

**MASS KILLINGS AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE
DURING THE HOLOCAUST IN TRANSNISTRIA**

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Introduction

In the Holocaust, during the mass-killings in the East, the Germans and their Romanian allies used extremely diversified violent methods against Jews. The perpetrators killed deportees by bullets, fire, drowning, hanging, deprivation or provoking suicide. In Transnistria different „systems” were put in place to organize and make efficient the process of killing. The „logistical challenge” was significant, having in mind that the new authorities organized the killing of tens of thousands of Jews.

Transnistria was a conquered province, since July-August 1941, and it was put under Romanian control after an agreement with Nazi Germany. This territory was a dumping ground and a killing site for the deported Jews from Bessarabia, Bukovina, Romania and also for local Jews.¹ Initially, Romanian authorities tried to push Jews over the Bug river but the Germans strongly opposed it, after they killed approximately 15,000 of them. A compromise was reached eventually by involving local Volksdeutsche in the killings. Since the 19th century, a dense network of German colonies covered the southern half of Transnistria. During the war, they were organized by the SS-controlled Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle (VoMi), which used Sonderkommando R(ussland) (SkR) and

¹ See Jean Ancel, *The History of the Holocaust in Romania*, Lincoln & Jerusalem, University of Nebraska Press & Yad Vashem, 2011, *passim*; Radu Ioanid, *The Holocaust in Romania. The Destruction of Jews and Gypsies Under the Antonescu Regime, 1940-1944*, With a Foreword by Elie Wiesel and a Preface by Paul A. Shapiro, Chicago, Ivan R. Dee, 2000, *passim*.

Selbstschutz militia to exterminate thousands of Jews. A system was put in place to send Jews „for work” in German colonies or to „cleansing” areas for sanitary reasons. In the coded language of that time, „work” and „cleansing” meant „extermination”. For example, in the Berezovca county around 34,000 Jews were killed with this method. In the Golta county, „The Kingdom of Death”, the same teams of German SkR/Selbstschutz, Romanian gendarmes and Ukrainian collaborators killed up to 70,000 Jews, especially in Bogdanovka.²

Sexual violence was the least researched topic.³ In this paper, I analyze the connection between sexual violence and other types of violent actions.

I focus on the mass-killings in Mostovoi as a case study. Mostovoi was a village in the Berezovka county. A transit camp functioned there in 1941-1942 for Jews deported from the Odessa area, after the Odessa massacre (October 1941), in which 20,000 Jews were killed by the Romanian army. The surviving Jews were deported to Golta and Berezovka and most of them were executed by German paramilitary, Romanian military and gendarmes and Ukrainian militia.⁴

The starting point of this paper was the meeting with one of the few survivors of the Mostovoi inferno, Angela Genesco, who lives in New York. In long discussions and interviews of oral history, she recalls the hell she went through. Besides the murders, tortures and beatings, sexual violence raged in Mostovoi, as in the rest of Transnistria. Angela’s story is combined with the general story of the Mostovoi mass-killings and sexual crimes as they result from documents of postwar trials against war criminals, which were recently made available in Romanian archives (in The National Council for the Study of the Securitate Archives, The National Archives of Romania, The Romanian Military Archives etc). I also researched, as a Tziporah Wiesel Fellow, documents copied by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in the Odessa State Archive.

Angela

Angela has been living in the US since 1966. We met in 2016, in Bucharest. She was back in Romania after half a century. Liviu Beris, the head of the Association of Jewish Victims of the Holocaust in Romania, introduced us to each other. Angela enjoyed being back to Romania. The

² Dennis Deletant, *Ghetto Experience in Golta, Transnistria, 1942-1944*, in „Holocaust and Genocide Studies”, Vol. 18, No. 1, Spring 2004, p. 1-26; Diana Dumitru, *Genocide for „Sanitary Purposes”? The Bogdanovka Murder in the Light of Postwar Trial Documents*, in „Journal of Genocide Research”, No. 10, 2018, p. 1-21.

³ The exception is the valuable chapter „Înjosirea iudaismului și a evreilor” in Jean Ancel, *Contribuții la istoria României. Problema evreiască*, vol. II, part 2 (1933-1944), București, Hasefer & Yad Vashem, 2003, p. 38-82.

⁴ Several historians wrote about the mass-killings in Mostovoi: Andrei Muraru, *Romanian Political Justice. Holocaust and the Trials of War Criminals: The Case of Transnistria*, in „Holocaust. Studii și cercetări”, vol. X, nr. 1 (11), 2018, p. 89-183; Ovidiu Creangă, *Mostovoi*, in Geoffrey P. Megargee (General Editor), Joseph R. White (Volume Editor), Hel Hecker (Contributing Editor), *The Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos, 1933-1945*, vol. III, Bloomington, Indiana University Press & United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2018, p. 719-721; Eric C. Steinhart, *The Holocaust and the Germanization of Ukraine*, Cambridge & Washington, Cambridge University Press & United States Holocaust Memorial Museum & German Historical Institute, 2015.

country she returned to, after so many years, had changed. She had left because of communism, as well as of anti-Semitism. She still remembers one phrase she heard so often: “How beautiful you are, such a pity you’re a kike!”

We talked at length, but, at the beginning of our dialogue, mostly about the present. I could feel her discomfort every time I directed the discussion towards the past. She didn’t want to remember. ”This past, I am over with!” She politely explained that she went through a serious trauma and talked too many times about it. She brought a CD with her oral history interview. Whenever I asked something about her experience of the war and of the Holocaust, she would say: “Everything is in that CD”. This was my tacit pact with her: to comply, as much as possible, with her wish to separate from the trauma of the Holocaust.

Since then, we kept calling each other on the phone and she started to open up. In the end, she agreed to be recorded. Several very precious hours of recording resulted.

It is worth mentioning, over and over again: the survivors of the hell of Mostovoi can be counted on the fingers of one’s hands, and Angela is one of them.

The interview recorded on CD by Stephen Lubofsky and given by her on June 14, 1995, is overwhelming. But not all is there, as Angela assured me – it’s just a small part of the terrible story this woman had. So, we talked some more. I mentioned a few names to her, as well as stories I had found in various documents. This is how I released, out of the depth of her mind, the memory of people she had not spoken about with anyone before or whom she had simply forgotten. Every discussion we had entailed nights of insomnia for her.

Bolgrad

Angela’s maiden name was Onitzkansky. Her parents called her Jenny. She was born on October 16, 1927 in Bolgrad, in Greater Romania. Her father, Pincu, was a simple merchant, and her mother, Clara, was a housewife. Angela was an only child and her parents, as well as other family members, spoiled her a lot. Her childhood memories are idyllic; she does not remember having had problems because of anti-Semitism. But she knew that, in the Old Kingdom, particularly in cities, Jews had serious problems. She felt safer in Bessarabia.

It was 1940 when the Soviets took over Bessarabia, Bolgrad included. Russian soldiers were now living in the family home. She started to learn Russian. She was not enthusiastic about the new regime, but it seemed to her it was better than in Romania. “However, being a Jew means to always be on the alert,” added Angela.

Her life changed completely after June 22, 1941. She was very afraid of the Germans, but soon noted that Romanians were working hand in hand with them. “They were just as bad!” mentioned Angela bitterly. Her parents made their luggage quickly, fled from Bolgrad and sought

refuge to the east, with the rest of the family – more than twenty people. Huge columns of people were taking part in the same infernal race. Sometimes walking, other times on the cart, they went from village to village, for many weeks, always under the threat of bombing and of German paratroopers.

