

Memory of Vapniarka and the Interface of Antisemitism, Fascism, Communism and the Holocaust

Paul A. Shapiro *

Abstract

It has been fashionable in some intellectual circles, both east and west, and expedient in some political circles in the years since the fall of communism, especially in the countries nestled between Germany and Russia, to explore the similarities and differences, or to simply assert the equivalency of the two scourges of the 20th century, fascism and communism, and the evil perpetrated in the name of these ideologies by Nazi Germany, on the one hand, and the Soviet Union, on the other.¹ Antisemitism, in different forms and times, was a prominent feature of both. It is revealing to explore the interface of antisemitism, fascism, communism and the Holocaust through a case study of the actual history of the Romanian-run camp at Vapniarka, located in the Romanian-administered slice of southwestern Ukraine between the Dniester and Bug rivers which was called Transnistria by the Romanians and their Axis allies. The different ways in which the actual history of the place has been remembered, recounted, reflected upon, and exploited in the postwar era is equally instructive for understanding the reciprocal impacts of Holocaust history, ideology, responsibility, politics and memory.

Keywords: memory, antisemitism, fascism, communism, the Holocaust

* *Director, Jack, Joseph and Morton Mandel Center for Advances Holocaust Studies, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 100 Raoul Wallenberg Place, SW., Washington, DC 20024-2126 E-mail: pshapiro@ushmm.org.*

¹ The establishment by the European Union in 2009 of a European Day of Remembrance for Victims of Stalinism and Nazism, commemorated each year on August 23, the anniversary of the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact of 1939, has bolstered assertions of this equivalency. For excellent analyses of this widespread phenomenon and the particularities of how it has manifested itself in Romania, see the following contributions by Michael Shafir (2016, pp. 52-110; 2018a, pp. 33-61; 2018b, pp. 96-150).

Located at a railroad junction, Vapniarka was one of the many locations in Transnistria to which Romanian authorities deported Romanian Jews and in which they concentrated the local Jews already living between the Dniester and the Bug (Shapiro, 2013; White, 2018).² While there was a German military presence in the territory even after the military front line moved far to the east, responsibility for Jewish policy in the territory was Romanian. Most Jews deported to Transnistria from Romania or displaced from their homes in Transnistria were confined in ghettos or sent to localities specifically designated to hold Jews—in towns and villages, on collective farms, and in other localities—where they were concentrated to await further deportation eastward into German-occupied Ukraine, which the Romanians hoped would be imminent, or to be killed. Shortly after the Romanian civil administration of Transnistria was established in the autumn of 1941, a ghetto was established at Vapniarka on the site of an abandoned Soviet cavalry school. But in mid-1942 the site was transformed into an actual camp and enclosed by three concentric barbed wire fences. Designed to hold special prisoners for an apparently indeterminate period, the camp commandant and guards were officers and troops subordinated to the Ministry of Interior in Bucharest and the General Headquarters of the Army, while administrative responsibility for the camp rested locally with the Governor of Transnistria.



Graphic 1: Model of Vapniarka camp created by survivor Avi Solomovici. Source: Beit Lohamei Haghetaot.

² Some of this general outline of the history of Vapniarka is drawn from (Shapiro, 2013). Additional detail and information on sources can be found at (White, 2018, pp. 811-13).

Several hundred Jews lived in the small town of Vapniarka before World War II. Roughly half of them fled eastward during the Red Army's retreat, and those who remained when combined Romanian and German military forces overran the locality in July 1941 were resettled in ghettos in the Tulcin district. But in October 1941, during the forced expulsion of the city of Odessa's huge Jewish population, 1,000 Jews from the Romanians' new provincial capital were sent to Vapniarka. Several hundred Jewish deportees from Romania proper arrived the following month. Many of the Jews in these first contingents died during the typhus epidemic that struck all across Transnistria during the winter and spring of 1941-1942.³ Other internees in the ghetto died as a result of maltreatment, malnutrition, and exposure. The dead were buried at the margin of the ghetto.

In early March 1942, as the typhus epidemic receded, the Vapniarka ghetto was repopulated. Nearly 1,200 Jews, mostly men between ages 18 and 50, were sent to the ghetto from the prison in Odessa, where they had been held for alleged criminal or communist activity (see Report No.31.338 of 1 March 1942 from the Second Army Corps to the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, recording Alexianu's approval of the transfer of the prison inmates to Vapniarka, and Note NO.22.936/A of 2 March 1942 confirming the departure of the prisoners by train) (Trașcă, 2010, pp. 472-475).

By this time, the majority of Odessa's Jewish population was already dead, murdered in the massacres that took place when the Romanian military occupied the city, or having succumbed to typhus, or following deportation to the Berezovca and Golta districts of Transnistria, where they were executed. Ironically, the Jews in the Odessa prison, convicted or accused of a crime, remained alive—a counter-intuitive “privilege” of actual or alleged criminality. (In this period, the Antonescu regime also interned some common criminals, members of the Bogomil religious sect, and Jehovah's Witnesses at Vapniarka, but the vast majority of internees were Jews.) The reprieve, however, did not last long. In May Constantin Z. (Piki) Vasiliu, Deputy Minister of Interior and Commandant of the Romanian Gendarmerie, proposed that Vapniarka be transformed into a camp for Romanian communists who were Jews, and Antonescu approves (see Communique No.799 of 9 May 1942 from Vasiliu to Presidency of the Council of Ministers, in Trașcă, 2010, pp. 526-28). In preparation for the change, Jews who remained alive in the Vapniarka ghetto were removed from the site in June. Some were taken to forced labor sites or to ghettos in the Golta district along the Bug. Others were summarily executed.

By July, decisions regarding who would be sent Vapniarka had been finalized. The following categories were targeted: Jews who were incarcerated in Romania

³ For well-documented studies of Romania's Jewish policy during the Holocaust, and Transnistria in particular, including the typhus epidemics that wracked the territory, see (Ioanid, 2000; International Commission on the Holocaust in Romania, 2005; Ancel, 2003).

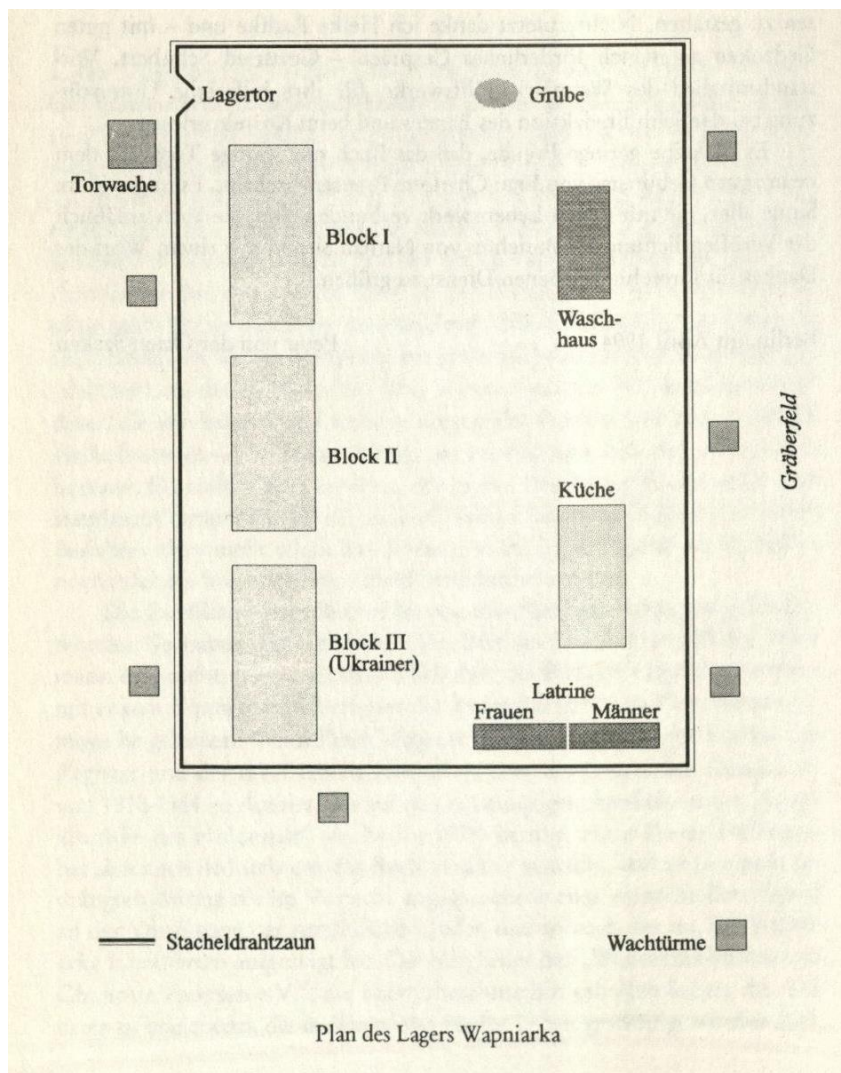
for communist activity, Romanian Jews who were not in jail but suspected of sympathizing with communism, and Jews who had expressed the desire to move from Romania to Soviet-occupied Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina during the year-long Soviet occupation of those territories from June 1940 to June 1941.⁴ During September, nearly 1,200 Jews in these categories were deported from inside Romania proper to Vapniarka. Among them were 407 (406 in some sources) communist, social democratic and other “political prisoners from the Tîrgu Jiu prison and 72 (87 in some sources) prisoners in the same categories from the Caransebeş prison.

