

## The Djurin Ghetto in Transnistria through the Lens of Kunstadt's Diary

### Prologue

In the three days between October 12<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> 1941, the last days of the holiday of Sukkot, the Jews of Rădăuți were deported to Transnistria,<sup>1</sup> crowded in stifling cattle wagons of freight trains. Although the deportees knew they were being taken to Transnistria, they had no idea what was the final destination and what fate awaited them there. Among the Jews deported on the third day, October 14<sup>th</sup> 1941, were Lipman Kunstadt and 11 of his relatives. The long train took them to their first stop, at Ataki. Having stopped at Ataki for several days, the deportees boarded rafts and crossed the Dniester river (Nistru in Romanian) towards Moghilev. On October 29<sup>th</sup> 1941 Kunstadt and his family, among a larger group of deportees were taken in a truck rented by the Germans to the Djurin ghetto in Transnistria.

### Who Was Lipman Kunstadt?

Eliezer Lipman Kunstadt, born July 22 1901 in the town of Rădăuți in the Romanian district of southern Bucovina, was the son of a prominent Rădăuți rabbi, Yzhak Kunstadt, himself a well-known public figure

His son Lipman, a highly educated person and a journalist by profession, served prior to the deportation as general secretary of the Jewish community in Rădăuți. He had also translated books from nine languages and published articles in both German and Romanian in the Rădăuți press.

Upon his arrival at the Djurin ghetto, Kunstadt was appointed secretary of the ghetto committee, and as he says in his diary:

**“I was the general secretary of the great Rădăuți community, and with a little bit of ancestral merit was fortunate enough to find employment as the committee’s registrar, with my fee paid in this world, rather than the next: a loaf of bread every morning. It is this employment that saves us from starvation, and besides, for the time being I am spared from falling [sic] to a German labor camp.”<sup>2</sup>**

---

<sup>1</sup> Transnistria – a region in the south western part of the Ukraine, between the Dniester river on the west and the Bug river on the east. Transnistria was Taken by the Germans and Romanians during Operation Barbarossa, in the summer of 1941, Transnistria (“Beyond the Dniester” – as it was named by Hitler) was an artificial geographical unit created in World War II, and comprising of the part of the Ukraine given by Hitler to Romania in return for the latter’s participation in the war against the USSR. For more on this subject see Ancel Jean, *History of the Holocaust (Romania)* Vol. 2, Yad Vashem (2002); Ioanid Radu, *The History of the Jews in Romania*, 4, The Holocaust, The Goldstein-Goren Diaspora Research Center, Tel Aviv University, Published in association with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (2002); Ofer Dalia, Daily life in Transnistria Gettos, *Yad-Vashem Studies* Vol. 25 (1996) pp, 175-207; Rosen Sarah, “The Personal, Family and Community, A Case Study of Survival in Murafa Ghetto”, *Moreshet* 92-93 (April 2012), pp. 214-233; Dallin Alexander, *Odessa, 1941-1944: A Case Study of Soviet Territory Under Foreign Rule*, Iasi-Oxford-Portland: The Center for Romanian Studies (1998); Fisher, Julius S. *the Forgotten Cemetery*, South Brunswick: Thomas Yoseloff LTD. (1969).

<sup>2</sup> Entry dated April 11 1942, 3 PM.

This entry indicates that he owed his employment as secretary of the Djurin committee to his pre-deportation activity in the Rădăuți community, and to his connections with Siegfried Jegendorf, head of the Moghilev ghetto committee and a central, influential figure among the Transnistria deportees, to whom he was related.<sup>3</sup>

Kunstadt filled five notebooks, hand-written in Yiddish in the first person singular. He wrote every day, often two or three times a day. Kunstadt observed the Djurin environment and life as a journalist, and described them both in the light of daily events and occurrences, and through his own engagement and involvement in these events, an involvement made possible by his daily work in the committee's offices. Through his association with committee members and community leaders he witnessed the challenges faced by Jews in the ghetto, and their requests for help from the committee, which he shares in his diary. The tone of his diary, which he also used to pour out his feelings and document personal experiences, conveys to his reader his sensitivity to the suffering of the poor and destitute. This total empathy and affinity with them probably stemmed from both his sensitivity to his fellow man and his own difficulties in providing for his family – his mother, sister, wife and two children. The entries are couched in rich, figurative language. Daily events are described sometimes humorously, often caustically, whereas in some cases the reality of ghetto life draws from him anger and fury. The members of the ghetto committee, the *Comitate* – both together and individually – and their actions are described in sharp, acerbic terms, especially when they are faced with crucial challenges and decisions. Thus Kunstadt allows us, his readers, to experience his own agitation and turmoil and understand, however partially, the reality of daily life in the ghetto and the challenges faced by the Jewish committees.

Here I would like to briefly refer to the nature of the genre we generally term 'diaries'.

