

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

ROMANIA

Volume I – Moldavia
(Pages 111-114)

Harlau
(Old Spelling – Hirlau)

Map Coordinates: 47° 26' North – 26° 54' East

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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
community and its relationship with the Gentile community.

Harlau: A *city* in Northern Moldavia in *Botosani County*, 48 kilometers
from the county's capital city. *In the 15th century it was the capital of
Moldavia*

Year	Number	% of Jews in General Population
1803	784	
1838	1,008	
1859	1,389	
1886	2,254	56.6
1899	2,718	59.9
1910	2,023	
1930	2,032	22.3
1941	1,736	18.0
1942	1,300	
1947	1,936	

Until the *Outbreak* of WWII

The Jewish Settlement

According to the tradition of *Harlau's* Jews, a Jewish settlement already *existed* there in the time of Stefan the Great (Stefan cel Mare, 1457-1504). The Prince's *Jewish* physician brought to the place his extended family *which* formed the *kernel of Jewish* settlement in the *city*. *In the old cemetery*, Tombstones *dating back* several hundred years *were found*. *From the beginning of the 18th century*, there are documents *extant pertaining to a tax exemption extended to* several Jewish craftsmen who *to* Harlau from Poland; one of them was the goldsmith of the Moldavian ruler Grigorie Ghica the second (1735-1739).

In 1768, the ruler Grigorie Calimachi granted a *written* license to a Jew to build a glass factory and a paper factory employing sixty workers, and exempted from *taxation the* three Jewish craftsmen among them. In 1786, the ruler Mavrocordat exempted from paying taxes a Jew who was sent to Poland on behalf the glass factory to *import* raw materials. *Documents granting special privileges like these attracted* many Jews from Poland *to Harlau*. *In a* Romanian document *dating* from 1769, Harlau is mentioned as one of the *cities* in the country *populated by Jewish merchants trading in* cattle, grains, alcoholic beverages, *and flammable raw material, etc.*

In 1829, the Moldavian council *announced those* Harlau Jews who *were* native *born were* exempt from supplying food to the army but *were* obliged to *hand over* alcohol to the troops.

In 1831 a *peasant's* revolt erupted because of a dispute over contracts on work conditions. One of the leaders of the revolt was a Jew named, Shmil, a *leading* member of *Harlau's Kehillah*.

The Jewish Kehillah *was* organized in 1751 as a "Guild." In 1805 the *Staroste (a slavic or slavonic word that got into the Romanian language meaning a leader, a chief, a head, of a small manufacturing craft or trade or guild)*. *Courtesy Marietta Iosefson*) of the Kehillah named Baruch was mentioned in a formal document. In 1834 the Guild became an actual Kehillah.

In 1897, the Kehillah opened an elementary school, but had to close it two years *later due to* a dispute. A few years before the outbreak of WWI a *Jewish* school reopened and with the aid of JCA (Jewish Colonization Association), a magnificent building was built for the school in 1904, housing 400 students.

There were five synagogues in Harlau, *including* the Big Synagogue, founded according to tradition at the end of the 17th century-*which had* in its Holy Ark - 50 Torah books. The Kehillah *also* owned a bakery for unleavened bread (matzah), a ritual bathhouse, a slaughterhouse and a "Talmud Torah". When the old cemetery was full, another plot was allocated for a new cemetery

Zionist Activity

By 1883 a branch of the movement to settle in Eretz Israel was active in Harlau, with 50 members. In *Herzl's time* a Zionist Association was established and a branch of the Union of the *Naturalized* Jews (U.E.P) and a branch of the Jewish Party of Romania.

Towards the end of the 19th century, Harlau Jews suffered from anti-*Semitic persecution*. In 1899-1900 *about* half of Harlau's Jews emigrated, most of them to the *United States*. The emigrants walked by foot to the seaports. Until this day there is an association of Harlau' Jews in New York. (*United Harlauer Association jhb*) However, the number of Jews in Harlau did not diminish since many of the Jews from the neighboring farms settled there during the *peasants* revolt (1907).

The economic situation of the Jews in Harlau remained *stable*. In 1903, 212 *owned real estate*. In 1910, 233 were merchants, 87 tailors, 49 shoemakers, 17 *blacksmiths*, 9 carpenters and 191 *in* other *occupations*.

