

# “Struma”: The Destiny of a Tragedy. A Revised Perspective<sup>1</sup>

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## **Abstract**

Using new and previously-published sources, including archival documents and family testimonies, this article revises the common view of the 1942 Struma disaster, the sinking of a ship carrying 769 people, mostly Jewish emigrants from Romania to Palestine. It attempts to reconstruct how the Struma emigration was organized, and who was involved in procuring the ship. It additionally outlines the biographies of several of the victims, as well as individuals who did not board the ship. The article also examines the involvement of victims’ families in the commemoration of the disaster in Romania and Israel. It supplements existing secondary literature on the Struma by clarifying certain aspects of the events, namely the number of victims, their geographical and family backgrounds, and interactions between authorities and organizers of the Struma emigration.

**Keywords:** Struma disaster; Jewish emigration; biography; Romania; Palestine; “Alya” Committee

## **I. Introduction**

While the story of the sinking of the MV Struma is common knowledge throughout the world, not everything about the tragedy of 24 February 1942 and the ship’s 769 passengers is known. Though 80 years have already passed, many details remain unclear, and there are still new archives to explore. During my research at the archives of the National Council for the Study of the Securitate Archives (CNSAS), the archives of the Centre for the Study of the History of Jews in Romania (CSIER), and the Constanța Port Authority fonds held at the Constanța branch of the National Archives, new information came to light.

Based on this new information, my study revises the narrative of the Jewish emigrants on the Struma, and offers responses to essential questions, namely: how was the ship procured, and under what conditions was the transport of Jewish emigrants organized? The study highlights the places of origin of some passengers, outlining micro-biographies of the victims, among them Isac Tercatin

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and Tuli Elcovici, survivors of the 1941 Iași pogrom. The study also presents the fate of survivor Medeea Salomovici, and the particular cases of Professor Samuel Aroni and of Mattei Dogan, the celebrated Romanian sociologist in France, each of whom narrowly avoided becoming the 770th victim of the Struma disaster.

## II. The Struma in historiography

Several books and articles have been written about the Struma, in multiple languages: Romanian, Hebrew, English, German, Russian, Turkish, and French — to name a few authors, among them Romanians: Maria Arsene, Leib Kupferstein, David Safran, Josephine Feinstein, Efraim Ofir, Shimon Rubinstein, Michel Solomon, Șerban Gheorghiu, Çetin Yetkin, Touvy Carmely, Dalia Ofer, Iordan Ivanov, Efraim Guttman, Samuel Aroni, etc.

The first work on this subject, *Meghilat "Struma"* ("Struma" Scroll) was published in 1942 in Tel Aviv, shortly after the sinking of the ship. Its author was journalist Leib Kupferstein, who emigrated to Palestine in 1940.<sup>2</sup> In this booklet, the names of the victims of the Struma disaster were published for the first time, and, because of the issues it raised, it was censored in Palestine for five years following its publication.<sup>3</sup>

In her work dedicated to the "Aliyah Bet"<sup>4</sup>, *Escaping the Holocaust: Illegal Immigration to the Land of Israel, 1939-1944*, Dalia Ofer included a chapter titled *The Struma and Its Passengers*. Here, Ofer refers to the passengers strictly by their number: 769. Any references to passengers' names, ages, or place of origin are absent.<sup>5</sup>

The number of victims of the Struma disaster is debatable, if one takes into consideration the approach by Samuel Aroni, Professor Emeritus at the University of California — himself directly involved in the events, being one of those originally registered to emigrate on the Struma. In 2002, Aroni published a crucial study dedicated to the history of the subject, *Who Perished on the Struma and How Many?*<sup>6</sup> The study showed that, until that moment, though several lists of passengers had been compiled, the information contained therein was inconsistent. Thus, Aroni brought together information from six previously-published sources

<sup>2</sup> Leib Kupferstein, *Meghilat "Struma"* (Tel Aviv: Ha'teakhadut oleh Rumania b'Eretz Yisrael, 1942). A copy of this work, translated into Romanian as *Cartea „Strumei”*, can be found in the Central Archive for the Study of the History of Jews from Romania. See: ACSIER, Fond III, Dosar 28, f. 75-105.

<sup>3</sup> Touvia Carmely, *Călător pe vasul morții: 74 de zile pe Struma* (Bucharest: Hasefer, 2014), 353.

<sup>4</sup> *Translator's note*: The wave of illegal "aliyah", or immigration, of Jews to Mandatory Palestine, which took place from 1920 to 1948.

<sup>5</sup> Dalia Ofer, *Escaping the Holocaust: Illegal Immigration to the Land of Israel, 1939-1944* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

<sup>6</sup> Samuel Aroni, "Who Perished on the Struma and How Many?", in Douglas Frantz and Catherine Collins (eds.), *Death on the Black Sea: The Untold Story of the Struma and World War II's Holocaust at Sea* (New York: Harper Collins), 295-349.

into one: the list made by the Constanța Port Authority Police, the list from the American general consul in Istanbul, the list published by Șerban Gheorghiu in his work *Tragedia navelor Struma și Mefkure* ("The Tragedy of the Struma and Mefkure Ships", published 1998),<sup>7</sup> the list of victims on the Struma memorial in Holon,<sup>8</sup> the list published by Efraim Ofir (1999),<sup>9</sup> and the list published by Touvia Carmely.<sup>10</sup>

The first list composed by Samuel Aroni, based on a combination of names from the six aforementioned lists, included a total of 781 victims presented in alphabetical order and by age. A second list identified 10 members of the ship's crew, among whom four were Jews. A third list contained the names and ages of nine passengers who were permitted to disembark in Istanbul. These nine, alongside David Stoliar, the only survivor of the ship's sinking, are the only 10 people who boarded the Struma and remained alive.<sup>11</sup>

After comparing the six lists, Samuel Aroni noted that multiple variations of family names existed for the same passengers, whether typographical or spelling errors, or errors that were made at the time of the passengers' initial registration. This also occurred in the case of given names.<sup>12</sup> Aroni notes in his conclusion, however, a series of errors regarding the number and exact identity of victims of the Struma shipwreck. If his compiled list is correct, he stated, the number of victims (including crew members) would be 791, of whom 785 were Jewish. He noted that 19 people are absent from the list compiled by the Constanța Port Authority, and that the list from the Holon monument is the least accurate of the six.<sup>13</sup>

In his work *With No Way Out*, published in Romania in 2003, Efraim Ofir dedicated a chapter to the passengers on board the Struma, and pointed out the lack of accuracy in the lists of emigrants. Ofir posited that one possible explanation regarding these inaccuracies and the discrepancies in the number of passengers may be related to the fact that, though such a document would have been circulated before the tragedy occurred, accurate information about which passengers

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<sup>7</sup> Șerban Gheorghiu, *Tragedia navelor Struma și Mefkure* (Constanța: Editura Fundației Andrei Șaguna, 1998).

<sup>8</sup> In Holon, Israel, there is a square surrounding a monument erected in memory of the victims of the Struma disaster. It was unveiled in 1968 and was designed by Andrei Reyesz, originally from Romania. Concurrent to the monument's unveiling, a brochure was published with a list of 801 names of passengers, without age or further details listed.

<sup>9</sup> Efraim Ofir, *With No Way Out. Story of „Struma”* (Tel Aviv: A.C.M.E.O.R., 1999).

<sup>10</sup> Touvia Carmely, *Struma: Periplus pierzaniei: reconstituirea istorică în perspectiva celor 58 ani care s-au scurs de la neuitata tragedie* (Haifa, 2000).

<sup>11</sup> Samuel Aroni, "Who Perished on the *Struma*, and How Many?", in Douglas Frantz and Catherine Collins, 295-296.

<sup>12</sup> Samuel Aroni, "Who Perished on the *Struma*, and How Many?", 300.

<sup>13</sup> Samuel Aroni, "Who Perished on the *Struma*, and How Many?", 300.



actually boarded the ship may be missing. The same is true for the lists of Jews recruited for work detachments and who were set to be released for emigration — in this matter, it is not known exactly if they were all released, nor if they arrived on board the ship.<sup>14</sup> Today, in a completely different conjecture, documents from the Securitate archives which list Jews from labour camps registered to emigrate may contribute to the identification of those released and, implicitly, of those who were actually present on the ship at the time of the tragedy.

The concern for the plain number of victims must also be accompanied by an investigation into their biographical details, and a symbolic reconstruction of their lives. This task is almost impossible to achieve as, with every session at the archives, new information appears that further completes the picture of the tragedy. The portrayal of the individual victims as one collective, in purely statistical terms and without an analysis of their biographies (as is the case in the previously mentioned works) reduces the complexity of the incident, which is part of the larger history of the Holocaust in Romania.

What remains absent from Samuel Aroni's list, as well as from those published earlier, is data concerning the place of origin of the victims. Unfortunately, a thorough registration of passengers was not made at the time of boarding; however, documents related to the disaster in the archives reveal the names of some families or individuals who paid to emigrate on the Struma.

The study by Florin Stan, which is based upon archival sources held in the National Archives of the Republic of Moldova in Chişinău, as well as in the Romanian National Military Archives, tangentially questions the origins of the emigrants on the Struma, and presents the case of one family from Chişinău who, though having purchased a ticket to emigrate, did not show up at the Constanţa port.<sup>15</sup>

Shimon Rubinstein, who focused on the study of the biographies of the Struma victims, gave two specific examples: one person, being originally from Bârlad, about whom information came from his parents, and the second being the survivor Medeea Salomovici, who was a relative of Rubinstein.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Efraim Ofir, *With No Way Out. The Story of The "Struma": Documents and Testimonies* (Tel Aviv/Cluj-Napoca: A.C.M.E.O.R./Editura Fundaţiei pentru Studii Europene, 2003), 100.

<sup>15</sup> This case refers to the Schvarţberg family of Chişinău, who paid the "Alya" Zionist Committee of Bucharest the sum of 766,000 lei to emigrate to Palestine, for the following persons: Michel Schvarţberg, Clara Schvarţberg, and their son, Moise Schvarţberg. Following this payment they were presented with an authorization to travel on 14 November 1941 ("Autorizaţia de călătorie nr. 229 A din 14 noiembrie 1941") by the Military Commandant of Chişinău, signed by colonel Eugen Dumitrescu. According to this document, the Schvarţberg family could travel by train from Chişinău to Constanţa between 15-17 November 1941, in order to travel onwards to Palestine, with a departure from the Constanţa port on 20 November 1941. However, the family did not arrive in Constanţa. Michel Schvarţberg was arrested, having been accused of escaping from the Chişinău ghetto, where he had stayed with his family during the deportations to Transnistria. See: Florin Stan, "Emigrarea evreilor între speranţa salvării şi realitatea dezastrului: Cazul „Struma” (1941-1942)", *Analele Universităţii „OVIDIUS” – Seria Istorie* 5 (2008), 67.

<sup>16</sup> Shimon Rubinstein, "Asupra câtorva tragedii mici petrecute în cadrul unei tragedii mari numită

Historian Lucian Zeev Herșcovici also tackled the issue of the victims, noting the special characteristics of the Struma tragedy, which he called “one great tragedy which contained 767 small tragedies”.<sup>17</sup>

Efraim Ofir’s book, *With No Way Out*, was the first large-scale historical work which attempted to reconstruct the biographies of the victims on board the Struma. In his approach, the author conducted discussions with the relatives and the acquaintances of those who disappeared. Thus, the historical data is supplemented towards the end of the book with a list, in alphabetical order, of the names of the victims, accompanied also by biographical details and photographs.