In his foreword to the diary kept in the Warsaw ghetto by teacher and educator Chaim Aron Kaplan,<sup>4</sup> Polish-Jewish historian Ber Mark referred to the genre's unique nature, especially when compared to memoirs. "A diary is, first and foremost, what was written at the actual time of the events [...] a piece of living reality, since not only its material, but the author's perspective is a distinct document of the time." Mark further emphasizes this uniqueness by distinguishing between a chronicle and a diary. "The distinct mark of the border line separating the diary from a chronicle is the **personal** moment. The chronicle documents events and occurrences every day, at a specific segment of time. The chronicle contains facts, sometimes even accompanied by the author's commentary. It is sometimes written wisely and well [...] but may sometimes be dry and merely informative." The diary, on the other hand, Mark claims, "Ought to have in it the personal, the emotional, the more or less intimate. The diary is

---

<sup>3</sup> Siegfried Jegendorf was an electrical engineer employed by the German Siemens company. In view of rising anti-Semitism in Austria, where he resided at the time, he returned in 1938 to Romania, to Rădăuți in southern Bucovina, whence he was deported to Transnistria in the Fall of 1941. Jegendorf was manager of the Turnatoria (foundry) in Moghilev and served as head of the Moghilev ghetto committee.

<sup>4</sup> Kaplan A. Chaim, *Scroll of agony: the Warsaw diary of Chaim A. Kaplan* translated and edited by Abraham I. Katsh, New York : Macmillan, 1965.

where the author pours out his soul [...]”. Amos Goldberg,<sup>5</sup> who has refined the definition even further, claims that the diary is “A text of a narrative nature, capable of organizing the writer’s human identity as a narrative one. This power of the diary may partially explain the prevalence of the first person singular in the writings of Jews during the Holocaust. In such a turbulent era, when the components of the identity are so fundamentally undermined, an era where yesterday’s concepts cannot explain what is happening today, nor give hope for tomorrow, a person finds it hard to understand himself or the world, impose order on or find meaning in it. It is in such an era that keeping a diary can help the writer preserve a trace of his identity and the coherence of the word into which he had been thrown. The diary spins the thinnest of narrative threads connecting the molecules of the protagonist’s crumbling world.”<sup>6</sup>

Alexandra Gabarini further claims<sup>7</sup> that diaries, indeed, cannot convey all experiences of all Jews during the war in their entirety, nor can they convey all experiences of the diarists themselves. However, they can and do shed light on the writers’ attempts to imbue their wartime experiences with meaning and understand them, even a little. In this context, the value of Transnistria diaries is in conveying the authors’ feelings and experiences during their deportation and incarceration in ghettos, while incidentally shedding light on occurrences in their vicinity, as documentation from the smaller ghettos (minutes of meetings, correspondence etc.) and the committees’ offices is sadly sparse.

All the above raises the question of the purpose for which this particular diary was written.

The foreword, written after the events described, not long before the diary’s publication, indicates that Kunststadt was motivated by two main objectives: the need to document events for posterity, stemming from his profession as a journalist, and an attempt to find solace and some relief from the harsh ghetto life.

**“I think the yellowing, faded pages from the Transnistria hell have been given a new lease on life, and their voice will be heard wherever Jews still live, so that the memory of suffering and pain, fear of death and hope, the nothingness and infinite oblivion and the paltry dreams reflected and set down in these five notebooks will have been preserved, if only on paper...”<sup>8</sup>**

The same sentiment is expressed in the diary itself, as Kunststadt writes on April 7, 1943, eighteen months after his arrival in the ghetto:

***“While writing about a year’s worth of Transnistria memories [...] the written pages testify to one truth that does not lie: death. What I have written of my mother’s death imparts real content, and even today I would not have written it any other way.”<sup>9</sup>***

---

<sup>5</sup> Goldberg, Amos, *Trauma in the First Person: Diary Writing During the Holocaust*, Kineret-Zmora Bitan Dvir, Or Yehuda, 2012 [Hebrew].

<sup>6</sup> Cited from Dr. Leah Prais’s lecture on the diary of Feivl Winer, during a day symposium on “Jewish Identity and Soviet Identity”, held in Jerusalem at the Yad Vashem museum in October 2015.

<sup>7</sup> Gabarini Alexandra, *Numbered Days: Diaries and the Holocaust*, New Haven, London: Yale University Press, (2006), p. xiii

<sup>8</sup> Prolog in the diary, p. 3 .

<sup>9</sup> Entry dated April 7 1943, p. 262.

Although feeling a need to write daily, many days pass without a single entry. This is how he explains it:

**“As we know, 12 days have passed since I wrote the previous lines. It is not because events ceased to happen, Heavens forbid, that my pen has taken such a long respite. On the contrary, in the pain-fraught tumult known as the Transnistria exile, each moment is wrapped in news and all kinds of troubles that shock the soul and take one’s breath away. The reason for this pause was totally different. The burning fire that had driven me while writing the first pages has been replaced with a deep pessimism, closer to a black despair. This started exhausting my brain with silly questions (kloz kashes): what for and for what purpose? And if I do succeed in editing the outlines of the Djurin camp chronicles and in doing so, set my feelings in watery ink on a half-penny worth of paper, what then? Will I then live to read, at other times, the reminiscences from the Transnistria hell? Will I be reminded of the suffering? Will at least some of my nearest and dearest live to do so? This is all so unnecessary, so ineffectual.**

**And nevertheless I sat down today, pen in hand, because of some news that have shocked me so deeply that I must calm my bedraggled nerves with an ink injection.”<sup>10</sup>**

Elsewhere he writes:

**“I am overwhelmed with grief at the news of the horrific fate of the relatives I grew up and matured with until the deportation. I will never see them again, nor them me. Therefore I seek solace in the mute pages of this notebook, into which I pour out my bleeding heart. They, the listening sheets of paper, hear me without falling into the trap of talk.”<sup>11</sup>**

Here Kunststadt sets down his second purpose in writing his diary – finding solace and comfort for the suffering in the Djurin ghetto. A diary touches upon many aspects of its author’s life, as does Kunststadt’s, addressing subjects such as the deportation and the shock experienced by the displaced Jews; the town of Djurin as seen through the deportees’ eyes; the encounter with local Jews and the relationships formed with them; the newly created demographic fabric and the ensuing social stratification in the ghetto; the Jewish committee in the ghetto, its members and their characteristics; daily life in the ghetto; descriptions of Kunststadt’s family in daily life circumstances; the Romanian authorities; the environment outside the ghetto and relations with local Ukrainians; references to other ghettos in the Moghilev district, such as Moghilev, Sargorod, Copaigorod etc.

