

**Hildrun Glass.** *Deutschland und die Verfolgung der Juden im rumänischen Machtbereich 1940-1944.* München: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2014. 303 pp. \$70.00, cloth, ISBN 978-3-486-72293-2.



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Recent years have seen a huge growth of research into what is broadly known as the Holocaust in Romania. This trend, driven by the release of Romanian and Soviet sources, has contributed a great deal to an increasingly differentiated and detailed understanding of the events that took place in Romania and in Romania's sphere of influence during the Second World War. Yet this new research and evidence also calls for the reconsideration of an older, contested, and contentious wider question: what was the character and scope of German influence on the Romanian leadership during the Holocaust? In other words, who bears the main burden of responsibility for the murder of three to four hundred thousand Jews under sovereign Romanian rule?

This is the main question Hildrun Glass tackles in her latest publication, *Deutschland und die Verfolgung der Juden im rumänischen Machtbereich 1940-1944*. To an extent, the answer depends on whether one adopts an "intentionalist" or a "structuralist" explanation for the Holocaust. However, it also largely depends on the evidence

used. For decades, Romanians and Germans passed each other the buck. In postwar courts of law dealing with war crimes and reparations claims, for example, Romanians blamed the Germans, and vice versa. Both German defendants and Romanian Holocaust deniers or minimizers used the lack of evidence or the sole availability of German sources to their advantage. The fact that nearly half of the Romanian Jews survived makes these questions all the more intriguing and important. As Dennis Deletant has argued in his biography of Romania's wartime leader, Ion Antonescu, Romania was unquestionably an ally of Nazi Germany, but his policy towards the Jews was "inconsistent."<sup>[1]</sup> How can this be explained? Glass's study thus explores what one can find out on the basis of all currently available evidence. She concentrates in particular on decision-making processes (*Entscheidungsfindung*, p. 203) at the top. This book thereby contributes to the much wider debate about what sources can tell us about the causes, timing, and dynamics of genocide during the Second World War. But it also gives insight

into the channels of communication in the Third Reich during the war and a foreign, sovereign government's possibilities for opposition to the Nazi leadership.

As Glass explains in her concise introduction, the study has three main aims. First, it seeks to address and challenge the phenomenon of "denial as reason of state" (p. 1, all translations mine) in Romania, which has been characteristic of the country's political--and to an extent intellectual--elites across different regimes. Secondly, it seeks to qualify, in the light of new sources, the image of Romania as merely opportunistic in its attitude towards Nazi Germany.[2] Finally, this book is intended as an engagement with and perhaps even a continuation and qualification of the work of the main historian of the Holocaust in Romania, Jean Ancel, who devoted his life to collecting and publishing incriminating Romanian sources on the events, and adopted a strongly intentionalist stance.[3] Drawing on three main types of sources--German and Romanian contemporary archival material and retrospective statements (mostly evidence collected in the context of post-war trials)--Glass carefully reconstructs the German-Romanian relationship as well as the German and Romanian governments' own independent and respective intentions over the course of World War II. As she herself writes, this is therefore a triple-angle analysis (p. 10).

The study's main argument is cleverly built into the structure of the book. Following a first chapter entitled "Context" on the structure of German-Romanian relations, the next chapters are given the main headings "Congruence," "Divergence," and "Dissent." This summarizes the changing attitude of the Romanian authorities toward the German leadership over time. These phases are dated 1940/41, 1942, and 1943/1944 respectively. The book ends with Romania's change of sides in the war on August 23, 1944, following King Michael's coup, which deposed Marshall Ion Antonescu and his regime. The short conclusion

outlines the key features of this trajectory once more and clarifies the author's own position with regard to the subject as a whole. As Glass writes in the last paragraph, Romania put an end to its alliance with the National Socialists when the prospects for military victory faded. The interruption of the policy of deportation and murder therefore needs to be seen as a consequence of this, rather than an ideological U-turn. The best evidence for this is that many of the Jews from Bukovina and Bessarabia, who were deemed foreign, were indeed murdered and further action against Jews in the Old Kingdom was postponed until the end of the war. While this finding does not necessarily revolutionize our understanding of the topic, it certainly links together neatly the insights of Romanian scholars, who have emphasized long-standing ideological arguments for the persecution of the Jews in Romania, and those of German historians stressing pragmatic considerations. This study points to the combined significance of both German influence and homegrown Romanian racism and anti-Semitism for the unfolding of the Holocaust in Romania.