### III. Organizing the transport of Jewish emigrants on the Struma

On 12 December 1941, after some delays, a ship was transformed overnight from a pontoon to a steamer, with its name changed from “Macedonia” to “Struma”, and left the port of Constanța with 769 Jewish emigrants on board. It was one of the first ships to leave for Istanbul after Romania’s entry into the war.

Its destination was Palestine, still under the British Mandate, and for Jews from Romania who crowded onto the Struma, their ticket signified the chance to escape the pogroms or the camps. These tickets were not cheap: each passenger paid 200,000 lei for a spot on the ship, or anywhere from 400,000 to 500,000 lei for a seat in a cabin.<sup>18</sup> Jewish emigration was a cynical, but profitable, affair for its organizers, the “Alya” Zionist Society (“Societatea sionistă ‘Alya’”).

The Struma was not the only ship that transported Jewish emigrants from Romanian ports towards Palestine. The first ship with Jewish emigrants which left from Constanța during the Antonescu’s regime was the Darien II, a ship registered in Panama. It was owned by a company of Greek shipowners, the Singros brothers, who were also set to organize the departure of the Struma. In Romania, the Singros company was represented by maritime agents Stefano D’Andrea<sup>19</sup> and Jean Pandelis.<sup>20</sup>

Darien II was a “success story” in the history of illegal emigration to Palestine, being the last large transport of Jewish emigrants before the entry of Romania into

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‘STRUMA’”, in *Studia et Acta Historiae Iudaeorum* IV, ed. Silviu Sanie and Dumitru Vitcu (Bucharest: Editura Hasefer, 1999), 193-204.

<sup>17</sup> “...o tragedie mare care include 767 tragedii mici”. Lucian Zeev Herșcovici, *Vasul „Struma” în istoriografie și în memoria colectivă*, published on [www.acum.tv](http://www.acum.tv), accessed 25 September 2021.

<sup>18</sup> ACNSAS, Fond Documentar, Dosar D 15412, f. 297.

<sup>19</sup> Stefano D’Andrea was an Italian subject of Greek-Jewish descent, and travelled frequently on the route Bucharest – Sofia – Istanbul. He was an associate of Jean Pandelis, and the two represented the Greek company Singros.

<sup>20</sup> Jean Pandelis was the representative of a Panamanian navigation society which purchased the Struma vessel from Stefano D’Andrea.



the war with a “happy ending”, despite the fact that it was undertaken on an old, outdated ship which did not guarantee safety for its passengers.<sup>21</sup>

With its entry into the war, Romania adhered to Nazi Germany’s policy of exterminating the Jews, known in historiography by the euphemism “cleansing the land” (“curățare a terenului”). Thus, from June to November 1941, the Romanian government abandoned its plans of Jewish emigration in favour of mass extermination and deportations to Transnistria.<sup>22</sup> The question of emigration was raised again after the Government reconsidered some advantages that could be wrought by the “disappearance” of the Jews from the Old Kingdom, with those from Bessarabia and Bucovina still being deported. In an address from the Military Cabinet of the Head of State to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, it was mentioned that emigration could be profitable as it would reduce the number of undesirable Jews and, additionally, the state could easily reappropriate the assets owned by those who had left.<sup>23</sup>

A large group of Jews was organized to leave in the autumn of 1941, but preparations had already been made earlier. From November 1940, the Zionist organization had begun to register Jews for the transfer of emigrants to Palestine on the MV Macedonia, which at that point was docked in the port of Piraeus. The “Alya” Committee was represented by Solomon Leibovici Ariel (who was apparently working for the Greek shipowner Jean Pandelis), Eugen Meissner, and Ella Gutman-Bunescu.<sup>24</sup> Pandelis was the owner of the MV Macedonia (previously named Lula), which was stationed in the port of Burgas.

Because considerable sums of money were collected — around 40 million lei — and none of the 300 people registered had left, the members of the “Alya”

<sup>21</sup> Efraim Ofir, *With No Way Out*, 68.

<sup>22</sup> Mihai Chioveanu, “The Metamorphosis of Romanian Cleansing Nation–statism: Reassessing the Emigration Policy during Holocaust”, in *Studia Hebraica IX-X*, ed. Felicia Waldman (Bucharest: Editura Universității din București, 2011), 256.

<sup>23</sup> See Address no. 3942/M from 15 November 1941 from the Military Cabinet of the Head of State to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in *Emigrarea populației evreiești din România în anii 1940-1944, Culegere de documente din Arhiva Ministerului Afacerilor Externe al României*, ed. Ion Calafeteanu, Nicolae Dinu, and Teodor Gheorghe (Bucharest: Editura Silex, București, 1993), 93.

<sup>24</sup> “The ‘Alya’ Committee immediately began registering emigrants at the cost of 30,000 lei per person, a price which increased as the registration requests increased. [...] Their meetings were held daily, without exception, regardless of the weather, and nothing could have caused a [member’s] absence. Everyone did nothing except to endlessly repeat the latest rumours circulated by the Committee themselves, and to try to represent their ‘ship’ in the most outrageous forms. The entire time [...] Mrs. Bunescu and S.L. Ariel received potential customers and set their prices [...]. From a corner of the office, the hoarse voice of Ariel — a member of the Executive of the New Zionist Organization — could be heard saying: ‘I can’t do it cheaper than a ‘cent’. Pandelis takes 70,000 — and we have to have something left over, too.’ From the office, the clinking of glasses marked the conclusion of a new ‘deal.’” In “Cazul Struma”, *Unirea III*, no. 60, February 1947, 3.

Committee were accused of fraud. Following investigations carried out by the Prosecutor's Office of Ilfov Court, Eugen Meissner (the president of the Committee), Solomon Leibovici Ariel, Ella Gutman-Bunescu, and an M. Schwartz<sup>25</sup> were arrested and investigated. Some would-be emigrants demanded their money back, but others who wanted to leave the country immediately withdrew their accusations. The members of the Committee were released provisionally once the vessel arrived in Romania, on the condition of carrying out the transport of emigrants in the shortest possible timeframe.<sup>26</sup> The Siguranță, alongside the 1<sup>st</sup> Coroner's Office were instructed to monitor whether this transport would be completed in "humane" conditions.<sup>27</sup>

Because of the war, the invasion of the Soviet Union, and the resulting impact on internal affairs in Romania — including the Iași pogrom and massacre of Jews in Sculeni in the summer of 1941<sup>28</sup> — work on the transport of Jewish emigrants stagnated. Operations resumed after Eugen Meissner requested the opinion of the General Police Directorate (henceforth "GPD") for approval from the General Staff to send a telegram to the United States in connection with a transfer of \$36,700 (for which Meissner had received the approval of the Ministry of Finance), in exchange for the transport of 400 Jewish emigrants on the Macedonia, which was already stationed in Constanța as of 28 May 1941.<sup>29</sup>

At that time, Eugen Meissner and Solomon Leibovici Ariel, together with the other members of the "Alya" Committee, guaranteed that the ship would depart in three weeks' time. In mid-July, the Committee requested approval from the authorities for daily telephone calls to Constanța, to contact shipowner Jean Pandelis, in order to organize delegates that would draw up lists of emigrants from Iași, Târgu Jiu, Slatina, Craiova, and Călărași, and to allow the travel of other delegates to Constanța, over a period of one month, to prepare the ship.<sup>30</sup> A portion of these requests were approved, namely the movement of delegates from Târgu Jiu, Slatina, Craiova, and Călărași, but Iași and Constanța were excluded as they were military zones.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>25</sup> *Translator's note:* "M. Schwartz" is listed in some documents as Max Schvart; see page 7.

<sup>26</sup> ACNSAS, Fond Documentar, Dosar D 15412, f. 9.

<sup>27</sup> ACNSAS, Fond Documentar, Dosar D 15412, f. 8.

<sup>28</sup> See: Marius Mircu, *Pogromul de la Iași*, Editura Glob, București, 1945; Matatias Carp, *Cartea Neagră, vol. 2: Pogromul de la Iași*, Editura Traiană, București, 1948; Aurel Karetcki, Maria Covaci, *Zile însângerate la Iași*, Editura Politică, București, 1978; Jean Ancel, *Preludiu la asasinat. Pogromul de la Iași, 29 iunie 1941*, Editura Polirom, Iași, 2005; Radu Ioanid, *Pogromul de la Iași*, Editura Polirom, Iași, 2021. About the massacre of the Jews in Sculeni, see: Radu Ioanid, *The Holocaust in Romania: The Destruction of Jews and Gypsies under the Antonescu Regime, 1940-1944*, with a Foreword by Elie Wiesel and a Preface by Paul A. Shapiro, Ivan R. Dee Publishers, Chicago, 2000, 94-95; Vladimir Solonari, *Purificarea Națiunii: dislocări forțate de populație și epurări etnice în România lui Ion Antonescu, 1940-1944*, Editura Polirom, Iași, 2015, 164.

<sup>29</sup> ACNSAS, Fond Documentar, Dosar D 15412, f. 5.

<sup>30</sup> ACNSAS, Fond Documentar, Dosar D 15412, f. 13.

<sup>31</sup> ACNSAS, Fond Documentar, Dosar D 15412, f. 18.



In an investigation published in *Unirea* newspaper, it was noted that in September 1941, Pandelis' associates resumed their "business" of emigration, this time under the auspices of the "Mondial Transport" company and with the now-rechristened Struma vessel.<sup>32</sup> Due to a general lack of confidence in the good faith of the organizers, a specialist was sent to Constanța in order to verify the accuracy of the information on the advertisement. A certain naval officer Tonegaru assured the specialist that the ship was perfectly equipped for the trip and spacious enough to carry 800 passengers.<sup>33</sup>

In the meantime, the "Alya" Committee, having received approval from the Police and the General Staff, drew up lists of Jewish emigrants who were set to board the Struma, with an approximate departure date of 28-30 October 1941, including: 1) a list of Jews who had completed their public service in the 35 work detachments within the Recruitment District of Bucharest; 2) a list of emigrants from the Recruitment District of Bucharest, who had not completed their mandatory work and were thus postponed from emigrating; 3) a list of Jews held in nine recruitment centres or who were interned in camps (in Târgu Jiu and Mereni, Constanța county); 4) a list of emigrants from Chișinău; and 5) a list of Romanian Railways (CFR) stations where emigrants would board from the provinces. The Committee also requested that the GPD approach the authorities for the release and appearance of certain Jews from recruitment centres or camps in Bucharest on 22 October 1941, as well as the exemption from forced labour of those postponed from emigrating, and the granting of necessary travel authorizations for the Jews from Chișinău.<sup>34</sup>

On 23 October 1941, the "Alya" Committee requested authorization from the GPD for the departure of those Jewish emigrants from Cernăuți<sup>35</sup> on board the Struma, for whom the Government of Bukovina had given its approval. The listed group included 323 adults and 33 children, as well as a further 285 adults and 35 children from other parts of the country, who were set to embark from Constanța,

<sup>32</sup> "After some disappointing publicity, the same people assured potential passengers of the certainty of obtaining Immigration Certificates for Palestine in Istanbul, as well as support from the Jewish Agency, which — they said — would bypass [the cost] of transport. The new contract stipulated higher costs for the trip, 200,000 lei per person for adults and 100,000 lei for children up to 10 years old. For this cost, the Organizing Committee made the following promises: to transport the passengers to the Palestinian shore, to give them sufficient food for the journey (tea with bread in the morning, plus a hot meal at lunch and dinner), as well as a comfortable place to sleep. The announcement contained a copy of a letter proving that the ship was fitted under the close supervision of the Romanian maritime authorities, with photographs of a new diesel engine and six beds inside the ship, as well as the authorization to take the necessary quantities of food out of the country. This transport was expected to net the organizers the fabulous prize of \$150,000." From "Cazul Struma", *Unirea* III, no. 60, February 1947, 3.

