

THE HOLOCAUST IN NORTHERN TRANSYLVANIA

Toward the Second Vienna Award

The Nazis' assumption of power in Germany in January 1933 marked a watershed in modern history. Within a relatively short time after the establishment of the totalitarian regime, the Nazis initiated a series of radical changes in the domestic and foreign policies of Germany. Domestically, they destroyed the democratic institutions of the Weimar Republic and adopted a series of socioeconomic measures calculated to establish a Third Reich that was to last a thousand years. Toward this end, they resolved to bring about the "purification" of Germany by expelling all Jews living in their country—a drive that eventually culminated in the physical destruction of European Jewry during the Second World War.

An important foreign policy objective of the Nazi regime was to replace the world order established after World War I by the Allies, under the provisions of the Treaty of Versailles and the Covenant of the League of Nations, with a "New Order" reflecting the principles of National Socialism. In pursuit of this objective the Nazis violated Germany's obligations under the various treaties ending the First World War. Among other things, they launched a massive rearmament program and re-militarized the Rhineland—aggressive moves that were indirectly encouraged by the failure of the Western democracies and the League of Nations to effectively oppose them, as they were more afraid of the long-range danger of Bolshevism than of the immediate threat posed by the Third Reich. In fact, their appeasement merely encouraged the Nazis to pursue their aggressive revisionist policies with greater intensity.

In their drive for supremacy in Europe, the Nazis first aimed to gain a dominant role in East Central Europe. Within a few years they gradually tied the socioeconomic, political, and military interests of the countries of the region to those of the Third Reich. They largely achieved this objective by financially and politically supporting these countries' antisemitic press organs and right radical parties and movements.

Post World War I Hungary was a natural ally for the Third Reich. Following the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1918, the Hungarian Kingdom became one of the major losers of the war. After first relying unsuccessfully on the Western democracies and the League of Nations to rectify what it termed the injustices of Trianon, in the mid-1930s Hungary decided to pursue its revisionist objectives in tandem with the Third Reich.

Although they were not always in harmony, both Hungary and Nazi Germany aimed to undo the European world order created after World War I. Their first target was the Little Entente, whose members—Czechoslovakia, Romania, and Yugoslavia—had been the major beneficiaries of the disintegration of Greater Hungary.

A week before the German annexation of Austria on March 12, 1938, the Hungarian government launched a rearmament program that was intertwined with the adoption of the first major anti-Jewish law. The twin issues of revisionism and the Jewish question came to dominate Hungary's domestic and foreign policies. The alignment of Hungary with the Reich paid its first dividend shortly after the Western democracies surrendered in Munich (September 29, 1938) to the Nazis' demands for solving the crisis over the Sudetenland, Czechoslovakia. Under the terms of the so-called First Vienna Award of November 2, 1938, brokered by Joachim von Ribbentrop and Galeazzo Ciano, the foreign ministers of Germany and Italy, Hungary acquired from Czechoslovakia the Upper Province (Felvidék)—a strip of land in Southern Slovakia and western Carpatho-Ruthenia. Following the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia in March 1939, Hungary also acquired Carpatho-Ruthenia (*Kárpátalja*).

Hungary's revisionist ambitions were indirectly enhanced by the German-Soviet Non-aggression Pact of September 1939, under whose terms the USSR was given a free hand in several parts of Eastern Europe, including Romania. The USSR refrained from acting against Romania as long as France, the country's foremost supporter, was still considered Europe's most formidable military power. But on June 26, 1940, three days after a defeated France was compelled to sign an armistice agreement, the Soviet government issued an ultimatum: it demanded that Romania give up Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina within a few days.

The annexation of these territories had been preceded by an orchestrated Soviet press campaign against Romania. The campaign caught the attention of Hungarian governmental officials, who began working out plans for the possible recovery of Transylvania in synchronization with the expected Soviet occupation of the eastern provinces of Romania. The Hungarian state and governmental leaders contacted Hitler early in July 1940 to press their case concerning Transylvania. Since the Führer needed both Hungary and Romania as allies in the planned invasion of the Soviet Union, the leaders of the two countries were advised to settle their differences by negotiation.

The Arbitration Award of August 30, 1940

The Hungarian-Romanian negotiations that began on August 16, 1940 in Turnu Severin, Romania, yielded no results and, after ten days of futile wrangling, both parties

appealed to the Germans for help. The deadlock was broken shortly after István Csáky and Mihail Manoilescu, the foreign ministers of Hungary and Romania respectively, were invited to Vienna “for some friendly advice” by their Italian and German counterparts. The arbitration award worked out by Ciano and Ribbentrop and their staffs was signed on August 30. Under the terms of this agreement—usually referred to as the Second Vienna Award—Hungary received an area of 43,591 square kilometers with a population of approximately 2.5 million. The area included the northern half of Transylvania, encompassing Sălaj, Bistrița-Năsăud, Ciuc, and Someș counties, most of Bihor, most of Trei Scaune and Mureș-Turda counties, and parts of Cluj County.¹ The territorial concessions also enabled Hungary to reestablish Maramureș, Satu Mare, and Ugocsa counties within their pre-World War I boundaries. The annexation of Northern Transylvania was completed by September 13, and the territory was formally incorporated into Hungary under a law passed by the Hungarian Parliament on October 2, 1940.

The Jews of Transylvania

The national-ethnic composition of Transylvania varied in the course of the three decades preceding the partition as reflected in the following table relating to Northern Transylvania:

Population of Ceded Portion of Transylvania

Census of 1910 (Hungarian by mother-tongue)		Census of 1930 (Romanian, by nationality)		Census of 1941 (Hungarian)	
Magyar	1 125 732	Magyar	911 550	Magyar	1 347 012
Romanian	926 268	Romanian	1 176 433	Romanian	1 066 353
German	} 90 195	German	68 694	German	47 501
Yiddish		Jews	138 885	Yiddish	45 593
Ruthene	16 284	Others	99 585	Ruthene	20 609
Slovak	12 807			Slovak	20 908
Others	22 968			Romany	24 729
				Others	4 586
Total	2 194 254	Total	2 395 147	Total	2 577 291

Source: C. A. Macartney, *October Fifteenth. A History of Modern Hungary, 1929-1945* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1957), vol. 1, p. 423.

¹ The county and district names and boundaries referred to in this study are those of Hungary of 1940-1944.

The census figures used in this table are dubious. Both the Hungarian and the Romanian census authorities appear to have juggled the figures relating to the ethnic and national minorities in order to advance their particular national interests with reference to their respective claims to the region. This was particularly true of the statistical treatment of the Jewish minority.

Before the partition, the total Jewish population of Transylvania was about 200,000. Of these, 164,052 lived in the territories ceded to Hungary.

The historical and cultural heritage that tied Transylvanian Jews to Hungary and the socioeconomic and political realities that bound them to Romania were the source of many conflicts during the interwar period. It is one of the ironies and tragedies of history that after the division of Transylvania in 1940 the Jews fared far worse in the part allotted to Hungary—the country with which they maintained so many cultural and emotional ties—than in the one left with Romania—the state identified with many antisemitic excesses in the course of its history.

The Jews of Transylvania were victims of the historical milieu in which they lived. Romanians resented them because of their proclivity to Hungarian culture and by implication Hungarian revisionism and irredentism. Hungarians, especially Right radicals, accused them of being “renegades” in the service of the Left.

The socioeconomic structure of Transylvanian Jewry was similar to that of the Jews in the neighboring provinces. Many were engaged in business or trade, and their percentage in the professions and white-collar fields outside of government was relatively high. There were, however, only a handful of Jews associated with mining and heavy industry. While no data on income distribution are available, the many studies on Transylvania reveal that there was a considerable proportion of Jews who could barely make a living; many depended for their survival on the generosity of the community. Most of these impoverished Jews lived in the densely populated Jewish centers of the northwest.

The original reaction of many of the North Transylvanian Jews to the historical changes in the region was to a large extent determined by their experiences during the previous three years, when the various Romanian governments instituted a series of antisemitic measures, and the memories they still nurtured about their lives in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The illusions cherished by many among these Jews that the Hungarian annexation of the area would denote a return to the “Golden Era” soon gave way to disbelief and despair. The newly established Hungarian authorities lost no time in implementing the anti-Jewish laws and policies that had already been in effect in Hungary proper. The Jewish

newspapers were suppressed, as were all nondenominational clubs and associations. The general democratic and moderate press in the region fared no better: most of the local press organs and periodicals were transformed into mouthpieces of the chauvinistic Right.

The discriminatory measures affected the Jews particularly harshly in their economic and educational pursuits. While those in business and the professions managed to make ends meet by circumventing the laws or taking advantage of loopholes, civil servants, with a few exceptions, were dismissed, and students in secondary and higher education found themselves almost totally excluded from the state educational system.²

The heavy hand of the Hungarian military authorities was felt particularly in the four counties of the Szekely area, which the Hungarians considered “sacred.” The Jews of the area were subjected to a review of their citizenship status; as a result many of them found themselves in custody because of their “doubtful” citizenship. Particularly hard hit was the Jewish community of Miercurea-Ciuc, where dozens of families were rounded up and expelled.³

But harsh as these many anti-Jewish measures were they were overshadowed by the forced labor service system Hungary introduced in 1939. During the first two years of its operation, the Jewish recruits of military age, though subjected to many discriminatory measures, fared relatively well. After Hungary’s involvement in the war against Yugoslavia in April 1941, however, the system acquired a punitive character. The Jewish labor servicemen were compelled to serve in their own civilian clothes: they were supplied with an insignia-free military cap and instead of arms they were equipped with shovels and pickaxes. For identification the Jews were required to wear a yellow armband; the converts and the Christians identified as Jews under the racial laws had to wear a white one. Shortly after Hungary joined the Third Reich in the war against the Soviet Union (June 27, 1941), the labor service system was also used as a means to “solve” the Jewish question. Many of the Jews recruited for service were called up on an individual basis rather than by age group. By this practice the military-governmental authorities paid special attention to calling up the rich, the prominent professionals, the leading industrialists and businessmen, the well-known Zionist and community leaders, and above all those who had been denounced by the local Christians as “objectionable” elements. Many among these Jewish recruits were totally unfit

² For a review of the legislative acts enacted against the Jews, consult *The Politics of Genocide. The Holocaust in Hungary*, 2d ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), pp. 125-130, 151-160. (Referred to hereafter as Braham, *Politics*.)

