

Book review of Antonio Faur, *Un deceniu din existenta evreilor bihoreni (1942-1952): contributi istoriografice si documentare (A decade from the existence of the Jews from Bihor County: historiographical and documentary contributions)*

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Antonio Faur, *Un deceniu din existența evreilor bihoreni (1942-1952). Contribuții istoriografice și documentare*, Cluj-Napoca, Editura Mega, 2012, ISBN 978-606-543-263-5.

By Anca Oltean¹

The book written by Antonio Faur, *Un deceniu din existența evreilor bihoreni (1942-1952). Contribuții istoriografice și documentare/ A decade from the existence of the Jews from Bihar. Historiographical and documentary contributions* brings in the scientific world new unpublished data about the condition of the Jews from Oradea during the times of Holocaust and its aftermath.

At the beginning of the book, the author makes the overall portrait of the Jewry of Romania after the Holocaust, consulting in this sense historical sources from the local Archives from Oradea, remarking that although antisemitic feelings continued to exist, the majority of Romanian population was not antisemitic. The book describes many cases when the Romanian nationals saved the Jews from deportation.

One of the chapters of this study has a topic the testimony of a survivor of German camps during the Second World War. The author took an interview to Varodi Iudith from Oradea, a survivor of the concentration camps from Auschwitz-Birkenau. She married Weiss Adalbert in 1948 and she worked for 30 years at the “Plastor” Factory from Oradea. She gave this interview to Antonio Faur at his request but also from her belief that the Jews were always a very loyal and hardworking people who did not like to discriminate other people and who were victims of Holocaust. Because of anti-Jewish legislation, in spite of the fact that she entered the third at the Commercial High School, she could not attend the school because she was a Jew. She joined a “Jiglity” a Zsidogymnasium and although away from Cluj, she succeeded to go to graduation exam and to obtain the graduation Diploma. Later on, she was interned together with her family in the ghetto from Dej. Her mother was beaten because she did not want to reveal the places where there were hidden the “treasures” of the family. There were kept more than 100 people in a train wagon on their way to Auschwitz. At Auschwitz they were put to hard labor. Their guardians were called *Kapo* and were part of other nationalities than German. After Auschwitz, she was deported to Buchenwald, commando Tauscha, in Germany, near Leipzig. She survived to hard labor and then she arrived in Timișoara and then she arrived in Timișoara and then she settled in Oradea, together with her husband.

Another chapter has the title *The report of the general consul from Oradea about the situation of Jewry from Northern Transylvania (1944)*. Antonio Faur mentioned that a chapter of this report was published in the review *Magazin istoric*. He also reveals another source which he had for this chapter, namely the work of Katona Béla, *Várad a viharban* (Oradea in the storm). From the report, it results that there were a network to save the Jews from the North-West of Transylvania which involved the existence of a guide, a connection with an important man from Oradea, a crossing point at the frontier, and the transport on the territory of Romania.

The ghettoization of the Jews from Oradea was also shown by Eva Heyman in her diary, another source of the author. The international Red Cross was informed about the condition of Jews from Oradea from the general consul Mihai Marina. The consul Mihai Marina procured data about the Jews found in the ghettos from Northern Transylvania. In the same time, the consul Mihai Marina elaborated a report about the tragic end of Jews deported to Auschwitz. The university professor Vespasian Pella, the Romanian ambassador to Switzerland passed through Oradea, in his way to Switzerland, handing in this report to International Red Cross.

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Another chapter has the title *Contribution of the General Consul from Oradea, Mihai Marina, and of his collaborators to the saving from death of some Jews*. The author quotes a fragment from the work *Final Report* that established the contribution of Romania to Holocaust that says that the cases when Romanians saved Jews from death were insufficiently researched. Another source the author quotes are the words of Elie Wiesel, a Jew from Transylvania who received later the Nobel prize, that acknowledge the Romanians' help to the actions of saving the Jews. Randolph Braham, an important historian who studied the condition of Hungarian Jews, is also quoted by Antonio Faur who mentions the Romanian state as a oasis for the escaped Jews from Hungary. Once arrived in Romania, the escaped Jews went to Arad, Timișoara and Bucharest. The author tries to establish consul Mihai Marina's contributions to the salvation of Jews. Mihai Marina had an excellent reputation and he had an important role in the promotion of the interests of Romania in North-West of Transylvania, and a part of Hungary. For the transportation of Jews there were utilized three cars: the consul's, the vice-consul Anghel Lupescu's and Ion Romașcanu's. In different locations, the escaped Jews were waited by trusty persons who crossed them the boundary to Romania.