<sup>33</sup> *Unirea* III, no. 60, February 1947, 3.

<sup>34</sup> ACNSAS, Fond Documentar, Dosar D 15412, f. 37.

<sup>35</sup> *Translator's note*: Also known as Czernowitz; now Chernivtsi, Ukraine.



where the Struma was fully-equipped and prepared to depart.<sup>36</sup> The Military Cabinet of the Head of State gave the Ministry of Foreign Affairs a positive response, as did the GPD.<sup>37</sup>

As the ship's departure was once again postponed, the Committee re-submitted petitions to the GPD (on 9 November 1941) requesting to release the emigrants held at the Recruitment Centres, giving an estimated departure date of 19 November. One day earlier, the organizers of the transport had announced that the departure of the Struma was postponed to 24 November, due to the fact that not all Jews had been released from their work detachments. In the meantime, CFR travel authorizations had been obtained for Jews registered on the lists compiled by the “Alya” Committee, the General Staff had ordered the listed Jews to be released from the camps, and the GPD had agreed to organize a special train to transport emigrants from Bucharest to Constanța on 24 November 1941. Within Jewish circles, a rumour circulated that the Germans had not allowed the ship to depart.<sup>38</sup>

On 22 November, the GPD sent a telegram to the Constanța Police Inspectorate, requesting that measures be taken to supervise the boarding of the passengers, and to send the Directorate a list of those who left.<sup>39</sup> However, on 24 November, the GPD changed their mind — only 10 hours before the departure of the emigrants.<sup>40</sup> Some passengers had already been gathered at Gara de Est station since 18:00, remaining at the disposal of the Police. The fact that none of the organizers were present with them caused further discontent among the Jews.<sup>41</sup>

This delay had two main causes. First, the list of those registered for emigration included Herșcu Zissu and Max Schvartș, who had been released provisionally, as well as the three co-accused of fraud: Eugen Meissner, Solomon Leibovici Ariel, and Ella Gutman-Bunescu. The Coroner with the 1<sup>st</sup> Cabinet of Ilfov Court notified the Siguranță regarding this situation. Additionally, the Detectives' Corps received information that among the passengers there were six Jews who had run away from the Cernăuți ghetto.<sup>42</sup> Thus, the “Alya” Committee was informed that the departure of the Struma would be postponed until the Government decided its date of departure.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> See the request from the “Alya” Committee and the New Zionist Organization to the GPD from 23 October 1941, in *Emigrarea populației evreiești...*, 92-93.

<sup>37</sup> ACNSAS, Fond Documentar, Dosar D 15412, f. 28.

<sup>38</sup> ACNSAS, Fond Documentar, Dosar D 15412, f. 217.

<sup>39</sup> ACNSAS, Fond Documentar, Dosar D 15412, f. 209.

<sup>40</sup> ACSIER, Fond III, Dosar 313, f. 7.

<sup>41</sup> ACNSAS, Fond Documentar, Dosar D 15412, f. 234.

<sup>42</sup> ACNSAS, Fond Documentar, Dosar D 15412, f. 228.

<sup>43</sup> ACNSAS, Fond Documentar, Dosar D 15412, f. 231.



The spirits of the Jewish emigrants were quickly deflating, now dominated by suspicion, hesitation, and growing doubt that the transport would take place. They received no explanation about this new delay. Only later did the organizers of the transport give statements to the press, in which they accused the Romanian authorities of halting the Struma's departure.

Undoubtedly, the Romanian authorities hindered the emigration by not respecting the deadline imposed by the "Alya" Committee. However, the vessel could not leave the port on the set date because the "Struma" Bulgarian Navigation Company, who claimed ownership of the Struma, seized the ship through an appeal filed at Constanța Court. "Alya" representatives then tried to reach an agreement with the Bulgarian company, and proposed that the dispute be resolved through an arbitration committee. It was thus agreed that a guarantee of 150,000,000 lei would be deposited by the organizers, in order to allow the ship to leave, after which a committee would be set up to decide the amount the organizers would have to pay the Bulgarian company in order to purchase the ship.<sup>44</sup> The organizers hoped that by 1 December — the date by which the sequestration of the ship would be lifted — they would obtain the final clearance from the Romanian authorities to depart.

Finally, on 1 December, the organizers obtained the approval of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Government. During this time, the Bulgarian Legation in Bucharest, seeking to defend the interests of the "Struma" Company, took steps towards another postponement of the departure, and offered to pay a guarantee to maintain the sequestration of the ship. According to a report by the Bucharest Police Prefecture, on 7 December, between 22:00 and 00:40, 740 Jews boarded a special train bound for Constanța from Gara de Est station. The report further stated that document control went well, and that "the emigrants were very satisfied with the conduct of the authorities."<sup>45</sup>

At Gara de Est train station in the Obor neighbourhood of Bucharest, two very different pictures came to light — one of the Jews who left, and the other of those who remained:

"On that leaden day of 7 December, with harsh frost biting every cheek, the platforms of Obor station were crowded both by those leaving, and by their relatives and acquaintances who came to behold such a miracle. Soldiers and officers, police commissioners and security agents, railway officials — all of the uniforms merged together, ordering and pushing, yelling and cursing. These were the only voices that defied the silence, the only noises permitted. On the other side of the line, a row of shovels stopped their work and lined up in an illusory order. The Labor Detachment of Obor station stared slack-jawed at the joyous people across

<sup>44</sup> ACNSAS, Fond Documentar, Dosar D 15412, f. 257.

<sup>45</sup> ACNSAS, Fond Documentar, Dosar D 15412, f. 318 bis.

the platforms. The security to board the train was very strict. Identity papers were checked, luggage was rummaged through, and sometimes the examiner, in a fit of zeal, would randomly pull whatever he found from the bags and candidly ask the comrade next to him: 'Do you have a diary in which I can wrap these shoes? I just received them as a gift.' No protests accompanied such events. People allowed themselves to be lined up, ambushed, humiliated, and robbed, and didn't attempt to defend themselves. They were otherwise indifferent, since they were leaving. Because they were leaving the fiery cauldron of Satan who had spread his sores all across Europe. Here they are on the trains! Here is this motley symphony of colours, the bizarre collection of suits growing poorer and chillier. Here are the handkerchiefs waving in their melancholic parting dance! And the whistling siren of the locomotive! Shrill and shriller! More estranging and more heart-rending. A twitch! The train leaves its place! The buffers collide. Slow! There's trouble again! Those on the platform rush forward and fight with the merciless weapons of the soldiers! Final wishes! Those last useless words — 'Write to me as soon as you get there!' — 'Be healthy!' — 'Be careful on that ship!' — they are lost within the sound of the wheels."<sup>46</sup>

At the train's departure, the group of Jewish emigrants shouted with joy: "Long live Greater Romania!" ("Trăiască România Mare!"). They were escorted by a police officer until they reached the Constanța port.

The boarding process took four days, and by 11 December, 682 passengers had boarded. Officials from the Constanța Customs Authorities, the National Bank, and an additional 5 people delegated by the Prime Minister's Office were responsible for customs control. Several train carriages of luggage containing linens, furs, clothing, and jewelry were seized, indicating that it was done abusively.

Even strictly-necessary food was withheld. Only the contents of two food carriages were allowed to board, for which approval from the Ministry of National Economy was requested.<sup>47</sup> Watches, rings, bracelets, pendants, and gold chains were seized from passengers, without an inventory being written up. The Commission of the National Bank of Romania insisted that all fur collars be removed from clothing. After the control of passengers, there remained a baggage check. Luggage over 20kg was opened, and the "surplus" weight removed without objection. A confidential report dated 10 February 1942, sent to the Captaincy of the Port of Constanța by the Undersecretary of State of the Navy – Merchant Navy Directorate, read that: "in accordance with the approval of Marshal Ion Antonescu, the clothing items left by the Jews on board the Struma, deposited at the Constanța Port Authority, will be handed over to the Patronage Council [of Social Works]."<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> H. Walter, "Din povestirile tragice ale vapoarelor cu emigranți. Pe bordul 'Strumei'", *Unirea III*, no. 61, 25 January 1947, 1.

<sup>47</sup> ACNSAS, Fond Documentar, Dosar D 15412, f. 323.

<sup>48</sup> D.J.A.N. Constanța, Fond Căpitană Portului Constanța, Dosar 120/1941-1942, f. 16.



769 passengers and 10 crew members boarded the *Struma*, despite the fact that the Merchant Navy Directorate declared to the Constanța Port Authority that the *Struma* was suitably equipped only for the transport of 600 travelers.<sup>49</sup> The ship finally left the Constanța port at 14:30. After its departure, it was rumoured that a further 100 Jewish emigrants were to board from the port of Varna, in a deal struck with Stefano D'Andreia in exchange for the transfer of the vessel. The authorities began an investigation into the matter, but this rumour was not confirmed.<sup>50</sup>

#### IV. The place of origin and cost of transport of the emigrants

From a socio-professional point of view, there was a large variety of Jews registered to emigrate on the *Struma*. Some were freelancers who could no longer practice their professions — doctors, lawyers, pharmacists — or engineers, machinists and tradesmen who had been kicked out of their jobs; others were artists or young students. Among them were elderly men and women, and children as young as 5-8 months old. They survived the war, the pogroms in Bucharest and Iași, the deportations to Transnistria, and the internment in forced labour camps. Most of them were originally from Bukovina and Bessarabia, with family outside of Romania, including in Palestine where relatives had already established a homestead. These passengers travelled in groups, either tied by blood or by economic relations. The list of casualties from after the disaster showed that no passenger was unknown to someone in Tel Aviv, and each had a person to receive them on the shore.<sup>51</sup>

In the preliminary lists of passengers there were also Jews from Cernăuți, who were authorized to leave by the Governor of Bukovina, but none of them embarked to emigrate. The registration of Jews from Cernăuți was done through Stefano D'Andreia, who collected sums of money (the equivalent of 356 tickets — so, 50,000,000 lei) from Jews in the ghetto, promising that he would take them from the ghetto and transport them to Palestine with an authorization by the authorities in Bucharest and the Government of Bukovina. But the Government of Bukovina had started the deportation of Jews to Transnistria and thus cancelled the departure authorizations, ordering that the money collected be returned to the Jews.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>49</sup> D.J.A.N. Constanța, Fond Căpitănia Portului Constanța, Dosar 123/1940-1942, f. 126.

<sup>50</sup> D.J.A.N. Constanța, Fond Căpitănia Portului Constanța, Dosar 132/1941, f. 116.

<sup>51</sup> ACSIER, Fond III, Dosar 28, f. 103.

<sup>52</sup> Stefano D'Andreia told the potential emigrants that he would deposit the collected sums at the Deposits Bank and that he would file a lawsuit against the State for cancelling the already-obtained authorizations, additionally mentioning that a deduction of 12% would be made from the sum owed. The Jews did not receive back the full cost of the tickets and, in the case of those deported to Transnistria, most likely never saw any money returned at all.