³For some details, see Tamás Majsai, “The Deportation of Jews from Csikszereda and Margit Slachta’s intervention on Their Behalf” in *Studies on the Holocaust in Hungary*, ed. Randolph L. Braham (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), pp. 113-163.

for labor or any other service, and eventually perished in the Ukraine, Serbia, and elsewhere. No data are available on the Northern Transylvanian Jewish casualties of the labor service system.⁴

The Jewish community of Northern Transylvania also suffered in the wake of the campaign the Hungarian authorities conducted against “alien” Jews in the summer of 1941. Especially hard hit were many of the communities in Maramureş and Satu Mare counties, where an indeterminate number of Jews were rounded up as “aliens.” They were among the 16,000 to 18,000 Jews who were deported from all over Hungary to near Kamenets-Podolsk, where most of them were murdered in late August 1941.

Despite the many casualties and discriminatory measures, however, the bulk of the Jews of Northern Transylvania, like those of Hungary as a whole, lived in relative physical safety, convinced that they would continue to enjoy the protection of the conservative-aristocratic government. This conviction was shattered almost immediately after the German occupation of Hungary on March 19, 1944.

The Final Solution

The occupation of Hungary was to a large extent based on German military considerations. Hitler was resolved to prevent Hungary from extricating itself from the Axis Alliance—a goal the Hungarians pursued after the crushing defeat of the Hungarian Second Army at Voronezh in January 1943 and especially after Italy’s successful extrication from the alliance in the summer of that year. The occupation itself was preceded by a meeting between Hitler and Horthy at Schloss Klesheim on March 18 during which the Hungarian head of state, confronted with a *fait accompli*, not only yielded to the Führer’s ultimatum but also consented to the delivery of a few hundred thousand “Jewish workers for employment in German industrial and agricultural enterprises.” It was largely this agreement that the German and Hungarian officials exploited as a “legal framework” for the implementation of the Final Solution in Hungary.⁵

Because of the worsening military situation—the Red Army was already approaching the borders of Romania—the Nazis and their Hungarian accomplices decided to implement the “solution” of the Jewish question in Hungary at lightning speed. On the German side, the SS commando that was entrusted with this mission was under the leadership of SS-

⁴ For details on the Hungarian labor service system, see Braham, *Politics*, chapter 10.

⁵ For details on the background and consequences of the Horthy-Hitler meeting at Schloss Klesheim, see *ibid.*, chapter 11.

Obersturmbannführer Adolf Eichmann. Although it was rather small—the commando consisted of only around 100 SS-men—it was successful in carrying out its mission primarily because it had received the wholehearted support of the newly established Hungarian government.

The government of Döme Sztójay, which Horthy constitutionally appointed on March 22, 1944, placed the instruments of state power—the gendarmerie, police, and civil service—at the disposal of the Nazis. In addition, it issued a series of anti-Jewish decrees, which were calculated to bring about the isolation, marking, expropriation, and ghettoization of the Jews prior to their mass deportation. For logistical reasons, the drive against the Jews was based on a territorial basis determined by the ten gendarmerie districts into which the country was divided. These districts, in turn, were divided into six anti-Jewish operational zones. Northern Transylvania encompassed Gendarmerie Districts IX and X, and constituted Operational Zone II.

The details of the anti-Jewish drive as well as some aspects of the deportation process were worked out on April 4 at a joint German-Hungarian meeting held in the Ministry of the Interior under the chairmanship of László Baký, an undersecretary of state in the Ministry of the Interior. Among the participants was Lt. Col. László Ferenczy, the gendarmerie officer in charge of the ghettoization and deportation of the Jews.

The draft document relating to the roundup, ghettoization, concentration, and deportation of the Jews--the basis of the April 4 discussion--was prepared by László Endre, another undersecretary of state in the Ministry of the Interior. It was issued secretly as Decree no. 6163/1944.res. on April 7 over the signature of Baký. This document, addressed to the representatives of the local organs of state power, spelled out the procedures to be followed in the campaign to bring about the Final Solution of the Jewish question in Hungary.⁶ Supplementary specific details about the measures to be taken against the Jews were spelled out in several highly confidential directives, emphasizing that the Jews destined for deportation were to be rounded up without regard to sex, age or illness.⁷ The Minister of the Interior issued directives for the implementation of the decree three days *before* the top-secret decree was actually sent out. In a secret order, the Minister instructed all the subordinate mayoral, police, and gendarmerie organs to bring about the registration of the Jews by the appropriate local Jewish institutions.⁸ These lists, containing all family members, exact

⁶ For the English version of the decree, see *ibid.*, pp. 573-75.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 575-78.

⁸ Order No. 6136/1944.VII.res. dated April 4, 1944. *Ibid.*, pp. 578-79.

addresses, and the mother's name of all those listed, were to be prepared in four copies, with one copy to be handed over to the local police authorities, one to the appropriate gendarmerie command, and a third to be forwarded to the Ministry of the Interior.⁹ To make sure that no Jews would escape the net, the Minister of Supply also issued a registration order, allegedly to regulate the allocation of food for the Jews.

Unaware of the sinister implications of these lists as well as of the wearing of the Yellow Star of David—the two interrelated measures designed to facilitate their isolation and ghettoization—the Jewish masses of Northern Transylvania, like their co-religionists elsewhere in the country, complied with the measures taken by their local Jewish communal leaders. In contrast to the national leaders of Hungarian Jewry, who were fully informed, the local community leaders were as much in the dark about the scope of these measures as the masses they led.¹⁰ In the smaller Jewish communities, especially in the villages, it was usually the community secretary or registrar who prepared the lists; in larger towns, the preparation of the lists was entrusted to young men not yet mobilized in the military labor service system. They usually acted in pairs, conscientiously canvassing the entire community, eager not to leave out a single street or building so as not to “deprive people of their share of provisions.”

The Nazis and their Hungarian accomplices set up their headquarters for the anti-Jewish drive in Munkács (now Mukachevo, Ukraine). At a gathering of the top officials in charge of the Final Solution on April 7, Endre spelled out the instructions for the implementation of the anti-Jewish drive in accordance with the provisions of Decree 6163/1944. He stipulated, among other things, that the Jews were to be concentrated in empty warehouses, abandoned or non-operational factories, brickyards, Jewish community establishments, Jewish schools and offices, and synagogues.

The Military Operational Zones

Since the anti-Jewish measures could not be camouflaged and the mass evacuation of the Jews was bound to create dislocations in the economic life of the affected communities, the Nazis and their Hungarian accomplices felt compelled to provide a military rationale for the operations. They assumed, it turned out correctly, that the local population, including some of the Jews, would understand the necessity for the removal of the Jews from the approaching frontlines “in order to protect Axis interests from the machinations of Judeo-

⁹ For a sample of a mayoral order addressed to a local Jewish community see *ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, chapter 29.

Bolsheviks.” On April 12, the Council of Ministers, *ex post facto*, declared Carpatho-Ruthenia and Northern Transylvania—the first two areas slated for deJewification—to have become military operational zones as of April 1.¹¹ The government appointed Béla Ricsóy-Uhlarik to serve as Government Commissioner for the military operational zone in Northern Transylvania.

The Ghettoization and Concentration Master Plan

The master plan worked out by the German and Hungarian anti-Jewish experts called for the ghettoization and concentration of the Jews to be effected in a number of distinct phases:

- Jews in the rural communities and the smaller towns were to be rounded up and temporarily transferred to synagogues and/or community buildings.
- Following the first round of investigation in pursuit of valuables at these “local ghettos,” the Jews rounded up in the rural communities and smaller towns were to be transferred to the ghettos of the larger cities in their vicinity, usually the county seat.
- In the larger towns and cities Jews were to be rounded up and transferred to a specially designated area that would serve as a ghetto—totally isolated from the other parts of the city. In some cities, the ghetto was to be established in the Jewish quarter; in others, in abandoned or non-functional factories, warehouses, brickyards, or under the open sky.
- Jews were to be concentrated in centers with adequate rail facilities to make possible swift entrainment and deportation.

During each phase, the Jews were to be subjected to special searches by teams composed of gendarmerie and police officials, assisted by local *Nyilas* and other accomplices, to compel them to surrender their valuables. The plans for the implementation of the ghettoization and deportation operations called for the launching of six territorially defined “mopping-up operations.” For this purpose, the country was divided into six operational zones, with each zone encompassing one or two gendarmerie districts.¹² Northern

¹¹ Decree no. 1.440/1944. M.E.

¹² For details on the gendarmerie districts, see Braham, *Politics*, chapter 13.

Transylvania was identified as Zone II, encompassing Gendarmerie District IX, headquartered in Cluj, and Gendarmerie District X, headquartered in Tîrgu-Mureş.

The order of priority for the deportation of the Jews was established with an eye on a series of military, political, and psychological factors. Time was of the essence because of the fast approach of the Red Army. Politically it was more expedient to start in the eastern and northeastern parts of Hungary because the central and local Hungarian authorities and the local population had less regard for the “Galician,” Eastern,” “alien,” and Yiddish-oriented masses than for the assimilated Jews. Their round-up for “labor” in Germany was accepted in many Hungarian rightist circles as doubly welcome: Hungary would get rid of its “alien” elements and would at the same time make a contribution to the joint war effort, thereby hastening the termination of the German occupation and the reestablishment of full sovereignty.