Non-Jewish communist prisoners jailed in Romania, often in the same facilities and cells, were not deported. Thus racial discrimination—antisemitism—clearly was a decisive factor even when the Antonescu regime dealt with its communist adversaries. The additional Jews sent to the camp, beyond those already in jail up to the 1,200 number, were simply seized on the streets of Czernowitz and other urban towns, or picked up in their homes without notice, and deported, frequently with little regard to their actual political affiliations. Being Jewish was sufficient cause for suspicion of communist leanings in the eyes of local police authorities. (The randomness of arrests is noted in Hirsch & Spitzer, 2010 p. 209, as well as in survivor memoirs relating to Vapniarka.)

When these new prisoners arrived, the conditions at Vapniarka were horrifying. No repairs had been made to the three camp buildings in which the first contingent of ghetto internees had contracted typhus. Nor had any sanitary measures been taken since the evacuation of the ghetto in June. There was no running water in the camp, and no food supply had been arranged. (Transnistria Governor Gheorghe Alexianu described the dire conditions in a report sent directly to state leader (*Conducător*) Ion Antonescu on November 9, 1942. To alleviate the situation, Alexianu proposed in the same report to review the status of each internee and remove those deemed less dangerous, who could be sent to labor sites and ghettos elsewhere in Transnistria. See Report No. 820 of 9 November 1942 from Alexianu to Antonescu.) (Traşcă, 709-10). Pointing to the shallow graves just outside the barbed wire, camp commandant Lieutenant Colonel Ioan Murgescu told new arrivals that they should try to do better than the over 500 former internees who had succumbed to typhus. To further intimidate his new charges, Murgescu added that while they had arrived on their feet, if they survived they would leave crawling on all fours. (His intimidating welcome is reported in several of the survivor

⁴ See Order No.2592 of 31 July 1942 from Vasiliu to the General Inspectorate of Gendarmerie, (Traşcă, 2010, pp. 617-618); and re-confirmation of the categories on the eve of the deportation in Report No. 41.009 of 5 September 1942 from the General Directorate of the Gendarmerie [Vasiliu] to the General Staff of the Army (Traşcă, 2010, pp. 653-654).

memoirs referenced in this study and in the affidavits of survivors at Murgescu’s postwar trial. See below.)



Graphic 2: Schematic of Vapniarka camp layout. Source: (Nathan Simon, 1994, 14).

Drawing on stocks of animal feed that Soviet forces had abandoned as they retreated, the Romanians fed the prisoners a diet that consisted principally of a fodder pea (*Lathyrus sativus*) that was a satisfactory component of feed for horses but toxic for humans. This wreaked havoc on the health of the prisoners, causing

lesions, violent stomach cramps, diarrhea and dehydration, impaired kidney function, spasmodic twitching of the arms and legs, then paralysis. Dr. Arthur Kessler from Cernăuți (Czernowitz) had managed a hospital during the year of Soviet occupation. Several months after Romania regained control of the city, he was jailed for six weeks for suspected collaboration with the Soviets, but following an investigation and, apparently, payment of a bribe, he had been freed on February 7, 1942. He also managed to be exempted from a large-scale deportation of Jews from the city in June.⁵ Nevertheless, seven months after his release from prison Kessler was picked up at his home during the sweep of the city for ‘leftist Jews’ and deported to Vapniarka. Once in the camp, Kessler assumed leadership of a team of internee doctors who had also been caught up in the September sweep. These doctors tracked the progression of the mystery ailment and linked it to the fodder pea diet. Believing, based on the doctors’ findings, that the internees were being systematically poisoned by the regime, a clandestine communist party cell, working through the prisoner committee recognized by camp authorities and led by Simion Bughici,⁶ who a decade later would become communist Romania’s foreign minister, organized and enforced a hunger strike by the prisoners. (The work of the clandestine cell, variously referred to by survivors as “the small committee,” “the executive cell,” “the clandestine committee,” among other similar designations, was coordinated by experienced communist party members Lazar Grunberg and Andrei Bernat [sometimes Bernath], both of whom were incarcerated in Caransebeș prison before their deportation to Vapniarka and had close ties to the party’s leadership. Both were executed in Rîbnița prison in March 1944 (see below), and both were honored post mortem by the communist regime through the naming of streets, forests, etc. in their memory. For a hagiographic treatment, see Goldberger, 1949). The doctors addressed a series of written appeals to the camp commandant and to the Governor of Transnistria, while the clandestine camp committee took advantage of the fact that some internees were taken out of the camp for labor to get news of conditions in the camp to family members, left-leaning contacts, the Jewish community leadership, and some government officials in Bucharest.

Neither the camp authorities nor the Governor took any action until the Ministry of Interior in Bucharest asked for a report. This led to initiation of an investigation,

⁵ In 2019, Arthur Kessler’s son David donated his father’s memoir and additional documentation and artifacts to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. See (USHMM, Accession Number 2019.183.1, Dr. Arthur Kessler Papers). An inventory of the collection is accessible on the Museum’s web site at www.ushmm.org. Kessler’s certificate of release from the penitentiary and document of exemption from the June deportation are among these papers.

⁶ Bughici (1914-1997), born Simon David, was ambassador to Moscow from 1949 to 1952, when he replaced Ana Pauker as Foreign Minister, a post he held until 1955. He served as vice president of the Council of Ministers from 1955 to 1957, was a member of the party’s central committee from 1948 to 1974, and was a parliamentary deputy from 1948 to 1975.

a visit by Governor Alexianu to the camp, and the dispatch to Vapniarka of a medical commission and the doctor serving as the Transnistria government's Director of Health and Advisor for Sanitation, who was responsible for monitoring health risks in the territory. He became convinced by the "medical records" that had been assembled by the Jewish doctors that a major health disaster was imminent and recommended that the prisoners' diet be changed. Adjustments were made that reduced but did not eliminate the proportion of fodder peas, and permission was granted for the prisoners to receive food, medicine and clothing from family members and Jewish community organizations that were still functioning inside Romania. Still, according to a report from late-February 1943, 611 prisoners showed symptoms of the fodder-pea-disease and 110 of them were severely afflicted with paralysis. A government inspector reported graphically on the condition of the 1200 Jews in the Vapniarka camp, who were victims of "serious poisoning." Noting that half of the internees were affected, the author of the report continued, "First, blackish-reddish spots appear on the toes, with severe muscle spasms and painful urination, followed by paralysis of the legs" (Report 1942, in Trașcă, 2010, pp. 728-31).