But the German army was moving faster than them. They were caught up in a small town – she only remembers that it was a German colony. Her father had a fit of herniated disc and fell behind, having separated from the rest of the family. When German paratroopers came, Angela was thinking how lucky other members of her family were, since they had fled. Later on, she learned that, in fact, almost all had been captured somewhere near Rostov, where a terrible German-Soviet stand-off had taken place, in September-November 1941. She showed me a photo of 33 members of her extended family: those who died in the Holocaust were more numerous than those who survived. Among those who perished was one of her aunts, who was nine months pregnant at the time.

They were captured by the Germans. The unit commander glanced at Angela, a beautiful blonde teenager, and thought she looked like his “Aryan” sister. This is why they were spared, she and her parents, and they were sent back to Bessarabia. Back in Bolgrad, their nightmare continued. They were locked in a kind of ghetto and, after a few weeks, they were sent to Transnistria, with all those living in the ghetto, escorted by Romanian gendarmes. It was the fall of 1941. Angela was 14 years old.

She still remembers the harshest of the gendarmes who escorted them - Alexandru Pierdevară (which means „slacker” in Romanian). “A bastard”, she added suddenly, lest I have time to make fun of his name.

The move to Transnistria was an ordeal because of fatigue, terrible hunger, poverty and disease. A lot of people died in front of Angela. “I never understood how it happened that I survived! I had no support from the gendarmes who were guarding us. On the contrary, the Romanians were terrible. Locals (i.e. Bessarabians, Transnistrians and Ukrainians) helped us a few times, but not often. Everyone used to ask gold, money or clothes from us. All of them had to be bribed” remembers Angela.

Mostovoi

As soon as they reached the district of Mostovoi, the hardships turned into a disaster. The cart they were using to travel capsized and her mother hit her head on a rock. She now had a nasty wound. She lost a massive amount of blood and needed to be taken to a hospital. Pierdevară agreed to have her transported to a medical care unit only after receiving several pieces of jewelry “as a gift.”

Her father was taken to perform forced labor to the Suha Verba collective farm, located in the district of Mostovoi. Angela would later find out that he was shot by German settlers, along with many others who were first forced to dig their own grave.

Angela was hospitalized together with her mother. There was a good side, here: this is how they met Dr. Serghei Kolpensky (Corpanschi in Romanian documents), who became a providential person in Angela's life. One of Kolpensky's daughters was among resistance fighters, and he had it in his mind to save Angela at any cost. He risked his life for her mother and for many others, always thinking of places to hide, as well as lies to tell in order to protect them, for two and a half years. Most of the time, Angela did not leave the hospital, being continuously moved between the few buildings of the institution. She was separated from her mother, so that they might not be noticed. She was blond, so she did not meet the stereotype of Jewishness, and spoke Russian, so she could pass as a local. For a while, she was introduced as the daughter of a nurse who worked there. She had several aliases. Whenever the situation worsened, she was put in a hiding place. During some raids, she had to stay hidden up to her neck in a barrel of water. Another time, she was put into a haystack. She spent a few weeks in an attic, with a Polish and a Russian Jew. The place was so crammed she could barely make a few moves. Later on, she was hidden in the home of a local police officer. And so on.

Her life was a continuous commotion within the empire of fear. She did not make any plans and expected to die, at any moment. She realized her words were never at the future tense. She confessed to be morally numb. When her mother was killed, there was no reaction from her. That is, no visible reaction. She was crumbling inside.

After her head wound healed, Angela's mother survived several more months in Mostovoi, hidden by Kolpensky hospital.

SkR

We know, from various documents and from historiographic sources, that the village of Mostovoi (in the County of Berezovka, led by the prefect Leonida Popp and the deputy prefect Alexandru Smochină) located on the road between Berezovka and Domanovka, was a transit and execution area for the Jews of Odessa, Southern Transnistria and Bessarabia, as well as for those who had been deported from Romania. As Ephraim Fleischman, a Jewish survivor, put it, Mostovoi was "a place of death for all, because almost all who were brought there were killed."⁵ Or, as the very

⁵ Declaration of Ephraim Fleischman, 14.05.2018, Archives of the National Council for the Study of the Securitate Archives (ACNSAS), P 7765, vol. 2, f. 38.

head of the Gendarmerie Legion in Berezovka, Octavian Ursuleanu, mentioned, “Mostovoi was the most terrible camp”.⁶

For several months, thousands of Jews were transferred to the Golta District. Some of them were pushed over the Bug River, where they were killed by the Germans. Soon, Golta was overpopulated with tens of thousands of deportees. The winter of 1941-1942 was terribly cold. A typhus epidemic broke in, with many hot spots. Famine was rampant. Citing health reasons, as well as logistics, Romanian authorities, in cooperation with local Ukrainian militias, systematically executed the deportees in Golta. In the district of Golta, especially in Bogdanovca, Domanovka and Akmechetka up to 70,000 Jews were killed between December 1941 and February 1942. It remained in collective memory as the “Land of Death”.⁷

Due to the overcrowding in Golta, the transit procedures were halted and the deportees were massed in the County of Berezovka, as well. They were placed in abandoned villages, in buildings of collective farms, stables and barns, becoming victims of the terribly cold Russian weather, of the typhus epidemic, hunger and aggressions from Ukrainian and German locals. As explained in a report written by the doctor who was in charge of the area (Andrei Gartner), “Mostovoi was chosen by Gen. Mihai Iliescu, a colonel at the time, to serve as a place of execution for the Jews in southern Bessarabia and Transnistria. The place was chosen on purpose, because it was surrounded by German settlers”.⁸ Indeed, there were large colonies of Germans in southern Transnistria; the County of Berezovca had 42 German villages with over 16,000 inhabitants; Mostovoi district included 16 German villages.

The county of Berezovca was the final destination for some 35,000 Jews, who were deported from the Odessa, southern Transnistria, Bessarabia and Romania.⁹ The first head of the Gendarmerie Legion in Mostovoi was heard saying they killed 34,600 Jews, and only some 100 saved themselves. Once Mostovoi was emptied of Jews, Roma people from Romania were deported in the area, at the end of 1942.

Executions were perpetrated by Romanian gendarmes or by German locals organized into paramilitary groups and firing squads. The Germans in the occupied territories were coordinated by an “institute” that had been created since 1937 and controlled by SS Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle, better known by the abbreviation VoMi. VoMi created a commando responsible for the execution of Jews, partisans and communists - Sonderkommando R(ussland), briefly SkR, reporting directly to Heinrich Himmler, the leader of the SS who did not want Transnistria and a large German community to be

⁶ Declaration of Octavian Ursuleanu, 24.05.1945, ACNSAS, P 7765, vol. 2, f. 74v.

⁷ See the chapter „Regatul morții” in Jean Ancel, *Contribuții la istoria României. Problema evreiască*, vol. II, part 1 (1933-1944), București, Hasefer & Yad Vashem, 2003, p. 77-172.

⁸ Declaration of Andrei Gartner, 19.03.1945, ACNSAS, P 7765, vol. 3, f. 46.