Of the plethora of themes, the present article will address the new reality imposed upon the deported Jews in the Djurin ghetto as reflected in Kunststadt’s diary, the relations between the deportees and the local Jews, and finally the non-Jewish external environment and Jews’ relations with it.

---

<sup>10</sup> Entry dated April 23 1942, p. 8.

<sup>11</sup> Entry Later on at the same day on April 23 1942, p. 9.

**The town of Djurin**<sup>12</sup> is located some 45 km north-east of Moghilev and some 25 km south of Sargorod, and was built on the slopes of two hills separated by a stream. Jews lived on the eastern slope, later to serve as the ghetto, while local Ukrainians lived on the western slope, across the stream.<sup>13</sup> (עדייות שלמה)

Before the outbreak of World War II the town's Jewish population numbered some 2,000, all residing in a separate quarter up the hill. The Jewish community was poor, and most Jews barely made a living working in the local sugar factory,<sup>14</sup> or the Jewish agricultural cooperative.<sup>15</sup> The town of Djurin had a synagogue, a religious school and a small Jewish cemetery. The community was led by Rabbi Hershel Karalnik, who was respected by all.<sup>16</sup> The local town committee, the Obscina, was responsible for burials and Kashruth (Jewish dietary laws), and acted as an intermediary between the Jews and the Soviet authorities.<sup>17</sup>

With the outbreak of war, all fit Jewish males were conscripted to the Red Army, leaving only the elderly, the sick, women and children – numbering about 1,000 – in town. The sugar factory, the town's main source of employment, was bombed, partially destroyed and ceased operations, leaving the Jews with no source of income.

On July 22 1941 Djurin was violently occupied by German and Romanian troops, aided by Ukrainian militias. As soon as the Romanian authorities took over the town, in the fall of 1941, the Jews were required to wear the Yellow Star and their freedom of movement was curtailed. Throughout the war the Jews of Djurin remained in their quarter, which had become the ghetto.

### **Shared Plight – Manifestations of Solidarity with Deported Jews**

The first deportees to arrive in Djurin, in September 1941, were Jews from Hotin in Bessarabia. Nearly naked, barefoot and ill, having wandered for weeks from one camp to another, they were housed in the synagogue, where most died shortly afterwards.

From late October 1941 until January 1942 Djurin was flooded by hundreds of deportees who had formerly stayed in Moghilev. Most were deported there from Bucovina, some from northern Moldova (Dorohoi) and Bessarabi In total, 3,500 deportees reached Djurin – 2,000 from Rădăuți, 400 from Vizhnitsa, 300 from Suceava and 200 from Hotin. The remainder came from Gura Umorului and

---

<sup>12</sup> Rosen Sarah, *The Collective and the Individual: Organization and Family. The internal life of the Jews in North Transnistria's Ghettos (Moghilev, Şargorod, Djurin, Murafa and Berşad), 1941-1944*, Thesis submitted for the degree of "Doctor of Philosophy", the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, 2013.

<sup>13</sup> Savion Miriam, Yad Vashem Archives vt 11435 ; Steinmitz Shlomo, interview conducted on January 17 2010 at his home in Ramat Gan ; Nir Jehudith, interview conducted on February 15 2011 at her home in Ramat Gan ; Bernstein Menachem, Yad Vashem Archives vt 03/8819.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. pp. 36-8.

<sup>15</sup> The agricultural cooperative was a common collective entity, created in the USSR during the Twenties and the Thirties, based on collective labor and sharing of profits among the workers.

<sup>16</sup> Lavi T., *The Community Registry Romania, Vol. 1* (Jerusalem, Yad Vashem, 1970) pp. 421-425 ; See also Rosen Sarah, *The Collective and the Individual: Organization and Family. The internal life of the Jews in North Transnistria's Ghettos (Moghilev, Şargorod, Djurin, Murafa and Berşad), 1941-1944*, pp. 36-38

<sup>17</sup> Group testimony: ghettos of Moghilev, Sargorod and Djurin, Yad Vashem Archives vt 10547.

Cîmpulung, Vatra-Dornei, Siret, Cernăuți and Dorohoi. The single trait common to all deportees was this forced concentration at a single locality, whereas interactions between them were the result of circumstances and the hardships of extreme conditions.