With attention focused on the camp, the Antonescu regime ordered a review of the status of the internees, as had been suggested earlier by Governor Alexianu.⁷ In March 1943 a review commission determined that 427 of the 554 individuals who had been sent to Vapniarka while free (not incarcerated) in Romania had been sent 'without cause' except, of course, that they were Jews.⁸ Instead of repatriation to Romania, however, these prisoners were moved from Vapniarka to the ghettos at Savrani and Olgopol and to the German-run bridge construction site at Trihati. Some perished at these sites. While decisions regarding the repatriation of most

⁷ The review developed in stages. As tens of thousands of Jews were deported to Transnistria, Alexianu complained about the difficulties he faced managing and provisioning the local population and the influx of Jews. Charged with supplying the Vapniarka camp, he won approval for the internees to be taken out of the camp to work, thus providing, from his perspective, at least some return on the cost of provisioning the camp. When it became clear that the internees used this "opportunity" to establish lines of communication with Bucharest and to complain about conditions in the camp, Vice Minister of the Interior Vasiliu, under whose direct authority the camp at Vapniarka had been established, ordered that only internees who had not been jailed in Romania before being sent to Vapniarka and who were deemed to be not dangerous could be taken out of the camp to work. This led to a triage among the internees in January 1943, with 427 categorized as eligible for labor outside the camp. This group was removed definitively from the camp in March. See Memorandum No. 820 from Alexianu to Conducător Ion Antonescu dated 9 November 1942 (in Trașcă, 2010, pp. 709-10); Vasiliu Memorandum No. 6538 to Antonescu dated 11 January 1943 (in Trașcă, 2010, pp. 731-33); and Report No.157.483 of 11 November 1943 from the Labor Directorate of the Government of Transnistria to the Presidency of the Council of Ministers (in Trașcă, 2010, pp. 817-18).

⁸ The overall results of the triage and the degree of detail on each internee cited by the commission are revealed in the "Proces Verbal" of 17 March 1943 signed by Lt. Col. Victor Grosu, President, and four other commission members, together with the name-specific findings of the commission (in Carp, 1947, pp. 420-422).

Jews from Transnistria were taken in November 1943, the repatriation of this group of Vapniarka survivors required special approval, which was communicated by Vice Minister of Interior Vasiliu on 8 December 1943 (on the transfer, see (Ioanid, 2000, pp. 250-51); on the Olgopol, Savrani and Trihati sites and repatriations from these localities, see (White, 2018, pp. 579, 732-34, 754-56)).⁹

By October 1943, with the Red Army approaching the region, it was decided to close the Vapniarka camp entirely. A few of the remaining internees were sent to Transnistrian ghettos at this time. Fifty-four of the Jewish communists who were considered to be leading cadres and most dangerous were sent to the prison at Ribnița, just across the Dniester river from Bessarabia, but still in Transnistria. Several months later, on March 19-20, 1944, all but three prisoners in this group, who appear to have survived the shooting by sheer chance, were executed in their prison cells by SS men, in the confusion that reigned as responsibility for the administration of Transnistria passed from Romanian to German control. While Romanian authorities were repatriating Jews during the Axis retreat from Transnistria, the SS continued to massacre any Jews they encountered.

The majority of the Jewish communists interned at Vapniarka, 565 prisoners, including Bughici, were sent to the Grosulovo ghetto when Vapniarka was closed, and then returned to Romania in March 1944. They were imprisoned, once again, in the camp for political prisoners at Tîrgu Jiu, where many of them had been held before their deportation 18 months earlier.¹⁰ This was their “return home.”

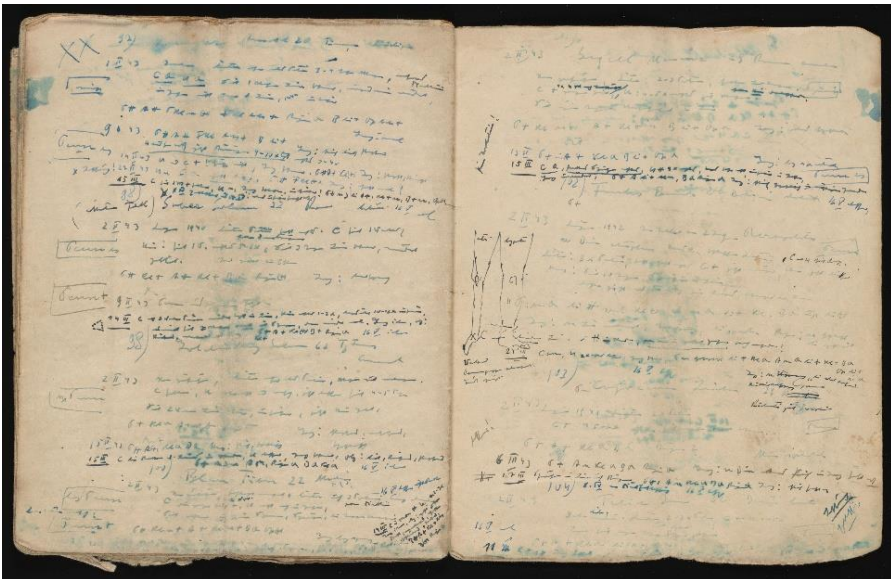
How has this history been documented? How has it been remembered? What uses have been made of it, and by whom?

My initial interest in Vapniarka was stimulated by documents at the International Tracing Service (ITS) in Bad Arolsen, Germany. The first of three Vapniarka-related collections at ITS, consisting of 95 pages in total, contains name lists of sick and crippled prisoners assembled by Dr. Kessler, as well as dozens of pages of medical notes about the progress of the disease and the condition of individual prisoners who had become ill as a result of the fodder pea diet.¹¹