The Ghettoization Decree

Like the decision identifying Carpatho-Ruthenia and Northern Transylvania as military operational zones, the decree stipulating the establishment of ghettos was adopted on an *ex post facto* basis. The government decree, issued on April 26, went into effect on April 28.¹³ Andor Jaross, the minister of the interior, outlined the rationale for, and the alleged objectives of, the decree at the Council of Ministers meeting of April 26. He claimed that in view of their better economic status the Jews living in the cities had proportionally much better housing than non-Jews and therefore it was possible to “create a healthier situation” by rearranging the whole housing situation. Jews were to be restricted to smaller apartments and several families could be ordered to move in together. National security, he further argued, required that Jews be removed from the villages and the smaller towns into larger cities, where the chief local officials—the mayors or the police chiefs—would set aside a special section or district for them.¹⁴ The crucial provisions of the decree relating to the concentration of the Jews were included in Articles 8 and 9. The former provided that Jews could no longer live in communities with a population of under 10,000, while the latter stipulated that the mayors of the larger towns and cities could determine the sections, streets,

¹³ Decree no. 1.610/1944. M.E. The objective of the decree, which was issued ten days *after* the Jews of Carpatho-Ruthenia were being rounded up, was camouflaged under the title “Concerning the Regulation of Certain Questions Relating to the Jews’ Apartments and Living Places.”

¹⁴ For the minutes of the Council of Ministers meeting on this issue, see *Vádirat a náciizmus ellen* (Indictment of Nazism). Ilona Benoschofsky and Elek Karsai, eds. (Budapest: A Magyar Izraeliták Országos Képviselete, 1958-1967), vol. 1: pp. 241-44.

and buildings in which Jews were to be permitted to live. This legal euphemism in fact empowered the local authorities to establish ghettos. The location of, and the conditions within the ghettos consequently depended on the attitudes of the mayors and their aides.

The Ghettoization Conferences

The details relating to the ghettoization of the Jews in Northern Transylvania were discussed and finalized at two conferences chaired by Endre. These were attended by the top Hungarian officials in charge of the final solution and representatives of the various counties and municipalities, including the county prefects and/or deputy prefects, mayors, and the police and gendarmerie commanders of the affected counties. The first conference was held in Satu Mare on April 6, 1944, and was devoted to the deJewification operations in the counties of Gendarmerie District IX, namely Bistrița-Năsăud, Bihor, Cluj, Satu Mare, Sălaj, and Someș. The second was held two days later in Târgu-Mureș, and was devoted to the concentration of the Jews in the so-called Szekely Land, the counties of Gendarmerie District X: Ciuc, Trei Scaune, Mureș-Turda, and Odorheiu.

Endre reviewed the procedures to be followed in the concentration of the Jews as detailed in Decree no. 6163/1944, and Lajos Meggyesi, one of Endre's closest associates, provided additional refinements relating to the confiscation of their wealth. The latter was particularly anxious to secure the Jews' money, gold, silver, jewelry, typewriters, cameras, watches, rugs, furs, paintings, and other valuables. Lt. Col. László Ferenczy revealed the preliminary steps already taken toward the ghettoization of the Jews, identifying the cities of Dej, Cluj, Baia Mare, Gherla, Oradea, Satu Mare, and Șimleu Silvaniei as the planned major concentration centers in Gendarmerie District IX. In the course of the anti-Jewish operations, Bistrița was added as an additional center, while Gherla was used only as a temporary assembly point, with those assembled there being transferred to the ghetto of Cluj.

In Gendarmerie District X, the cities of Reghin, Sfântu Gheorghe, and Târgu Mureș were selected as the major concentration centers. The last major item on the conferees' agenda for this district meeting was the composition of the various ghettoization commissions, i.e., of the officers and officials in charge of the anti-Jewish operations, and the specification of the geographic areas from which the Jews would be transferred to the major ghetto centers. Since most of these ghettos were in the county seats, they were designated as the assembly and entrainment centers for the Jews in the various counties.

The Ghettoization Drive

In accordance with the decree and the oral instructions communicated at the two conferences, the chief executive for all the measures relating to the ghettoization of the Jews was the principal administrator of the locality or area. Under Hungarian law then in effect, this meant the mayor for cities, towns, and municipalities, and the deputy prefect of the county for rural areas. The organs of the police and gendarmerie as well as the auxiliary civil service organs of the cities, including the public notary and health units, were to be directly involved in the roundup and transfer of the Jews into ghettos.

The mayors, acting in cooperation with the subordinated agency heads, were empowered not only to direct and supervise the ghettoization operations but also to determine the location of the ghettos and to screen the Jews applying for exemption. They were also responsible for seeing to the maintenance of essential services in the ghettos.

A few days before the scheduled May 3 start of the ghettoization drive in Northern Transylvania, the special commissions for the various cities and towns held meetings to determine the location of the ghettos and settle the logistics relating to the roundup of the Jews. The commissions were normally composed of the mayors, deputy prefects, and heads of the local gendarmerie and police units. While nearly the same procedure was followed almost everywhere, the severity with which the ghettoization was carried out and the location of and the conditions within the ghetto depended upon the attitude of the particular mayors and their subordinates. Thus in cities such as Oradea and Satu Mare, the ghettos were set up in the poorer, mostly Jewish-inhabited sections; in others, such as Bistrița, Cluj, Reghin, Șimleu Silvaniei, and Târgu Mureș, the ghettos were set up in brickyards. The ghetto of Dej was situated in the Bungur, a forest, where some of the Jews were put up in makeshift barracks and the others under the open sky.

Late on May 2, on the eve of the ghettoization, the mayors issued special instructions to the Jews and had them posted in all areas under their jurisdiction. The text followed the directives of Decree no. 6163/1944, though it varied in nuances from city to city.¹⁵

The ghettoization of the close to 160,000 Jews of Northern Transylvania began on May 3 at 5:00 a.m. The roundup of the Jews was carried out under the provisions of Decree no. 6163/1944 as amplified by the oral instructions given by Endre and his associates at the

¹⁵ For a sample, see the text of the announcement issued by Mayor László Gyapay in Oradea. Braham, *Politics*, p. 629.

two conferences on ghettoization plans in the region. The Jews were rounded up by squads that were usually set up by the local mayor's office. These were usually composed of civil servants, usually including local primary and high school teachers, gendarmes, and policemen, as well as *Nyilas* volunteers. The units were organized by the mayoral commissions and operated under their jurisdiction.

The ghettoization drive was directed by a field de-jewification unit headquartered in Cluj. This unit was headed by Ferenczy and operated under the guidance of several representatives of the *Eichmann-Sonderkommando*. Contact between the de-jewification field offices in Northern Transylvania and the central command in Budapest was provided by two special gendarmerie courier cars that traveled daily in opposite directions, meeting in Oradea—the midpoint between the capital and Cluj. Immediate operational command over the ghettoization process in Northern Transylvania was exercised by Gendarmerie Col. Tibor Paksy-Kiss, who delegated special powers in Oradea to Lt. Col. Jenő Péterffy, his personal friend and ideological colleague.

The Jews of the rural communities were first assembled in the local synagogues and/or Jewish community buildings. In some cities, the Jews were concentrated at smaller collection points prior to their transfer to the main ghetto. At each stage they were subjected to an expropriation process that assumed an increasingly barbaric character.

The ghettoization of the Jews of Northern Transylvania, as in the other parts of Hungary, was carried out smoothly, without known incidents of resistance on the part of either Jews or Christians. The Jewish masses, unaware of the realities of the Final Solution program, went to the ghettos resigned to a disagreeable but presumably non-lethal fate. Some of them rationalized their “isolation” as a logical step before their territory became a battle zone. Others believed the rumors spread by gendarmerie and police officials as well as some Jewish leaders that they were merely being resettled at Kenyérmező in Transdanubia, where they would be doing agricultural work until the end of the war. Still others sustained the hope that the Red Army was not very far and that their concentration would be relatively short-lived.

The Christians, even those friendly to the Jews, were mostly passive. Many cooperated with the authorities on ideological grounds or in the expectation of quick material rewards in the form of properties confiscated from the Jews. The smoothness with which the anti-Jewish campaign was carried out in Northern Transylvania, as elsewhere, also can be attributed in part to the absence of a meaningful resistance movement, let alone general opposition to the persecution of the Jews. Neutrality and passivity were the characteristic attitudes of the heads of the Christian churches in Northern Transylvania, as reflected in the behavior of János

Vásárhelyi, the Calvinist bishop, and Miklós Józán, the Unitarian bishop. The exemplary exception was Aron Márton, the Catholic bishop of Transylvania, whose official residence was in Alba-Iulia, in the Romanian part of Transylvania.¹⁶

The ghettoization drive in Northern Transylvania was generally completed within one week. During the first day of the campaign close to 8,000 Jews were rounded up. By noon of May 5, their number increased to 16,144, by May 6 to 72,382, and by May 10 to 98,000.¹⁷ The procedures for rounding up, interrogating, and expropriating property of the Jews, as well as the organization and administration of the ghetto, were basically the same in every county in Northern Transylvania. The Jews were rounded up at great speed, given only a few minutes to pack, and driven into the ghettos on foot. The internal administration of each ghetto was entrusted to a Jewish Council, usually consisting of the traditional leaders of the local Jewish community.¹⁸ The living conditions in the North Transylvanian ghettos were similar to those that prevailed elsewhere (see above).

Conditions in the Ghettos

The conditions under which the Jews of Northern Transylvania lived in the ghettos prior to their deportation were fairly typical of conditions in all the ghettos of Hungary. In the assembly centers—the county ghettos—the feeding of all Jews, including those transferred from neighboring communities, became the responsibility of the local Jewish Councils. The main and frequently only meal consisted primarily of a little potato soup. Even with these meager rations, though, the feeding problem became acute after the first few days, when the supplies the rural Jews had brought along were used up. The living conditions in the ghettos were extremely harsh, and often brutally inhumane. The terrible overcrowding in the apartments within the ghettos, with totally inadequate cooking, bathing, and sanitary facilities, created intolerable hardships as well as tension among the inhabitants. But deplorable as conditions were in the city ghettos, they could not compare to the cruel conditions that prevailed in the brickyards and the woods, where many of the Jews were kept for several weeks under the open skies. Inadequate nutrition, lack of sanitary facilities,

¹⁶ For details on the resistance movements and on the attitudes and reactions of the Christian church leaders, see *ibid.*, chapter 10.

¹⁷ These figures do not include the Jews of Maramureş County and of some districts in the neighboring counties that were geographically parts of Northern Transylvania but administratively parts of Gendarmerie District VIII. These Jews fell victim to the drive conducted in Carpatho-Ruthenia and northeastern Hungary. See *ibid.*, chapter 17.