This “Struma scandal”, in no way unique, was a profitable one for Jean Pandelis and his emissary to Cernăuți, the shipowner Stefano D’Andreia,<sup>53</sup> who worked with the lawyer Eusebiu Hotinceanu. The group received approval from the Government of Bukovina to draw up a list of 130 people for departure. Instead of only 130 people, 356 Jews signed up, each paying 200,000 lei for a spot on the ship or 300,000 lei for a seat in a cabin. But they were deported to the Cernăuți ghetto, with no exceptions, beginning on 11 October 1941. The would-be emigrants stayed there for 15 days and, implicitly, their approval for emigration was cancelled. Following the deduction of 12.5% of the cost of each ticket for allegedly unrecoverable expenses (according to the account statements from the Romanian Credit Bank in Cernăuți, and later confirmed during an investigation), it appears that Stefano D’Andreia deposited 36,387,982 lei into his personal account, and under the name of Hotinceanu, in a separate account entitled “Palestine”, a further sum of 11,500,000 lei — in total, the deposits were worth 47,887,982 lei.<sup>54</sup>

The “Alya” Committee collected a total of 33,000,000 lei for the transport.<sup>55</sup> All receipts for the purchase of tickets were destroyed at Ella Gutman-Bunescu’s house, fearing investigations by the Ilfov Court following complaints made by some Jews.<sup>56</sup>

Based on an anonymous complaint, the Prime Minister’s Office ordered an investigation and a write-up from the Prosecutor’s Office of Cernăuți Court, in connection with certain irregularities that occurred during the evacuation of Jews from Cernăuți in autumn 1941. The resulting report revealed several issues concerning the emigration. Namely, it showed that people were recorded on the emigration lists even before the establishment of the Cernăuți ghetto, by the owner of the vessel Stefano D’Andreia, with the help of lawyer Eusebiu Hotinceanu.

Hotinceanu, having been asked to provide an explanation, revealed that he was the victim of a blackmail attempt by Major Teodorescu Sachelarie Alexandru from the Bucharest Gendarmerie Inspectorate. The latter had demanded 10,000,000 lei from Hotinceanu to obtain approval for the departure of the Jews to Palestine. The ship’s owner, represented by Hotinceanu, did not agree with this proposal, and thus Major Sachelarie lowered his price to 5,000,000 lei. Hotinceanu declined the second proposal and stated that the ship’s owner would only pay if the major could intervene and remove as many Jews as possible from the Cernăuți ghetto — a number which, at that point, was fixed at 130 people — and to obtain authorization to leave the ghetto. Hotinceanu’s request was partially granted: an

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<sup>53</sup> ACNSAS, Fond Documentar, Dosar D 15412, f. 298.

<sup>54</sup> ACNSAS, Fond Documentar, Dosar D 15412, f. 283.

<sup>55</sup> ACNSAS, Fond Documentar, Dosar D 15412, f. 299.

<sup>56</sup> ACNSAS, Fond Documentar, Dosar D 15412, f. 297.



increase in the number of people authorized to emigrate was obtained, but the exit from the ghetto was not allowed.<sup>57</sup> As the terms of the initial agreement were not fulfilled, Hotinceanu refused to pay Major Sachelarie any more money and renounced the deal.

Major Sachelarie was then summoned to the hearings, and gave a contradictory statement. Since there was no evidence to prove the crime reported in the initial complaint and write-up, the investigation charged Hotinceanu with abuse of power. The proceedings also revealed a number of accomplices from the City Hall's litigation department, who collaborated in compiling the list of authorizations and in releasing Jews who were set to leave Cernăuți by train.<sup>58</sup> Upon further review of the lists, additional authorizations were found to have been made by the Mayor of Cernăuți, Traian Popovici.<sup>59</sup>

The investigation showed that Traian Popovici had made numerous additions to the lists. He was accused of planning the release of Jews from the ghetto, in exchange for 40,000 to 100,000 lei per head. The same accusations were brought against Major Iacobescu, the former commander of the ghetto. Questioned about what criteria he considered when adding names to the list of authorizations, Popovici stated that he had examined each case and, based on "humane" considerations, allowed close relatives to benefit from protection of the holder of the initial authorization. The practice of adding names to individual authorizations had also been carried out by other heads of the gendarmerie who supervised the ghetto: this included Major Geamanduri, Captain Andronescu Dan, Sublieutenant Criveanu Ronțiu Teodor, among others.<sup>60</sup> As in the case of Hotinceanu, they were charged with abuse of power.

On the emigration lists for the Struma, there were also passengers from Iași, a city which had been home to intense Zionist organizing before 1941, including through the youth sections of Hanoar Hatzioni, Hashomer Hatzair, Hashmoneia, Gordonia, Bnei Avodah, Betar, and others.

<sup>57</sup> See the report on judicial investigations in connection with the sorting and evacuation of Jews from Cernăuți in Autumn 1941, in Arhivele Militare Române (AMR), Direcția Justiției Militare, Fond 5465, Dosar 2319, f. 317-318.

<sup>58</sup> AMR, Direcția Justiției Militare, Fond 5465, Dosar 2319, f. 314.

<sup>59</sup> For example, according to Authorization no. 9299 "Re: Wagner Iacob and Family" ("Nr. 9229 a lui Wagner Iacob cu familia"), the text "and with a 64-year-old brother, Leibisch Wagner" ("și cu un frate de 64 de ani, Leibisch Wagner") was later added. Mayor Traian Popovici was accused of adding a similar mention in Authorization no. 797 of Weintraub Strul, where he wrote: "together with his sister Ida Berghoff, née Weintraub, a widow and state pensioner, with whom he lives" ("împreună cu sora sa Ida Berghoff, născută Weintraub, văduvă, pensionară de stat, cu care locuiește împreună"). AMR, Direcția Justiției Militare, Fond 5465, Dosar 2319, f. 315.

<sup>60</sup> AMR, Direcția Justiției Militare, Fond 5465, Dosar 2319, f. 315-316.

## V. Some examples of individuals registered to depart

**Isac Tercatin** prepared for years to emigrate to Palestine. A member of the Zionist organization Betar,<sup>61</sup> he, like other members, studied agriculture and other trades that he could make use of in his new country. Betar was a right-wing, anti-Marxist organization whose goal was to carry out public and paramilitary actions that would spur the rapid establishment of an Israeli state.<sup>62</sup> In Romania, Betar (also known as B'rith Trumpeldor) was the youth section of the New Zionist Organization,<sup>63</sup> and through intense activities manifested itself in all areas of Jewish life.<sup>64</sup>

A report from the Iași Police Inspectorate described a meeting of Revisionist Zionists which took place on 15 March 1937 at the city's Trade Council. Isac Tercatin, as leader of the youth organization ("Mefaked Ken Beitar Iași"), spoke about the "formation of a fighting legion of Jews, which would serve as a guard of defence for those in Palestine."<sup>65</sup> Tercatin was also a member of a special council created by the local committee of the Jewish Party ("Partidul Evreiesc"),<sup>66</sup> whose headquarters in Iași was located at 20 Cuza Vodă Street. The role of this commission was to recruit members from the Zionist youth organizations Hashomer Hatzair, B'rith Hacanaim, and B'rith Trumpeldor, "in order to further spread the idea of the 'Jewish Party'".<sup>67</sup>

<sup>61</sup> Founded in Riga in 1923, Betar was led by Vladimir (Ze'ev) Jabotinsky (1880-1940). It was a Revisionist Zionist organization, representing the right- to far-right of Zionism, and placed itself against Marxist/labour-aligned organizations. See *Cuvântul Evreesc* III, no. 55, 17 January 1937; Peter Bergamin, *The Making of the Israeli Far-Right: Abba Ahimeir and Zionist Ideology* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2020), 90.

<sup>62</sup> Alexandru Elias notes that all Zionist organizations, whether of the left or the right, sought to prepare for emigration to Palestine and did not involve themselves in internal (Romanian) political life. Based on the socialist ideology of some of the organizations, the authorities speculated that there were connections with the Communist Party and with the Soviet Union, and thus denigrated Zionism as an enemy of public order. See: Alexandru Elias, "Sionismul, între realitate și mistificare", in *Buletinul Centrului, Muzeului și arhivei istorice a evreilor din România* 11, ed. Dumitru Hâncu and Harry Kuller (Bucharest, 2005), 20.

<sup>63</sup> *Translator's note*: "Noua Organizație Sionistă" in Romanian, also referred to by its acronym, "Tzakh", in Hebrew. The New Zionist Organization was founded by Jabotinsky after an ideological split from the larger World Zionist Organization in 1935 and was the main Revisionist Zionist formation at the time.

<sup>64</sup> In Romania, this general formation had been operating from Bucharest since 1928, under the chairmanship of lawyer Iacob Schieber from Cernăuți. It consisted of four sections: Moldova (headquartered in Iași), Bessarabia (Chișinău), Bucovina (Cernăuți), and Transylvania (Dej). In 1937, except for Cernăuți, there were almost no other Zionist youth organizations rivalling Betar in any Bukovinian city.

<sup>65</sup> ANR, Fond Inspectorate Generale de Poliție, Dosar 779, f. 1.

<sup>66</sup> The Jewish Party of Romania (Partidul Evreiesc din România) was founded on 4 May 1931. Following the party's General Congress on 7-8 November 1933, a Central Committee was elected, including a delegate from Iași, the lawyer M. Moscovici. See: *Programul și Statutele Partidului Evreiesc din România, Votate la Congresul General din 7-8 noiembrie 1933, Discursul de deschidere al Congresului* (Bucharest, 1934), 34.

<sup>67</sup> ANR, Fond Inspectorate Generale de Poliție, Dosar 779, f. 269.



In October 1937, the Iași Police Inspectorate reported that Betar received a package with documents and instructions for the intensification of their propaganda. The report also showed that the local Betarist youth group consisted of 36 members between the ages of 13 and 23. Twice per week, on Tuesdays and Sundays, they gathered in a closed room to attend Zionist history courses, but also to undertake paramilitary training.<sup>68</sup>

In 1938, Isac Tercatin took his brother Baruch Tercatin, then only 10 years old, to the Trianon Theatre in Iași, to listen to the speech of the Zionist leader Vladimir (Ze'ev) Jabotinsky, who had come to Romania to lobby for Jewish emigration to Palestine. Later, Isac would contribute to the organization of the transport of emigrants on the Darien II ship, remaining in Iași to help with further transports.<sup>69</sup>

Following the Iași pogrom, Isac fled to Bucharest, though the rest of his family remained in Iași. At 26 years old, his desire to emigrate had grown stronger, as events increasingly unfavourable to Jews began to unfold in the capital.<sup>70</sup> Baruch Tercatin later remembered: “My brother, who at that time was the leader of the Betar organization in Iași, was very active in organizing Aliyah. [...] We were once walking down the street together and a Legionnaire<sup>71</sup> suddenly caught him and sent him to unload sacks of cement from a vehicle. My brother was then sent to a labour camp, but was later released.”<sup>72</sup>

After the Iași pogrom, as an August 1941 note from the Police Inspectorate showed, Zionist activity in the city was “completely halted”. The New Zionist Organization had started its activity in May and was occupied with the massive emigration of young people, but both Zionist activity and fundraising through Keren Hayesod (United Israel Appeal) and Keren Kaymeth (the Jewish National Fund) were stopped by the bloody events of the pogrom, which took place on 28-29 June 1941. In a note from the Iași City Police dated 27 August, it was written that, “regarding the activity of the Jews in relation to recent events and the restrictive measures taken against them, no concrete [Zionist] action is currently observable in Iași, in any domain, since such actions have nobody to organize them, as the main leaders of the Jewish masses are missing, some having been interned, others having left Iași, and others were sent to unknown places by the army on 28 June 1941.”<sup>73</sup>

<sup>68</sup> ACNSAS, Fond Documentar, Dosar D 15503, f. 521.