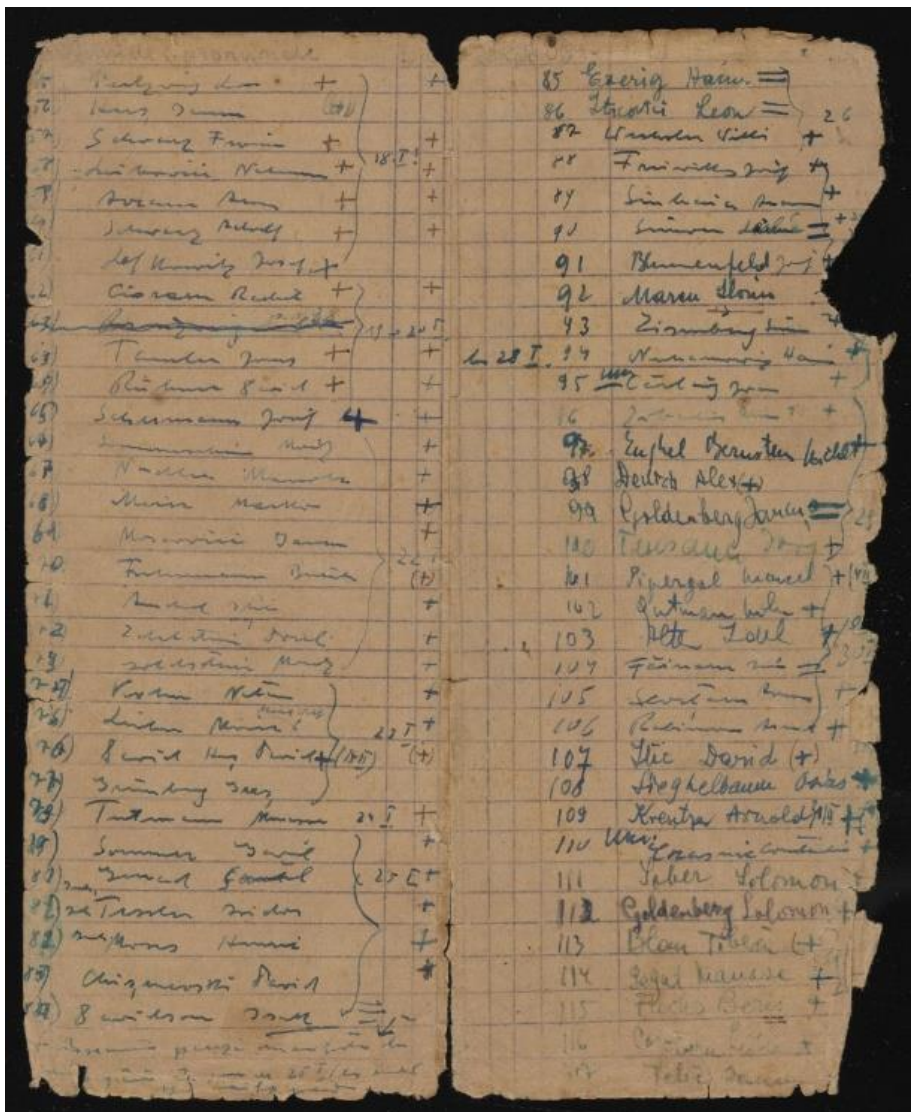
⁹ Approval of the group’s repatriation is in Report No. 48.297 of 8 December 1943 from the Inspectorate General of the Gendarmerie [Vasiliu] to the Presidency of the Council of Ministers (in Trașcă, 2010, pp. 822-825).

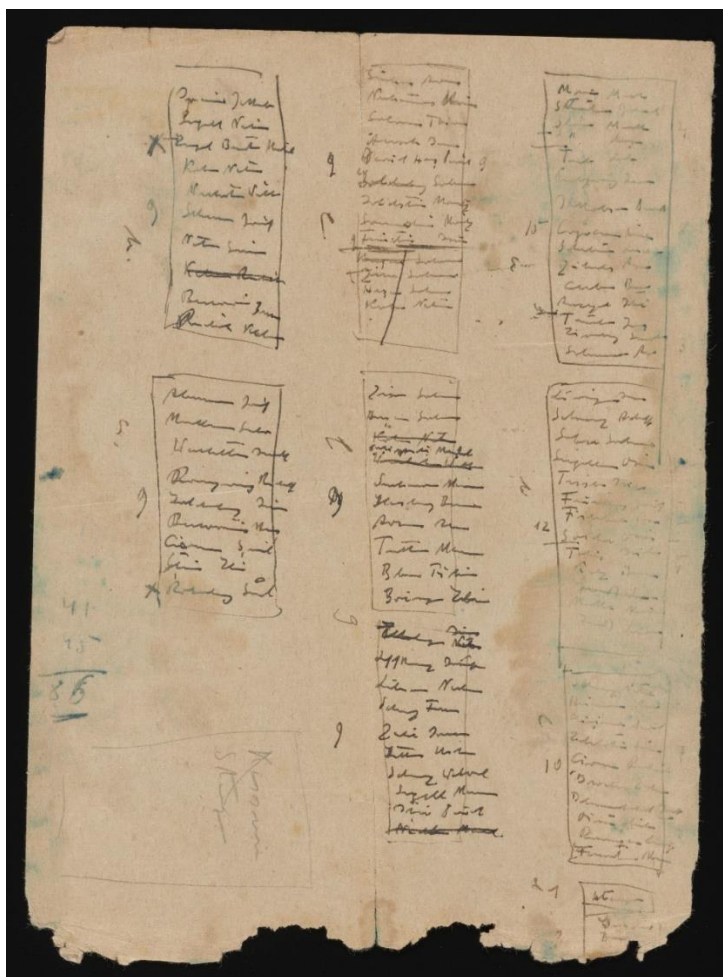
¹⁰ On the Grosulovo ghetto and the experience of the Vapniarka survivors after their transfer there, see (White, pp. 687-688). For the decision to repatriate the Vapniarka survivors at Grosulovo and from the prison at Ribnița, see Order No. 55.093 of 16 March 1944 from the General Inspectorate of the Gendarmerie [Vasiliu] to the General Staff of the Army (in Trașcă, 2010, pp. 833-834).

¹¹ “Aufzeichnungen des ehemaligen Lagerarztes im Lager Wapniarka, 1942-1943,” ITS Digital Collection, List Material of various camps, I.1.47.1, Folder 19a, DOI 5160449-5160553 (VCC 176/c



Ordner 19a in the paper records). In 2018, the International Tracing Service changed its name to “Arolsen Archives.”





Graphics 3a, 3b, 3c: Arthur Kessler patient observation notes. Source: USHMM—Arthur Kessler Collection and International Tracing Service--Arolsen Archives.

The notes are in tiny, often nearly illegible, on irregular bits and pieces of paper. They include ink-sketches of manifestations of the disease on particular patients, and a sketch showing, plank-bed by plank-bed, with from nine to fifteen prisoners in each bed, the names of ill prisoners in the “infirmary” set up by Kessler and his colleagues in one of the camp’s three buildings. These are the diagnostic notes of a Jewish doctor seeking to keep track of the affliction that was attacking his Jewish

patients. No fascism, no comrades or communism, just a Jewish doctor tracking the course of a disease and treating his patients.¹²

Ghetto Fighters' House

- 3 -

(11)

Nr.1) 27.12.1942 : SOLOMOVICZ Avraham.

22 Jahre, Jaasy, 2. Pavillion Part., Familienanamnese o.B., Nikotin +, Lues β, Alkohol β, Vater an Meningitis gestorben, Mutter gesund, Fuasballspieler bis 1939, Gefängnis seit 1940. Dort Fischeln, Kartoffelsuppen, selten Fleisch, selten Wurst als Nahrung. Seit einem Jahre nicht richtig satt gegessen. Im Gefängnis zeitweise Urinstörungen, dann wieder ganz gesund. Hier seit 16.9.1942. Isst ausschliesslich Futtererbsen, zweimal 1/2 Liter täglich, dazu 200 g Brot. Seit 2 Wochen Pferdefleisch zweimal wöchentlich 200 g. Seit 4 Wochen sehr häufiges Urinieren (20 x am Tage und 10 x nachts) Stuhl o.B. Seit 2 Wochen Beine schwer, Kloben am Boden mit der Spitze, Unsicherheit im Stehen, Stiegensteigen schwer, wird täglich schlechter. Sehen gut, Hören gut, Sprache o.B. Vergesslichkeit in letzten Wochen. Hirnnerven o.B. Obere Extremitäten o.B., Bauchdecken Refl.+, Cremaster Refl.+. P.S.R. + +, Klonus + beiderseits, links mehr als recht. Babinski rechte +, links ?, Oppenheim β, Gordon β, Gang spastisch, Rigor +.

6.I.1943 :

Seit 29.12.1942 in der Infirmerie, Diät; subjektiv : Gehen schlechter, Hirnnerven o.B., obere Extremitäten : Trieps und Biceps-R.+, Bauchdecken-R.+, Cremaster-R.+ P.S.R. +, Pat.Klonus +, sp = 11, A.S.R. +, Fussklonus rechte +, links +, Babinski beiderseits +, Oppenh im beiderseits +, Sensibilität o.B., Rigor +, Gang spastisch, Körperhaltung schwankend, tänzelnd, Balance durch Armbewegungen.