¹⁸ For details on the composition of the Jewish Councils and on the German and Hungarian elements involved in the anti-Jewish drive in Northern Transylvania, see *ibid.*, pp. 626-52.

absence of bathing opportunities, as well as inclement weather led to serious health problems in many places. The water supply for the many thousands of ghetto inhabitants usually consisted of a limited number of faucets, several of which were often out of order for days on end. Ditches dug by the Jews themselves were used as latrines. Minor illnesses and ordinary colds, of course, were practically ubiquitous. Many people also succumbed to serious diseases including dysentery, typhoid, and pneumonia.

The poor health situation was compounded by the generally barbaric behavior of the gendarmes and police officers guarding the ghettos. In each ghetto the authorities set aside a separate building to serve as a “mint”—the place where sadistic gendarmes and detectives would torture Jews into confessing where they hid their valuables. Their technique was basically the same everywhere. Husbands were often tortured in full view of their wives and children; often wives were beaten in front of their husbands or children tortured in front of their parents. The devices used were cruel and unusually barbaric. The victims were beaten on the soles of their feet with canes or rubber truncheons; they were slapped in the face, and kicked until they lost consciousness. Males were often beaten on the testicles; females, sometimes even young girls, were searched vaginally by collaborating female volunteers and midwives who cared little about cleanliness, often in full view of the male interrogators. Some particularly sadistic investigators used electrical devices to compel the victims into confession. They would put one end of such a device in the mouth and the other in the vagina or attached to the testicles of the victims. These brutal tortures drove many of the victims to insanity or suicide.¹⁹

Though in some communities there were local officials who endeavored to act as humanely as possible under those extraordinary conditions, their example was the exception rather than the rule.

¹⁹ For testimonies presented by the prosecution in the 1946 trial of officials involved in the implementation of the Final Solution in Northern Transylvania, see Randolph L. Braham, *Genocide and Retribution. The Holocaust in Hungarian-Ruled Northern Transylvania*. (Boston: Kluwer-Nijhoff, 1983). (Cited hereafter as Braham, *Genocide*.) The basic source of this work was the judgment (May 31, 1946) in the 1946 trial that took place in Cluj, Ministerul Afacerilor Interne, *Dos. Nr. 40029. Ancheta Abraham Iosif si altii* (Dossier no. 40029. The Case of Josif Abraham and Others). vol. 1, part II, pp. 891-1068. (See also section Crime and Punishment.). On the anti-Jewish campaign in Northern Transylvania in general, see also United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, DC, Archives (Cited hereafter as USHMM), RG 25.004M, roll 42, file 5, and roll 94, file 23.

The Major Ghetto Centers

Cluj. The ghetto of Cluj was one of the largest in Northern Transylvania. As elsewhere in the region, the ghettoization, which began on May 3, 1944, was preceded by an announcement posted all over the city the day before. Issued under the signature of Lajos Hollóssy-Kuthy, the deputy police chief, the text of the announcement was also published in the local press on May 3. The Jews of Cluj and of the communities in Cluj County were concentrated in a ghetto established in the Iris Brickyard, in the northern part of the city. The specifics of the concentration operation were worked out at a meeting held on May 2 under the leadership of László Vásárhelyi, the mayor, László Urbán, the police chief, and Gendarmerie Col. Paksy-Kiss. The meeting, attended by approximately 150 officials of the municipality who were assigned to the roundup operations, was devoted to the details of the ghettoization process as outlined in the decree and during the conference with Endre held at Satu Mare on April 26.

The Hungarian officials of Cluj received expert guidance in the anti-Jewish drive from *SS-Hauptsturmführer* Strohschneider, the local commander of the German security services. The ghettoization was carried out at a rapid pace. By May 10 the ghetto population reached 12,000. At its peak just before the deportation, by then including the Jews transferred from the ghetto of Gherla, it was close to 18,000.

In addition to the officers noted above, the following officials were also heavily involved in the anti-Jewish drive: József Forgács, the secretary general of Cluj County representing the deputy prefect; Lajos Hollóssy-Kuthy, deputy police chief; Géza Papp, a high-ranking police official; and Kázmér Taar, a top official in the mayor's office. Overall command of the ghettoization process in Cluj County, except Cluj, was exercised by Ferenc Szász, the deputy prefect of Cluj County, and by József Székely, the mayor of Huedin. The Jews of the various towns and villages in the county were first concentrated in their localities, usually in the synagogue or a related Jewish institution. After a short while and a first round of expropriations, they were transferred to the ghetto in Cluj.

Among the Jews transferred to the ghetto of Cluj were those from the many communities in the districts of Borșa, Cluj, Hida, Huedin, and Nadasdia.²⁰ Next to the Jewish community of Cluj, by far the largest communities brought into the Iris Brickyard were those of Huedin and Gherla. The Jews of Huedin were rounded up under the command and supervision of Székely, Pál Boldizsár, the city's supply official; József Orosz, the police

²⁰ Among these were the Jews of Borșa, Ciucea, Gilău, Hida and Panticeu.

chief; and police officers and detectives Ferenc Menyhért, András Szentkúti, András Lakatos, and Sándor Ojtózi.

The brickyard ghetto of Gherla included close to 1,600 Jews. Of these, nearly 400 were from the town itself; the others were brought in from the neighboring communities in the Gherla district.²¹ The transfer of these Jews into the Cluj ghetto was carried out under the command of Lajos Tamási, the mayor of Gherla, and Ernő Berecki and András Iványi, the chief police officers of the town.

The ghetto of Cluj was under the direct command of Urbán. The internal administration of the ghetto was entrusted to a Jewish Council consisting of the traditional leaders of the local Jewish community. It was headed by József Fischer, the head of the city's Neolog community, and included Rabbi Akiba Glasner, József Fenichel, Gyula Klein, Ernő Marton, editor-in-chief of the *Új Kelet* (New East), Zsigmond Léb, and Rabbi Mózes Weinberger (later Carmilly-Weinberger). Its secretary general was József Moskovits, and Deszö Hermann the secretary.

Fischer reputedly was one of the few provincial Jewish leaders who were fully informed about the realities of the Nazis' Final Solution program. He and his family were among the 388 Jews who were removed from the ghetto of Cluj and taken to Budapest—and eventually to freedom—on June 10, 1944, as part of Kasztner's controversial deal with the SS.²²

The ghetto was evacuated in six transports, with the first deportation on May 25 and the last on June 9.²³

Dej. The ghetto of Dej included most of the Jews in Someș County. Under the administrative leadership of Prefect Béla Bethlen, the county was represented at the April 26 conference with Endre in Satu Mare by János Schilling, the deputy prefect; Jenő Veress, the mayor of Dej; Lajos Tamási, the mayor of Gherla; Gyula Sárosi, the police chief of Dej; Ernő Berecki, the police chief of Gherla; and Pál Antalffy, the commander of the gendarmerie in Someș. The objectives and decisions of this conference were communicated to the chief civil service, gendarmerie, and police officers of the county at a special meeting convened and chaired by Schilling on April 30.

²¹ Among the Jews first assembled in Gherla were those of the villages of Aluniș, Băița, Beudiu, Buza, Chiochiș, Dârja, Fizeșu Gherlii, Icloda, Lacu, Livada, Lujerdiu, Manic, Mateiaș, Nasal, Pădureni, Pui, Sic, Sânnicoară și Sânmartin.

²² For details, see Braham, *Politics*, chapter 29.

²³ For further details, see Braham, *Genocide*, pp. 24-27, 123-141.

As elsewhere, the ghettoization drive began on May 3. The roundup of the Jews in the county was carried out under the command of Antalfy. The ghetto of Dej was among the most miserable in Northern Transylvania. At the insistence of the virulently antisemitic local city officials, it was set up in a forest—the so-called Bungur—situated about two miles from the city. At its peak, the ghetto included around 7,800 Jews, including close to 3,700 from the town itself. The others were brought in from the rural communities in Someș County, many of whom were first assembled in the seats of the districts of Beclean, Chiochiș, Dej, Gherla, Ileanda, and Lăpuș.²⁴ The luckier among the ghetto dwellers lived in makeshift barracks; the others found shelter in homemade tents or lived under the open sky. Before their transfer to the Bungur, the Jews of Dej were concentrated into three centers within the city, where they were subjected to body searches for valuables.

The ghetto, surrounded by barbed wire, was guarded by the local police supplemented by a special unit of 40 gendarmes assigned from Zalău. Supreme command over the ghetto was in the hands of Takáts, a “government commissioner.” The internal administration of the ghetto was entrusted to a Jewish Council consisting of the trusted leaders of the local community. The Council included Lázár Albert (chairman), Ferenc Ordentlich, Samu Weinberger, Manó Weinberger, and Andor Agai. Dr. Oszkar Engelberg served as the ghetto’s chief physician and Zoltán Singer as its economic representative in charge of supplies.

Sanitary conditions within the ghetto were miserable, as were the essential services and supplies. This was largely due to the malevolence of Veress, the mayor of Dej, and Dr. Zsigmond Lehnár, its chief health officer. The investigative teams for the search for valuables were as cruel in Dej as they were everywhere else. Among those involved in such searches were József Fekete, József Gecse, Maria Fekete, Jenő Takacs, József Lakadár, and police officers Albert (Béla) Garamvolgyi, János Somorlyai, János Kassay and Miklós Désaknai.

The ghetto was liquidated between May 28 and June 8 with the removal of 7,674 Jews in three transports. A few Jews managed to escape from the ghetto. Among these was Rabbi József Paneth of Nagyilonda, who together with nine members of his family was eventually able to get to safety in Romania.²⁵

²⁴ Among these were the small Jewish communities of Beclean, Beudiu, Bobâlna, Icloda, Ileanda, Lăpuș, Mica, Reteag, Șintereag, Urișor, and Uriu. Those assembled in Gherla were eventually transferred to the ghetto of Cluj.

²⁵ See Braham, *Genocide*, pp. 27-29, 178-187. See also USHMM, RG 25.004M, roll 52, file 2044; roll 72, file 40027; rolls 89-90, file 40029.b.