<sup>69</sup> Douglas Frantz and Catherine Collins, *Death on The Black Sea. The Untold Story of The Struma and World War II's Holocaust at Sea* (New York: Harper Collins, 2003), 87.

<sup>70</sup> Douglas Frantz and Catherine Collins, *Death on The Black Sea*, 88.

<sup>71</sup> *Translator's note*: A member of the far-right, antisemitic Legion of the Archangel Michael, or Iron Guard, active in Romania between 1927 and January 1941.

<sup>72</sup> See the declaration from Baruch Tercatin in *Jurnalul Săptămânii* (Tel Aviv), 23 February 2018.

<sup>73</sup> “...cu privire la activitatea evreilor față de recentele evenimente și față de măsurile restrictive luate contra lor, în prezent la Iași, nu se observă o acțiune concretă pe tărâmul vreunui domeniu, întrucât asemenea acțiuni nu are cine să le conducă, căci principalii conducători ai maselor



The President of the Jewish Community, Iacob Iosef, who survived the pogrom, took charge of helping poor families and those who had suffered losses as a result of the events, organizing a collection of funds from wealthier families.<sup>74</sup> An 11 April 1942 note by the Detectives' Corps also revealed that the recently established Centrala Evreilor<sup>75</sup> undertook efforts to facilitate the emigration of a large number of Jews from Romania to the United States or Palestine.<sup>76</sup> The departure of around 10,000-20,000 Jews to Palestine was expected, as organized by Mișu Benvenisti, the President of the Zionist Executive and of the local Palestine Office.<sup>77</sup>

Later in 1941, when a spot opened up on the Struma, Isac Tercatin did not hesitate to go to Palestine, despite knowing the risks involved. The success of the previous emigration on the Darien II gave him confidence that the Struma would have the same happy outcome.

On 17 November 1941, the GPD announced, according to information circulating among Jews in Bucharest, that "a number of young Betarists" were going to leave on the Struma, travelling of their own accord to Constanța. The leadership of the organization forbade young people to return to the capital, in the event that the emigration would no longer be carried out.<sup>78</sup>

Among the Betar members who sought to leave was **Yaakov Bercovici**, of Dorohoi. Bercovici and many of his fellow Zionist militants had also managed to flee to Bucharest, and helped organize the transport of emigrants on the Struma.<sup>79</sup> According to Efraim Ofir, the exact number of Betar activists on board the Struma is unknown; however, according to the list drawn up by the Revisionist Zionists, there were approximately 200 members on the ship, including the local president of the New Zionist Organization, Dr. S. Lazarovici, alongside commanders Yona Berkovici, Arie Lekerm, Itzhak Terkatin, Abraham Vidman, Iehoshua Binlag,

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evreiești lipsesc, unii fiind internați, alții s-au mutat din Iași, iar alții au fost trimiși fără a se ști unde de armata la 28 iunie 1941." ACNSAS, Fond Documentar, Dosar D 11372, f. 37.

<sup>74</sup> ACNSAS, Fond Documentar, Dosar D 11372, f. 37.

<sup>75</sup> Published in the Romanian official gazette *Monitorul Oficial* no. 299 (17 December 1941), the Decree-Law no. 3415 disbanded the Federation of Unions of Jewish Communities in Romania and established Centrala Evreilor ("Jewish Centre"). The latter's structure and functioning was regulated by the Decree-Law no. 319 which appeared in *Monitorul Oficial* no. 26 (31 January 1942). Centrala became the only Jewish organization authorized to represent the interests of the Jewish community in Romania, under the control of the Antonescu regime. One of Centrala's duties was to organize the emigration of the Jews. See: *Colecție de Decrete-Legi, Regulamente, Decizii privitoare la organizarea evreilor din România*, Editura Centralei Evreilor din România, 1942, 1-5.

<sup>76</sup> ACNSAS, Fond Documentar, Dosar D 11372, f. 260.

<sup>77</sup> ACNSAS, Fond Documentar, Dosar D 11372, f. 47.

<sup>78</sup> ACNSAS, Fond Documentar, Dosar D 15412, f. 86.

<sup>79</sup> Douglas Frantz and Catherine Collins, *Death on The Black Sea*, 87-88.



and Miki Gutenmacher.<sup>80</sup> A second list, which appeared on 20 March 1941 in *HaMashkif* (“The Observer”), the newspaper of the Revisionist Party (Hatzohar) in Mandatory Palestine, provided a further 15 names of members, three of whom were accompanied by family members. According to that list, as well as a report published in the booklet *On the Way to Zion*, approximately 100 Betar members were counted among the victims of the Struma disaster.<sup>81</sup>

There were also four travellers from Gura Humorului on board the Struma: **Ester Leib** (born Staroste, in 1902), **Şmuel (Schmuel) Fleischer** (born 1900), **Sonia Fleischer** (born Solomon, in 1905), and **Norbert Fleischer** (born 1935, the son of Schmuel and Sonia).<sup>82</sup>

**Fritz Picker**, from Câmpulung and president of the city’s Zionist organization, managed to leave the city during the Holocaust and before the deportations to Transnistria, living in Bucharest. In 1941, together with his wife Rosa and their daughter Silvia, he boarded the Struma.<sup>83</sup>

The Elcovici family from Iași was subjected to violence and physical terror during the pogrom unleashed by the Antonescu regime in the Moldavian city. **Şmil Elcovici**, a merchant by trade, was among the survivors of the genocide. In a statement by Şmil, which can be found in the “File on the sufferings of a Jewish family. General inquiry among the Jews of Romania.” (“Dosarul suferințelor unei familii evreiești. Anchetă Generală printre Evreii din România”), in the archives of the World Jewish Congress, he stated that his brother, **Tuli Elcovici**, died on the Struma.<sup>84</sup> The other brother, severely affected by beatings he sustained during the pogrom, died shortly thereafter. Their father, Aizic Elcovici, died of asphyxiation on one of the “death trains” that transported Jews towards Podu Iloaiei. According to Rașela Elcovici, Aizic’s widow and Şmil’s mother, Aizic’s death occurred at the train station in Iași on 30 June 1941.

<sup>80</sup> Efraim Ofir, *With No Way Out*, 107.

<sup>81</sup> Efraim Ofir, *With No Way Out*, 107.

<sup>82</sup> Arieh Yaron (Iticescu) (translator), *Gura Humorului, un oraș din Bucovina de Sud: Cronica comunității evreiești*, 280.

<sup>83</sup> Veronica Bârlădeanu, ed., *Viața și martiriul evreilor din Câmpulung-Bucovina*, vol. II, (Bucharest: Tipografia Cicero, 1997), 384.

<sup>84</sup> “After the massacre in Iași, I lost my father. My younger brother was severely beaten. I took care of him for a year, selling everything, but my beloved little brother died. With great material sacrifice I sent my other brother to Palestine on the Struma, but this dear brother was also a victim, [this time] of Turkish criminals. I had two families to support: mine, and that of my mother, with my sick sister and brother. I was booted from my father’s shop, I sold the machines from the workshop, all of the tools, and various things in the house in order to save my brother; I sold everything, but his illness had no cure. It is impossible to describe everything — the Legionary terror, the Christian workers’ terror, the criminality of it all. We saw their true face, and we know them now. Not a just word from either this whole time. Therefore, we need to save ourselves now. We can no longer stay in these places stained with the blood of my family and that of thousands of Jews.” See: ACSIER, Fond CME, Plic 23, Dosar A, regarding the head of the family Elcovici Şmil.

Among the passengers whose lives were saved by disembarking in Istanbul was **Medeea Salomovici**. Born in Bucharest in 1919, Medeea was the only daughter of Jean Marcovici and Cecilia Fischer. She graduated high school in the capital in 1937 and found work at an architecture office, becoming the head secretary. She knew three foreign languages: French, English, and German. In 1940, she married Nezu Salomovici, the son of a wealthy textile merchant from Bucharest, and they lived together in a house on Calea Moșilor. The tickets to emigrate were purchased by Nezu's father, with the hope that the young couple would find a future in Palestine. One day before the departure of the train from Bucharest to Constanța, Medeea, who was pregnant, suffered a miscarriage. Because of her health, she had difficulties travelling, especially due to the rough conditions on board the ship. When the ship was anchored on the Turkish shore, Medeea (who further suffered an embolism) disembarked.<sup>85</sup> Although the authorities barely gave her permission to leave, she was taken to the "Or Ha'Haim" Community Hospital, where she was treated. Another eight emigrants disembarked, holding valid British visas for Palestine. Medeea's husband remained on board, despite her insistence that he accompany her. When she recovered, she was informed of the sinking of the Struma. She received an emigration certificate from the Jewish Agency and made her way to Palestine by land.<sup>86</sup> There, she was offered a position at a diamond polishing company in Tel Aviv, and lived at the "Beith HaHulutzot" hostel. She remarried in France, where she died in 1996.<sup>87</sup>

The family of **Samuel Aroni** (Cervinschi)<sup>88</sup> was smuggled out of the Chișinău ghetto in October 1941, holding travel tickets to Palestine for four people, including his parents and the two children. They arrived in Bucharest where they hid in an apartment on Mântuleasa Street, awaiting the departure of the Struma. On 24 November 1941, after the ship's departure was postponed several times, police descended upon the Bucharest apartment of their uncle, Monia Apotecher, because the three smugglers who helped the Chervinschis escape the ghetto were caught assisting another Jewish family. Apotecher tried to bribe the police to look the other way, but was arrested. Samuel Aroni's parents and grandmother were also

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<sup>85</sup> Shimon Rubinstein, "Asupra câtorva tragedii mici...", 200-202.

<sup>86</sup> ACSIER, Fond III, Dosar 313, f. 38.

<sup>87</sup> Shimon Rubinstein, "Asupra câtorva tragedii mici...", 203.

<sup>88</sup> Today, Samuel Aroni is Professor Emeritus at the University of California in Los Angeles. In 1995, he published the second edition of his work entitled *Memories of the Holocaust: Kishinev (Chișinău) 1941-1944*, in which he recounted his experience of the Chișinău ghetto and how he managed to escape to Bucharest with his family. He was 14 years old when he was imprisoned in the ghetto, together with his parents and 6-year-old brother, Alexandru Vlahuță Street no. 19. After the war, Samuel changed his name to Aroni, in memory of his grandfather who died during a death march to Transnistria. In 1994, he returned to his hometown for the first time in 53 years, where he participated in the organization of the city's first post-war international symposium on Jewish history, language, and literature.



arrested. He and his brother managed to escape by running out the back door. The children were then hidden in the house of the Saperstein family, relatives of their uncle, until they were rescued by other family members in January 1942. Another uncle, Iosif Landau, travelled illegally from Galați to Bucharest, disguised as an officer, and took the two boys to Galați, where they remained until 1943. After the arrest of Samuel's parents, David and Clara, in April 1942, they were interned in the Dumanovca camp, but managed to escape before Russian troops advanced on Transnistria. Another two years passed before the family, now reunited, managed to emigrate illegally to Palestine. On 9 July 1944, they joined the list of 731 refugees on the Kazbek ship.<sup>89</sup>

**Mattei Dogan**, the French sociologist of Romanian origin, narrowly avoided being one of the victims of the Struma disaster. A century after his birth (16 October 1920), new information appeared that changed the biography of the well-known academic.