8.I.1943 :

Ab 6.I. 1943 3mal täglich eine Tablette Betaxin, 5 g Magn.-sulfuric. täglich.

13.I.1943 :

Gang idem. Temperatur unter 37°.

20.I.1943 :

Gang erschwert, verlässt nicht mehr das Bett, P.S.R.+ +, Pat.Klonus + +, Rigor +, Babinski + beiderseits.

28.I.1943 :

Urindrang, Urin entleert sich tropfenweise.

5.2.1943

Liquor : Pandy negativ.

8.3.1943 :

Gang schwer, Klonus +

14.3.1943 :

Schwellung beider Fussrücken, Art.dors.pod. +, kann

-4-

Graphic 4: Transcribed extract, Kessler patient observation notes. Source: Beit Lohamei Haghetaot.

¹² In the 1950s, living in Israel, Arthur Kessler wrote a series of papers describing the ordeal at Vapniarka and the content of his camp notes. He explained that he wrote the notes in tiny lower-case Gothic script "which in part can be deciphered only with a magnifying glass." To facilitate understanding of the content of the notes, which tracked 139 seriously ill individuals, in July 1957 Kessler typed, in German, a sample of the content of the notes he kept on 2 patients, Avraham Solomovicz and Avraham Haimovicz, as well as samples of notes he made in a diary for several months before he was transferred from Vapniarka to the Olgopol ghetto. See "Ärztlicher Bericht" of Dr. Arthur Kessler, dated 18 July 1957, Item 4878 in the Ghetto Fighters House Archives, Beit Lohamei Haghetaot, Israel.

The second collection at ITS is a 12-page “Register of Jews interned in the Camp at Wapniarka-Transnistria on the 1st of September 1943” (ITS Digital Collection, VCC 176/c Ordner 19). The list contains 706 names, with the internees identified by age, profession, and ‘locality of origin’. It was prepared at the end of the war by the ‘Tracing Office of the World Jewish Congress [WJC] in Bucharest’ as part of the WJC’s massive effort in the immediate postwar years to determine which Jews of Europe remained alive, where they were, and whether they could be repatriated or reunified with other surviving family members. The list, in fact, was based on a handwritten list created by Romanian authorities following the triage that took place at Vapniarka earlier in 1943. While the communist Simion Bughici, number 318 on the list, is still in the camp in September, Dr. Kessler’s name does not appear on the list, because he, together with some of the others whose arrests were deemed to have been ‘without cause’, had been transferred out of Vapniarka in the spring. With hindsight and familiarity with the Vapniarka story, we know that the people on the list likely were communists. But to anyone encountering this list when it was produced by the World Jewish Congress or by chance since that time, the communist affiliation of the people on the list would not be obvious at all. Ironically, this document, so laden with political significance, most likely would stimulate memories—proud memories—simply of vitally important Jewish organizations seeking to assist European Jews in the wake of tragedy.

17 *Joe*

REGISTER
of Jews interned in the Camp at Vapniaroca - Transnistria
on the 1st of September 1943

No.	Name and Christian Name	Age	Profession	Place of origin
1.	Salsberg David Berou	37	Physician	Botoșani
2.	Fleminger Isidor	38	Lawyer	Gernăuți
3.	Boiangiu Meer	35	Accountant	Botoșani
4.	Finkelstein Freim	28	Plumber	Botoșani
5.	Moscovici Ilie	73	Locksmith	Roman
6.	Selomon H ergou	22	Clerk	Bacău
7.	Selomon Eisu	23	Clerk	Bacău
8.	Ansel Itic	29	Weaver	Bacău
9.	Lovinger Iure	23	Printer	Bacău
10.	Romacanu Garel	24	Painter	Bacău
11.	Calman Solomon	21	Joiner	Bacău
12.	Segal Mates	40	Weaver	Iasi
13.	Bium Leiba Laskir	37	Baker	Milticeni
14.	Goldenberg S. Selomon	62	Merchant	Eg. Frunze-Iasi
15.	Shery Leizer	61	Shoemaker	Eg. Frunze-Iasi
16.	Faivel Merit	30	Clerk	Iasi
17.	Caras Avram	42	Joiner	Iasi
18.	Hergou Berou	30	Carpenter	Iasi
19.	Grünberg Lassar	29	Under-graduate	Iasi
20.	Iancovici Iancou	41	Clerk	Galați
21.	Iesipovici Merit	60	Merchant	Giurgiu (Vlașoa)
22.	Schwartz Natan	25	Hairdresser	Iasi
23.	Simon Nathan	22	Tailor	Iasi
24.	Bürger Ernst	57	Lawyer	Tinicoara
25.	Iassaki Tiberiu	30	Clerk	Lugoș
26.	Rujanaki Eugen	35	Engineer	Brăila
27.	Fischer Fridrick	47	Clerk	Brăila
28.	Blumenfeld Osiat	27	Workman	Brăila
29.	Gombe Samuil	55	Glazier	Deva
30.	Blau Tiberiu	21	Weaver	Medias
31.	Frenkel Iuliu	45	Technicist	Turda
32.	Hergovici Martin	47	Upholsterer	Turda
33.	Vexler Vili	24	Clerk	Botoșani
34.	Landau Moses	27	Physician	București
35.	Balaban Iosif	39	Textilist	Iasi
36.	Gips Leib	50	Furrier	București
37.	Kaufman Emancil	54	Shoemaker	București
38.	Iudovici Mordhai	37	Clerk	Orhei
39.	Goldstein Lupu	44	Flasier	București
40.	Braunstein Zoltan	22	Tanner	Medias
41.	Chon Marou	45	Merchant	București
42.	Weis Arpad	42	Clerk	Eragov
43.	Goldenberg Israel	40	Clerk	Pojorâta Bucovina
44.	Weis Francisc	36	Tailor	Sibiu
45.	Cusinski Morits	28	Tailor	București
46.	Rosen Bernard	39	Tailor	Botoșani
47.	Rettenberg Aurel	37	Journalist	București
48.	Neuman Carol	37	Engineer	București
49.	Lucoceveski Natan	50	Manufacturer	București
50.	Segal Nathan	45	Pharmacist	București
51.	Meier Iosif	25	Workman	Iasi
52.	Bielstein Simon	32	Tailor	Botoșani

Graphic 5: World Jewish Congress list of Vapniarka internees on 1 September 1943, first page.
Source: International Tracing Service-Arolsen Archives.

In addition to his medical notes, Arthur Kessler left an additional record of his experience in the form of a lengthy unpublished memoir entitled “A Camp Physician” (*Ein Arzt im Lager*).¹³ Kessler describes in powerful detail his arrest, his deportation by train to Vapniarka, his clinical observation of the progress of disease in the camp, and the hunger strike that finally resulted in some relief measures being taken by Romanian authorities. He is vehement in his condemnation of Jews who collaborated with camp authorities. The memoir also provides a remarkable description of the experience of the group of Jews sent from Vapniarka to Olgopol, where Kessler observed firsthand the brutality and random death meted out by overseers of every stripe and the corruption that pervaded Transnistria under Romanian occupation. A central characteristic of Vapniarka, however—its *communist* prisoner population and the *communist* leadership of the camp’s clandestine prisoner committee—is alluded to only indirectly in this otherwise detailed “memory” of the place. Kessler refers several times to a “black hand” controlling prisoner activity, but he does not delve further into the significance of the term or describe whose ‘hand’ this was. This is particularly striking because of the likelihood that it was precisely the special character of the prisoner population and the fact that many of the prisoners had been convicted before deportation through a legal process under Romanian law, which gave the prisoners the “standing” to protest their maltreatment and even achieve some amelioration of their situation. Such ‘privilege’ was not generally accorded to the broader mass of deported and displaced Romanian and Ukrainian Jews in Transnistria, who could be brutalized with no right of appeal and murdered with impunity. For Arthur Kessler, his struggle as a doctor in a camp where serious disease was gaining momentum undoubtedly dominated his memories. But it is equally possible, if not inevitable, that drawing attention to the centrality of the ‘communist identity’ of the place where Dr. Kessler’s drama took place was perhaps perceived to be an inconvenient “detail,” most wisely omitted, by the time Dr. Kessler, living in a Western democracy, wrote his memoir, most probably in the 1960s, at the height of the Cold War.