Șimleu Silvaniei. The ghettoization of the Jews of Sălaj County was carried out under the command and supervision of the officials who had participated at the Satu Mare Conference of April 26: András Gazda, deputy county prefect; János Sréter, mayor of Zalău; József Udvari, mayor of Șimleu Silvaniei; Lt. Col. György Mariska, commander of the county's gendarmerie unit; Ferenc Elekes, police chief of Zalău; and István Pethes, police chief of Șimleu Silvaniei. Baron János Jósika, the prefect of Sălaj County, resigned immediately when he was informed by Gazda about the decisions taken at the April 26 conference. He was one of the few Hungarian officials who dared to take a public stand against the anti-Jewish actions, deeming them both immoral and illegal. His successor, László Szlávi, an appointee of the Sztójay government, had no such scruples and cooperated fully in the implementation of the anti-Jewish measures.

Soon after their return from Satu Mare, the conferees met at the Prefect's office with Béla Sámi, the chief county clerk; Drs. Suchi and Ferenc Molnár, the chief health officials of Sălaj County and Șimleu Silvaniei, respectively; László Krasznai, the head of Șimleu District; and István Kemeceș, the technical services department of Șimleu Silvaniei, in order to select a site for the ghetto.

The roundup of the Jews in Șimleu Silvaniei was carried out under the immediate command of István Pethes; in Zalău under the leadership of Ferenc Elekes; and in the other parts of the county under the direction of Gazda and the immediate command of Lt. Col. György Mariska. Among the sizable Jewish communities affected were those of Tășnad and Crasna.

The Jews of Sălaj County were concentrated in the Klein Brickyard of Cehei, in a marshy and muddy area about three miles from Șimleu Silvaniei. At its peak, the ghetto held about 8,500 Jews.²⁶ Among these were the Jews from the communities in the districts of Crasna, Cehu Silvaniei, Jibou, Șimleu Silvaniei, Supuru de Jos, Tășnad, and Zalău.²⁷ Since the brick-drying sheds were rather limited, many of the ghetto inhabitants were compelled to live under the open sky. The ghetto was guarded by a special unit of gendarmes from Budapest and operated under the command of Krasznai, one of the most cruel ghetto commanders in Hungary.

²⁶ Among these were the Jews from the towns of Crasna, Șimleu Silvaniei, Tășnad, and Zalău. On Șimleu Silvaniei, see USHMM, RG 25.004M, rolls 90, 92 and 94, file 40029. On Tășnad, roll 50, files 1106, 30 (502), and 422 (666).

²⁷ Among these were the Jews from the towns of Buciumi, Cehei, Cehu Silvaniei, Jibou, Nusfalau, Pir, Șimleu Silvaniei, Supuru de Jos, Supuru de Sus, Surduc, Tășnad, and Zalău.

As a result of tortures, poor feeding, and a totally inadequate water supply in the ghetto, the Jews of Salaj County arrived at Auschwitz in very poor condition, so that an unusually large percentage were selected for gassing immediately upon arrival. The deportations from Cehei were carried out in three transports between May 31 and June 6.²⁸

Satu Mare. Because of the relatively large concentration of Jews in Satu Mare County, the Hungarian authorities set up two ghettos in the county: one in the city of Satu Mare and the other in Baia Mare. At first Carei was also used as a concentration center for its local Jews and those in the neighboring communities. However, after a brief period, the Jews in the ghetto of Carei, which was under the leadership of a Jewish Council composed of István Antal, Jenő Pfeffermann, Ernő Deutsch, and Lajos Jakobovics, were transferred to the ghetto of Satu Mare.²⁹

The county representatives at the Satu Mare Conference of April 26 included László Csóka, the mayor of Satu Mare; Endre Boér, the deputy county prefect; Zoltán Rogozi Papp, the deputy mayor of Satu Mare; Ernő Pirkler, the city's secretary general; and representatives of the local police and gendarmerie.

The commissions for the apprehension of the Jews of Satu Mare and its environs were established at a meeting held shortly after the conference. It was chaired by Csóka and attended by representatives of the police and gendarmerie, including Károly Csegezi, Béla Sárközi, and Jenő Nagy of the police and N. Deményi of the gendarmerie. Members of the financial and educational boards of the city also participated in the work of the commissions. The ghettoization in Satu Mare was carried out with the cooperation of Csóka; in the rest of the county the Jews were rounded up under the administrative command of Boér.

At its peak the ghetto of Satu Mare held approximately 18,000 Jews. They were rounded up in the following eleven districts of the county: Ardud, Baia Mare, Carei, Copalnic Mănăştur, Csenger (now in Hungary), Fehérgyarmat (now in Hungary), Mátészalka (now in Hungary), Oraşu Nou, Satu Mare, Şomcuta Mare, and Seini.³⁰ The commander of the ghetto was Béla Sárközi, the police officer in charge of the local branch of the National Central Alien Control Office (*Külföldieker Ellenőrző Országos Központi Hatóság--KEOKH*). The

²⁸ For further details, see Braham, *Genocide*, pp. 29-30, 162-178.

²⁹ For documentary sources on Carei, see USHMM, RG 25.004M, roll40, file12; roll 50, file 446(678), and roll 51, file 1130(III).

³⁰ Among the Jews concentrated in the Satu Mare ghetto were those Aleşd, Apa, Batiz, Bixad, Căraşeu, Carei, Craidorolt, Copalnic Mănăştur, Lechinţa, Livada Mică, Medieşu Aurit, Micula, Mireşu Mare, Negreşti-Oaş, Oraşu Nou, Seini, Şomcuta Mare, Trip, Vama and Viile Satu Mare. On Bixad, see USHMM, RG 25.004M, roll 51, file 852 (I). On Negreşti-Oaş, roll 49, file714 and roll 50, file 7141.

Jewish Council was headed by Zoltán Schwartz and included Samuel Rosenberg, the head of the Jewish community, Singer, Lajos Vinkler, and József Borgida, all highly respected leaders of the Jewish community of Satu Mare. The searches for valuables were carried out with the customary cruelty by Sarközi, Csegezi, and Deményi. Their effectiveness was enhanced by the presence of a special unit of fifty gendarmes from nearby Mérk.

The ghetto was liquidated through the deportation of the Jews in six transports between May 19 and June 1.³¹

Baia Mare. The ghettoization of the Jews of Baia Mare and of the various communities in the southeastern districts of Satu Mare County was based on guidelines adopted a few days after the Satu Mare Conference. The meeting of the local leaders was held at the headquarters of the Arrow Cross Party in Baia Mare, which was also attended by László Endre. The city was at first represented by Károly Tamás, the deputy mayor, but he was soon replaced by István Rosner, an assistant police chief, who proved more pliable. Among the others present were Jenő Nagy, the police chief; Sándor Vajai, the former secretary general of the mayor's office; Tibor Várhelyi, the commander of the gendarmerie unit; Gyula Gergely, the head of the Arrow Cross Party in Northern Transylvania; and József Haracsek, the president of the Baross Association (a highly antisemitic association of Christian businessmen).

The ghetto for the Jews of the city of Baia Mare was established in the vacant lots of the König Glass Factory; the Jews from the various communities in Baia Mare, Șomcuta Mare, and Copalnic Mănăștur districts were quartered in a stable and barn in Valea Borcutului about two miles from the city. The roundup of the Jews and the searches for valuables were carried out under the command of Jenő Nagy and Gyula Gergely with the involvement of *SS-Hauptsturmführer* Franz Abromeit. The ghetto of Baia Mare held approximately 3,500 Jews and that of Valea Borcutului over 2,000. Of the latter, only 200 found space in the stable and the barn; the others had to be quartered outdoors. The commander in chief of the ghetto was Tibor Várhelyi. The Jews in the ghetto of Baia Mare were subjected to the tortures and investigative methods customary in all ghettos. Among those involved in these investigations, under the leadership of Nagy and Várhelyi, were Károly Balogh and László Berentes, associates of the Phoenix Factory of Baia Mare, as well as Haracsek, Peter Czeisberger, Zoltán Osváth, and detectives József Orgoványi, Imre Vajai

³¹ For further details on the ghetto of Satu Mare, see Braham, *Genocide*, pp. 31-32, 101-113. See also USHMM, RG 25.004M, roll 51, files 854 (I) and 920 (I); roll 88, file 40029, vol. 4.

and István Bertalan. Overall responsibility for the administration of the county at the time rested with Barnabás Endrödi, who had been appointed prefect of Satu Mare County by the Sztójay government on April 25, 1944.

The 5,917 Jews in these two ghettos were deported in two transports on May 31 and June 5.³²

Bistrița. The approximately 6,000 Jews of Bistrița and the other communities in Bistrița-Năsăud County were concentrated at the Stamboli farm, located about two to three miles from the city. Close to 2,500 of the ghetto inhabitants were from Bistrița itself. The others were brought in from the communities in the districts of Lower Bistrița and Upper Bistrița, Năsăud, and Rodna.³³

The ghettoization of the city's Jews was carried out under the command of the mayor Norbert Kuales and police chief Miklós Debreczeni. In the other communities of the county the roundup was guided by László Smolenszki, the deputy prefect, and Lt. Col. Ernő Pasztai of the gendarmerie. All four had attended the April 28 conference with Endre in Târgu Mureș.

The ghetto, consisting of a number of barracks and pigsties, was inadequate from every point of view. The very poor water and food supply was in large part due to the vicious behavior of Heinrich Smolka, who was in charge. Among those who cooperated with Smolka in the persecution of the Jews was Gusztáv Órendi, a Gestapo agent in Bistrita. The local police authorities were assisted in guarding the ghetto by twenty-five gendarmes from Dumitra, who had been ordered to Bistrita by Col. Paksy-Kiss. After May 10, 1944, the prefect of the county was Kálmán Borbély.

The deportation of the 5,981 Jews in Bistrita took place on June 2 and 6, 1944.³⁴

Oradea. The largest ghetto in Hungary—except for the one in Budapest—was that of Oradea. Actually, Oradea had two ghettos: one for the city's Jews, holding approximately 27,000 people and located in the neighborhood of the large Orthodox synagogue and the adjacent Great Market; the other, for the close to 8,000 Jews brought in from the many rural communities from the following twelve districts: Aleșd, Berettyóújfalu (now Hungary),

³² For further details on Baia Mare, see *ibid.*, pp. 32-33, 113-123. See also USHMM, RG 25.004M, roll 42, file 40030; rolls 90 and 94, file 40029. On Baia Sprie, see roll 60, file 22291.