⁹ Declaration of Mihai Hausner, 24.05.1945, ACNSAS, P 7765, vol. 3, f. 77v.; Declaration of Dumitru Osețchi, 25.05.1945, ACNSAS, P 7765, vol. 2, f. 149; Declaration of Gheorghe Ianculescu, 23.10.1948, ACNSAS, P 7760, vol. 1, f. 310v.

left under the Romanian administration. The SkR replaced Enisatzgruppe D after the extermination unit commanded by Otto Ohlendorf left Transnistria, in the fall of 1941, moving eastward. In turn, the SkR founded “Self Defense” units, called Selbstschutz, a sort of private militia. The German controlled areas, stretching over their space of habitation, were a state within state, as Romanian authorities had little power over them. SkR units consisting of the SS and Selbstschutz, comprised of local recruits, participated in the execution of tens of thousands of Jews in the south of Transnistria,¹⁰ including the area where Angela lived.

Periodically, Romanian gendarmes selected groups of Jews they surrendered to the Germans, or the convoys of deportees were intercepted directly by the German Kommandos. Romanian gendarmes took part in the massacres or assisted the German units (by selecting groups and escorting them to the place of execution, performing searches, gathering corpses, burning or burying them, etc.) or by directly joining firing squads. Some of the convoys of deportees were executed directly by the Romanian gendarmes, without the coordination of the Germans. Jews from over 20 convoys were shot by Germans and Romanians in 1941-1943.

The Castle

Angela repeatedly mentioned two places of horror forever etched in her memory: the Castle and Rastadt.

The Castle was an imposing, but damaged building in Mostovoi, once owned by a local ruler. It had been taken over by the Germans and Romanians, and became a place of detention. Thousands of Jews were kept there in unimaginable conditions of misery, disease and hunger, under threat from nearby Kommandos.

Rastadt was a German colony some 8 km away from Mostovoi, where a local SkR command operated: Bereichkommando 11 (Bk11), commanded by Rudolf Hartung, a man of extreme cruelty. Bk11 would move all over the county of Berezovka to take over columns of Jews they either killed on the way, or led them to Rastadt and other German colonies in the area.

Next is a description of the distribution of forces, made by a Romanian gendarme on mission in the area: “In the vicinity of Mostovoi, in Rastadt and Lichtenfeld, there were two groups of German SS death head policemen, 5-600 people strong, each. They were v(ery) well equipped and motorized. In the neighboring Vaselinovo district, there were more such units. In the County of Berezovca, there were several German villages, previously ruled by the German police.”¹¹

Most Jews, about 10,000 people, were taken from Colosovca, where deportation trains stopped from Odessa. The journey lasted a few days. Transported in cattle cars, the deportees were

¹⁰ Eric C. Steinhart, *op. cit.*, *passim*.

¹¹ Declaration of Dumitru Pandrea, 10.04.1945, ACNSAS, P 7765, vol. 2, f. 166.

not given food or water. They were forced to defecate inside (or had to bribe policemen to be allowed to evacuate the filth). In Colosovca, a first selection was made for those to be put to death immediately, as they were not able to work. All were robbed. From Colosovca, deportees were taken on foot to the Castle.¹²

Bk11 periodically rounded up Jews from Mostovoi, from the Castle, for executions. Victims had their gold teeth plucked before or after their death indiscriminately, by the Germans or by Romanian gendarmes. The bodies were burned in pits or in a few ovens erected there especially for this purpose. The terrible stench spread throughout the area, so that executions were not a secret to any resident of eastern Transnistria. Here's what a Romanian gendarme deployed in the area said: "In early December 1941, we saw thick smoke in the region of Visoli, next to Rastadt, coming out of a crater. Three columns that probably came out of the three ovens. I asked around and I learned that the smoke came from the bodies of people who had been shot by the Germans and burnt in the ovens. I also learned, on that occasion, that tens of thousands of misfortunate people were killed there. At the time, people spoke of some 50,000 victims. I was also then that I heard the Germans would rob them before the executions."¹³

The year 1942 witnessed most executions. Their timeline is difficult to establish, because few official documents still exist – orders were largely oral, many documents were destroyed, operations were secret, etc. What we have, instead, is the testimony of perpetrators, witnesses and victims, whose temporal accuracy is poor, but it helps us understand the sinister atmosphere of Transnistria. In many cases, all the Jews in the column were killed, so that the only ones who could testify about it were the very gendarmes who fired.

Executions

Columns of Jews first arrived in the county of Berezovka after the massacre of Odessa, in October 1941. The waves of deportees peaked in January-February, July and September 1942. The 4th Operative Gendarmerie Battalion, in charge of escorting Jews, was ordered to shoot anyone who could not keep up with the rest of the column. Also, upon reaching their destination, the County of Berezovka, most of these Jews were assassinated.

For example, in July 1942, three trains reached the station of Colosovca, with 800, 400 and 300 Jews respectively. Most were from Odessa, some were from the camp of political prisoners in Vapniarca. The first two batches of deportees were given over to the Germans by Lieutenant Ion Iordache, who temporary replaced Major Ion Popescu, the commander of the Berezovca Gendarmerie Unit. Iordache learned that the Jews from the first batch were killed by the Germans. Colonel Ion

¹² Ovidiu Creangă, *Colosovca*, in *The Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos*, p. 642-643.

¹³ Declaration of Octavian Alviurescu, 2.06.1945, ACNSAS, P 7765, vol. 2, f. 147v.

Iliescu, the head of the Gendarmerie in Transnistria, asked Iordache to attend the execution of the second batch of 400 Jews from Vapniarca.¹⁴

Here's Iordache's testimony: "This convoy came by train from Vapniarca to the Colosovca station, next to Mostovoi. From there, the convoy was taken over by me and I gave it over to the German SS units who were waiting in the station. From there, the convoy was headed to Visoli, where the execution took place, and I saw how they executed them by gun to the back of the head, after they were stripped naked. The clothes were given to the German civilian population and they kept the gold. The bodies were placed in a pit, oven-style, layers of bodies alternated with layers of canola, and set on fire. Previously, they sprayed the stack with gas. The pit-ovens would burn for a week or two, as the canola became soaked in the fat of the bodies and fueled the fire".¹⁵

In the case of the third batch of 300 Jews, the Germans refused to take them, on the grounds that had already been robbed and were too poor. The German commander explained that he could not motivate his men without the "rewards" taken from the Jews. Iordache asked the Gendarmes Inspectorate in Transnistria what to do and was answered that the Jews were to be executed by the gendarmes.¹⁶

The next quote is from the testimony of another gendarme, Dumitru Terțeleanu, the head of the Mostovoi local unit: "I accompanied the convoy to the place of execution, too, and saw the whole thing. Before execution, the Jews were stripped naked and shot, and their clothes were handed over to local civilians. The victims would walk naked to the edge of the oven, and first sergeant Constantinescu would use a rifle to shoot them in the back so that they fell into the oven. Given that first sergeant Constantinescu Dumitru did not have enough ammo, he would place three victims in a row, so that one bullet might kill three people."¹⁷

Thus, the murderers' methods were similar. Even the practice of "saving" bullets was mentioned in other testimonies, this time used by the Germans. Angela had also heard of the killing of several people with a single bullet. For this reason, some would fall into the pit without being killed and were burned alive. As one survivor from Iași (Judith Țucherman) mentions, "children and people who were not fatally shot on the field of execution, both in Berezovka and Mostovoi, were sprayed with gasoline and burnt alive."¹⁸

Suitcases

¹⁴ Declaration of Ion Iordache, 26.06.1952, ACNSAS, P 7765, vol. 4, f. 29-30. In this case, the order to transfer Jews from Vapniarca to Colosovca remained in the archives: The Order no. 60 from 15.07.1942, issued by Region II Internation, by the Order no. 53/5 of the Transnistria Gendarmerie Inspectorate, ACNSAS, P 7765, vol. 2, f. 46.