Arthur Kessler’s remembrances and nearly invisible allusion to the communists’ role in the camp also reflect the fact that he was not part of the political core group that included Simion Bughici, among others. But what of the

¹³ The memoir, including an English translation of the original German, is in the Dr. Arthur Kessler Collection at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. A typed copy of the original German manuscript also is available as Catalogue Nr. 28947 in the Ghetto Fighters House Archives, Beit Lohamei Haghetat, Israel.

other players in the Vapniarka drama? How do they depict the Vapniarka experience? Several unpublished and several published memoirs exist.

Bughici himself authored a “memoir,” 30 pages long, which appears to have been prepared as part of an extensive effort in 1982 by the Federation of Jewish Communities of Romania (FCER) to gather first-hand testimonies from Jewish survivors of deportation to Transnistria (Bughici, Folder 374). It may appear curious that a high-level party member and government official of communist Romania would produce a memoir under the auspices of the country’s Jewish community organization. But the FCER was itself a state-authorized official entity, linked to the communist regime’s Ministry of Cults, as were other officially recognized religious denominations. The Jewish auspices notwithstanding, Bughici’s memoir is replete with communist jargon. Still, his description of his transfer from a prison cell at Tîrgu Jiu to Vapniarka, the situation in the camp, and the activity of the prisoner committee are reliable. It is interesting that Bughici describes the decision of the communist leadership to establish a so-called “Jewish community of Vapniarka,” headed by Radu Alexandru, as a measure designed to enhance the sense of prisoner ‘solidarity’ and extend the communist leadership’s control to Jewish internees who were not party members. In effect, Bughici draws attention here to the clear distinction between communist and Jewish. He acknowledges the important work of the camp’s Jewish doctors, but he places greatest emphasis throughout the memoir on communist organization and political activism in the camp. Like Kessler, he condemns informers like a certain Bubi Finchelstein, who cooperated with the Romanian commandant. His anger, however, focuses not on the betrayal of Jews by a Jew, but on his concern that the Romanians wanted to score a political victory by putting the eminently corruptible and already compromised Finchelstein in charge of the officially recognized prisoner committee, which would have threatened Bughici’s leading role and the control being exercised by the clandestine communist committee.¹⁴ For Bughici, it was the communist element, not the Jewish, which dominated memory of Vapniarka.

Bughici acknowledges the heroism of Colonel Sabin Motora, Vapniarka’s last commandant, who saved the Vapniarka internees who had been sent to Grosulovo by protecting them from German forces during their repatriation from Transnistria

¹⁴ Several of the memoir writers reviewed here describe Finchelstein’s avarice as well as his collaboration with Romanian camp authorities. While all enumerate misdeeds that inflicted additional hardship on the internees, only some appear to have been aware of the political threat to communist control that he represented. The authorities’ awareness of the existence of the clandestine group is documented in a report dated 16 July 1943 from the Police Directorate-Detective Unit, which describes the control exercised by the clandestine party group, including its organization of assistance for internees receiving no help from their families or other outside sources; see Police Directorate-Detective Unit Report dated 16 July 1943, Catalog No.13544 (Registration No. 18684), Ghetto Fighters House Archives, Beit Lohamei Haghetat, Israel.

to Romania in the spring of 1944. Bughici's own survival, after all, and the survival of many other *communists* were a direct result of Motora's actions. This reality notwithstanding, the interpretation and memory of Motora's heroism was quite different a year after Bughici wrote his memoir, in 1983, in Israel, when Yad Vashem honored Motora as a Righteous Among the Nations. While Yad Vashem notes that many of these rescued Jews were suspected communists, Motora's title of "Righteous" was earned not for saving communists, but for saving *Jews*.¹⁵ Confounding the issue of Motora's memory even further, in postcommunist Romania the gendarmerie office in Motora's native Mureș county was renamed the "Colonel Sabin Motora Mureș County Inspectorate of Gendarmes." Motora, a career gendarmerie officer since 1920, had been commandant of the brutal detention camp at Caracal, where communists and other political enemies of the Antonescu regime, to be followed by Soviet prisoners of war once Romania joined in the Axis attack on the Soviet Union, were incarcerated. He had been awarded Nazi Germany's Order of the German Eagle (*Verdienstorden vom Deutschen Adler*) in recognition of his service to the combined German-Romanian cause. Still, he was honored in post-communist Romania for his "high moral character," demonstrated when he saved the surviving Jewish internees of Vapniarka and Grosulovo. During annual commemorative ceremonies, it has been possible for no mention to be made of the fact that the Jews Motora saved were communists.¹⁶

Additional memoirs of Vapniarka survivors in the records of the Romanian Jewish Federation, including several penned by female former internees, range from just a few pages long to nearly fifty. Some of the lengthier ones are from Radu Alexandru, President of the "Jewish Community of Vapniarka," the outreach mechanism through which Bughici sought to engage non-party members in the camp; Valter Isac, one of only three survivors of the massacre at Rîbnița prison; and Eugen Friedlander, who provides a detailed description of the measures taken by the communist-controlled prisoners committee. In spite of the fact that the Jewish Federation was the memoir collector, it is not surprising, given the fact that these memoirs were collected in the early 1980's, that communism emerges from the authors' memories as the preeminent element emphasized. The Jewish factor, antisemitism, the fact that these communists were deported to Transnistria because

¹⁵ The citation regarding Motora on Yad Vashem's web site concludes, "Owing to this action of his, the Jews arrived at the Târgu-Jiu camp where they remained until their liberation in August 1944. Motora did all he could to save the lives of Jews, despite the fact that he was risking his military career and his life by doing so."

¹⁶ See, for example, the 2 April 2013 report of a commemoration held at Motora's grave in the presence of Motora's 90-year-old son, at adevarul.ro/locale/targu-mures/colonelul-sabin-motora-fost-comemorat-jandarmii-mureseni-1_515a85c500f5182b857639b7/index.html (viewed 31 August 2019).

they were Jews was clearly of secondary importance to the authors at the time and in the context in which they wrote.¹⁷

A final, lengthy unpublished memoir, 132 crowded pages in four notebooks, was written in longhand in 1967 by Zalman Broder.¹⁸ Broder was taken to Vapniarka from the Țirgu Jiu prison. Written from a politically correct communist perspective, his memoir provides unusual detail regarding the activities of the communist leadership, naming names, in particular, of survivors who had “become someone” in the first decades of postwar communist Romania. A second focus, also political, deals with the authorities’ efforts to recruit informers and collaborators among the internees. Broder records in his memoir the differences of character and behavior of the succession of four commandants at the camp (Ioan Murgescu, Christache Popovici, Sever Burădescu, and Sabin Motora). Broder’s focus on the political, his emphasis on communist activity in the camp, and the predominantly communist perspective revealed in chapter titles like “Aspects of party life and the collective’s activity of reciprocal antifascist assistance” are hardly surprising. Before his transfer to Vapniarka, he had been imprisoned at Țirgu Jiu for communist agitation, sharing space with leaders of the party. He was in communist Romania when he wrote his memoir, in the middle of the Cold War. And even as a pensioner, in 1971, on the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Romanian Communist Party, Broder was awarded the Order of Tudor Vladimirescu through a special act of the Council of State that provided recognition to party members for long-term service.¹⁹

Still, Broder suffered the symptoms of lathyrism himself and was confined for long periods in the infirmary organized by the prisoners. In his memoir he praises the work of Dr. Kessler and the other doctors and records the sequence of events, including the visits by regional medical authorities, which resulted in some amelioration of the prisoners’ situation. He writes emotionally of “nurses” among the female prisoners who “spared nothing” and “sacrificed their own food rations” for those stricken, identifying them one *Jewish* name after another and even more personally referring to “nurse” Betty Belinstein as “mother of the afflicted.” Thus Broder’s unpublished memoir has greater balance than the others, incorporating both memory of what was collective and communist and memory of what was personal and Jewish, to which memory of the cross-cutting health crisis,

¹⁷ The memoirs can be found in the records of the Federation of Jewish Communities of Romania (FCER) and on microfilm at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum; see USHMM RG-25.021, Reel 15, Folders 367, 370, and 371.