Inspired by Rabbi Karalnik, local Jews welcomed the deportees with open arms. They managed to accommodate some two thirds of the deportees in their own homes, crowded 8-10 people per room, and even provided them with blankets and house wares. Some 1,000 whom the local Jews were unable to house in their homes were given shelter in cow-byres and store-rooms.<sup>18</sup>

All of the above raises the question of the nature of the relationships forming between the various groups in the crowded ghetto. As we have seen above, the locals, themselves abjectly poor, welcomed the deportees and made room for them in their crowded homes, albeit for a small fee. Indeed, during the deportees' first months in the ghettos (the winter of 1941-1942), the common daily hardships generated co-dependence and reciprocal relations between locals and newcomers: the meagre rent paid by the deportees was an additional income that slightly improved the locals' bleak economic plight. Moreover, the deportees brought with them from Romania goods rarely seen in the Ukraine at the time (fine textiles, shoes, tablecloths, housewares, clothing etc.).

In his diary, Kunststadt describes both their welcome into Djurin and the local Jews' poverty and wretchedness:

**“The local Jews, who have never known exile and have spent their lives crowded in tiny rooms, are even more downtrodden than us, who have been uprooted from our places of residence and nearly forgotten that we, too, once had homes of our own [...] Some of the Djurin inhabitants make a living selling houseware, others live only on the rent they receive for letting a corridor or a cot-bed, and the rest go begging and hold out a bowl for a portion of warm soup in the local soup-kitchen, or half a loaf of bread from the local charity.”<sup>19</sup>**

Complementary evidence indicates that the deportees, fluent in Romanian and German, became intermediaries between the local Jews and the Romanian and German authorities. The local Jews, on the other hand, speaking the native tongue and well acquainted with the local Ukrainian way of life and culture, mediated between the deportees and their new, alien environment.<sup>20</sup> The common tongue in which all Jews communicated with each other was Yiddish. Within a short while the local Jews had become a minority in their own town, outnumbered by the deportees.

The coalescent human and demographic fabric conjoined people from different cultural backgrounds, and possessing different mentalities and financial means. The practical consequences of this change

---

<sup>18</sup> Rosen Sarah, *The Collective and the Individual: Organization and Family. The internal life of the Jews in North Transnistria's Ghettos (Moghilev, Șargorod, Djurin, Murafa and Berșad), 1941-1944*, pp. 36-8 ;<sup>18</sup> Savion Miriam, Yad Vashem Archives vt 11435

<sup>19</sup> Entry dated July 17 1942, 2 PM, p. 93.

<sup>20</sup> Tenenhaus Yehuda, Yad Vashem Archives vt 7748; Schternshus Kurt, Yad Vashem Archives vt 937; See also group testimony, Murafa and Barsad ghettos, Yad Vashem Archives vt 10552; Group testimony, Djurin, Sargorod and Moghilev ghettos, Yad Vashem Archives vt 10547.

caused ups and downs in relations between the local Jews and the deportees thrust upon them, creating a need to bridge the gaps between the various groups, and challenging all.

In his diary Kunststadt often refers to the cultural gap and the differences of mentality separating the various groups, and in particular to the classes formed in the ghetto, which as will be shown below, affected each of the groups and relations between them.

### **The New Demographics in the Ghettos**

As we have seen above, the destinations the deportees found themselves in left a harsh impression – both due to the living conditions, so different to those they had been accustomed to, and the enormous cultural differences between themselves and the local Jews (whose culture, notably, was profoundly influenced by that of their equally poor non-Jewish peasant neighbors). The Bucovina deportees were shocked by the dilapidated appearance of the Djurin ghetto and the wretchedness of the entire area, as well as the local Jews' poverty. Both infrastructure and houses were crumbling, and the inhabitants lived in deplorable, or in the deportees' words, "primitive" conditions.

The collectivization programs enforced by the Soviet authorities prior to the Romanian-German occupation led to a chronic shortage of basic foods among both Ukrainians and Jews. With the arrival of the deportees, the Jews had to crowd, ten to a room, without even basic amenities, in houses that were mostly dilapidated clay or wooden huts with beaten earth floors.

To illustrate the shock of the first encounter with local conditions and dilapidated infrastructure, Kunststadt describes the all-pervading mud in the Djurin ghetto:

**"The Djurin mud is an agonizing, tormenting plague, a sticky addition to black suffering. As soon as the gates of the Djurin paradise opened before me, on October 29 1941, at ten at night, this mire clung to me in all its grace. We have only just climbed down from the German truck that had dragged us to this corner, and already I was introduced to the mud. It was a dark, wet evening and I slid and found myself lying face down in a revolting, thick, ice-cold mess [...] my sole consolation was not being alone in this, as I was not the only one sporting this fine appearance. The stubborn mud kept swelling to this very day, in May, so much so that I had no choice but to surrender to it."**<sup>21</sup>

Local Jews' references to the deportees' complaints highlight the profound cultural chasm separating the two groups, as Kunststadt writes in his diary:

**"The local Jews were quite used to the mud clinging to everything and were unable to comprehend why the Bucovina refugees kept complaining and resenting it. How come? For they themselves, their fathers and grandfathers all lived out their lives in this very mud, married, fathered children, attended celebrations and funerals without the mud ever sticking to the soles of their shoes."**<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>21</sup> Entry dated May 6 1942, p. 31.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

Another phenomenon the deportees were unaccustomed to was the total absence of toilets in Djurin. In his observations, Kunststadt humorously describes the phenomenon of people relieving themselves in the streets or at entryways, and the ensuing scandal. This phenomenon, common to all the Transnistria ghettos, attests to local Ukrainian customs and culture:

