

## Transylvania

Region in Central Europe that belonged to Hungary until 1920, at which time it was given to Romania. On August 30, 1940, Northern Transylvania was transferred back to Hungary, as a reward for siding with Germany.

Northern Transylvania had a population of 2.5 million, including 165,000 Jews. Most lived in the areas of Dej, Cluj, Sighet Marmatiei, Tirgu Mures, Oradea, and Satu-Mare. Many Transylvanian Jews were happy to join Hungary after 20 years under Romania; however, they were soon subjected to Hungary's anti-Jewish regulations.

The Germans occupied Hungary in March 1944, and quickly began readying the Jews for the "Final Solution." They divided Northern Transylvania into two districts. Jews were not allowed to travel or communicate with Jews in other areas, so each community was left isolated. The only way to make contact was through the Jewish Council of Budapest, which usually just passed on instructions from the German and Hungarian authorities. On May 2 Jews were forbidden to leave their homes, except for one short hour in the morning to shop. The next day, the Nazis began transferring Jews to ghettos; the operation ran smoothly and took only 10 days. There was hardly any resistance. Some Jews did not realize what was going to happen to them, others thought they were being sent away to work, and some hoped the Allies would soon win the war. In the villages and smaller towns, the Jews were gathered in their synagogues and community buildings; after a few days, they were moved to the ghettos located in larger cities. In Dej, the Jews were moved to the forest. Each ghetto had its own *Judenrat*, which carried out the instructions given them by the main Jewish Council or by the Hungarian or German authorities. Each ghetto also had a building, nicknamed the "mint," where Jews were tortured into revealing the whereabouts of their valuables.

The Jews did not stay long in the ghettos---131,641 Jews were soon deported to Auschwitz. The transports lasted from May 16 to June 27, 1944. Only the Jews working in labor units and a few exemptions were left behind.

Romania retained control of Southern Transylvania. In 1941 there were 40,937 Jews living there. During the reign of the "National Legionary

Government" in 1940, local authorities terrorized the Jews of Southern Transylvania. Their property was systematically looted and they were kicked out of their homes. Hundreds of Jews were tortured into "selling" their property to the authorities. However, when the Legionary government toppled in January 1941, the situation improved slightly. The conditions in the forced labor units were somewhat alleviated, and few Southern Transylvanian Jews were sent to labor battalions.

During the summer of 1941, Ion Antonescu, the head of the Romanian government, ordered all Romanian Jews---including those in Southern Transylvania---expelled from their villages and towns. The operation was executed haphazardly, causing the Jews much distress. During the expulsion, the authorities found that the large cities where they had planned to station the Jews were not suitable. Thus, in late 1941 and early 1942, the Jews who had already been sent to the larger towns were now moved to makeshift ghettos. By the summer of 1942 they were faced with another threat: deportation. Southern Transylvanian Jewish leaders traveled to Bucharest to enlist the help of Romanian Jewish leader Wilhelm Filderman.

By the summer of 1943, the Jews' situation had improved somewhat. In 1944 they themselves were able to rescue thousands of Jews from Northern Transylvania and Hungary, where Jews were being arrested and deported. However, the circumstances of the Jews of Southern Transylvania changed in September 1944, soon after the Romanian army surrendered to the Soviets. The Hungarian army occupied an area along the northern border of Southern Transylvania. Most Jews fled the region, but the Hungarians murdered any they could find. The area was liberated that month, but when the Romanian army reoccupied most of Southern Transylvania, no Jews were left.