¹⁸ USHMM RG-04.027*01 (Acc.1992.A.0113), Zalman Broder, “Amintiri din Lagărele Vapniarka și Grosolovo, 16 Sept. 1942 – 4 Aprilie 1944.”

¹⁹ “Consiliul de Stat. Decretul nr. 157/1971 privind conferirea unor ordine ale Republicii Socialiste România pentru activitate îndelungată în mișcarea muncitorească și merite deosebite în opera de construire a socialismului,” at <https://lege5.ro/Gratuit/gu4tqoju/decretul-nr-157-1971-privind-conferirea-unor-ordine-ale-republicii-socialiste-romania/2> (viewed 31 August 2019).

communist and medical response, and the personal tragedy of paralysis adds even greater nuance.

The principal published survivor memoirs relating to Vapniarka, in contrast to most of the unpublished ones described above, were all written outside Romania by former internees who left the country during the communist era. Two of the authors settled in Israel and two in Germany. The impact on memory of the “where” and “when” factors again are fundamental, just as they were for the memoirs written inside Romania and for Arthur Kessler’s *Ein Arzt im Lager*.

Ihiel Benditer (1919-2013) taught law at the University of Iași after World War II, but he moved to Israel in 1983 and in 1995 published a book about Vapniarka, Grosulovo, and several other ghettos (Benditer, 1995). (An excerpt in English translation appeared subsequently in Carmelly, 1997, pp. 181-202.) The book reflects Benditer’s personal experience at Vapniarka and Grosulovo, but in form and approach it resembles a research work more than a memoir. Documents are cited, and new details of the efforts of the Jewish doctors emerge from Benditer’s interviews of Arthur Kessler in Israel. Testimonies by other survivors are quoted, and Benditer writes about ghettos where he did not have personal experience. Nevertheless, writing in Israel, after having stayed in Romania until he retired, Benditer includes recollections about the celebration of Jewish holidays in the camp and, downplaying the dominant communist aspect of the camp, stresses that the prisoners, who we know were at Vapniarka because of actual or presumed communist or leftists leanings, actually came from a broad range of social backgrounds and political persuasions. Reporting on the creation of the prisoner committee, for instance, he identifies three members as a banker, an attorney, and a rabbi, while referring to three *communist* members (Simion Bughici, Emanoil Vinea, and Aurel Rotenberg), all of whom became major government and party officials in postwar Romania, simply as “former political detainees from various prisons and camps in Romania.”²⁰ Still, Benditer does not avoid the issue of communism altogether. He makes reference to the existence of a “communist collective that operated in secret,” but with nowhere near the clarity of his assertion that “It is essential to remember that Vapniarka was a camp of deported Jews.” The inclusion of other ghettos in Benditer’s study further obscures the centrality of the issue of communism.

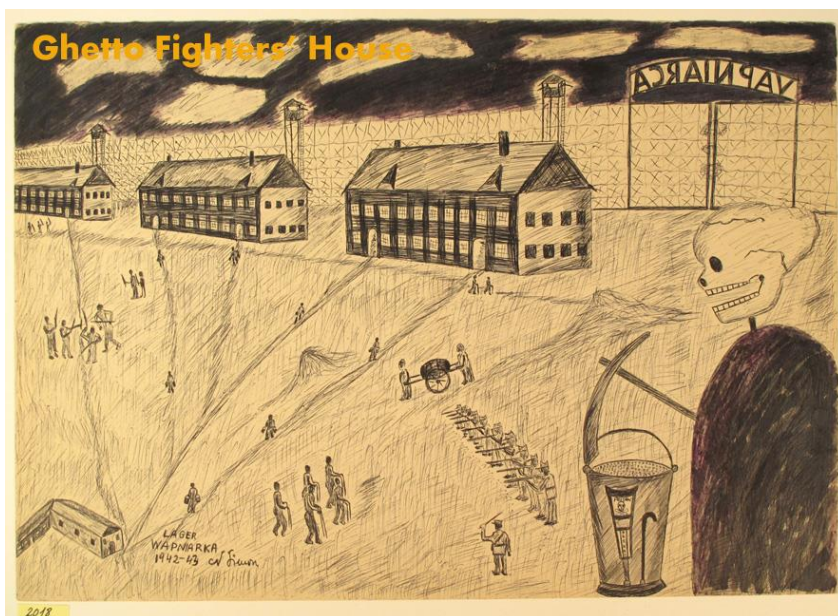
²⁰ Vinea (1905-1969), born Emanoil Vainstein, became deputy minister of industry and food (1948-51) and then vice president of the Romanian National Bank (1952 on). Rotenberg (1906-1992), who adopted the Romanian-sounding name Stefan Voicu, served as deputy editor of the party newspaper *Scinteia* and editor in chief of the major party publications *Lupta de clasă* and *Era Socialistă*, was a member of the party’s central committee (1955-1984), and a parliamentary deputy (1961-1985).

In contrast to Ihiel Benditer, Nathan Simon (1922-1993) left Romania in 1950, during the first major wave of Jewish emigration after the installation of the communist regime. His memoir, written in Romanian in 1989 and published in German in 1994, a year after Simon's death, shows none of Benditer's hesitancy to address the author's own connection to communism or the communist "collective" that exercised a controlling hand among the internees in the camp.²¹

Simon relates in exceptional detail his arrest on trumped up charges at age 18, the betrayal and beatings that led him to sign a confession to a crime he did not commit, the education in communist ideology that he received from the hard-core communists with whom he was incarcerated in both the Caransebeş prison and the prison-monastery of Văcăreşti, and, ultimately, his deportation to Vapniarka. Simon describes the clandestine "small committee" of communists who, "drawing on their harsh experience during years spent in Romanian prisons," were "the real leaders of the camp." While acknowledging that he never knew the full membership of this group, Simon praises the group's analytical ability and its success in confronting camp authorities and forcing some improvement in camp conditions. Simon fills in details regarding the relationship between the "small committee" and the "Jewish Committee" headed by Radu Alexandru, and he remembers with considerable nostalgia the solidarity among internees that the communist leadership group succeeded in fostering, in spite of initial tensions between wealthier and poorer internees and, in particular, between formerly convicted communist internees and those who had been free before being sent to Vapniarka. Simon knew some members of the "small committee" personally from his time in Caransebeş prison, and was assigned to the same barrack as members of the leadership group. While it is unclear whether his familiarity with certain issues stemmed from his time in Vapniarka and Grosulovo or afterward, the fact that he wrote willingly about the communist nature of the camp experience, and his own, results in this memoir adding considerable information to what others provide. The 21-day hunger strike directed by the "small committee," the machinations of commandants Murgescu and Burădescu to impose Bubi Finchelstein as leader of the prisoner committee, the unifying impact of a speech on reciprocal assistance by Bughici, the techniques used by the clandestine committee to communicate with Bucharest, and an attack on Jewish internees by a small band of Ukrainian prisoners organized by the camp authorities all emerge in sharp relief from Simon's memoir. Not avoiding more problematic developments in the "prisoner collective," he also relates the tension within the leadership group provoked by one member's sexual escapade with a woman—a plant—who betrayed the information she learned to camp authorities.