¹⁵ Declaration of Ion Iordache, 28.05.1945, ACNSAS, P 7765, vol. 2, f. 135-135v.

¹⁶ Declaration of Ion Iordache, 26.06.1952, ACNSAS, P 7765, vol. 4, f. 29-30.

¹⁷ Declaration of Dumitru Terțeleanu, 25.05.1945, ACNSAS, P 7765, vol. 2, f. 131.

¹⁸ Declaration of Iudith Țucherman, 14.05.1945, ACNSAS, P 7765, vol. 2, f. 87.

In September 1942, a group of about 600 Jews were deported from Romania to Mostovoi because they had asked to leave for the USSR, in 1940. When inspecting the transport, Colonel Ion Iliescu told them: “You wanted Russia, here’s Russia.”¹⁹

We have few testimonials about this transport. Dora (Dvoira) Kogan was born in Odessa and was taken by surprise by the events of the summer 1940. She was in Bucharest at the time and asked the authorities to be allowed to return home. She never got the chance to leave, given the short notice of the Soviets until they closed the borders, after they took over Bessarabia and northern Bukovina. In September 1942, at midnight, a police officer entered the house and arrested her husband. A few days later, she was arrested, as well. She was told to take luggage and loaded two suitcases. She took money and jewelry. In prison, she learned she would be deported to Transnistria, in a large group. In the train, some 40-50 people were loaded in each car, and were first sent to Tiraspol, then to Colosovca. The journey was a nightmare for the deportees, as they were hungry and filthy. The gendarmes and locals took all the money they could take from them. One bread could be bought for 60,000 lei. They would defecate inside the train and had to throw the feces through the bars of the small windows. If they wanted the doors to open and to evacuate the filth, they had to collect money from everybody and pay the gendarmes. In Tiraspol, they were ordered to hand over their jewelry.²⁰ The image of a child who had been hit in the head haunted her all her life. He had a severe split, but gendarmes refused to have him taken to the hospital. From Colosovca to the Castle, they were taken on foot. Dora's husband, Ioil Kogan, was suffering from diabetes and had a heart condition. His medical situation worsened on the way. Dora ran away from the Castle to look for a doctor and found Kolpensky. Then, she negotiated with a gendarme lieutenant and she gave him the two leather suitcases they had taken from Bucharest, in exchange for being allowed to see the doctor. It was their luck since, at the precise time they were missing, the almost 600 Jews staying in the Castle were escorted out and executed.²¹

“Sent to work”

The train of deportees was taken over by the commander of the Gendarmerie Legion in Berezovca, Major Ion Popescu, on September 16, 1942. Immediately, two German officers showed up at the station of Colosovca and said they had permission from Colonel Iliescu to take the group of Jews.²² As the orders had to be clarified, the Jews were taken to Mostovoi, to the Castle, and were

¹⁹ Declaration of Arthur Bergmann, 11.04.1945, ACNSAS, P 7765, vol. 3, f. 85.

²⁰ The minutes of Sept. 10-12, 1942, recording the confiscation of valuable were kept, ACNSAS, P 7765, vol. 5, f. 156-168.

²¹ Declaration of Dora Kogan, 28.02.1945, ACNSAS, P 7765, vol. 3, f. 103-104v.

²² Declaration of Ion Popescu, 20.06.1945, ACNSAS, P 7765, vol. 2, f. 116v-117v.

later given over to the Germans. In a short report, Popescu wrote that, on September 18, a number of 598 Jews “were handed over to the German police, to perform works in Rastadt”.²³

The handover “for work” was a euphemism and a coded expression whose meaning was clear to all the gendarmes. Here is the translation of the system they used, according to one of the gendarmes. Iordache, quoted above, said: “The executions were done by German units (formed) by the locals of Berezovca. They did so in order to hide what they were doing, by using the following system: the Germans were approved groups of Jews for labor, but, in fact, they sent them to be executed by the Germans, who first robbed, then killed them.”²⁴

Another gendarme in the County of Berezovka, who was posted in the same position throughout the war, Constantin Teodorescu, gave a similar statement: “During the time I was in the Leg.(ion) of Berezovka, I believe at least 20 convoys were executed, at the order of the Gendarmes Inspectorate of Odessa. They ordered the Legion to have these people disappear, and the actual executioners were Germans from the colonies of Rastadt and Visoli. It is true, these convoys were handed over under the pretext of labor, but, in reality - and this fact what known by every single member of the Legion - they were given over to be exterminated.”²⁵

Finally, the head of the gendarmes’ station in Mostovoi from December 1, 1942 to July 1, 1943, sergeant Ion Cârligel, also mentioned that they “agreed with the Germans to shoot them so that our fellow gendarmes be legally covered: they asked the Germans to sign documents according to which they were taken to work. In reality, everyone knew the trick, they were taken to be shot. Thousands of Jews were thus handed over to the Germans in Rastadt and Lichtenfeld”.²⁶

The Jews who had been deported from Romania were taken on foot, on a forced march, from Colosovca to the Castle, in Mostovoi. On the way, they were robbed and beaten. The gendarmes threatened they would be stripped naked, killed, thrown into mass graves and set on fire. Some Jews believed them, others considered they were just using threats to extort more money and valuables from them. Among those who did not believe the threats was Iosif (Zuță) Abramovici, a communist sympathizer from Botoșani. The group of deportees also included political prisoners from the camp of Târgu Jiu or from local prisons of the Security Agency, who were to be sent to the camp of Vapniarca. In Tiraspol, the authorities lost the documents of the convoy, so that the “politicals” were sent to Mostovoi, with the others. Abramovici confessed, in his own words, something that historiography would later call the “crisis of imagination” when facing the Holocaust: “I could not imagine that atrocities would actually be so savage. (...) I could not believe reality would actually be

²³ Information Note no. 286 from 22.09.1942 of the Berezovka Gendarmerie Legion, ACNSAS, P 7765, vol. 3, f. 13.

²⁴ Declaration of Ion Iordache, 28.05.1945, ACNSAS, P 7765, vol. 2, f. 135v.

²⁵ Declaration of Constantin Teodorescu, 6.06.1945, ACNSAS, P 7765, vol. 2, f. 155.

²⁶ Declaration of Ion Cârligel, 12.05.1945, ACNSAS, P 7765, vol. 3, f. 43v.

that cruel. Not long after that, I saw that fascist terror displaying a boundless cruelty. One could not find such things even in the most fantastical stories.” Abramovici was told by the gendarmes: “A dog is worth more here than a Kike”.²⁷

Looting

Iosif Abramovici testified about what happened once the deportees reached the Castle. The looting continued at a much larger scale. The luggage was looted or stolen altogether by volunteers and Ukrainian gendarmes, either under threat, or through deception. “They usually approached women and older people, telling them they wanted to help them carry their luggage. As soon as they were given the luggage, the gendarmes left the premises.” In order to intimidate the deportees, a Jew from Bessarabia was chosen at random, accused of having cursed the Romanian army, severely beaten in front of everyone and taken away to be shot. “The night we spent in the Castle was a night full of anguish and horrors beyond description. I cannot repeat the threats and ordeals we were subjected to by the gendarmes, as well as the suffering we went through that night: lots of crying, screaming, people left without food and clothing, without any prospect of being able to earn their living, disconnected from the ones they had left at home, families with young children who did not have anything to eat the following day, etc.”²⁸

A woman who was deported from Iași, Frida Lazarova, arrived later at the castle and found blood stains on the walls and etched warnings, such as: “Innocent deportees were shot here”, “We starved here”. She was told that German troops surrounded the Castle, loaded them into trucks and sent them to Rastadt. Before the Germans showed up, Romanian gendarmes selected a dozen wealthier Jews from the larger group, who were not executed.²⁹ This is how Abramovici was spared.