³³ Among the rural Jews transferred to the ghetto in Bistrița were those of Ilva Mare, Ilva Mică, Lechința, Năsăud, Nimigea de Jos, Prundu Bârgăului, Rodna, Romuli, and Șieu.

³⁴ For further details, see Braham, *Genocide*, pp. 33, 187-190.

Biharkeresztes (now Hungary), Cefa, Derecske (now Hungary), Marghita, Oradea, Săcueni, Sălard, Salonta Mare, Sărrét (now Hungary), and Valea lui Mihai. Many of the Jews from these communities were concentrated in and around the Mezey Lumber Yards.³⁵

The ghetto of Oradea was extremely overcrowded. The Jews of the city, who constituted about 30 percent of its population, were crammed into an area sufficient for only one-fifteenth of the city's inhabitants. The density was such that 14 to 15 Jews had to share a room. Like every other ghetto, the ghetto of Oradea suffered from a severe shortage of food; they also were the victims of the punitive measures of an especially vicious local administration. The antisemitic city government often cut off electric service and the flow of water to the ghetto. Moreover, under the command of Lt. Col. Jenő Péterffy, the gendarmes were especially sadistic in operating the local "mint," which was set up at the Dréher Breweries immediately adjacent to the ghetto. Internally, the ghettos were administered by a Jewish Council headed by Sándor Leitner, the head of the Orthodox Jewish community.

The deportation of the Jews began with the "evacuation" of those concentrated in the Mezey Lumber Yard on May 23. This was followed on May 28 with the first transport from the city itself. The last transport left Oradea on June 27.³⁶

Țara Secuilor. In Gendamerie District X, the so-called Țara Secuilor (Szekler Land), which encompassed Mureș-Turda, Ciuc, Odorheiu, and Trei Scaune counties, the Jews were placed in three major ghettos: Târgu Mureș, Reghin, and Sfântu Gheorghe. The concentration of the Jews of Țara Secuilor counties was carried out in accordance with the decision of a conference held in Târgu Mureș on April 28, 1944. It was chaired by Endre and attended by all prefects, deputy prefects, mayors of cities, heads of districts, and top police and gendarmerie officers of the area. As decided at this conference, the ghetto of Târgu Mureș held not only the local Jews but also those from the communities in Odorheiu County and the western part of Mureș-Turda County. The ghetto of Reghin held the Jews of the communities in the eastern part of Mureș-Turda County and the southern part of Ciuc County. The ghetto of Sfântu Gheorghe was established for the Jews of Trei Scaune County and the southern part of Ciuc County. As was the case everywhere else, the Jews of the various communities were

³⁵ Among the Jewish communities concentrated in the yard were those of Aleșd, Biharia, Borod, Marghita, Săcueni, Sălard, Salonta, and Valea lui Mihai. On Marghita see USHMM, RG 25.004M, roll 88, file 40029; On Salonta see roll 42, file 40030, item 43.

³⁶ For further details, see Braham, *Genocide*, pp. 33-36, 79-101. For additional documents on the fate of the Jews in Oradea and Bihor County, see also USHMM, RG 25.004M, roll 42, file 40030; roll 73, file 40027; roll 87 and 88, file 40029.

first concentrated in the local synagogues or community buildings before being transferred to the assigned ghettos.³⁷

Târgu Mureș. The ghetto of Târgu Mureș was located in a dilapidated brickyard at Koronkai Road that had an area of approximately 20,000 square meters. It had one large building with a broken roof and cement floors; since it had not been in use for several years, it was also extremely dirty. The ghetto population was 7,380 Jews, of whom approximately 5,500 were from the city itself and the others from the communities in the several county districts, including Band, Miercurea Nirajului, Sângeorgiu de Pădure, and Teaca. Among these were the 276 Jews of Sfântu Gheorghe and the Jews of Bezidu Nou, descendants of the Szekler who had converted to Judaism in the early days of the Transylvanian Principality. It was alleged that these Jews were given a chance to escape ghettoization by declaring that they were Magyar Christians but, according to some sources, refused to do so.³⁸

Approximately 2,400 of the 7,380 Jews in the brickyard, the largest ghetto in the area, found accommodation in the brick-drying barns; the rest had to make do in the open. The commander of the ghetto was police chief Géza Bedő; his deputy was Dezső Liptai. The Jewish Council, which did its best to alleviate the plight of the Jews, included Samu Ábrahám, Mayer Csengeri, Mór Darvas, Ernő Goldstein, József Helmer, Dezső Léderer, Jenő Schwimmer, Ernő Singer, and Manón Szofer. Conditions in this ghetto were as miserable as they were elsewhere; the water supply was particularly bad. Dr. Ádám Horváth, the city health officer, and his deputy, Dr. Mátyás Talos, were mainly responsible for the failure of the health and sanitary services in the ghetto.

The Târgu Mureș Jews were concentrated under the overall guidance of Mayor Ferenc Májay, who had attended the conference called by Endre. In fact, Májay proceeded with the implementation of Endre's directives just one day after the conference, when he ordered that the main synagogue be turned into a makeshift hospital. The police and gendarmerie units directly involved in the ghettoization process were under the direct command of Col. János Papp, the head of the Gendarmerie Directorate in the four counties of the Țara Secuilor; Col. János Zalantai, the commander of the Legion of Gendarmes of Mureș-Turda County; and Géza Bedő. Leadership roles were also played by Col. Géza Körmendi, the head of the *Honvéd* units in the city and the county, and Gen. István Kozma, the head of the so-called

³⁷ On Țara Secuilor in general, see USHMM, RG 25.004M, roll 51, file 1548, item 1160 (I), and Fond Tribunalul Poporului-Cluj, 1945-1946, roll 1, item 11.

³⁸ The ghetto of Târgu Mureș also included the Jews of Band, Miercurea Nirajului, Sângeorgiu de Pădure, and Sovata.

Szekler Border Guard (*Székely Határőr*) paramilitary organization. The involvement of these *Honvéd* (Hungarian armed forces) officials was exceptional, inasmuch as regular military units were not normally involved in the ghettoization process. Kozma claimed that he had gotten involved at the personal request of Endre. Major Schröder, the local representative of the Gestapo, provided the technical assistance required for the anti-Jewish operation.

The harshness and effectiveness of the local military-administrative authorities notwithstanding, Paksy-Kiss found much wanting in their operation and provided a special unit of gendarmes for their assistance. The concentration of the Jews was carried out with the help of the local chapter of the Levente paramilitary youth organization.

Májay's immediate collaborators in the launching and administration of the anti-Jewish measures in Târgu Mureș were Ferenc Henner, the head notary in the mayor's office, and Ernő Jávör, the head notary of the prefecture. In the county of Mureș-Turda the concentration was carried out under the direction of Andor Joós and Zsigmond Marton, prefect and deputy prefect respectively.

In Odorheiu County and the city of Sfântu Gheorghe, the county seat, the ghettoization was carried out under the general guidance of Dezső Gálfy, the prefect. Immediate command in the county was exercised by deputy prefect István Bonda and Lt. Col. László Kiss, the commander of the gendarmerie in the county. In Sfântu Gheorghe proper the roundup was directed by Maj. Ferenc Filó and police chief János Zsigmond.

As in all other major ghettos, the Târgu Mureș ghetto had a "screening commission" whose function it was to evaluate petitions from Jews, including claims for exemption status. The commission, whose attitude towards Jews was utterly negative, consisted of Májay, Bedö, and Col. Loránt Bocskor of the gendarmerie. In Târgu Mureș there was also a "mint," located in a small building within the ghetto. Among the torturers active in the drive for the acquisition of Jewish valuables were Ferenc Sallós and Captains Konya and Pintér of the gendarmerie.

The first transport was entrained for Auschwitz on May 27, 1944. By June 8, when the third and last transport departed, 7,549 Jews had been removed from these local ghettos.³⁹

Reghin. The ghetto of Reghin was established in a totally inadequate brickyard selected by Mayor Imre Schmidt and police chief János Dudás. Both of them had attended the Târgu Mureș Conference with Endre on April 28, 1944. They were assisted in the selection of

³⁹ USHMM, RG 25.004M, roll 50, files 10781, 10801, and 10861; rolls 88 and 89, file, 40029.

the ghetto site and in the roundup of the Jews by Maj. László Komáromi, the head of the *Honvéd* forces in Reghin; Lt. G. Szentpály Kálmán, the commander of the local gendarmerie unit; and Jenő Csordácsics, a counselor in the mayor's office and the local "expert" on the Jewish question.

Most of the Jews were housed in brick-drying sheds without walls. A number had to live in the open, and a few were allowed to stay in houses right near the ghetto at the edge of the city. At its peak the ghetto population was 4,000 people, of whom approximately 1,400 were from the town itself. The others were brought in from the eastern part of Mureș-Turda County and the northern part of Ciuc County.⁴⁰

The Jews of Gheorgheni in Ciuc County were rounded up under the direction of Mayor Mátyás Tóth and police chief Géza Polánkai. Even exempted Jews were picked up along with rest and held together with the others in a local primary school, where the searches for valuables were conducted by Beéa Ferenczi, a member of the local police department. After three days at the school, where they were given almost no food, the Jews were transferred to the Reghin ghetto.⁴¹

The Reghin ghetto was guarded by the local police and a special unit of 40 gendarmes from Szeged. Conditions in the ghetto were similar to what they were elsewhere. Searches for valuables were performed by the police and gendarmerie officers guarding the ghetto and assisted by Pál Bányai, Balázs Biró, András Fehér, and István Gösi, members of a special gendarme investigative unit. To help with the "interrogation of the Jews from Gheorgheni, Béla Ferenczi was summoned from that town. In the pursuit of hidden valuables, Irma Lovas was in charge of vaginal searches. The ghetto was under the immediate command of János Dudás.