That same year a mixed school with 205 students *functioned* there. In 1913 almost all the craftsmen *and almost all the merchants in the city were Jewish.*

The Kehillah between *the* Two World Wars

Until 1922, representatives of the synagogues elected the Kehillah's leadership. *That* year general elections were held for the first time, *with* all the Kehillah's members participating. Of the four competing *lists*, the *list* headed by the Zionist leader Dr. W. Abeles, (*see below*) *was chosen.* In 1928 the Kehillah was reorganized *keeping with* the "*Law of Religions*" *promulgated* that same year.

Following Emancipation, (*the naturalization laws of 1919 jhb*) there were always *Jews serving on* the city council. Often representatives of the ruling party were elected from the Kehillah's most *prominent* members. With time Jews were accepted *into* Romanian parties as well. In 1930, 4 Jews belonging to the ruling party were elected to the *city* council, 2 belonging to the opposition party, one as the merchants' representative, and the local Rabbi.

Apart from the existing institutions, the Joint aided in *founding in Harlau*, a Jewish bank, which *offering small* loans to *those in need.*

Rabbis and Personalities

Famous Harlau rabbis *included:* Rabbi Chaim Yitzhak Aizikson; born in Harlau *during* the eighties of the 18th century. Known as an enthusiastic Hasid, *he was a regular visitor at the court of the Tzadik (a great Rabbi of the Hasidic movement in Judaism).* He passed away at *age* 72. His son who *succeeded* him, Israel Aizikson (born *ca.* 1840), wrote a book "*Shomayr Mitzvot*" (*Keeper of The Commandments*). He also *participated* in Zionist activities and in 1882 traveled to Paris to *persuade* Baron Rothschild to *establish* a settlement in Eretz Israel for the Jews of Dorohoi and Botosani *counties.* Rabbi Israel Aizikson was the grandfather of Michael Landau, a former delegate in the Romanian parliament and *now* the *head* of the *national* lottery *of the State of* Israel. Another Rabbi worth mentioning is Rabbi Menachem Nachum Buchner, author of the book "Saying Amen." (*Tchernovitz; 5679*) *From* 1916-1944 Rabbi Mendel Rabinovitz presided *in Harlau, succeeding, his* father Rabbi Meir, and grandfather, Rabbi Yosef, *who* were Rabbis in Harlau before him.

The Jewish journalist Horia Carp was born in Harlau (1869). He was a delegate to the Senate in the years between the two world wars. Also

born there was Dr. L. Abeles, president of the Kehillah and of the Zionist **Organization of** Harlau and his son Dr. **Walter** Abeles (1903) the **Director General of Kupat Cholim (Israel's largest healthcare organization)** in Jerusalem and the Israeli ambassador to Colombia (1960-1963) and at present, the Israeli ambassador to Costa Rica.

During the Holocaust

In the autumn months of 1940 several thousands German soldiers camped in Harlau.

When Antonescu **assumed power** Ion Bulfan was **appointed** Mayor of Harlau. He was a shoemaker, who learned his **trade** from a Jew. **In concert** with his deputy Botezatul, Director of the post office, Gramada, commander of the **legionnaire's** police, Rosca, the veterinarian Dr. Pantelimon Scripea and the physician Dr. Tibuleac, **there** began systematic persecutions **of** the Jews. They **planted** communist pamphlets in several Jewish homes and **subsequently jailed** them **based on their being** communists and sent them to a military court in Iasi. Following a thorough interrogation they were freed.

Following **the first days** of terror, the mayor summoned Rabbi Mendel Rabinovitz and **made clear** that the **acts of** terror will **cease** on the condition that the Jewish **merchants** will agree to gradually **turn over** their stores to **members of** the "Iron Guard". The Rabbi gathered all the leaders **of the Kehillah** and it was decided that to prevent disasters it would be better to give up their stores, so the confiscation **got underway, though** many of the Jewish **merchants** left **the city**. Besides the stores other assets were confiscated, **including** houses, especially **houses** belonging to **the well-to-do**