It was already known that Mattei Dogan emigrated to France in 1946, where he became a central figure in the field of social sciences, seen by Romanian political scientists as a founder of the discipline. At the request of Vincent Hoffmann-Martinot, the French sociology professor and President of the Mattei Dogan Foundation (founded in Paris in 2001), I documented the possible Jewish origins of Dogan's family. It was then that I discovered, in a March 1945 issue of *Monitorul Oficial* (the Romanian government's legislative monitor), a name change request from Pinsler to Dogan.<sup>90</sup> This information allowed me to find out that Matei Pinsler, alongside his co-religionists, suffered persecutions under the Antonescu regime, having been a victim of forced labour in harsh conditions at the Cotroceni Poligon camp.

2020, Professor Cristian Preda published a new study of Dogan's biography based on information from his personal file at the University of Bucharest, where the sociologist (then still a student, under the name Matei Pinsler) had studied.<sup>91</sup> According to Preda, it is very likely that Matei Pinsler had also attended

<sup>89</sup> Samuel Aroni, *Memories of the Holocaust: Kishinev (Chișinău) 1941-1944* (Los Angeles: University of California, Los Angeles, International Studies and Overseas Programs, 1995), 55-56.

<sup>90</sup> *Monitorul Oficial al României. Partea 1*, 113, no. 057, 10 March 1945, 1843. See also the result of the name change request: *Monitorul Oficial al României. Partea 1*, 113, no. 242, 23 October 1945, 9321: "Through decision No. 106.063 of 17 October 1945, Mr. Matei Pinsler, born in Roman, Roman county, changed his patronymic on 16 from Pinsler to Dogan, and is henceforth named Matei Dogan."

<sup>91</sup> Enrolment at the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters was made on the basis of decree-law no. 275 of 12 April 1945, which allowed the registration of young people persecuted for racial reasons between 1 January 1938 and 23 August 1944. See: Cristian Preda, "Descoperiri recente privitoare la biografia și scrierile lui Mattei Dogan (1920-2010)", in *Revista de Istorie a Evreilor din România. Discurs și violență antisemită în România modernă 4-5* (20-21), ed. Adrian Ciofâncă (Bucharest: Editura Hasefer, 2019-2020), 197-205.

the College for Jewish Students,<sup>92</sup> within the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters, as his name appeared on a list of students who performed forced labour there, clearing snow.<sup>93</sup>

Matei Pinsler sought a road to safety, being one of those registered to emigrate on the Struma. In the list provided by the “Alya” Committee to the GPD seeking the release of members of work detachments, Matei Pinsler is the sixth person listed. He served in the Cotroceni Poligon camp with fellow detachment member David Stoliar, the only survivor of the Struma disaster, who is the eleventh person listed.<sup>94</sup>

These documents do not reveal whether Matei Pinsler arrived in Constanța to board the Struma, nor what the reasons may have been for his non-appearance. It is possible that he abandoned his plans once he saw the condition of the ship. He would not have been the only one: according to historian Lucian Zeev Herșcovici, several Jews refused to board the ship, including a young Radu Bogdan, the historian and art critic.<sup>95</sup> Like them, Matei Pinsler may have chosen to save himself by remaining in the country.

## VI. The memorialization of the victims.

### The role of Max Ludovic

In Bucharest, in the Giurgiului Jewish Cemetery, a monument was erected in memory of the victims of the Struma disaster. This monument was the initiative of the industrialist Max Ludovic, the husband of Mina Gaster, who herself was the sister of the Romanian-born linguist and scholar Moses Gaster. Their sons, the chemist Eduard Ludovic and the lawyer Eugen Emanoil Ludovic, disappeared on their way to Eretz Israel at 39 and 36 years of age, respectively. The Ludovic brothers had visas for Iraq, but were not allowed to disembark when the Struma docked in Istanbul.<sup>96</sup>

In a series of 1946 memorandi put forward to the Federation of Unions of Jewish Communities in Romania and the Jewish Community of Bucharest, Max

<sup>92</sup> One of the first legislative measures undertaken by the Antonescu regime after its establishment was one which regulated the situation of Jews in education. Decree-Law no. 3438 of 11 October 1940 excluded Jews from all forms and levels of schooling, i.e. from primary schools, secondary schools, and universities. The law granted Jews the right to organize their own primary and secondary schools attended exclusively by Jewish students. The College for Jewish Students, founded by lawyer Marcu Onescu (Oxemberg), was founded as a result of this decree.

<sup>93</sup> ACSIER, Fond III, Dosar 124 A, f. 7. Matei Pinsler is listed at number 150. His place of birth (Roman), the names of his parents (Iancu and Ghitla), and his address in Bucharest (38 General Lahovari Street) are all indicated.

<sup>94</sup> ACNSAS, Fond Documentar, Dosar D 15412, f. 147.

<sup>95</sup> Lucian Zeev Herșcovici, *Vasul „Struma” în istoriografie...*

<sup>96</sup> See the copy of an address by the Chief Rabbinate of Turkey, Istanbul, 14 February 1946, in ACSIER, Fond III, Dosar 28, f. 12.



Ludovic criticized the attitudes of the leaders of the two institutions, who refused to set up a “tomb” for those lost. The skepticism of the community leadership was a result of the appearance of various rumours that emigrants had actually survived, and were either in St. Moritz or in Australia.

Max Ludovic presented the example of Palestine where, immediately after the disaster, not only was a day of fasting proclaimed, but also a general strike. Near Jerusalem, in the Ma’ale HaHamisha kibbutz, a forest called “Yishuv” was planted, with the first trees dedicated to the memory of the Struma victims. Ludovic also demanded action be taken by the Rabbinical Council led by Chief Rabbi Alexandru Şafran so as to allow widows of the victims to remarry, citing the example of rabbis in Jerusalem who had permitted the remarriage of Medeea Salomovici, while also holding a *Requiem* and erecting a monument to the disappeared.<sup>97</sup>

There were also voices within the Jewish community who, disputing the sinking of the ship, protested against the erection of a monument to the victims. This was the case of the writer Josephine Feinstein,<sup>98</sup> whose two sons were lost in the tragedy: Mircea, a poet, and Harry, a painter.<sup>99</sup>

Max Ludovic’s petitions resonated with the leadership of the Jewish community. The Federation of Unions of Jewish Communities decided to hold an annual *Requiem* for the victims of the Struma disaster, and the Sacra Society collected donations to finance the Giurgiului monument. A 14 February 1946 address by the President of the Jewish Community in Istanbul, Henri Sorianu, may have contributed to these decisions, as he communicated that all passengers on board the Struma had perished in the Black Sea, save for David Stoliar and those who landed in Istanbul on Palestinian visas — thereby denying rumours of the existence of other survivors.<sup>100</sup>

<sup>97</sup> ACSIER, Fond III, Dosar 28, f. 31-38.

<sup>98</sup> In a memorandum dated 9 March 1943, addressed to Chief Rabbi Alexandru Şafran and speculating on various rumours, Josephine Feinstein wrote: “How does the press explain that a ship of 800 people could sink, and only one person escape? The press knows that there were at least 700 young people on the ship (aside from children), between 15 and 30, all athletes. Do they know that the ship was close to the shore, and how is it that not even the crew (who were prepared, like any other crew, for a potential evacuation) could be saved? Or that my boys, one 22 years old, the other 20, were perfect swimmers, and that most of the young men knew how to swim just as well? Do you think they preferred to die? Have journalists ever confirmed news of bodies or the wreckage? Don’t they know that a search was done and nothing was found?” See ACSIER, Fond III, Dosar 28, f. 60-61.

<sup>99</sup> Harry Juster, Josephine Feinstein’s son, drew the Struma on a palette with the caption: “Bucharest, 24.XI.1941, Romania. The dearest palette for my dearest. Harry.” (“Bucureşti, 24.XI.1941, România. Paleta cea mai dragă, ființei celei mai dragi. Harry.”) A reproduction of the drawing can be seen in Israel Bar-Avi, *Scritori din Aliaua Română. Scritori ai generației mele: Josephine Feinstein, poeta-prozatoare* (Jerusalem: Cercul Literar “Menora”, 1970), 18.

<sup>100</sup> ACSIER, Fond III, Dosar 313, f. 97.

Max Ludovic was in charge of procuring four lists of missing people from the Siguranță, the Constanța Port Police, the Red Cross, and a list published in the *Meghilat “Struma”* brochure, which at that point had been censored. Ludovic was one of the first to point out the numerous errors that riddled the lists of passengers, and established a definite list with the help of relatives.<sup>101</sup>

Despite the appeal launched by the Sacra Society, Max Ludovic noted in his memorandum dated 15 December 1947 that the collection of funds and the compiling of names of the disappeared was done with great difficulty — money was received from the relatives of only 152 of the victims.

More than five years after the tragedy, some relatives still denied the sinking of the Struma. A notice accompanied by 63 signatures was sent to the Sacra Society to prevent the engraving of the names of some “supposedly” disappeared on the monument. Thus, spaces were left on the marble where the names should have appeared, but were not engraved.

Max Ludovic pointed out that the notice presented by the 63 signatories was false, as “11 [signatures] were utterly unreadable scribbles, in order to avoid any liability, 17 are written by the same person, 3 were signed without their consent (according to those persons), 4 names are left without signatures, 7 are altogether false as those people contributed with a modest sum or assured a future contribution, and 2 are not even on the list of those perished, so at least 44 signatures are contested.”<sup>102</sup> He condemned those that maintained this “fake news” and who delayed the erection of the monument, a project which had been immediately discussed after 23 August 1944. Among these was Josefina Feinstein, who spread rumours that the passengers on the Struma had landed in Asia Minor or that they were all interned in Camp No. 63 in the Caucasus.<sup>103</sup> Despite these difficulties, a grandiose monument was built in 1947, 3.70m high and 2m wide, with an inscription, and the names of the 769 victims engraved on its ten marble slabs.<sup>104</sup>

<sup>101</sup> “These four lists were not written alphabetically, nor were the names entered in the same order, so it was very difficult to compile them into a single alphabetical list, from which the 769 names on the marble plaques are taken. There were errors in every list, misheard names and typos, and in the end I reviewed everything as best as I could. [...] Through publications, visits, circulars, newspaper personals, solemn requiems, etc. I asked those who knew someone on the Struma to give the exact name of the victim and to contribute as much as their wallet and heart would allow, submitting their voluntary contribution to the Sacra Society.” ACSIER, Fond III, Dosar 28, f. 57.

<sup>102</sup> ACSIER, Fond III, Dosar 28, f. 58.

<sup>103</sup> ACSIER, Fond III, Dosar 28, f. 58.