Sfântu Gheorghe. The ghetto of Sfântu Gheorghe held the town's local Jews as well as those from the small communities in Trei Scaune County and the southern part of Ciuc County. The total ghetto population was 850.⁴² The commission for the selection of the ghetto site consisted of Gábor Szentiványi, the prefect of Trei Scaune County, who behaved quite decently toward the rural Jews; Andor Barabás, the deputy prefect; István Vincze, the chief of the Sfântu Gheorghe police; and Lt. Col. Balla, the commander of the gendarmes in Trei Scaune County. All of these had attended the Târgu Mureș Conference with Endre. The

⁴⁰ Among these were the Jews of Iernutei, Lunca Bradului, Răstolița, and Toplița.

⁴¹ USHMM, RG 25.004M, roll 73, file 40027; roll 89, file 40029.

⁴² In addition to the Jews of Sfântu Gheorghe, the ghetto included the Jews of Boroșneu Mare, Covasna, and Târgu Secuiesc.

ghettoization of the few hundreds of Jews from the town of Sfântu Gheorghe differed from the procedure followed elsewhere. On May 2, 1944, the Jews were summoned by the police to appear the following morning at 6:00 a.m. at police headquarters along with all members of their families. One person from each family was then allowed to return home in the company of a policeman to pick up the essential goods allowed by the authorities. After this the Jews were transferred to an unfinished building that had neither doors nor windows.

The Jews of Ciuc County, including those of Miercurea Ciuc,⁴³ were rounded up under the general command of Ernő Gaáli, the prefect of Ciuc County; József Abraham, the deputy prefect; Gerő Szász, the mayor of Miercurea Ciuc; Pál Farkas, the city's chief of police; and Lt. Col. Tivadar Lóhr, the commander of the gendarmes at Miercurea Ciuc. Like the city and county leaders of Trei Scaune County, these officials too had attended the Tîrgu Mureş meeting with Endre.

The conditions in the Sfântu Gheorghe ghetto, which was under the immediate command of an unidentified SS officer, were harsh. The Jews from this ghetto were transferred to the ghetto of Reghin a week later.⁴⁴

Sighetu Marmăției. Although geographically Maramureş County was part of Northern Transylvania, for de-jewification purposes it was considered part of Carpatho-Ruthenia and Northeastern Hungary. Since it contained one of the largest concentrations of Orthodox and Hasidic Jews in Hungary, the German and Hungarian officials were particularly anxious to clear this area of Jews.

The details of the anti-Jewish measures enacted in Maramureş County, as in Carpatho-Ruthenia as a whole, were adopted at the conference held in Munkács on April 12, 1944. Maramureş County and the municipality of Sighetu Marmăției were represented at the Munkács Conference by László Illinyi, the deputy prefect; Sándor Gyulafalvi Rednik, the mayor of Sighetu Marmăției; Lajos Tóth, the chief of police; Col. Zoltán Agy, the commander of the local legion of gendarmes; and Col. Sárvári, the commander of District IV of the gendarmerie. On the morning of April 15, Illinyi held a meeting in Sighetu Marmăției with all the top officials of the county to discuss the details of the ghettoization process, including the selection of ghetto sites. That same afternoon Tóth chaired a meeting of the civilian, police, and gendarmerie officials of Sighetu Marmăției at which the details of the

⁴³ USHMM, RG 25.004M, roll 50, files 1106 and 1920.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, rolls 89 and 94, file 40029. For further details on the fate of the Jews in the counties constituting Tara Secuilor, see Braham, *Genocide*, pp. 36-40, 141-157.

operation were reviewed. This meeting also established the twenty commissions in charge of rounding up the Jews. Each commission consisted of a police officer, gendarmes, and one civil servant.

The ghetto of Sighetu Marmatiei was established in two peripheral sections of the city, inhabited primarily by the poorer strata of Jewry. The ghetto held over 12,000 Jews, of whom a little over 10,000 came from the city itself. The others were brought in from many of the mostly Romanian-inhabited villages in the districts of Dragomirești, Maramureș, Ocna-Șugatag, Ökörmezö (now Ukraine), Rahó (now Ukraine), Técsö (now Ukraine), and Vișeu de Sus.⁴⁵

The ghetto was extremely crowded, with almost every room in every building, including the cellars and attics, occupied by fifteen to twenty-four people. The windows of the buildings at the edges of the ghetto had to be whitewashed to prevent the ghetto inhabitants from communicating with non-Jews. To further assure the isolation of the Jews, the ghetto was surrounded by barbed wire and guarded not only by the local police but also by a special unit of fifty gendarmes, assigned from Miskolc, under the command of Colonel Sárvári. The commander of the ghetto was Tóth; József Konyuk, the head of the local firefighters, acted as his deputy. The ghetto was administered under the general authority of Sándor Gyulafalvi Rednik, whose expert adviser on Jewish affairs was Ferenc Hullmann. It was Hullmann who rejected practically all of the requests forwarded by the Jewish Council asking for an improvement in the lot of the ghetto inhabitants.

The Jewish Council consisted of Rabbi Samu Danzig, Lipót Jozsovits, Jenő Keszner, Ferenc Krausz, Mór Jakobovits, and Ignátz Vogel. Like every other ghetto, Sighetu Marmatiei's also had a "mint" where Jews were tortured into confessing where they had hidden their valuables by a team composed of Tóth, Sárvári, János Fejér, a police commissioner, and József Konyuk. At the time of the anti-Jewish drive the head of Maramureș County was László Szaploneczai, a leading member of Imrédy's *Magyar Megújulás Partja* (Party of Hungarian Renewal).

The ghetto of Sighetu Marmatiei was among the first to be liquidated after the beginning of the mass deportations on May 15, 1944. The ghetto was liquidated through the removal of 12,849 Jews in four transports that were dispatched from the city between May 16 and May 22. The local Jewish physicians and the few Jews who were caught after the

⁴⁵ Among these were the Jews of Berbești, Bârsana, Budești, Giulești, Mara, Nănești, Oncești, Poienile Izei, Sârbi, Surduc, and Vadu Izei, On Berbești, see also USHMM, RG 25.004M, roll 61, file 7081.

departure of the transports were deported from the ghetto of Aknaszlatina. The Aknaszlatina ghetto, which held 3,317 Jews from the neighboring villages, was liquidated on May 25.⁴⁶

There were two other ghettos in Maramureş County. The one in Ökörmezö, which held 3,052 Jews, was liquidated on May 17. A much larger ghetto was in operation for a short while in Vişeu de Sus.⁴⁷ The Jews held there were entrained at Viseu de Jos, where they joined the Jews from other neighboring villages.⁴⁸ A total of 12,079 people were deported from Vişeu de Jos and Vişeu de Sus, in four transports that left between May 19 and May 25, 1944.⁴⁹

Deportation: The Master Plan

Unlike what happened in Poland, the Jews in Hungary lingered in ghettos for only a relatively short time: the ghettos in the villages lasted for only a day or two, and even those in the major concentration and entrainment ghetto centers, which were usually located in the county seats, were short-lived. In Northern Transylvania they only lasted a few weeks.

The technical and organizational details of the deportation were worked out under the leadership of László Endre. Early in May, he issued a memo to his immediate subordinates, providing general guidelines relating to the anti-Jewish operation with emphasis on Hungarian-German cooperation in the drive.⁵⁰ The details of the memo were discussed at a conference in Munkács on May 8-9 attended by the top administration, police, and gendarmerie officers of the various counties and county seats. The conference, chaired by László Ferenczy, heard an elaboration of the procedures to be used in the entrainment of the Jews and the final schedule for the planned transports from the various ghetto centers. The schedule was in accord with the instructions of the Reich Security Main Office (*Reichssicherheitshauptamt*; RSHA) as worked out by the Eichmann-*Sonderkommando*, which called for the de-jewification of Hungary from east to west. Accordingly, the Jews of Northern Transylvania and those of Carpatho-Ruthenia and northeastern Hungary were to be deported first, between May 15 and June 11. The conference also agreed on the written

⁴⁶ Among these were the Jews from of Bocicoiu Mare, Câmpulung la Tisa, Coştiui, Crăciunel, Remeţi, Rona de Jos, Rona de Sus, and Săpânţa. On Crăciunel, see also USHMM, RG 25.004M, roll 72, file 40027; On Rona de Sus, see roll 40, file 40030, item 26.

⁴⁷ Among these were the Jewish communities of Borşa, Leordina, Moisei, Petrova, Poienile de Munte and Ruscova. On Vişeu de Sus, see roll 42, file 40030, item 40; On Borşa, see roll 49, file 710.

⁴⁸ Among these were those from Bogdan Vodă, Botiza, Glod, Ieud, Rozavlea, Săcel, Şieu, Sajofalva, Sălişte, and Vişeu de Jos.

⁴⁹ For more details on the anti-Jewish drive in Maramureş County, see Braham, *Genocide*, pp. 40-42, 157-162. See also USHMM, RG 25.004M, roll 71, file 40027.

⁵⁰ Braham, *Politics*, pp. 666-68.

instructions to be issued for the mayors of the ghetto and entrainment centers, specifying the procedural and technical details relating to the deportation of the Jews.⁵¹

Transportation Arrangements

The schedule of the deportations and the route plan were reviewed at a conference in Vienna on May 4-6, 1944, attended by the representatives of the railroad, the Hungarian gendarmerie, and the German Security Police (*Sicherheitspolizei*; SIPO). The chief representative of the gendarmerie was Leó Lulay, Ferenczy's aide; the Eichmann-*Sonderkommando* was represented by Franz Novak, the transportation specialist.

The conferees considered three alternative deportation routes. After considering the military, strategic, and psychological factors relating to the various proposals, the conferees decided to begin the deportation of the Hungarian Jews on May 15 with the trains to be routed from Kassa to Auschwitz across eastern Slovakia, via Presov, Muszyna, Tarnow, and Cracow. A compromise was also reached on the number of deportation trains per day. While Endre, who was eager to make Hungary *judenrein* as quickly as possible, suggested that six trains be dispatched daily, Eichmann, who was better informed about the gassing and cremating facilities in Auschwitz, originally suggested only two. At the end they settled on four trains daily, each carrying approximately 12,000 Jews.

The Wehrmacht and the German Railways proved highly cooperative about providing the necessary rolling stock, an indication of the Nazis' resolve to pursue the Final Solution even at the expense of the military requirements of the Reich. Together with their Hungarian accomplices they attached a greater priority to the deportation of the Jews than to the transportation needs of the Axis forces even when Soviet troops were rapidly approaching the Carpathians.