**“Incidentally, there are other reasons to learn things anew in Djurin [...] Here, for instance, is a question every Bucovina refugee asks himself at least once a day, if his bowels are in good shape: Why doesn’t anyone in Djurin know of that secret place which even the Emperor goes to alone? Should we ask whether the Jews of Djurin are angels, having no need of such a place? No, they are as much flesh and blood as those strange Bucovina Jews, but have been peculiar creatures for generations and find an answer wherever and whenever they can, as long as, God forbid, no one – and in particular, no policeman - sees them in the act [...] Oh well. So fines are paid and voices are raised to the heavens – screams of home owners suspecting someone to have done the foul deed on their doorstep, and even the harsh tongue of passersby, showing the finger. Indeed, every morning the entire ghetto seethes for a while, policemen drag offenders to the committee, women screech, do-gooders rush to beg for clemency from committee members, until the turmoil quietens down and the next morning the sequence starts all over again.”<sup>23</sup>**

With deep puzzlement and in a cynical tone, Kunststadt introduces the explanation for the lack of toilets:

**“Today, Djurin residents claim, they can do nothing, as doing something requires food – materials currently unavailable, such as oranges, pepper, or... paper. But it is a cheap excuse. Not too long ago food was plentiful, war did not rage yet no one lifted a finger to furnish the apartment with that hidden place. One sees the same customs not only in Djurin, but in all localities between the Dniester and the Bug.”<sup>24</sup>**

Yet another, unhappy phenomenon Kunststadt describes in his diary is the absence of water wells in the Djurin ghetto:

**“Thus, for example, the woeful trouble of water. The town of Djurin and its 8,000 inhabitants – two thirds Jews in the ghetto uphill and one third Ukrainians in town, in the sugar factory quarter (where a large sugar factory operated until the war). There people are literally dying for a sip of water. The place has a single water well, an ancient facility, which can be reached with difficulty equal to the parting of the Red Sea. During mud season one drowns, and in the winter one drags oneself at great peril up the mountain – over a kilometer on flooded, slippery soil. People armed with cans, jugs and pails stand in a long line by the pump and wait, sometimes for hours, until they can get a little water. There are always fights, with people often coming to blows over who gets a pail of water sooner, and who sacrifices their health to gain a little rusty water as old as Methuselah.**

**“When, as happens at least once a week, God intervenes and the pump is out of order, the entire town remains without a sip of water [...] The inhabitants of Djurin never saw fit to dig a few more**

---

<sup>23</sup> Entry dated May 6 1942, p. 32.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.



**wells. Yet if you talk to them, you will hear the claim that they alone are truly civilized, while the newcomers from Bucovina have never had even a taste of civilization.”<sup>25</sup>**

Kunstadt also sadly describes in his diary the housing shortage and the intolerable conditions in the apartments, entries which offer a glimpse into locals’ living conditions:

**“Near us lived Dr. Gabor and his family. His apartment was no more luxurious than mine: a dilapidated roofless ruin, without doors and walls. The cold rain fell hard on the poor walls, as well as the humans and the various covers.”<sup>26</sup>**

In the same context of the harsh living conditions, Kunstadt describes his and his family’s lodgings:

**“We - myself, Daza<sup>27</sup> and the children – are living in a dark little room, two meters long and three meters wide, with not enough room to drop a pin. In this hovel we eat, cook, sleep and write literature for posterity! I do not know what to advise myself under such pressure.”<sup>28</sup>**

Similar descriptions can be found in other diaries (e.g. the diaries of Miriam Korber,<sup>29</sup> Cerna Bercovici<sup>30</sup> and Mordechai Kupstein,<sup>31</sup> among others), testimonies and memoirs. These attested to the huge chasm separating what the deportees had left behind and the local Jews and their culture, a chasm which resulted in considerable condescension towards the locals.

By April 1942 a ghetto committee was established, comprised of deportees from southern Bucovina, and the newcomers, now the “new masters”, started dictating how the ghetto should be run. The Ukrainian Jews, now the ghetto’s weakest and most vulnerable group, were the first to be put on the lists of those selected to do force labor outside the ghettos, and last to receive relief sent from Romania. Although himself one of the deportees, Kunstadt harshly criticizes this phenomenon:

**“According to the list the shipment contains a few shoes, about twenty suits [...] In Djurin there’s need for shoes with heavy, double soles, suitable for walking in marshes and snows [...] Since the items**

---

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Entry dated April 4 1942, p. 10.

<sup>27</sup> Kunstadt’s wife.

<sup>28</sup> Entry dated October 19 1942, p. 180.

<sup>29</sup> Korber Bercovici Miriam, *Jurnal din Ghetto – Djurin Transnistria, 1941-1943*, Bucuresti: Kriterion (1995). Miriam (Mimi) Korber was seventeen and a half years old when she was deported with her family from Rădăuți in southern Bucovina. Her family arrived at the Moghilev ghetto, and after a few days was taken by trucks to Djurin. Miriam survived, returned to Romania, studied medicine and worked as a pediatrician in Bucharest..

<sup>30</sup> Bercovici Cerna, in: Avni S., *Kimpulung-Bukowina, A Memorial of the Jewish Community in Kimpulung and Surroundings*, Vol 1, (2003), published by the community of former residents of Cîmpulung-Bucovina and surroundings , pp. 220-221. Twelve year old Cerna Bercovici was deported with her family from Cîmpulung in southern Bucovina, and was marched on foot from Moghilev to the Sargorod ghetto.