Another chapter is entitled *The contribution of the lawyer Aurel Socol to the saving of some Jews from Cluj (April-July 1944)*. The author mentions the sources of documentation referring to the lawyer Aurel Socol. One of them is an article in *Tribuna*, no. 34 from 1990 written by Gheorghe I. Bodea. There followed several articles in *Tribuna* under the coordination of Augustin Buzura who was the intellectual product of the interwar university from Cluj, a student at the Faculty of Law, University King Ferdinand from Cluj-Napoca. After the war, he was deported to communist prisons. In his memories, Aurel Socol mentions that after the occupation of Hungary by Fascist Germany, the Jews from Hungary had lost their occupations and were obliged to wear a yellow star. He used the help of a guide, Vasile Crișan who had to cross the frontier from Hungary to Romania together with the Jews. He required some money for his services. In the summer of 1944, a group of Jews organized by Aurel Socol was caught when trying to cross the frontier. Aurel Socol assumed his responsibility and he was, in consequence, sent to Hungarian prisons where he was severely brutalized.

Another chapter has the title *Final considerations referring to the ways of clandestine passing of frontier of the Jews from Hungary in Romania (May-August 1944)*. The deportation to German and Polish concentration camps started in March 1944. The new government of Döme Sztójay, organized ghettos on the territory of Transylvania and Hungary. The ghetto from Oradea was the second after the one from Budapest comprising 35 000 of Jews. Most Jews that rezided in the ghettos were not aware about their future deportation and treatment. Antonio Faur has data about clandestine ways of evadation from the area of Romanian-Hungarian frontier in Bihor county. Together with Jews from Transylvania and Hungary, Jews from Germany, Poland, Czech Republic passed the frontier in this area. They really believed that their salvation is in Romania and from Romania they emigrated to Palestine. The conclusion of the author based on documents shows that although there were cases when the Jews didn't have to pay for being crossed the frontier, in most cases they had to pay. Antonio Faur describes the way in which the border was crossed: „The way of crossing the border had components: one in Oradea and the other on the other side of the frontier, in Romania. There were in a tight communication for avoiding the failures. The general consul Mihai Marina had, of course, the great responsibility to prepare „the passing” over the boundary, in the places where there was less control by the Hungarian soldiers. Sometimes he avoided Băile Felix as point of frontier connected with Romania, because it was a space very well surveilled. The village of Șuaieiu was situated in the proximity of the railway train Oradea-Holod-Beiuș and it was an optimal place for the organization of an efficient network of clandestine passing of some Jews in Romania where they were waited by guides, or they actioned on their own, assuming the risk to be caught by militaries”. (Faur, 2012: 100)

The author analyzes in a chapter of the book the presence of Jews in the Public Library of the city of Oradea in the year 1944. One of the fascist initiatives was the elimination of the books written by Jewish authors from the local library and the identification of Jewish readers whom were forbidden the access to the library. Antonio Faur shows that the director of Public library of Oradea elaborated a list

with Jewish readers with the purpose of forbidding Jewish access to library. In the end of this work, the author attached this table with readers of Jewish origin from 1944.

Another chapter of the work concerns the contribution of the researcher Ioan Chira at the reinterpretation of some aspects from the tragic history of the Jewish Communities from Oradea. Dr. Ioan Chira, twenty years after the Holocaust elaborated *The genocide of the Jews of Bihor during the Hungarian occupation (September 1940-October 1944)*, a very rigorous study with good references, based on works published abroad, but also on National Archives Branch from Bihor County. Ioan Chira presents the evolution of Jewish problem from Hungary during the years 1920 and 1944 and also the Jewish sufferings from Oradea and Bihor County during the years 1941-1944.

A chapter has the title *New documentary sources referring to the sufferings of Jewish survivors of the ghettos, concentration camps, battalions of workers that came back in Oradea after the war*. Using inedited archival sources, the author draws a picture of the post-war Jews situation after their return from Holocaust. He uses the declarations of some returned Jews that were entitled to governmental pensions after the return from Holocaust: survivors, orphans of both parents, widows, injured persons. After their return from Holocaust, the author shows that they had a precarious material situation and they were ill because of the harsh conditions from deportation times. The Jewish Democratic Committee brought the Jewry under communist control. As an annex to the book, the author adds a list with Jewish persons that applied for pensions they were entitled to according to Law no.82/ 1st April 1948 with the stipulation of their infirmity and a description of the circumstances on which they got the infirmity.

Antonio Faur completes his work with some unpublished documents concerning the deported Jews (in the year 1944) from the North of Bihor County. Authorities after the war wanted to have lists with the Jews who were persecuted, valuable witnesses of what happened in the past. Thus the author adds a nominal table with the deported Jews from the village of Sălard, Bihor County, a nominal table with the inhabitants from labor camps or politically imprisoned; a table with the Romanian and Jewish inhabitants which were sent out of the country and also other tables concerning the situation of Jewry from Holocaust years.

The author reveals data about an important document (from the year 1952) about the Jews of Oradea, namely a list achieved in 1952 with the Jewish inhabitants of Oradea in which there is mentioned the number of the Jews and their residence. The document was discovered by the author in the local archives.

The present book written by Antonio Faur brings an important contribution to the history of the Jews from Bihor County in the very storm of Holocaust. His book is welcome in Romania, a country where the Jewish problems during the Holocaust were for so long wrongly interpreted or ignored.