The Deportation Process

In accordance with the decisions reached at the Munkács conference of May 8-9, the deportations began on schedule on May 15 in Gendarmerie districts VIII, IX, and X (Carpatho-Ruthenia, northeastern Hungary, and Northern Transylvania), which were identified as Dejewification Operational Zones I and II. Each day four trains, each consisting of 35 to 40 freight cars, were dispatched to the various entrainment ghetto centers to pick up their human cargo in accordance with a well-defined schedule. Each train carried about 3,000

⁵¹ Ibid., pp. 667-69.

Jews crammed into freight cars with each car, carrying on the average 70 to 80 Jews. Each car was supplied with two buckets: one with water and the other for excrements. One of the first ghettos to be cleared was that of Kassa, the rail hub through which almost all the deportation trains left the country. There, the Hungarian gendarmes who escorted the deportation trains were replaced by Germans.

The Jews were permitted to take along only a limited number of items for the “journey.” They were strictly forbidden to take along any currency, jewelry, or valuables. Immediately prior to their removal from the ghettos to the entrainment platforms, they were subjected to still another search for valuables. The brutality with which the searches were conducted varied, but they were uniformly humiliating. In the course of the searches, personal documents, including identification cards, diplomas, and even military-service documents were frequently torn up and their proud owners turned into non-persons. Shortly after the searches were completed, well-armed gendarmes and policemen escorted the Jews to the entrainment points. After the Jews were crammed into the freight cars amidst great brutality, each car was chained and padlocked.⁵²

The German and the Hungarian officials in charge of the Final Solution bureaucratically recorded the entrainment and deportation operations on a daily basis. Ferenczy submitted his reports to Section XX of the Ministry of the Interior. The reports of the Eichmann-*Sonderkommando* were sent to Otto Winkelmann, the Higher SS- and Police Leader in Hungary, who routinely forwarded them not only to the RSHA but also—via Edmund Veessenmayer, Hitler’s Plenipotentiary in Hungary—to the German Foreign Office.

According to these reports, the number of Jews deported within two days of the operation's start was 23,363. By May 18, it reached about 51,000. The number of those deported continued to climb dramatically as the days passed: May 19, 62,644; May 23, 110,556; May 25, 138,870; May 28, 204,312; May 31, 217,236; June 1, 236,414; June 2, 247,856; June 3, 253,389; and June 8, 289,357.⁵³ The transport of June 7, which was reported the following day, was the last one from Zones I and II. With it, the German and Hungarian experts on the Final Solution achieved their target: within twenty-four days, they had deported 289,357 Jews in ninety-two trains—a daily average of 12,056 people deported and

⁵² The horrors of the entrainment and deportation were described in detail in a great number of memoirs and testimonies after the war. Consult *The Hungarian Jewish Catastrophe: A Selected and Annotated Bibliography*, 2d ed., comp. and ed. Randolph L. Braham (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), and *The Holocaust in Hungary: A Selected and Annotated Bibliography, 1984-2000*, comp. and ed. Randolph L. Braham (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001).

⁵³ *The Destruction of Hungarian Jewry: A Documentary Account*, comp. and ed. Randolph L. Braham (New York: World Federation of Hungarian Jews, 1963), docs. 267-279.

an average of 3,145 per train. Among these were the 131,639 Jews deported in forty-five trains from the ghetto entrainment centers in Northern Transylvania.⁵⁴

Crime and Punishment

Many, but certainly not all, the German and Hungarian military and civilian officials who were involved in the Final Solution in Northern Transylvania were tried for war crimes after the war. Most of them managed to escape with the retreating Nazi armies and avoided prosecution by successfully hiding their identity after capture by the Allies. Others managed to settle in the Western world, emerging as useful tools in the struggle against communism and the Soviet Union during the Cold War.

Nevertheless, a relatively large number of the top Hungarian governmental and military officials responsible for the planning and implementation of the Final Solution were tried in Budapest, having been charged, among other things, with crimes also committed in Northern Transylvania. Many of the Nazi officials and SS officers in charge of the anti-Jewish drive in Hungary were tried in many parts of the world, including Nuremberg, Frankfurt, Bratislava, Vienna, and Jerusalem.⁵⁵

The roundup and prosecution of individuals suspected of war crimes in Northern Transylvania—and elsewhere in postwar Romania—were undertaken under the terms of the Armistice Agreement, which was signed in Moscow on September 12, 1944. With its implementation supervised by an Allied Control Commission operating under the Allied (Soviet) High Command, the Agreement also stipulated, among other things, the annulment of the Second Vienna Award, returning Northern Transylvania to Romania.

The people's tribunals (*Tribunalele popurului*) were organized and operated under the provisions of Decree-law no. 312 of the Ministry of Justice, dated April 21, 1945.⁵⁶ The crimes committed by the gendarmerie, military, police, and civilian officials in the course of the anti-Jewish drive in Northern Transylvania, including the expropriation, ghettoization, and deportation of the Jews, were detailed in the indictment presented by a prosecution team headed by Andrei Paul (Endre Pollák), the chief prosecutor.⁵⁷ The trial of the suspected 185 war criminals was held in Cluj in the spring of 1946 in a People's Tribunal presided over by Justice Nicolae Matei. Of the 185 defendants, only 51 were in custody; the others were tried

⁵⁴ See Appendix 1.

⁵⁵ See Braham, *Politics*, pp. 1317-1331.

⁵⁶ For text, see *Monitorul Oficial* (Official Gazette), Bucharest, part 1, April 24, 1945, pp. 3362-64.

⁵⁷ For the text of the indictment, see USHMM, RG 25.004M, roll 87, file 40029.

in absentia. The proceedings recorded the gruesome details of the Final Solution in the various counties, districts, and communities of Northern Transylvania.

The trial ended in late May 1946, when the People's Tribunal announced its Judgment.⁵⁸ The sentences were harsh. Thirty of the defendants were condemned to death; the others received prison terms totaling 1,204 years. However, all those condemned to death were among those tried *in absentia*, having fled with the withdrawing Nazi forces. Among these was Col. Tibor Paksy-Kiss, the gendarmerie officer in charge of the ghettoization in the region. The percentage of absentees was also high among those who were condemned to life imprisonment. Among those under arrest, three were condemned to life imprisonment, six were freed after having been found innocent of the charges brought against them, and the remainder were sentenced to various types of imprisonment, ranging from three to twenty-five years. The harshest penalties were meted out to those who were especially cruel in the ghettos.

Virtually none of the condemned served out their sentences. In Romania, as elsewhere in East Central Europe during the Stalinist period, the regime found it necessary to adopt a new social policy that aimed, among other things, at the strengthening of the Communist Party, which was virtually non-existent during the wartime period. Under a decree adopted early in 1950,⁵⁹ those convicted of war crimes who “demonstrated good behavior, performed their tasks conscientiously, and proved that they became fit for social cohabitation during their imprisonment” were made eligible for immediate release irrespective of the severity of the original sentence. Among those who were found “socially rehabilitated” were quite a few who had been condemned to life imprisonment for crimes against the Jews. Guided by political expediency, the Communists made a mockery of criminal justice.

⁵⁸ For documents on various trial proceedings and judgments, see *ibid*, roll 69, file 40027; roll 76, file 40024 and roll 87, file 40029. See also USHMM, Fond *Tribunalul Poporului—Cluj, 1945-1946*, roll 2, item 22. For the English translation of the Judgment, see Braham, *Genocide*.

⁵⁹ Decree no. 72 of March 23, 1950, “Freeing of Convicted Individuals Prior to the Completion of Their Term (*Decret Nr. 72 privitor la liberarea înainte de termen a celor condamnați*). *Monitorul Oficial*, March 23, 1950. Also reproduced in *Colectie de legi, decrete, hotărâri și deciziuni* (Collection of Laws, Decrees, Resolutions, and Decisions) (Bucharest: Editura de Stat, 1950), vol. 28: pp. 76-79.

**Deportation Trains from Northern Transylvania
Passing through Kassa (Kosice) in 1944:
Dates, Origin of Transports, and Number of Deportees⁶⁰**

May 16	Sighetu Marmației	3,007
May 17	Ökörmező (now Ukraine)	3,052
May 18	Sighetu Marmației	3,248
May 19	Vișeu de Sus	3,032
May 19	Satu Mare	3,006
May 20	Sighetu Marmației	3,104
May 21	Vișeu de Sus	3,013
May 22	Sighetu Marmației	3,490
May 22	Satu Mare	3,300
May 23	Vișeu de Sus	3,023
May 23	Oradea	3,110
May 25	Oradea	3,148
May 25	Cluj	3,130
May 25	Aknaszlatina	3,317
May 25	Vișeu de Sus	3,006
May 26	Satu Mare	3,336
May 27	Târgu Mureș	3,183
May 28	Dej	3,150
May 28	Oradea	3,227
May 29	Cluj	3,417
May 29	Satu Mare	3,306
May 29	Oradea	3,166
May 30	Târgu Mureș	3,203
May 30	Oradea	3,187
May 30	Satu Mare	3,300

⁶⁰ These data were collected by the Railway Command of Kassa (Kosice). Mikulas (Miklós) Gaskó, "Halálvonatok" (Death Trains), *Menóra*, Toronto, June 1, 1984, pp. 4, 12. The figures relating to the number of trains and deportees and the deportation dates do not always coincide with those given in other sources.

May 31	Cluj	3,270
May 31	Baia Mare	3,073
May 31	Șimleu Silvaniei	3,106
June 1	Oradea	3,059
June 1	Satu Mare	2,615
June 2	Bistrița	3,106
June 2	Cluj	3,100
June 3	Oradea	2,972
June 3	Șimleu Silvaniei	3,161
June 4	Reghin	3,149
June 5	Oradea	2,527
June 5	Baia Mare	2,844
June 6	Dej	3,160
June 6	Bistrița	2,875
June 6	Șimleu Silvaniei	1,584
June 8	Dej	1,364
June 8	Cluj	1,784
June 8	Târgu Mureș	1,163
June 9	Cluj	1,447
June 27	Oradea	2,819