

Encyclopedia of the Jewish Communities  
From their Foundation 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 town in Northern Moldavia, Botosani district, 48 kilometers  
from the town-district. Capital city of Moldavia in the 15<sup>th</sup> century.

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<b>Year</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>% of Jews in General Population</b>
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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	

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## Until the Breakout of World War II

### 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 the Jewish* settlement in the city. *In the old cemetery, tombstones dating back several hundred years were found. From the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, there are documents extant pertaining to a tax exemption extended to several Jewish craftsmen who immigrated 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 that 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 World War I, 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 17<sup>th</sup> 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's 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 ["Fusgeyers" RSS]. 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 peasant's 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 18<sup>th</sup> 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 they're 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).  
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