<sup>104</sup> It reads: “This monument was dedicated to the memory of the holy martyrs and heroes of Romania, perished *al kiddush Hashem* in the waves of the Black Sea, on board the Struma, on 24 February 1942 (7 Adar 5702). Dear and precious children, inseparable in life and beyond its borders, [perished] in the days of terrible persecution. In the service of Israel and of the freedom fighters, 769 brothers and sisters headed towards Eretz Israel, facing the wrath of the waves of



Chief Rabbi Alexandru Şafran accepted Max Ludovic's proposal to raise a monument in memory of the victims of the Struma tragedy on 3 July 1946, in a meeting attended by Wilhelm Filderman, Abraham Feller, and others. However, after 1947, the Jewish Democratic Committee launched a campaign to discredit the rabbi, portraying him as "the servant of the Anglo-American imperialists". As Efraim Ofir noted, in order to benefit from financial and legal support for the raising of the monument, Max Ludovic pioneered this communist-orchestrated campaign.<sup>105</sup>

The monument to the victims of the Struma disaster in the Giurgiului Cemetery was unveiled on 19 September 1948, in the presence of Chief Rabbi Moses Rosen, Salo Schmidt, the President of the Jewish Community of Bucharest, as well as representatives of the Jewish Democratic Committee, and various religious organizations. 4,000 Jews from Bucharest participated in the ceremony.<sup>106</sup>

Since then, annual *Requiems* have been held in Bucharest, known as the "Commemoration of 7 Adar", and organized either at the Giurgiului Cemetery or at the Bucharest Choral Temple. In 1958, Rabbi Moses Rosen gave a sermon in which he evoked the memory of those lost in the tragic maritime event.<sup>107</sup>

"The tragic fate of the 769 is one episode within the great tragedy of the 6 million martyrs of the Holocaust, a terrible warning to the world to do everything possible to prevent such acts from happening again," Rabbi Moses Rosen stated at the 1976 commemoration.<sup>108</sup> Even today, on 24 February, the ceremonies commemorating the victims of the Struma shipwreck continue to take place at the Choral Temple.

In Israel, the memorialization and commemoration of the tragedy caused by the sinking of the Struma is due to the actions of Baruch Tercatin, whose brother Isac Tercatin, of Iaşi, was one of the emigrants who drowned in the Black Sea in 1942. In his autobiography, Baruch Tercatin recalls the commemoration in 1952, which was attended by then-Chief Rabbi of Israel Isser Yehuda Unterman, and the President of the Jewish Agency, Berl Locker.<sup>109</sup>

For the 50th commemoration of the victims of the Struma disaster, Baruch

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the Sea, but also the more dangerous [wrath] of the waves of hatred. They were not allowed to enter the Promised Land, and the work of the murderous arm was made easier. The 769 *Kiddushim* thus joined the 6,000,000 Jews who suffered martyrdom in this terrible unleashing of passions, that of the war of 1939-1945. Today, as the remnants of Israel attempt to rebuild their ranks, we raise this *matzevah* for those without a grave, who will remain forever alive and imperishable in the history of our people. May their memory be a blessing." ACSIER, Fond III, Dosar 59, f. 1.

<sup>105</sup> Efraim Ofir, *With No Way Out*, 257.

<sup>106</sup> *Unirea* IV, no. 170, 21 September 1948, 1 and 3.

<sup>107</sup> "Revista Cultului Mozaic" din R.P.R. III, no. 7 (26), 5 March 1958, 2.

<sup>108</sup> "Revista Cultului Mozaic" din R.P.R. XXII, no. 364, 15 March 1976, 4.

<sup>109</sup> Baruch Tercatin, *Privind spre Ierusalim* (Bucharest: Editura Hasefer, 2016), 152.



Tercatin initiated a large-scale event, and managed to convince the Knesset to organize a special meeting on 19 March 1993.<sup>110</sup> This action was repeated on the 70th anniversary of the tragedy, on 21 February 2012. After an event in the Yerushalayim Hall, a press event followed in the Plenum Hall, attended by the President of the Federation of Jewish Communities in Romania, Aurel Vainer.<sup>111</sup>

64 years after the shipwreck, the Struma Museum was established in Be'er Sheva, where commemorative events take place annually. Baruch Tercatin was involved in the creation and development of the museum, continuing his role as organizer of the annual commemorative events, in collaboration with the Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, the United Organization of Jews of Romanian Origin (Organizația Unitară a Evreilor Originari din România, AMIR), as well as with Hitahdut Olei Romania (the Union of Immigrants from Romania, HOR).

Today, as part of the effort to recover biographical information and photographs of the 769 people who disappeared on board the Struma, there is an online project initiated by Mircea Cohn,<sup>112</sup> whose uncle, Felix Gartenberg, was a passenger on board the Struma. With him were Arnold Gartenberg, Felix's cousin, and Arnold's wife Beca. Arnold was head of Betar in Moinești and one of the organizers of the transport of emigrants on the Struma.<sup>113</sup>

## VII. An original letter from the Struma

Among the original pieces collected in the archive of the CNSAS, there is also a letter sent by one of the passengers before the sinking of the Struma.

The letter, sent to a Mrs. F. Friedman in Bucharest, dated 7 January 1942, was signed by a “Marcel”. This is a pseudonym. The letter's actual author was Dr. Zalman Cohn, who died a month or two later, alongside the other passengers.

At the time of writing, the Struma had been blocked for three weeks by Turkish authorities in the Istanbul port. Although the journey to Istanbul — the ship's first stop — was supposed to last 12 hours, the ship arrived at Büyükdere port on 16 December and would remain there for 70 days. The Jews were forbidden to disembark, being forced to endure difficult conditions. Dr. Zalman Cohn described these conditions with leniency and humour, at a time during which the situation had not yet worsened much. The British authorities granted entry visas to Palestine to only 9 passengers — those who had British citizenship.

In the more than two months during which passengers were stuck on the ship in Istanbul, their desperation took on ever-increasing proportions. Hundreds of letters

<sup>110</sup> Baruch Tercatin, *Privind spre Ierusalim*, 161-162.

<sup>111</sup> Baruch Tercatin, *Privind spre Ierusalim*, 165.

<sup>112</sup> The project takes the form of a Facebook group called “The Struma Tragedy”. They also maintain a website on Geni: <https://www.geni.com/projects/Struma/1123>.

<sup>113</sup> This information was given to me by Mircea Cohn.



and telegrams were sent from the ship, conveying confidence and hope that the outside world would not leave the Jewish emigrants there, forgotten. One telegram sent after “Marcel’s” letter read: “Don’t be late. Our life is in your hands. In the name of God, tell us if there is any hope of getting off this ship. If we can continue the journey by train.”<sup>114</sup> In another telegram, a young man wrote: “The situation is terrible from every perspective, and we believe that we will soon breathe our last.”<sup>115</sup>

“6 January 1942

My dear,

*I continue with a description of our peregrinations on board the Struma.*

*I ended my previous lines by telling you about our arrival in Istanbul.*

*Since 16 December, the date of our arrival, to this day, we are continuously making riddles to figure out the date of our departure. As I wrote to you immediately after our arrival here, the engine of the steamer has been dismantled for repairs and we expect it to be brought to us for our departure.*

*I know that you will accuse me of forgetfulness, carelessness, etc., that I could spend almost 20 days without writing a line. But you are not correct (as always). It was an extremely happy coincidence that I was even able to send my last letter, since at the time not a single line could be sent. I begin this letter without knowing when, or whether, it too will leave; still, it is proof that I thought about you.*

*Life on board is a pleasure. We get up whenever we wish to, each cabin arranging its own schedule. As there are three of us, we have a cabin to ourselves, the dimensions of which are as follows: 1.60m wide, 1.80m high, 1.90m deep — that is, as you can see, a larger-than-average drawer. There are three identical overlapping rooms on the ground floor, first floor, second floor. We occupy the cabin on the second floor. One advantage is that we receive water just after the deck, whereas the others receive it from each other. The depth of 1.90m is shortened by at least 0.40m because we have luggage at our heads. So when we stretch our legs, they leave the cabin. Disadvantage: you always have to have them washed. The neighbours on our right, left, and bottom are more or less likeable, depending on the side from which you look at them.*

*Everything is a bit monotonous, but amusing enough. It reminds me of those nights when we played “concrete or abstract?” or the game with the animals.*

*The food is worse. Worse not because we lack it, or that it’s not varied. On the contrary — it’s different than what I’ve been used to.*

<sup>114</sup> “Nu întârziati. Viața noastră este în mâinile voastre. În numele lui Dumnezeu, răspundeți-ne dacă mai este speranță că vom coborî cu toții de pe vas. Dacă vom putea continua călătoria cu trenul.”

<sup>115</sup> “Situția este groaznică din toate punctele de vedere și credem că în curând vom ajunge la ultima noastră suflare.”

*For example, this morning they served us an orange. It has vitamins.*

*At lunch: Hors d'œuvres: crumbs.*

*Plat de jour: Hard boiled eggs and salami.*

*Bread: 200 grams per day, without coffee, without compote, and without fruit.*

*In the evening: four figs and 15 Turkish hazelnuts.*

*Hot food or tea, missing. They can't be prepared for lack of wood.*

*The entire menu is prepared in the on-board kitchen and brought to everyone's nose; all they have to do is chew it. However, with this regime, nobody has gained weight here yet. On the contrary, everyone's clothes have gotten bigger. Fresh air is always done according to a schedule. Each traveller was given a number. There are 760 numbers in total. Starting at 8 in the morning, passengers with numbers spanning 1 to 150 leave to the deck and stay there until 9 o'clock, and thus the numbers change hourly. And the passengers.*

*What adds a bit of spice to our day-to-day is the arrangement of the management committees. Everyone believes that they'll be able to achieve more than the others.*

*It seems that many interventions are being made so that we can disembark here and be transported by land to Palestine. In this way, for the organizers — Pandelis, Alya, Bunescu, Ariel & Comp. — a significant advantage would be created by recovering the ship, in order to be able to organize another departure. Upon arrival in Palestine the ship cannot return, being confiscated by the English. I assume you understand the game? Until we know who will come out on top, we have to sit still and not be able to do anything.*

*What are you up to? Have you got yourself sorted in any way? Try and write a registered letter, with confirmation of receipt, to the Struma in Istanbul, maybe this way we can receive a letter; until today, nobody has received any correspondence on board, maybe this is how it could arrive.*

*Write to me about everything and everyone.*

*I kiss you very dearly, yours,*

*Marcel*

*P.S. I'm telling you to try to write me like that because no correspondence of any kind has arrived on board, only telegrams.*

*P.P.S.*

*19 January.*

*I reached today without being able to send the letter yet. Still nothing new. However, maybe in 10 days we'll be able to leave.*

*I kiss you sweetly,  
Marcel.<sup>116</sup>*

<sup>116</sup> ACNSAS, Fond Documentar, Dosar D 15412, f. 379-380 bis.



## Rezumat

Folosind surse noi, precum și izvoare publicate anterior, inclusiv documente de arhivă și mărturii de familie, acest articol propune o versiune revizuită și completată a viziunii general acceptate asupra dezastrului Struma din 1942, adică a scufundării unei nave care transporta 769 de persoane, majoritatea emigranți evrei din România către Palestina. Articolul încearcă să reconstituie modul în care a fost emigrarea cu Struma și răspunde la întrebarea privind persoanele implicate în procurarea navei. În plus, articolul prezintă biografiile câtorva dintre victime, precum și cele ale persoanelor care nu s-au urcat la bordul navei. Articolul examinează, de asemenea, implicarea familiilor victimelor în comemorarea dezastrului în România și Israel. Articolul completează literatura secundară existentă privind cazul navei Struma prin clarificarea anumitor aspecte ale evenimentelor, axându-se pe numărul victimelor, proveniența lor geografică și familială, precum și pe interacțiunile dintre autorități și organizatorii emigrării cu ajutorul navei Struma.