The extent of German influence on policies toward the Jews is made clear from the outset. The first chapter, entitled "Context" and dealing with the period 1937-40, outlines the structures and character of German political interference in Romania starting from before the outbreak of the Second World War. Not only did the radicalization of policies against the Jews in Romania follow a number of what Glass calls "German models" (*deutsche Vorbilder*, p. 18), but Germany also had a vast network of institutions and individuals operating in Romania in this period, offering a mixture of advice on economic matters and aryanization. This chapter thus introduces us to many of the main actors of the study and their institutions: the German embassy (Deutsche Gesandtschaft Bukarest--DGB) and its ambassador, Manfred Freiherr von Killinger, who had a direct line to both Ribbentrop and Hitler, but also economic and military officers including members of the NSDAP, SS,

and RSHA (Reichssicherheitshauptamt). The cooperation which had started under King Carol II continued uninterrupted and intensified from September 1940, following General (later Marshall) Ion Antonescu's coup and his establishment as the leader of the Legionary State with his right-hand man, foreign minister, and deputy prime minister, Mihai Antonescu.

The following chapter on the congruence of German and Romanian plans over the course of 1941 thus reads as the natural consolidation of the German-Romanian relationship established before then. However, everything takes a more serious turn. In April 1941, Gustav Richter, one of Eichmann's aides, arrived in Bucharest to act as adviser on Jewish affairs (*Judenberater*), together with so-called colonization experts Karl Pflaumer and Theodor Ellgering. The meaning of "congruence" comes into its own with Romania and Nazi Germany's joint attack on the Soviet Union in the summer of 1941. Romania was indeed Germany's closest ally on the eastern front. For Romania this was not only a chance to satisfy expansionist foreign policy aims in the east and "wage a great war against the Slavs" (p. 113), but also an opportunity to "clear the ground" or "cleanse the terrain" (*curățirea terenului*, p. 4)--namely by getting rid of foreign elements and in particular foreign Jews. For Glass, this expression can be regarded as synonymous with the German "resolution of the Jewish question" (*Lösung der Judenfrage*, p. 51). Indeed, this policy resulted in the violent massacre of hundreds of thousands of Jews in the conquered areas and the deportation of over one hundred thousand Jews from Bukovina and Bessarabia to ghettos and camps in Romanian-administered Transnistria, in the hope of transferring them further beyond the Bug River at a later date. As Glass shows, cooperation with the Germans was not always smooth but at this point, they largely agreed on what the task of "administration" (*Verwaltung*) of the conquered areas involved.

The recorded brutality with which Romanians treated Jews in these areas makes the developments over the course of the year 1942 all the more intriguing. In the space of a few months, Romania shifted its position from closest to reluctant ally with regard to Jewish persecution. The plans drawn up at the Wannsee Conference in January 1942 had included the deportation of all Romanian Jews, over three hundred thousand people, to the *Generalgouvernement*. But this never happened. The Germans tried to exercise pressure by emphasizing their need for a Jewish workforce and encouraging Romanians to follow the Slovak or the Croat examples--apparently to no avail. This is what Glass describes as the phase of divergence. Yet the evidence here is highly problematic as the Romanian archives appear to have been cleansed (there is a nine-month gap in the archives between January and September 1942). Richter declared having obtained a written note from Mihai Antonescu in June agreeing to deportations of Jews from the Banat and southern Transylvania. This note is referred to in German sources but it was never found. What can be established for certain is that Romania was hesitating and delaying handing over its Jews and this, Glass believes, even before the fateful military struggle over Stalingrad. It is clear that by October 1942, Mihai Antonescu no longer believed in a German victory. By then, too, the meaning of "transferring Jews to the *Generalgouvernement*," as requested by the Germans, was no longer a secret. This moment marked a radical change in Romania's policy toward the Jews and towards its German ally, which made its alliances conditional on agreement with the "the final solution" (*Endlösung*).

