collaborators committed the abominable criminal acts against the European Jew population, as well as with victims’ behaviour under unspeakable historical circumstances. In our opinion, there has been and still is a shortage of elaborate works based on thorough documentation using doubtless information in a balanced manner and according to historical truth concerning the rescue operations to save hundreds of Jews in Central Europe. We therefore consider the work as a main historiographical asset pleading to overcoming certain controversial stages in the field of investigation of contemporary historical issues.

The work has a very suggestive title and by its content manages to focus reader’s attention on new information of great scientific value brought to the foreground by archive documents available at the National Archives – Bihor County Office. They all speak of a series of intellectuals and particularly of ordinary people (in fact, being a simple person is the most complicated thing to do), mostly peasants, Romanian citizens, who endangered their own life and family in many situations. Yet they remained good Christians, brave, selfless and humane people helping their fellow Jews to escape the genocide organised in the Nazi extermination camps.

The work is made up of three chapters preceded by an *Introducere (Introduction)*. At the end of the book there is a broad documentary annex (a list of documents and facsimiles). We have to notice that the initial chapters are translated into English, which facilitates the reading by wider historiographic groups in Europe and elsewhere. As the introduction shows it, the work is a stage research that we consider able to act as basis of a synthesis on the tragic experience of the Jews in the Crișana area in 1944. In the same introduction, the author makes a brief introduction to the Jew community in Bihor, as they stood out due to their contribution to the development of the social, economic and cultural life in the area. The first chapter – *Contribuții documentare la cunoașterea „filielilor” bihorene de trecere clandestină a evreilor peste frontiere, din Ungaria în România (1944) (Documentary Contribution to Introducing the Bihor “Connection” for the Fraudulent Passage of Jews over the Border from Hungary to Romania)* (p. 15-32) – intends to make the readers more comfortable with the topic. A historiography of the issue is needed. The author lays stress on the need to systemati-

cally search archive documents providing doubtless information on certain actions of the kind. Here, we also find the aim of the work: providing accurate information to the scientific area on some Romanian village inhabitants near the borders, who turned into guides for the Jews “passing the border between life and death” (p. 7), between Hungary and Romania. After analysing the documents, the author reaches the conclusion that there used to be connections for illegal crossing of the Hungarian-Romanian border by the Jew refugees from Poland, Hungary and Northern Transylvania. Moreover, Antonio Faur manages to identify some itineraries (both by railway and on foot) followed by the Jews with the help of contact persons and often with the support of the Romanian border guards. They crossed the border in safe areas, somewhere south from Oradea, near Baile Felix. They went then to the counties of Arad and Timis, where the Jews were helped by local Mosaic communities to reach Palestine.

The second chapter – *Contribuția primarului Teodor Popoviciu (din Vârciorog, jud. Bihor) la salvarea de la moarte „sigură” a sute de evrei (1944)* (*Contribution of Mayor Teodor Popoviciu (from Vârciorog, Bihor County) to Saving Hundreds of Jews from ‘Certain’ Death (1944)*) (p. 33-42) – shows the collaboration of some intellectuals (mayors, diplomats, cultural attaches, ecclesiastic personalities, etc.) to save Jew refugee from certain death. Antonio Faur debates on the importance of archive documents not only from a historical point of view, but also considering human analysis belonging to man’s sensitive side.

The last chapter – *Noi date despre evreii care s-au salvat de la moarte, trecând granița din Ungaria în România (iunie, 1944)* (*New Information on Jews Saved from Death by Crossing the Border between Hungary and*

Romania (June 1944) (p. 43-53) – presents some cases of Jews fraudulent crossing of the border to Romania. Although they were caught by the Romanian authorities and sent to Romanian camps (as they usually did), they were released on August 23, 1944 and managed to save their life from the torment of the Nazi extermination camps. Certain humanitarian actions, attitudes and gestures of Romanian administrative institutions representatives or ordinary citizens saving hundreds of Jews (their fellows) from **certain death** by crossing the border from Hungary and the Transylvanian territory surrendered to Horthist authorities to Romania are set to the foreground.

After reading 192 documents (p. 57-237) and facsimiles (p. 238-403) generously provided by the author, the reader has the opportunity to share completions and taints of the issue that are absolutely necessary in contemporary historiography debates. Once again, this shows the professionalism and involvement of the historian Antonio Faur in the research topic.

We also notice the clear, direct and concise style avoiding to render the reading difficult with details less relevant, as the author is familiar with the terms used. Due to the value of the documents annexed, the paper is an extremely valuable work for both specialists and the public interested in the topic. It reveals dramatic realities regarding life and death decisions at the borders of Romania during the Second World War. At the same time, the documents are useful working tools to pursue new systematic research in this highly sensitive field which has to be recovered as much as possible in an honest manner.



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