<sup>31</sup> Kupstein Mordechai, in: Avni S. *Kimpulung-Bukowina, A Memorial of the Jewish Community in Kimpulung and Surroundings*, Vol 1, (2003), published by the community of former residents of Cîmpulung-Bucovina and surroundings , pp. 228-258. Mordechai Kupstein was deported with his family from Cîmpulung in southern Bucovina, and ultimately arrived at the Sargorod ghetto. Having survived the war, he emigrated to then-Palestine, joined the IDF and was killed during the 1948 war in the battle for Jerusalem.

were sent specifically for the deportees from Romania, the committee would certainly give a little to the Ukrainian Jews, and it is precisely the escapees from the camps by the Bug, almost all Ukrainian Jews, who are dressed in rags, not a shirt on their back, their feet wrapped in rags. Putting the local Jews and us, esteemed Romanians, in the same group would be unacceptable. At first the locals welcomed us as important guests, but in time the tables have turned, and perhaps both sides are to blame. In their own eyes, the Djurin old-timers regard themselves as important descendants of Jewish royalty, although they owe their survival to the uninvited guests. Throughout Transnistria, the Romanian occupation authorities have deported all Ukrainian Jews from any localities where no Romanian refugees were present, and sent them to camps near the Bug, where most of them have perished.”<sup>32</sup>

The above quote highlights the fact that in the eyes of both the German and Romanian occupying forces, the local Jews were regarded as first candidates to be sent outside the ghettos, to the German-controlled camps across the Bug. Kunststadt describes the injustice done to the local Jews with much bitterness and anger.

Within the ghetto population, classes and social hierarchy soon emerged: at the center of power were members of the local leadership and their cronies from south Bucovina, as well as deportees who had managed to bring with them (at great risk) money and valuables.

In his rich, vivid language Kunststadt compassionately describes the ghetto’s most vulnerable inhabitants, those destitute, hungry Jews, among them the deportees from Bessarabia and northern Bucovina, as well as the local Ukrainian Jews. He calls them, half sarcastically half angrily, “Treif” [“Treif” is non-kosher food, a Yiddish derogatory] and “Kaparot sacrifice”, the butcher’s knife raised above their heads. His diary indicates they were the first to be sent away from the ghettos:

**“The Romanian overlords in Sargorod [the Sargorod ghetto – S.R.] explained to him [Dr. Rosenstrauch, head of the ghetto – S.R.] that Djurin is too full of Yids, and that overcrowding may damage their health. So indeed, in view of this justifiable claim the powers that be have arrived at the conclusion that the Jewish collective should be left in place, and part of it should be transferred to the camps near the Bug, across the river, to the Germans. The head of the camp was given no inkling over whom the threat hangs, and who is to decide who would be selected to leave. It is thought that the Ukrainian Jews, as well as the Bessarabians and the ‘treif’ north Bucovinians would be the sacrificial roosters for Kaparoth.”<sup>33</sup>**

And there’s one more, even lower class – the Ukrainian Jews who had escaped from the camps across the Bug and sought refuge in the ghetto. These Kunststadt dubs “treif of treif”, which in his cynical imagery tells the reader even more emphatically that they have no right to exist:

---

<sup>32</sup> Entry dated February 7 1943, 8 PM, p. 247.

<sup>33</sup> Entry dated January 4 1943, 7 AM, p. 220.

**"Some of those in hiding are 'treif of treif', not even Romanian, the scant remainder of the Jewish communities in the Ukraine, where German and Romanian murderers have slaughtered nearly all Jews."**<sup>34</sup>

Kunstadt's diary further indicates an inner division into two additional sub-groups: those privileged enough to have some chance of being repatriated to Romania – "Kosher" Jews deported from northern Romania (from Dorohoi) and southern Bucovina, and therefore not suspect of Communist leanings; and Jews from Bessarabia, northern Bucovina and local Djurin Jews, who had all lived under Soviet rule and were consequently suspect of Communist sympathies.<sup>35</sup>

### **The External Environment and the Ghetto's Relations with It.**

Relationships with the local Ukrainian population were complex, affected by different, contradictory factors. On one hand, the anti-Semitism prevalent among both rural and urban Ukrainians was a given with a profound negative impact on these relationships. On the other hand, local Ukrainian peasants, who suffered as much as the Jews under the Romanian occupiers, could feel a measure of sympathy towards the suffering Jews .

Although official policy under the Soviet rule expressly prohibited any anti-Semitic activities, Ukrainian nationalists commonly assumed the Jews to be avid supporters of the Soviet regime, and hence deserving of an especially hostile treatment.

Anti-Jewish policies during the Romanian-German occupation lent these anti-Semitic sentiments legitimacy, and enabled the Ukrainian residents to join in on the slaughter of the Jews by the Romanian army and gendarmerie, and benefit from the looting of the property of the deported and the dead.

This collaboration between Ukrainian nationalist groups (who opposed the Soviet authorities) and the Germans and Romanians in persecuting the Jews is a well-known phenomenon, in particular during the first stage of the ghettos' establishment and up to the formation of a Jewish police.

In his diary Kustadt refers to two groups of Ukrainians – Ukrainian nationalists and rural peasants. The former included members of Ukrainian militias who collaborated with the occupying forces. He describes how Ukrainian militiamen helped gendarmes drag Jews out of their homes for forced labor. Complementary evidence indicates that these militia men also served as guards in the forced-labor camps where their treatment of the Jewish inmates was cruel and brutal.