Moritz Friedman, a Jew of Botoșani, was spared because he was a barber and cut the hair of the gendarmes on the train from Tiraspol to Colosovca. The gendarmes decided they needed him some more. Moritz managed to take his wife, Deborah, whom he introduced as his sister. They were hidden in a kitchen of the gendarme station nearby the castle. A person who was considered to be the head of the Jews in Mostovoi, Max Horovitz, his wife, son and brother in law were also brought there. Horovitz asked for the shutters to be drawn and for them to whisper, as the Germans had come to take the Jews away. Later on, the wealthy Jews that Frida Lazarovici referred to were brought into the kitchen, as well. About 30 people were taken there. Horovitz was the middleman used by the gendarmes: he urged the Jews inside to hand over their jewelry, watches, rings, clothes, shoes, pens,

²⁷ Declaration of Iosif Abramovici, 16.05.1945, P 7765, vol. 3, f. 176-177.

²⁸ Declaration of Iosif Abramovici, 16.05.1945, P 7765, vol. 3, f. 176-177.

²⁹ Declaration of Frida Lazarovici, 22.03.1945, P 7765, vol. 3, f. 44.

etc. in order to be left in the hiding place. After a while, the gendarmes made a new selection, sending to death some of the ones they previously sheltered.³⁰

Clara

Let us get back to Angela Onitzkansky. Clara, Angela's mother, was told by a Ukrainian peasant that her sister, Sonia Zeligman, was in the group of deportees from Galați. Indeed, the list of deportees to the County of Berezovca includes Sonia (Sara) and her husband Carol (Haim) Zeligman, with their two sons, Avram and Iosif.³¹ The deportees were told they would be used for labor.

When the Bk11 appeared in the area, Kolpensky rushed to hide Angela and Clara in a haystack, in the yard of a garage. But Clara could not stay there and wait. She suspected that the Jews held at the Castle would be executed. She then told Angela she would come out of hiding. As much as the girl wept and pleaded with Clara not to leave her alone, she could not persuade her mother. As soon as she went, Angela heard gunshots.

As Clara Onitzkansky was fleeing to the Castle, she was seen by a corporal of gendarmerie, Ion Papuc, who fired at her and hit her in the hand. Instead of taking the wounded woman to the hospital, Papuc took her to the gendarmerie station. Deborah Friedman, Moritz Friedman's wife, saw her there as she was savagely beaten by a gendarme, Staff Sergeant Aurel Lungu, because she asked him to save her daughter, Angela.³² Lungu had escorted to Mostovoi a group of more than 400 Jews from the Suha Balka farm. After the war, he was accused of having shot at least 15 Jews, on the way, because they were too old or because he wanted to rob them. The Jews from Suha Balka, who were “living skeletons”, were handed over to the Germans, together with the deportees from Romania.³³

Angela later learned her mother was tortured for a long time. As she was crying out, saying she was a mother, that she had a daughter called Jenny, who would perish without her, the gendarmes noticed she had gold teeth. At that point, they plucked them out, despite the fact she was still alive. She was last seen in a cart, together with her sister, by local villagers who stood by and watched the murders as if it was a show. Clara cried to them to take care of Jenny.

Angela was told her mother was killed in Rastadt, with her sister.

³⁰ Declaration of Moritz Friedman, 5.06.1941, ACNSAS, P 7765, vol. 3, f. 186.

³¹ Table of Jews from the urban territory, evacuated to Transnistria on the ground that in 1940 they demanded repatriation to the USSR, în Jean Ancel (ed.), *Documents Concerning the Fate of Romanian Jewry During the Holocaust*, vol. V (Bessarabia, Bukovina, Transnistria: Extermination and Survival), vol. V, Beate Klarsfeld Foundation, 1986, p. 443.

³² Declaration of Debora Friedman, 5.07.1945, ACNSAS, P 7765, vol. 3, f. 192

³³ Interrogatory of Aurel Lungu, 20.06.1945, ACNSAS, P 7765, vol. 2, f. 122-122v; Declaration of Rudolf Kirschen, 16.06.1945, ACNSAS, P 7765, vol. 3, f. 66-69v. On the living conditions in Suha Balca, see the declaration of Ozias Sigal, 23.05.1945, ACNSAS, P 7765, vol. 2, f. 105-108v.

The SS members of BK11 and the Selbstschutz militia took the Jews from the Castle – the deportees from Romania and those brought from Suha Balka – in Rastadt and executed them. Then, they burned their bodies.

The mass murder was carried out on September 19, 1942 and was reported the following day by the Gendarmes Sector of Mostovoi.³⁴ It was two days before Yom Kippur, the most important Jewish holiday.

Nudelman

From the group of about one thousand Jews brought to Rastadt on the eve of Yom Kippur, one person escaped and could tell what he saw, after the war. Haskel Nudelman was deported from Bucharest in the group of 598 people. He understood early on the fate that awaited him, because gendarmes would systematically deny the deportees water and food. Lieutenant Dumitru Osețchi, charged with guarding the train from Tiraspol to Colosovca, entered every car to rob them. Osețchi also pulled two women, mother and daughter, out of the group, and gave them over to the Germans, who shot them. At the Castle, Nudelman was terrified of the bloodstains on the walls and the grim inscriptions.

About 150 Jews fled from the castle and took refuge in the village. The Germans - “SS death's head”, i.e. Bk11, arrived after them soon, together with “a group of German armed policemen from the Rastadt colony”, i.e. the Selbstschutz. The column of about 1,000 Jews was taken to Rastadt. Some three kilometers before the colony, knowing he was going towards certain death, Nudelman fled the group. The Germans fired their automatic weapons and hit him in one leg, but he continued to move away, so they did not catch him. He then hid in the weeds and bandaged his wounds with his underwear. One kilometer away, the Germans began the executions. He saw it with his own eyes. At first, they took the children, then the women. The men were last to die. He could hear the desperate cries of the victims. The dead and injured were thrown into a mass grave and, at nightfall, straws were sprayed with gas, placed there, after which they were set on fire.

Nudelman returned to Mostovoi, where he spent 24 hours hiding inside a toilet. He was later sheltered by a Jewish carpenter who worked for the local administration. He was well received, was given clothes and his wounds were cleaned up. Meanwhile, the gendarmes had started the hunt of all those who had evaded the Castle. Civilians were warned they would be shot should they shelter Jews. Nudelman surrendered, for fear of causing inconvenience to the man who housed him. It was September 19. He reached the gendarme station together with the group of “protected” Jews and those who had been caught after the Germans left. At another selection, Nudelman was lucky because a

³⁴ Informative note no. 286 from 22.09.1942 of the Berezovka Gendarmerie Legion, ACNSAS, P 7765, vol. 3, f. 13.

woman lied that he worked for the Prefecture. The selected ones were generally better dressed, and the gendarmes wanted to rob them, so they were executed. Only sixteen Jews survived.³⁵

Zeligman

Angela Onitzkansky, shocked by the disappearance of her mother, learned that, despite all tragedies, a miracle, in fact several miracles took place. Her uncle, Carol Zeligman and his two sons, Avram and Iosif, escaped death due to a series of miraculous episodes. Angela knows the details from Avram Zeligman, whom she was close to until his death, a few years ago. I was able to fill in the story due to Avram and Carol Zeligman's statements, given at the postwar investigation against the gendarmes in Mostovoi, that I was able to find in the archives.