The persecutions continued and became **more severe** from day to day; Jewish men were **drafted** to **do** forced labor before the law **mandating** it was legislated. The **legionnaires** murdered the Kehillah's **chief** Iosif Lozner, his wife and daughter and several other Jews. The Jews were forbidden to pray publicly in the synagogues so **services were conducted** secretly in private homes. The school building was confiscated and the **children** studied in the Big Synagogue. In a few months all the Jews were obliged to **affix** the yellow **badge** of shame. They were **forbidden from** buying food **in the market, except for specified times**. The mill, operated by a Jew, was confiscated and **no longer supplied** flour **to Jewish bakers**. **Christians** were **also prohibited from selling** bread to the Jews. Jewish owners of grocery stores could not buy oil and **Christians** were

prohibited from selling oil to Jews. A Jewish ***druggist*** was forced by the ***chief*** of police to leave ***the city***.

December 1940 ***witnessed*** a new wave of robbing Jewish homes by soldiers accompanied ***by*** students who arrived ***in the city to spend the*** Christmas ***holiday***. Many Jews ***fled the city***, stores ***were shut***, economic life ***was*** paralyzed and the situation got so grave that in January 1941, Mayor ***Bulfan*** asked Rabbi Rabinovitz to ***persuade*** the Jews to return to ***the city*** and ***in return*** promised to ***restore*** order.

After the fall of the “Iron Guard” (Jan. 1941) Dr. Agapie ***became*** Mayor of Harlau and Simu ***was chosen chief*** of police. ***Monthly***, the Jewish leaders handed them a sum of money collected from the Jews as ***a*** bribe and in return, the two protected the Jews. After the ***outbreak*** of the war between Romania and the USSR (June 1941), when the ***order*** to expel the Jews from the city arrived, the mayor and the ***chief*** of police succeeded ***in obtaining*** a permit to cancel it. Even the German soldiers ***many of whom were in*** the city did not dare to harm the Jews.

Nevertheless, they were unable to prevent a general ***order*** that brought ***about*** the arrest of 22 of the more ***prominent*** members of the Kehillah by the police. They were held for three days in a small room ***with all the*** windows ***shut*** and ***in a space*** so narrow that they were forced to stand the ***entire*** time. After that ***things became easier as*** they were transferred as hostages to the Big Synagogue. ***They were thought responsible for*** all the sabotage and bombing acts and ***were*** destined to pay ***for this*** with their lives. Here they were imprisoned for two months with Romanian and German soldiers passing by, threatening to kill them.

The Russians bombed the city and the authorities spread the rumor that one of the pilots ***was*** a Jew, ***born in*** Harlau. ***Nevertheless*** the hostages were saved because the only person killed in the air raid was a Jewish woman. After that their situation became easier thanks to the intervention of Romanian aristocrats (see below) and from there on they could be exchanged ***in stages***.

From May 1942 on ***groups of Jews*** were sent to ***do forced*** labor in Bessarabia, There they worked in quarries with an anti-Semitic officer ordering them around, ***making*** their life miserable.

When the front got closer to Harlau, the Germans decided to ***slaughter*** the ***local*** Jews. ***For this purpose they*** left in the city a ***special*** unit ***whose***

task was to execute this planned “action.” But they did not have time *to fulfill their mission* because the *Soviet* army entered the city from two directions, from the direction of *Botosani* and from the direction of Iasi, and the German unit was taken *captive*.

In the spring of 1944, the Russians conquered Harlau and the anti-Semitic *regime ended*.

Among those who helped the Jews *during* this period *we need to note* two priests: Constantinescu and Stefanescu; When Rabbi Rabinovitz was taken *as a* hostage, *Father* Constantinescu visited his family and swore *that only over his dead body would* the Rabbi be harmed. *Father* Stefanescu hid valuable things belonging to Jews in his home and returned everything after the war.

In addition, the noble Romanian *land-owning* families Ghica-Deleni and Polizu-Micsunesti *intervened on behalf of* the Jews from time to time.

After the war life returned to normal.

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The General Archive of The History of The Jewish People. RM 160, 164. Yad Vashem Archive. 011/6—5; 011/18—1 (108-110); PKR/I—38 (319-23); I—153 (1483-506); I—154 (1507-12); I—155 (1513-16).

W. Filderman Archive 18(84, 153, 201—202); 19 (45); 45 (7, 8,16, 17).

M. Karp Archive I, 22, 53—54, 92—94; VI, 70.