

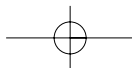
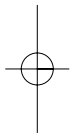
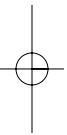
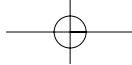
Kimpolung-Bukowina

**A memorial of the Jewish community
in Kimpolung and surroundings**

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**בהוצאת ארגון יוצאי קימפולונג-בוקובינה והסביבה
Published by the committee of former residents of
Kimpolung-Bukowina and Surroundings**



About the book

An abridged history of Jewish life in Kimpolung-Bukovina and surrounding

As far back as the 18th century, even before its annexation to the Austrian Empire, Bukovinian Kimpolung, the picturesque little town situated in a Carpathian depression, was a crossing point on the routes from Poland to Transylvania and the Ottoman Empire. The existence of a kosher hostel in town at that time leads to the twofold conclusion, that there were Jewish families in town, and that among the numerous merchants that passed through, many were Jewish, hence the need for a kosher hostel.

The annexation of Bukovina to the Austrian Empire, particularly its union with Galicia, resulted in a flow of Galician Jews to Bukovina, many of whom settled in Kimpolung.

The grant of civil rights to the Jews in 1867 marked the beginning of growth and development of the Jewish community in town. Kimpolung and its surroundings attracted Jews, who came and settled on the banks of the Moldova river, at the foot of Mount Dea and Mount Runc and other peaks in the Carpathian mountains range. The mountains, the river, the view and the clear air contributed to the development of tourism to the town, which became a source of income for the Jews. They were also permitted to study at universities and to work in academic fields; they became doctors, lawyers, chemists and book-keepers, in Kimpolung as well as in the surrounding villages: Breaza, Vama, Moldovitz and others. Cultural life developed, both Jewish and universal. Synagogues were built, "hederim" were established and many Jews considered themselves "hassidim" and belonged to various rabbinical courts.

Under Romanian Rule

Bukovina was annexed to Romania in 1918. As a result, the conditions of the Jewish population changed. Even though European powers demanded the Romanian government to grant citizenship and civil rights to all its residents, including Jews, the authorities avoided doing so.

The atmosphere in Romania as a whole and in Bukovina in particular, was nationalistic. The leader of the Nazi "Iron Guards" arrived in Kimpolung and assembled his supporters on the Rarau peak where they sang nationalist songs and discussed their plans, which included expulsion of the Jews. Notwithstanding the conditions throughout the country, Jewish life in town went on unhindered. The Jews sensed the approach of hard times, when the anti-Semitic government of Goga-Cuza ascended to power in 1937. Every Jewish resident had to produce before the court documents proving that he had been born in Romania to rightful citizens and that they had not come from another country. The government of Goga-Cuza fell after 44 days only; the law of citizenship reexamination remained nonetheless in place.

At the beginning of June 1940, the Anti-Semitic government of Giurgutu came to power. On June 26th the Soviets demanded that the Romanians retreat from Bessarabia and northern Bukovina, leaving the Romanians no alternative but to comply. (The Soviet order was based on the Ribbentrop-Molotov agreement). Malicious rumors about Jews insulting the Romanian army on its retreat and welcoming the Soviets joyfully were spread by Romanians who took revenge carrying out pogroms among Jews, throwing out Jewish passengers from speeding trains, etc. Due to the geographical proximity, the full force of the events was felt in Kimpolung.

The deportation to Transnistria

In preparation for their deportation, the Jews throughout Bukovina were ordered to leave their homes in the villages and move into towns.

On September 6th 1940, after Romania had been forced to return north Transylvania to Hungary, the legionary government, under Antonescu, raised to power and the persecution of the Jews restarted. For instance, on Yom Kipur, the Rabbi of Kimpolung, Josef Rubin, was cruelly harnessed to a cart piled high with objects robbed from Jewish houses. Jewish students were expelled from government and public schools. Jewish property was confiscated and nationalized. Representatives of Romanian authorities — *kostudes* — were appointed to each business. They usually behaved like utter parasites, leisurely enjoying life, not doing any work at all.

When the German army attacked the USSR on June 22nd 1941 and Romania joined the war against the USSR, the Jewish population of Bukovina was crowded together by the Romanian authorities in the gettos of their towns. Part of the men were taken hostages and lived thereafter in permanent danger.

On October 11th 1941, the municipality emitted a decree, ordering the Jews to take with them only what they could carry, and on the following day, the 12th October, close up their homes, hand over the keys to the municipality and assemble at the local east train station, named Capul Satului. There they were huddled into cattle wagons and dispatched to an unknown destination. Two days and one night later, they reached a desolate spot where they were told that they were to make their way to the Bessarabian town of Ataki.

Entering the destroyed homes of the Jews of Attaki, they were appalled by the sight. The Jewish residents of the town had been most cruelly murdered. In their last moments they had written on the walls of the houses; "Say Kaddish for us" and "Revenge our blood".

Even more shattering was the sight of the Jews who had arrived to Attaki from the camp of Yedinets: these had been evicted from their homes in July and kept in the most awful conditions.

A few days later they were taken across the Dniester river to a region in the Ukraine that the Germans had handed over to the Romanians. Once over the Dniester, they were divided into convoys and forced to march through an area called Transnistria (between the Dniester and the Bug rivers) dragging along their feet in the mud, hungry and shivering of cold. Desperately struggling to survive, they were forced to sell their last possessions.

Lack of most basic sanitary conditions created a very propitious ground for lice to multiply and consequently, a typhus epidemic broke out – an additional, no less terrible killer.

Some of the former residents of Kimpolung managed to reach an agreement with the Romanian authorities in Mogilev, and, paying in money and in jewels, bought the permission to join the convoy headed to the village of Shargorod, others reached Morafa, Djurin, where the living conditions were said to be slightly better.

The winter months of 1941-1942 were awful. People froze to death or

perished of starvation and typhus. The “Hevra Kadisha” collected every morning the corpses that had been placed outside homes for burial, mostly in mass graves.

The return to Kimpolung

The Soviets advanced, at long last, conquering their land and liberating exiles. Only few of the Jewish deportees from Bukovina survived, and they lived in very hard conditions. Some of the survivors set out immediately for home, in the wake of the Soviet army, but couldn't reach their homes because of the ongoing fighting. They had to wait in Bessarabia, Dorohoi and other localities behind the front till their homes were liberated by the Red Army (1944-1945).

Less than half of those deported from Kimpolung were fortunate enough to return to their home. They tried in vain to rebuild their lives and to restore the town to its old agreeable self. The hatred towards Jews awakened again and the repressive communist regime all but facilitated these attempts. Kimpolung did not feel like home any longer. The realization that the people of Israel needed a home, a state of their own ,became increasingly stronger. Jews started leaving the beautiful landscapes of Kimpolung, emigrating to Israel. Most passed through the Cyprus camps and when they finally reached the promised shores, they fought the hardships of absorption, set up new homes and started rebuilding their lives.

In this book, the survivors of the atrocities of the Holocaust, former residents of Kimpolung and their descendents, relate their unspeakable suffering, their nearly hopeless struggle against the cold, starvation and disease, the tragic fate of those who had not been strong enough and succumbed or were murdered in cold blood. Most of them recount their hope of reaching Israel, their good fortune and pride in being able to cling to their new homeland, to build and develop it.

Kimpolung, the little, picturesque town in the valley surrounded by forest-covered mountains, with its crisp, fir-perfumed air, has greatly changed. The mountainous landscape may have remained unchanged, the wind may still bear the fragrant smell of fir, but the once flourishing and vital Jewish community of Kimpolung in south Bukovina, in all its glory, lives only in the memory of those few who still live and tell its story.