The Zeligman family was taken out of the Castle apparently due to the intervention of an acquaintance. We do not know whether it was Clara Onitzkansky or someone else, but the person knew the gendarmes. Carol Zeligman stated that the person "arranged, I don't know how, for us to be able to escape the guards." The father and two sons were removed from the castle by Sergeant Dumitru Terțeleanu, the head of the Mostovoi gendarme station, whom they gave a set of gold teeth and two watches. They were hidden in a house, during which time they gave another watch and two pens to Sergeant Lungu and petty officer Papuc. The next day, after they paid their protection tax, the Zeligman family was put into carts along with a group of about fifty Jews. They were told they would be taken to a farm, to stay in hiding. It was the night of September 19 to 20. After one kilometer or two, the men were ordered to get down, were taken near a 15-20 meter long pit, which had been dug in advance, and were ordered to undress. Carol Zeligman was horrified to see one of the gendarmes, Franz Căliman, was using his bayonet to stab a man in the group, named Iacob Grill. The latter's wife, Ana, started to scream and was shot on the spot. Avram Zeligman, who was only 13 years at the time, asked permission to urinate and Papuc turned toward him, menacingly. So as not to see the killing of his son, Carol Zeligman began to flee. The gendarmes fired after him, but only one bullet shredded his ear. He was able to hide in a cornfield. The following day, he was caught by gendarmes and taken to prison. Papuc said he would kill him, but he escaped arrest due to another gendarme, whom he gave a t-shirt. He was entrusted to Max Horovitz and reached the group of "protected" people, as mentioned above. He was then hidden in the hospital, with Angela and Dr. Kolpensky's help.³⁶

Let us get back to the place where the Zeligman family was to be executed, along with others. Papuc wanted to kill Avram Zeligman, but the gun did not fire and he struck the boy three times in the head with his rifle butt. Avram fell among the bodies. As he was full of blood, the gendarme

³⁵ Declaration of Haskel Nudelman, 29.03.1945, ACNSAS, P 7765, vol. 3, f. 58-61v; see also his declaration from 11.05.1945, ACNSAS, P 7765, vol. 3, 56-57v.

³⁶ Declaration of Carol Zeligman, 13.07.1945, ACNSAS, P 7765, vol. 5, f. 118-119v.

believed he was dead. He remained there for a while, hiding among the dead, after which he took to the field. He was caught by the gendarmes and escaped once again, running in a cornfield. He then hid in the hospital, with his father.³⁷ All his life, Avram had a hole in his head and severe medical conditions. His brother, Iosif (aged 12) survived, too. However, their mother remained at the Castle and was killed by the Germans, together with Clara.³⁸

Kirschen

The stampede resulted as Carol Zeligman fled the group, made it possible for two other men to escape. One of them, Rudolf Kirschen, left us a testimony. Rudolf and his wife, Tauba, were deported from Bucharest at the beginning of September 1942, in cattle cars that were locked from the outside. The cars were overcrowded, each carrying some 40 people, including elderly people and children aged 2 or 3. After reaching Mostovoi, they were taken to the Castle. Soon, the group of Jews from Suha Balka arrived. Their situation was miserable. Sensing the imminent danger, the Kirschens asked how they could leave the Castle. They found that, in return for large amounts of money, the gendarmes could take them to the village or to the hospital. So, they paid.

This decision saved their lives. The gendarmes led them to a “host” in the village of Mostovoi. Meanwhile, the Germans came to the Castle and took everybody, in two separate convoys.

But not even those who had paid for protection were safe. They soon learned that, in fact, they entered a dangerous mechanism of extortion that would only postpone their death by a few days. In the two days they stayed with their “host”, the Jews inside the village were harassed continuously. “We were terrorized by the gendarmes,” said Rudolf Kirschen, adding that “they would keep asking us for items, so as to spare our lives.” Eventually, the gendarmes decided to kill them.

When he was taken to the killing field, together with the other men, was held tight by gendarme Franz Căliman, the latter’s bayonet being propped on Rudolf’s back. At one point, the situation precipitated and Căliman loosened his grip. Taking advantage of the dark, Rudolf jumped over the pit and ran as fast as he could. He was not hit by the bullets. He stayed in hiding, to the ground, all night long. He heard Grill’s heartbreaking groans for a while, as he had been stabbed with the bayonet by Căliman.

In the morning, at the site of the massacre he found a mass grave. He dug with his bare hands, in search of his wife, Tauba. He could not find her. He asked about her at a farm in the area and, as he suspected she had been murdered, he decided to commit suicide. He hung himself.

³⁷ Declaration of Avram Zeligman, 13.07.1945, ACNSAS, P 7765, vol. 5, f. 117-117v.

³⁸ Declaration of Rudolf Kirschen, 16.06.1945, ACNSAS, P 7765, vol. 3, f. 66-69; Declaration of Tauba Kirschen, 11.04.1945, în ACNSAS, P 7765, vol. 3, f. 64-65v.

A Russian peasant saw him and thought he was a paratrooper. He quickly jumped and saved him. In the end, Rudolf reached the hospital and was saved by the same Kolpensky. Some three days later, a woman was discovered in the field. It was Tauba, his wife, whom he thought dead.

After the war, he and Tauba testified to what had happened there. She explained that, during the stampede when her husband escaped, she broke away from the group of women and vanished into the night.

The rape. Rapes

After the Yom Kippur massacre, a new head of the Gendarmerie Legion was appointed in Berezovka. It was Major Octavian Ursuleanu. During the period he was commander there, beginning on October 25, 1942, the number of murders decreased, for the massive deportations to Mostovoi had stopped.

Ursuleanu chose the path of corruption, taking money from the Jews to spare their lives. “This Major”, mentioned a witness, “felt the wind of change and imposed a softer regime, being mainly interested in making profit and in blackmailing deportees”.³⁹ After the war, he was tried for war crimes. His fellow gendarmes had many words of praise for him, in comparison with the events that had taken place during the previous period, when Major Ion Adam Popescu was the commander. However, the investigation revealed numerous murders and cases of abuse committed during Ursuleanu’s rule. Angela knew better.

Angela, who had turned 16, would come out of the hiding place, once in a while, to find food. She would also bring food to others. This is when she was caught. Ursuleanu ordered Pierdevară: “Bring that virgin to me, that pretty girl with blonde pigtails.” Angela was taken to the gendarmerie and pushed into a room by Ursuleanu, who closed the door. “He forced me upon the bed, shredded my clothes off and threw himself over me. That was the rape. Then, Pierdevară knocked on the door and told him the Germans were coming for inspection. Ursuleanu told him: ‘Take her and throw her out!’ And he took me and threw me into the street. I walked all night, almost dead, in shreds, at that age, in search of the hospital. Kolpensky took me in and hid me in the attic, after that.” It was May 1943.