**"We have been informed that thirty slave-laborers escaped the peat mines<sup>36</sup> in Tulcin, and there's serious reason to assume all were killed by Ukrainian policemen or gendarmes."**<sup>37</sup>

In full collaboration with the Romanian gendarmes, Ukrainian militias prevented Ukrainian peasants from bringing their produce to the markets. In other instances they would descend on the markets, riot,

---

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Entry dated February 20 1943, 7 PM, p. 224; Entry dated December 11 1943, p. 355.

<sup>36</sup> Turf deposits mined for peat (called *Torf* in Romanian and Yiddish) located near Tulcin.

<sup>37</sup> Entry dated August 17 1943, 9 PM, p. 300.

indiscriminately beat anyone they encountered, whether Jew or peasant, and together with the gendarmes would overturn the peasants' stands and trample their goods.

This is how Kunststadt describes it in his diary:

**"[...] The peasants were prohibited in advance from bringing not only flour, potatoes and bread to market [...] but also beans, chickpeas, barley and livestock [...] This morning, peasants unaware of the order brought plentiful goods. The market was as full as any rich market befitting the rich Ukrainian soil [...] All this splendor did not last for more than a quarter of an hour, when suddenly Ukrainian militiamen and gendarmes armed with whips wildly attacked and destroyed all that goodness. Even "kosher" [approved] goods such as butter and eggs."**<sup>38</sup>

The second group mentioned often in Kunststadt's diary is that of the rural peasants, simple, downtrodden people who barely eked out a living working the land. They, too, were affected by the German occupiers and later the Romanian authorities, who treated them brutally. This treatment generated a deep hatred of the occupiers, and in some, a measure of empathy to the Jews and their plight. The Romanian authorities demanded that the peasants continue to work the land, only to be robbed of their crops by the same authorities. Kunststadt describes it thus:

**"There were two obvious reasons for the scarcity of goods in the market. First of all, the Romanian occupying forces rob the peasants of their wheat, livestock, dairy products and all kinds of foods, leaving the farmers barely enough to live on, unless they hide – at risk to their lives – some of the crops [...] By order of the governor of Transnistria, General Alexianu, local peasants are prohibited from not working the land on weekdays, to prevent any loss of the taxes collected by the state."**<sup>39</sup>

Another factor affecting relations between the Ukrainians outside the ghetto and the Jews incarcerated within were economic interests – the main driver behind the food trade and Ukrainian peasants' willingness to take the risk of employing Jews and giving them lodging.

Complementing testimonies to Kunststadt's diary indicate that the peasants mercilessly exploited the starving Jews' hunger, in order to acquire items they never had before. Indeed, with the arrival of the deportees, there was a significant increase in the variety of goods sold in the markets of the Kolkhozes and towns. Many peasants who coveted the valuables brought by the Jews from Romania (fine suits, furs, bed linen, jewelry and gold watches) could now get them for a meagre meal, or a few pounds of potatoes.

**"The local peasants have heard that veritable treasures can now be found in the streets of Djurin, and hordes of Goyim [gentiles] from the vicinity climb up the hill to grab Jewish possessions for next to nothing. Clothes, shoes, bed linens, tables, chairs and housewares are thrown outside [...] The cunning peasants see at first glance how desperate the Jews are for cash, and haggle much harder before they show even a single mark, sucking blood to the last drop. Jews peel the tin roofs from over their houses**

---

<sup>38</sup> Entry dated July 5 1942, p. 91.

<sup>39</sup> Entry dated January 8 1943, 9 PM, p. 41.

**and scrape the walls for pennies, drag out the last bunk bed, part with the last Shabbat suit and their sole remaining pair of galoshes, women remove their wedding rings and their gold earrings. [...]**<sup>40</sup>

Unlike the rabid anti-Semitism of the Ukrainian nationalists, among peasants there were cases of empathy to the Jews' suffering, which found its expression in acts of mercy and compassion.

This is seen in Kundstat's account of how differently the Ukrainians treated refugees who had managed to escape the camps of Peciora or Vapniarka and tried to find shelter in the homes of local Ukrainians:

**"Very often the gentile woman, out of pity, gives the vagabond a slice of bread, while her husband sneaks out and hands the 'criminal' over to the gendarmes. In some cases, however, Ukrainians show kindness, provide food and clothing and some even shelter [the escapees] in their attic for a while."**<sup>41</sup>

In another instance Kunstadt recounts how Jews escaping from labor camps were fed by Ukrainian peasants:

**"Here's a Djurin miracle for you: the Jews of the Krijopol forest all returned home, but in such a state! Exhausted, in rags [...] Their escort beat them mercilessly with their rifle butts and tortured them ceaselessly. They would have collapsed of hunger were it not for Ukrainian peasants in some villages, who took pity on them and gave them food donations."**<sup>42</sup>

Complementary testimonies indicate that peasants willingly accepted the services of Jewish artisans and craftsmen – carpenters, builders, painters, leather workers, tanners and tailors, whose wages they paid in food and firewood. Many Jews took seasonal work in return for food and lodging.<sup>43</sup> In the winter of 1942-3, for instance, a quota of knitted garments for the German army was imposed on peasant wives, who in turn hired Jewish girls to knit for them.