As the second section of this chapter on the Romanian plans for deportation shows, however, the Romanian backtracking needs to be viewed with a pinch of salt. Romanians continued to try to transfer Jews in Transnistria over the Bug River to German-controlled areas in full awareness of what this meant for them. In their vision for the

“new organization of southeastern Europe” after the war, Jews and Roma were not mentioned other than in connection with a one-way transfer (p. 203). Further deportations to Transnistria from Cernăuți, where some 19,000 Jews had been able to remain following the first wave of deportations, took place in the summer of 1942, and some 2,216 Jews were deported from Bucharest in September 1942 as well. Finally, as Glass seems to suggest, one cannot exclude the possibility that Romania’s reluctance to deport its Jews was linked to confusion concerning the contradictions between German and Romanian plans and Romania’s concern for its image. This is what Ion Antonescu’s repeated references to Hungarian Jews, whose treatment at this point had been better than that of Romanian Jews, for instance, suggests. Yet, it is worth noting that Glass does not make as much of the argument of Marshall Antonescu’s “national pride” to explain his unwillingness to deport Romanian-speaking Jews, as emphasized by some historians.[4]

The last chapter deals with the years 1943 and 1944 and describes the “change of heart” (*Sinneswandel*) of the Romanian government (p. 233). By this time, the break between Romania and Germany regarding the Jewish question was official. This chapter focuses on the tense interactions between Marshall Antonescu and Hitler, and Mihai Antonescu and Ribbentrop, and traces Ion and Mihai Antonescu’s increasingly diverging views of the situation. The latter is said to have thought that the Germans were going mad. During the last meeting between Ion Antonescu and Hitler, in 1944, the Jewish question was apparently not even broached. The Germans were livid about Romania’s promotion of Jewish emigration as the solution to the Jewish question. But until the regime’s collapse in August 1944, Romania continued moving away from Germany and closer to international partners and institutions such as the Red Cross. In March 1944, Ion Antonescu

even, if grudgingly, authorized the wholesale repatriation of Jews from Transnistria.

In many ways this book confirms what was already known about the chronology and dynamics of power in Romania during the Holocaust. But it both provides yet more compelling evidence and deepens the sense of the unknown and unknowable. As Glass constantly shows, postwar accounts are highly unreliable and contemporary material is both fragmentary (besides losses, much may have been discussed orally or not recorded) and biased (German and Romanian sources often present diverging emphases). What appears to be true is that Romanians drew the line between life and death along the border between the Old Kingdom and the new provinces. However, as she concludes, a complex situation was made even more complex by the war and this affected motives and choices. One is therefore unavoidably led to speculate whether a different outcome to the war would have meant a different outcome for Romanian Jews as well. Glass does not settle the intentionalist/structuralist debate, either. A great deal of attention is paid to particular individuals—Ion and Mihai Antonescu, of course, but also others such as Richter, Killinger, and Radu Lecca (the person assigned as the Romanian Jewish affairs commissioner)—in their relationships to each other and to the German leadership at the highest level. This provides insight into German and Romanian structures of power and communication and the structural modes of oppression and exploitation of Romanian Jews. But it especially suggests the significance of these individuals in and of themselves, their personal interests, and political maneuvering, for what happened.

If the study does not so much offer a new or particularly conclusive main claim, this was also not necessarily its primary objective. Indeed, it can be read as a critical commentary on the evidence and a reflection on the possibility of reconstructing the decision-making processes during

the Holocaust at all. By drawing on court cases and postwar memoirs alongside archival sources, the study also highlights the intricacies of the postwar blame game and strategies of exculpation that hindered efforts to shed light on what happened after the war and which still pose problems for historians today. At times, the reader may be overwhelmed by the listing of contradictory claims side by side and the level of detail—a search for truth that can also seem somewhat positivistic. But the approach is very transparent and therefore, in a sense, inherently reflective. Besides, Glass's careful and systematic confrontation of German and Romanian material unquestionably goes far beyond anything other historians have done until now. At the juncture of Romanian, Third Reich, and Second World War history, it constitutes important reading for scholars working in any of these fields.

#### Notes

[1]. Dennis Deletant, *Hitler's Forgotten Ally: Ion Antonescu and His Regime, Romania 1940-1944* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 2.

[2]. See, e.g., Raul Hilberg, *Die Vernichtung der europäischen Juden: die Gesamtgeschichte des Holocausts* (Berlin: Olle & Wolter, 1982), 515; and Andreas Hillgruber, *Hitler, König Carol und Marschall Antonescu: die deutsch-rumänischen Beziehungen 1938-1944* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1954).

[3]. See, e.g., Jean Ancel, *Documents Concerning the Fate of the Romanian Jewry during the Holocaust*, 12 vols. (Jerusalem: The Beate Klarsfeld Association, 1986).

[4]. Vladimir Solonari, *Purifying the Nation: Population Exchange and Ethnic Cleansing* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010).

[5]. Radu Ioanid, *The Holocaust in Romania: The Destruction of Jews and Gypsies under the*

*Antonescu Regime, 1940-1944* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee Publishers, 2000).

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