“There were many rapes in Mostovoi,” Angela told me. “In the end, I was the most protected, for Kolpensky kept me in hiding”. Angela knew the story of a girl, Rita, who was raped by 18 gendarmes. She survived and, after the war, went to Israel.

Documents from the archives of CNSAS confirm the rapes. A war-time report on the crimes in Mostovoi mentions: “The gendarmes would regularly rape them. The women who would not let

³⁹ Declaration of Andrei Gartner, 19.03.1945, ACNSAS, P 7765, vol. 3, f. 47.

them, were killed. The country had been almost completely free of venereal diseases, but, in two years, many had syphilis and gonorrhea.”⁴⁰

And gendarmes would also rape underage girls and older women. The nightmare of the women began immediately after arrival, during the selection and searches. The searches were brutal, intrusive. Good-looking women were pulled aside, while their men were sent to work and / or to death.

Just like in the case of the murders, the coded euphemism used to conceal the rape was “work”. As one witness (Mihai Bartza) remembers, “most of the beautiful Jewish women were invited (sic) to the gendarme station, under the guise of having to do various works. There, the women and girls were raped by the gendarmes.”⁴¹

We know from the documents that rapes began early on, when the head of the Gendarmerie Station in Berezovca was Ion Popescu. Actually, he was the one to set the tone. Here is what one of the survivors, Mihail Hausner, remembers: “Major Popescu would come to choose girls. He would take and rape them, promising to spare their lives, but, after they were raped, he ordered to have them shot. I was there and saw in person how, for the last time, he removed a girl named Nadia from the group, raped her and she contracted syphilis.”⁴²

A doctor who was sent to work in Transnistria, Andrei Gartner, recounted after the war, that Major Popescu had a harem of about 30 girls.⁴³ Soon after, some of the girls committed suicide out of shame and horror, while the others were killed.⁴⁴

The clearest testimony was given by a woman, Olga-Cornescu Averbuch, a Bessarabian Jew who was first deported from Tiraspol, then to Mostovoi. In Tiraspol, she too learned of the practice of the “harem”. Major Nicolae Scriban, a former praetor of the 14th Infantry Division during the time of the Iași pogrom, who fulfilled the duties of Mayor in Tiraspol, held a group of young Jewish women from Bessarabia in the former bath of the town. The deported women were raped one at a time. Finally, as Olga Cornescu Averbuch says, the girls were taken to the ghetto in Tiraspol, “in a deplorable state, frightened by what they had gone through. They said the Mayor was very brutal to them.” After one day, the girls were taken out of the ghetto and executed.⁴⁵ Olga was transferred to Mostovoi. There, she saw Major Popescu among the deportees to select girls, on several occasions, “to live with them, promising he would take them to Berezovka and save them from death.” Olga was

⁴⁰ *Shed blood does not wash with words. Documentary about atrocities committed by Germans and German allies in Transnistria*, report attached to Andrei Gartner's statement, ACNSAS, P 7760, vol. 3, f. 48.

⁴¹ Declaration of Mihai Bartza, 13.10.1945, ACNSAS, P 7765, vol. 3, f. 307.

⁴² Declaration of Mihail Hausner, 12.11.1948, P 7760, vol. 1, f. 313v. Information confirmed by Olga-Cornescu Averbuch, declaration from 3.02.1949, ACNSAS, P 7760, vol. 14, f. 43.

⁴³ Declaration of Andrei Gartner, 19.03.1945, ACNSAS, P 7765, vol. 3, f. 47.

⁴⁴ *Shed blood does not wash with words*, ACNSAS, P 7760, vol. 3, f. 49.

⁴⁵ Declaration of Olga-Cornescu Averbuch, 3.02.1949, ACNSAS, P 7760, vol. 14, f. 42-42v.

also lured, but she declined the offer, remaining in Mostovoi until the arrival of the Soviet troops, in 1944.⁴⁶

After that, there was a new head of the Gendarmerie Octavian Ursuleanu. The postwar statements of some of the gendarmes mentioned he ended the rapes. But Angela says that “Ursuleanu was the head of rapists.”

Indeed, the investigations against the gendarmes, after the war, revealed ample evidence about rapes that took place during Ursuleanu’s tenure. A valuable testimony was left by Alexe Rușciuc, a Romanian clerk who had been appointed mayor of Berezovca between November 1, 1942 and February 1, 1943. Rușciuc clashed with the gendarmerie after he abolished the communal police, which was used by the gendarmes to rob the Jews. The gendarmes started to look for Rușciuc’s weak points and found he had a relationship with an employee at the Berezovca Praetor’s Office, Taisia Ștefănescu, who was accused of being a Jewish spy. Rușciuc was fired and interned in Mostovoi, with his girlfriend. “On that occasion, says Rușciuc, when I was imprisoned in Mostovoi, I was able to learn first-hand about the life of the inmates, and it (was) scary. Barefoot and poorly dressed in the middle of winter, they starved. Girls were raped and the aid that reached the place was seized by Major Ursuleanu. The gendarmes would organize drinking parties and, drunk as they were, under the leadership of the above-mentioned Lieutenant (Dumitru Pandrea, author’s note) and (of) Lieutenant (Aurel) Hergelegiu and (Petru) Pântea, they would beat us all, torturing us terribly.”⁴⁷

Here are a few concrete cases of rape during Ursuleanu’s rule. A gendarmerie sergeant named Eugen Simota, who committed several murders, raped a girl aged 15. The disclosure was made after the war, by one of his fellow gendarmes who had seen the girl crying and covered in blood.⁴⁸ Lieutenant Dumitru Pandrea, the former primary school teacher who was mentioned above, deflowered a young Jewish girl named Mariana, after which he bragged to the praetor with the bloody sheet.⁴⁹

Terțeleanu also had “a whole harem of girls and women.”⁵⁰ Gendarme Gheorghe Pană, who had several STDs, infected many girls.⁵¹ On April 30, 1943, the gendarmes selected two girls from a group of Jews who was sent to work in a farm, to rape them. The girls started to scream and the gendarmes cynically told them: “Why are you crying? You will be killed, anyway!” At least one of them was indeed killed. The other went missing. The Jews of the rest of the convoy were shot, too.⁵²

⁴⁶ Declaration of Olga-Cornescu Averbuch, 3.02.1949, ACNSAS, P 7760, vol. 14, f. 42v-43.

⁴⁷ Declaration of Alexe Rușciuc, 28.05.1945, ACNSAS, P 7765, vol. 2, f. 125-125v.

⁴⁸ Declaration of Petru Fedorovici, 26.10.1948, ACNSAS, P 7760, vol. 1, f. 303.

⁴⁹ Jean Ancel, *Contribuții*, II-1, p. 277.

⁵⁰ Declaration of Mihail Hausner, 24.05.1945, ACNSAS, P 7765, vol. 3, f. 18.

⁵¹ Declaration of Judith Țucheman, 14.05.1945, ACNSAS, P 7765, vol. 2, f. 87.

⁵² Declaration of Iancu Abramovici, 5.06.1945, ACNSAS, P 7765, vol. 3, f. 190.

Documents include countless such testimonies. There can be only one conclusion. Besides murder, torture and beatings, sexual violence raged in Mostovoi, as in the rest of Transnistria.

Corruption

Once again, let us get back to Angela. The weeks she had to stay in the attic seemed like forever to her. Kolpensky would come every evening to bring food to her and to the two boys whom she shared the hideout with. The place was very difficult to reach: their food was placed in a bucket they raised by using a rope.