This, too is documented in Kunstadt's diary:

**"During the summer there was another source of livelihood, with a respectable income of three marks a day, [...] It is a way of making a living during the summer months, just like the income made by quite a few girls and women who used to sneak out of the camp and work for local farmers."**<sup>44</sup>

Sometimes the peasant women grew to love the young girls, so much so they were willing to keep and adopt them.<sup>45</sup>

All the above evidence indicates how the humanitarian, religious and economic motives intertwined and worked together to generate acts of compassion and kindness.

---

<sup>40</sup> Entry dated July 17 1942, 2 PM, p. 94.

<sup>41</sup> Entry dated October 10 1942, p. 182.

<sup>42</sup> Entry dated October 17 1942, 2 PM, p. 175

<sup>43</sup> Akerman Bat Sheva, Yad Vashem Archives vt 11356; Schechter Kalman, , Yad Vashem Archives vt 8797,

<sup>44</sup> Entry dated 25 March 1942, 9 PM, p. 255.

<sup>45</sup> Meller (Faust) Hanna, *Beyond the River*, Beit Lohamei Haghetatot- Ghetto Fighters' House (1985), p. 145; Meller (Faust) Hanna, interview conducted on March 12 2010 at her home in Haifa; Savion Miriam, Yad Vashem Archives vt 11435.

In other cases, the local peasants cooperated with the ghetto residents in passing on information to the 'sealed in' ghettos, a phenomenon also described by Kunstadt:

**"A few days ago all the Jews in Ierusinca, in the Moghilev district, were deported to Pecior. The peasants tell us that Jews were deported from other places too."**<sup>46</sup>

Kunstadt noted in his diary it was from peasants that the ghetto residents learned of the murder of the Jews of Vinnytsia in death pits, during an Akzia conducted by SS me:.

**"Peasants arriving at Djurin brought with them the bitter news, and said that for several days afterwards the earth above the graves was still moving. News spread quickly through the camp, raising panic. Some thought, 'In what way is Djurin any better than Vinnytsia?'"**<sup>47</sup>

In conclusion, the arrival of large groups of deportees and the rapid increase in the number of the Jews incarcerated in the ghetto resulted in a significant rise in population density, accompanied by severe absorption and demographic problems.

The circumstances of the deportations generated a new human and demographic fabric in the ghettos, whose population consisted of Romanian deportees and Jews native to the region. The deportees' arrival to the Djurin ghetto brought together Jews from different cultural backgrounds, with very different mentalities and economic capacities.

The arrival of the deportees turned the locals into a minority in their own home town, outnumbered by the newly arrived Romanians. Moreover, the Jewish leadership in the ghetto evolved from among the Bucovina deportees, and maintained this role until the end of the war. Consequently, the deportees became the new masters in Djurin, imposing their own agenda. In practical terms, this change resulted in ups and downs in the local Jews' relations with the deportees forced upon them. Coping with the new circumstances presented a challenge to all the groups in the Djurin ghetto population, on which this paper focuses.

Despite the differences, these groups also had quite a few things in common. The very deportation and displacement, the betrayal by their homeland and 'good' neighbors, were shared by all and left all deportees feeling affront and anger.<sup>48</sup> The difference between these two groups stemmed from two main factors – their culture and the ensuing mentality, linked to their places of origin; and the circumstances and mode of their deportation. These two factors find expression in Kunstadt's above-discussed highly cynical and caustic writing.

The relationships formed with the Ukrainian non-Jewish population outside the ghetto show just how varied were relations between Jews and Ukrainians: where the Ukrainian peasants had common interests with the Jews, humanitarian and religious motives could come to the fore and drive them to

<sup>46</sup> Entry dated February 16 1943, 9 PM, p. 244.

<sup>47</sup> Entry dated April 28 1942, 6 AM, p. 16.

<sup>48</sup> Yeri (Joseph) Rom, a Suceava deportee, expressed these sentiments of affront and betrayal in a poem he composed. See in: Fuchs Benzion (ed.), *The Book of the Jews from Suceava (Shutz) and the Surrounding Community*, vol. II, Teper Publishing, p. 581.

help the Jews fit more easily in their environment. On the other hand, the benefits the peasants gained from Jews working in their homes and farms were yet another incentive to help the latter.<sup>49</sup>

Hence, as Kunstadt's diary shows, relations between Jews and the Ukrainian population outside the ghettos were based on both parties' common interest in the reality of life under the occupation – the famine in the Ukraine following Stalin's Five Year Plan, the emergence of a barter system, the availability of a cheap Jewish labor force and the peasants' humane sentiments. In other cases these sentiments had to be awakened through bribes, while at times the bribes elicited manifestation of humane sentiments in people otherwise devoid of them.

**Epilogue:** Kunstadt survived the deportation along with most of his family, except his mother and his brother-in-law. Although during the Fifties he and his family emigrated to Israel, in the Sixties they moved yet again to the United States where they lived in the Bronx, New York. In the US, too, Kunstadt kept writing, mainly in Yiddish, and publishing in the Jewish press. Even in the United States, where he spent his last years, he published articles in Hebrew and English His feuilletons, with his trademark gentle humor, became quite popular among his readers.

He died in 1978, aged 78, and in 1982 his relatives typed the original manuscript of the diary on a typewriter and added annotations. The final text of the typed diary comprises 340 ten-inch pages. The diary was printed in a limited edition of a few copies – some are kept by descendants, and others preserved in several libraries in Israel.

---

<sup>49</sup> Ofer Dalia, "Daily Life in the Transnistria Ghettos", *Yad Vashem Studies* 25 (1995), p. 198.