**Cuvinte-cheie:** dezastrul Struma; emigrația evreiască; biografie; România; Palestina; comitetul "Alya"

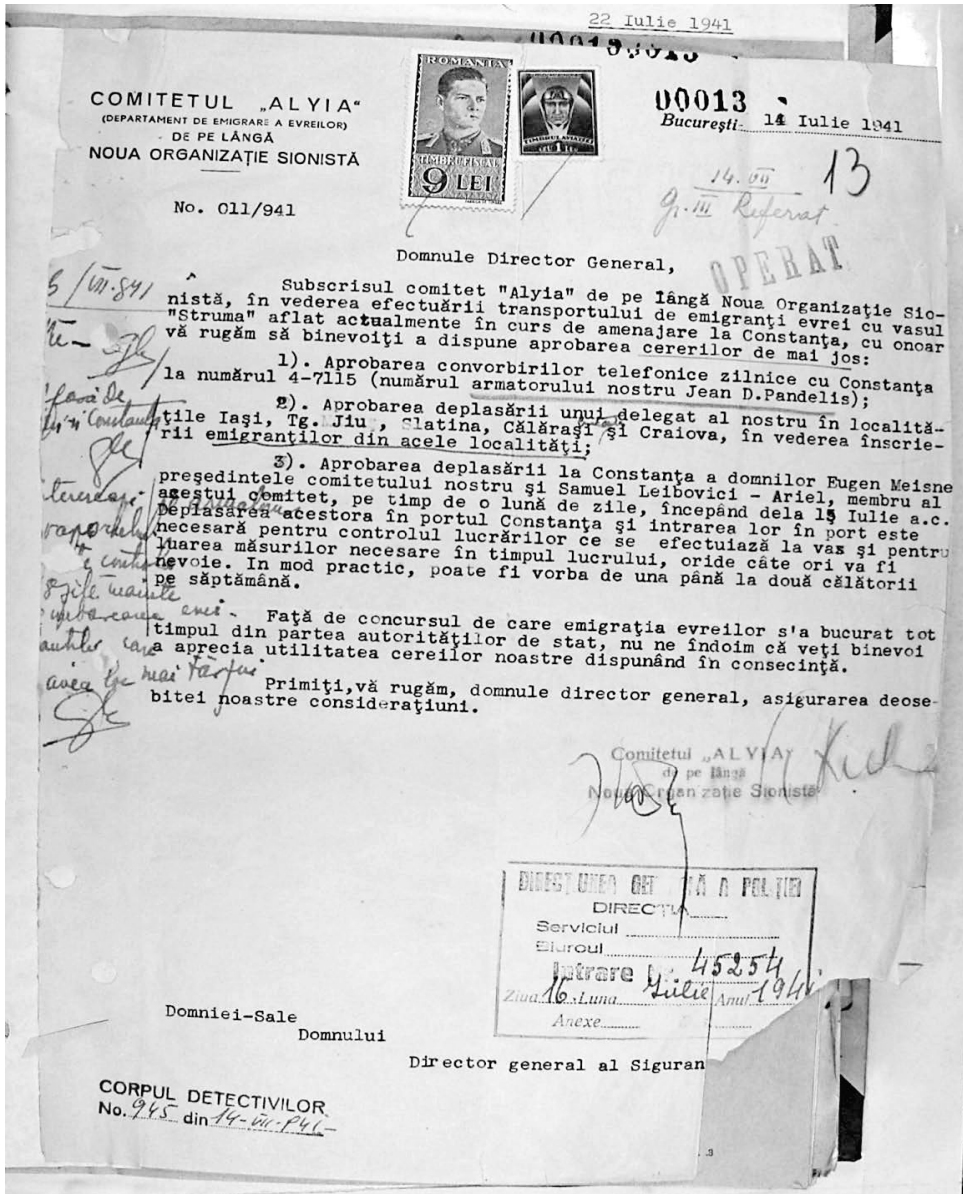
**Maria Mădălina Irimia,**

"Wilhelm Filderman" Centre for the Study of the History of

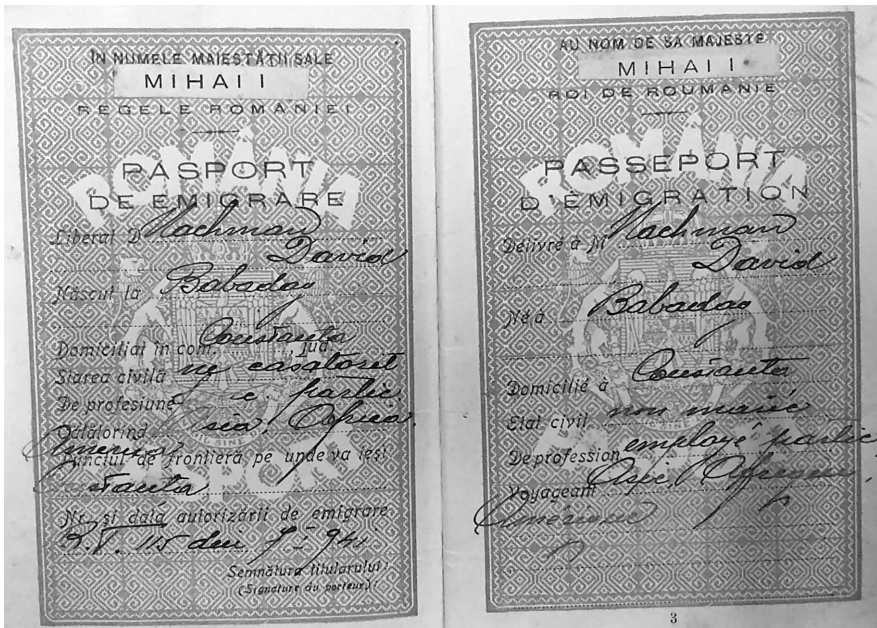
Jews in Romania (CSIER-WF), Bucharest

Email: [madalina.irimia@yahoo.com](mailto:madalina.irimia@yahoo.com)

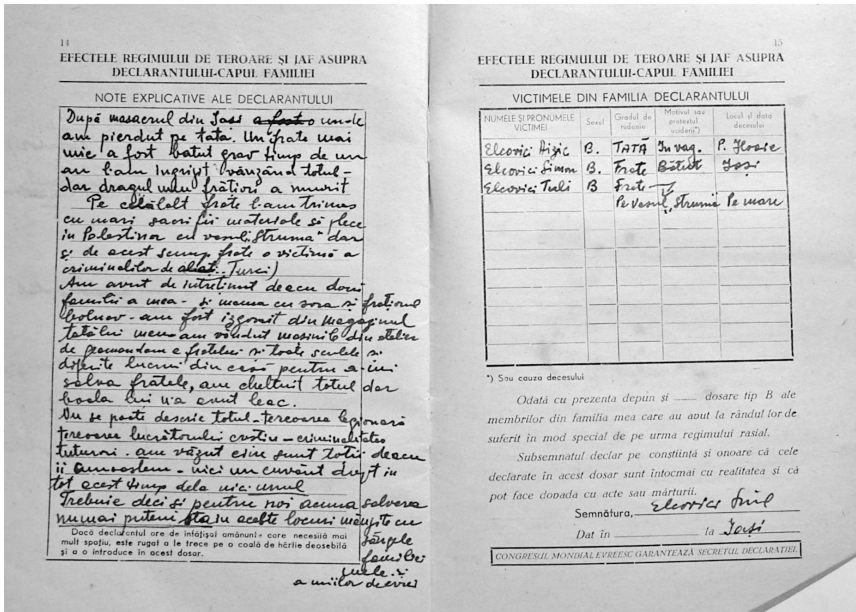
APPENDIX  
DOCUMENTS RELATED TO THE STRUMA



Approval for the emigration of Jews held in concentration camps.  
(Source: ACNSAS, Fond Documentar, Dosar D 15412, f. 13).



A passport for emigration on the Struma.  
(Source: ACSIER, Fond III, Dosar 452).



S. Elcovici Șmil's statement to the World Jewish Congress.  
(Source: ACSIER, Fond CME, Plic 23, Dosar A).



Isac Tercatin (1916-1942). (Source: *Jurnalul Săptămânii* (Tel Aviv), 23 February 2018. Personal archive of Baruch Tercatin).

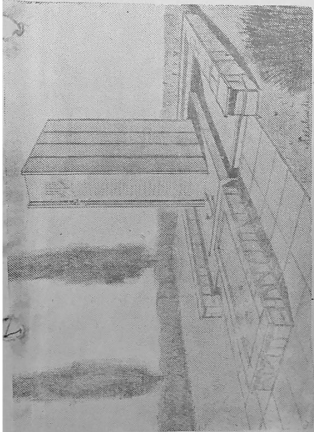
**Sala Sfatului Negustoresc**  
**Evrei!**  
Sunteți rugați a lua parte  
**Luni 15 Martie a.c.**  
**ORA 9 SEARA**  
la **CONFERINȚA** vajnicului luptător sionist  
**Dr. Aron Propes-Varșovia**  
Membru în executiva mondială a org. Brith Trumpeldor  
care va vorbi despre două depoziții:  
**Ch. Waitzman**  
**VI. Jabotinschi**  
Vor mai lua cuvântul D-nii :  
**Ing. Hahamu** Comitetul Executiv N.O.S.  
**F. Rozen** **K.T.H.**  
**N. Baratz** **Tiomkinia**  
**I. Tercatin** **Bethar**

Tip. Aberman

Isac Tercatin listed as a speaker at a Zionist conference (1937). ANR, Fond Inspectoratele Regionale de Poliție, Dosar 779, f. 4.



**Monumentul „STRUMA“**  
 Înălțat în Cimitirul Giurgului, în memoria celor 769 suflete pierite „AL KIDUȘ HAȘEM“, la 24 Februarie 1942, în valurile Mării Negre, în drum spre Țara Sfântă.



Ați contribuit la înălțarea acestui monument istoric al Iudaismului?!  
 Dacă da! onoare Dv.! v'ați făcut datoria.

**Dacă nu!** faceți-vă **imediat sfântă datorie**, depunând contribuția Dv., cât vă lasă inima și punga!

Monumentul acesta, sine loc de mormint scumpilor voștri de pe **Struma**. „Majetvah“ este înălțată, toate numele scumpilor pieriți se găsește săpat pe marmore, dar lucrarea nu este încă plătită, nici pentru cea ce este înălțată, dar cu atât mai puțin, pentru cea ce mai este de făcut.

Nu lăsați să păgubească pe acei care au muncit și cheltuit să ridice monumentul!

La lanțul celor 6 milioane evrei măcelăriți în Europa, la masacrele aela Iași, la vicimile trenului morții, la deportările în massă și la muncile forțate cu consecințele lor (bolnavi pe veci, paralizați, acii, condamnați la moarte, alții la ani grei de temniță) se alătură și cei 769 „Kedosim“ de pe **Struma**.  
**Nu motivați lipsa de bani! Luați din gura voastră și alegeți la Soc. SACRA („Heva Kadisa“) str. Mircea Vodă 30, depunând acolo contribuția Dv. Dați și Dumnezeui vă va da! Sufletele Sfinților voștri nu au încă odihnă, până nu vă faceți datoria!**

The appeal launched by the Sacra Society for the Struma monument.  
 (Source: ACSIER, Fond III, Dosar 28, f. 1).



A view of the inauguration ceremony for the Struma monument. September 19, 1948. (Source: Fototeca CSIER).





The Struma Monument at Giugului Cemetery, Bucharest.  
(Source: Fototeca CSIER).