After a while, they thought the situation got better and went out of hiding. Angela would still move around very cautiously, as they actually faced dangers everywhere. Ursuleanu was heard saying that Jenny should be killed, because she knew too much. The war went badly for the Germans and Romanians, who began to think about their situation afterwards.

There were a few Jews who collaborated with Romanian and German authorities, hoping to save themselves by denouncing others. One of the persons who closely collaborated with the gendarmerie was a leader of the Jews in Mostovoi, Max Horovitz, a native of Chernivtsi. Another close collaborator of Ursuleanu was the leader of the Jews in Berezovka, Bruno Grosu, a dentist originally from Iași. He was seconded by Gustav Segall, Mișa Grotugolov and Mendel Carol. The collaborators of the gendarmes came to denounce each other, so that Grosu and Segall made it possible for Grotugolov, Mendel Carol and his wife to be executed.⁵³

This atrocity increased the authority of Grosu and Segall, who threatened to put to death anyone who opposed them. They forced the others to pay a regular protection fee to Major Ursuleanu. The list of people who gave money to the head of the Gendarmerie Legion in Berezovca also includes the Zeligman family. This is how the father and two sons escaped.

But Max Horovitz was assassinated, too, along with his family. He was in the convoy with the two girls mentioned before, on April 30, 1943.⁵⁴ First, he was shot and robbed, then cut into pieces. Being a collaborator did not save him. Bruno Grosu was convicted to hard labor for life, after the war, but was not found by investigators in Romania.

Corruption often decided who would live and who would die. Ursuleanu developed a complicated mechanism to extort the deportees, with the help of Jewish collaborators. He returned to Romania with a fortune. Survival had to be paid for, and any payment was just a prelude to the next one. The gendarmes under his orders did the same. Angela said that Pierdevară would threaten to kill anyone until he received money or jewelry from them. After a while, the payment “timed out” and he would

⁵³ Declaration of Iancu Abramovici, 5.06.1945, ACNSAS, P 7765, vol. 3, f. 189.

⁵⁴ Declaration of Iancu Abramovici, 5.06.1945, ACNSAS, P 7765, vol. 3, f. 190.

once again demand the gift of toleration. Ursuleanu was more subtle: he worked with middlemen, but imposed higher stakes.

Orphans

After she came out of hiding, Angela was surprised, at some point, while she was walking around to get some food, by a Ukrainian gendarme who collaborated with the Romanians and Germans. But he did not surrender her to them. He took pity and brought her to his house, in a village. Angela has nicer memories from that time, because the family of the gendarme took care of her. She was liked by the villagers, as well. Everyone was involved in the effort to save the girl.

Word of mouth made it possible for a political deportee with communist views, Iosif Abramovici (Vasile), a well-to-do Jew born in Botoșani, to learn about Angela. Communist prisoners had a better situation. They were better organized and received support from communist organizations in the country, and especially from the Soviet resistance. Given the change in the tide of war, the gendarmes took some care of them, for tactical reasons.

Abramovici negotiated Angela's fate with Ursuleanu. The Major asked for tens of thousands of lei to be delivered to him in exchange for her freedom. Abramovici sent word home, to Botoșani, and paid Ursuleanu to include Angela on the list of orphans who were to return to Romania.

Wilhelm Filderman, the leader of the Romanian Jewry, had sent countless memos to Romanian dictator Ion Antonescu, asking for the immediate repatriation of the deportees. He was joined by other personalities, whose standing was more solid, at the time. The Red Cross also became involved in the case. The reports of the authorities in Transnistria were worrying. The Jewish Center of Romania, a puppet organization founded by the Antonescu regime, could not avoid expressing in their reports the terrible findings, after field visits. Ultimately, Antonescu agreed. As of December 1943, the deportees of Dorohoi were repatriated. On March 6, 1944, more than 1.800 children returned to Romania, of the 5.000 orphans in Transnistria at the time.

Angela was taken in the first batch. She was listed there under a false name, Rozalia Brenner, a girl who had died, and her registered age is older than the real one. Her separation from Kolpensky was very painful. Angela has recently learned that a statue of him was erected in Mostovoi, as a token of gratitude from the many Jews he saved.

Thanks to Bordeianu and the money he paid for her freedom, Angela reached Iași, where she was placed in an orphanage. In her pocket, there was a piece of paper written and signed by Ursuleanu, dated 25.09.1943. It was a certificate which showed that "Jelly Onițcanschi" was entered into the records of the Berezovca Gendarmerie Legion and was used at labor, in fact forced labor.

Given that the Soviets were advancing, the other deportees of Transnistria were liberated, as well. Behind them, there was only the shadow of death. Everywhere, there were shallow mass graves, and dogs would unearth the remains of the murdered. Ruins, rags and a lot of grief.

Epilogue

When Angela left the camp, Iosif Abramovici, who later changed his name to Vasile Bordeianu (after his wife's surname, Emilia Bordeianu), came after her at the orphanage. He found her dressed in tatters. He gave her some of his clothes and took her home, to Botoșani. After that, they all moved to Bucharest. Angela lived with the Bordeianu family for a long time, until she married. It was a good time for her, during which she also went to college. Vasile Bordeianu got to hold an important position within the Communist Party. Later on, he was sidelined and he left the country, eventually.

In Bucharest, Angela was summoned as a witness at the People's Court in 1945, to testify about the perpetrators in Mostovoi. She gave two testimonies, one in April and the other in July. She recounted some of the horrors she went through. Among other things, she mentioned that other gendarmes tried to rape her, as well: Papuc, Terțeleanu and Lungu. She saw in person the ovens where the victims were burnt to ashes after being shot. She saw a girl being shot right in front of her. She testified that, at first, the executions were performed by the Germans, but the Romanian gendarmes took this task over, later on. It was July 1945 when Angela met Șura Pierdevară face to face. He threw himself at Angela's feet and kissed them, begging for forgiveness and a favorable statement. "Jenny, take care of me, please, I have a baby at home," cried Pierdevară. Angela would not look at him. She did not meet Ursuleanu, Papuc or Căliman anymore.

Ursuleanu was imprisoned until 1961, after which he served two years of house arrest. The Securitate would put him under surveillance as late as the 1980's. His criminal and intelligence records can be found at the CNSAS. Pierdevară was imprisoned until 1955, when he was pardoned. Terțeleanu was pardoned in 1964 and was put under surveillance until 1977, when he died. Herghelegiu was released in 1956. He kept a low profile in Piatra Neamț and was under surveillance until he died, also in 1977. Căliman died in November 1945. Lungu was released in 1956. He was under the tight scrutiny of the Securitate until his death, in 1982. Nothing is known about Papuc's fate.

Angela married a survivor of the Iași pogrom, Benone Genesco (Beno Ghetler). Beno went through the ordeal of forced labor in Transnistria - Balta, Mogilev, Berezovka, Râbnița, Nikolaev etc. At one point, he escaped together with others, but they were caught by the gendarmes. As punishment, they were, stripped naked, locked in a hut and awaited execution. To their luck, the area was

conquered by Soviet partisans. So, Beno survived and was able to return to Romania. He worked in foreign trade, and later became a physician.

In 1965, Beno emigrated first to Italy, then to the US. He and Angela married and they lived in New York, both working in a cosmetics company. Today, this company is known worldwide under the brand name “Mario Bădescu”. The Genescos played a defining part in founding the brand.