²¹ Simon's typewritten Romanian manuscript is registered as Item No. 5984 in the Ghetto Fighters House Archive, Beit Lohamei Haghetat, Israel. The published German version is (Simon, 1994).

Simon was a victim of lathyrism as a result of his incarceration at Vapniarka, and he remained disabled for the rest of his life. His memory of this aspect of the camp and other manifestations of the brutality of the camp authorities emerges clearly not only from his memoir, but from sketches that he produced of the camp, with the perspective making it clear that the artist had been inside the camp looking out through the barbed wire, not outside looking in. Simon's visual memoir shows multiple prisoners walking with canes, guards beating prisoners with batons, prisoners trudging with water buckets in hand between their barracks and the sole water faucet in the camp, a ten-man execution squad, with all soldiers wearing a clearly identifiable Romanian army cap and the camp commandant poised to give the signal to fire, and, finally, in the foreground under the scythe being wielded by death himself, a crutch and a cane, clearly signaling that some of the stricken prisoners did not survive their affliction.²²



Graphic 6: Pen and ink sketch of Vapniarka camp by survivor Nathan Simon. Source: Beit Lohamei Haghetaot.

²² Simon's pen and ink drawing, labeled 'Nathan Simon: The Vapniarka Camp', is Catalogue Nr. 2018 in the art collection of the Ghetto Fighter's House, Beit Lohamei Haghetaot. A second, slightly different sketch is Catalogue Nr. 3711.

Simon makes reference in his memoir to the Chanuka commemoration and to the prayer space for Jewish observance (“synagogue”) set up in one of the prisoner barracks. He also declares his love of Israel. But in contrast to the Vapniarka experience depicted by Ihiel Benditer as having a predominantly Jewish character, Simon, who departed Romania soon after the war, shows no hesitation in emphasizing the communist essence of Vapniarka, and even less in emphasizing the brutality of Romania’s wartime government, military, and gendarmerie forces.

Like Benditer, Geza Kornis (1917-2019) stayed in Romania after his repatriation from Transnistria. In his brief memoir entitled “Survival Through Solidarity,” Kornis traces his membership in the communist party back to his first arrest in 1939, when he criticized the country’s lurch rightward under the royal dictatorship of King Carol II (Kornis, 2004). Formally taking up party membership in 1945, Kornis advanced through the ranks of the Ministry of Foreign Trade until his 25-year career came to an abrupt end when, sensing that the antisemitic direction of party policy under Nicolae Ceaușescu was likely to become permanent, he applied to emigrate in 1972. Removed from his post and expelled from the party, Kornis finally was permitted to leave the country in 1974, as the issue of free emigration became a salient part of the discussions that led to the creation of the Organization on Security and Cooperation in Europe, and especially as the Jackson-Vanick Amendment became law in the United States. Kornis’s choice of title for his memoir signals clearly his appreciation for the communist-led control and organization of the prisoner community at Vapniarka. His memoir provides interesting perspective regarding the clandestine leadership’s assignment of tasks to prisoner teams, which enabled the prisoners themselves to control much of the camp’s internal operation, and simultaneously limited the potential exposure of the internees to brutal treatment by the camp guards. Kornis also elaborates on the clandestine committee’s systematic use of outside contacts, in particular railway workers with whom internees assigned to forced labor at the busy Vapniarka rail station had regular interaction, not only to bring news and extra food into the camp, but more importantly, to carry messages and money to and from contacts in Bucharest. These contacts eventually had the effect of drawing the central government’s attention to the health crisis in the camp, leading to the visits by Governor Alexianu and health inspectors in December 1942 and January 1943.

At the same time, throughout the memoir Kornis makes his own Jewish identity clear and manages to maintain a focus on Vapniarka as a Jewish experience. The reader learns that after being forced out of the army because he was Jewish and before his deportation to Transnistria, in 1941 and 1942 Kornis was “drafted” and taken to Timisoara and the Olt Valley to work in the *Jewish* forced labor brigades the Romanian government had created as a form of “alternate service” for Jews. Stressing that over 60 percent of the internees at Vapniarka were not, in fact, communists or even politically sympathetic to communism, Kornis makes the point that the camp held *Jews*, and no communists who were not *Jews*. When he

describes the efforts of the clandestine small committee to have internees befriend some of the guards, he notes that “this political work really bore fruit later on,” but goes on to define the positive impact this way: “Regular contact between the internees and the guards enabled the guards to understand the true nature of the Jewish people, i.e., that they were not as horrible as anti-Jewish propaganda constantly tried to portray them.” Thus, Kornis’s memory of Vapniarka is dual in nature, and perhaps closest to the duality of the camp itself. Looking back, 70 years after his return from deportation and 30 years after his emigration from Romania to Germany, he could write both:

The only reason that they did not exterminate us was that our communist leadership...organized our survival. I will never deny or regret my anti-fascist activities under the leadership of the illegal Romanian communist party during the antisemitic right-wing dictatorship in Romania, beginning in 1939.

and

I was born a Jew and discriminated against at school, in the army, and at work. As a Jew I was dispossessed, as a Jew I was forced to work in labour camps, and as a Jew I was deported and had to spend almost two years in a concentration camp and a ghetto. Like it or not, I was always a Jew and a second-class citizen.

A final published memoir, titled simply *Darkness*, appeared first in Romania in 1997 and shortly afterward, in 1999, in German (Gall, 1992; Gall, 1999). Matei Gall (1920-), who like Kornis continued to give interviews about his experience well into the second decade of the 21st century, again like Kornis relates a life commitment to communism in his youth, which led to imprisonment and deportation to Vapniarka. Gall’s lengthy description of his experience in Vapniarka confirms the essential facts that constitute the core history of the place. To the general picture of solidarity among the internees, Gall adds very touching detail regarding some of the personal friendships that he experienced in the camp and, of course, the personal pain experienced when internees with whom he was particularly close developed symptoms of lathyrism and suffered the debilitating symptoms. What is truly unique in the memoir, however, derives from the fact that Matei Gall was included in the group of internees that was taken from the camp as it was liquidated and incarcerated in the prison at Rîbnița. He was one of only three survivors of the massacre that took place there in March 1944, and he provides a powerfully detailed description of the months of imprisonment at Rîbnița, the attitude of the Romanian guards as it became clear that German and Romanian forces were not able to stem the Red Army’s steady advance, and the 24 hours of terror during which nearly all of the ex-Vapniarka internees imprisoned at Rîbnița were executed in their cells.

At war's end, Gall remained true to his commitment to communism and stayed in Romania even when his parents emigrated to Israel in 1949.²³ He began a career in the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which until mid-1952 was led by Ana Pauker, and then by Gall's fellow survivor of Vapniarka, Simion Bughici. Like Pauker, however, Gall fell victim to the antisemitism, cadre policy, and internal competition for dominance within the party that spread through all of the East European communist countries during the final years of "High Stalinism."²⁴ Gall's betrayal by the communist party that he had served and for which he had been imprisoned, deported, and nearly killed, stemmed from Stalin's increasingly aggressive antisemitism and desire to ensure Soviet control over the communist parties of its new satellite states. This manifested itself as an intense questioning of the "loyalty" of whole categories of veteran party cadres, including those who had relatives living abroad or other potential connections in the capitalist world, and not least of all Zionists. The removal of Pauker and emergence of Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej as the unchallenged leader of the Romanian Communist Party was one result at the top. The investigation, interrogation, and thinning out of Jewish membership in the party was one result in the rank and file. In 1952, under the guise of a 'verification of cadres', Gall was subjected to multiple investigations and interrogations during which he was required to put in writing, repeatedly, responses to questions designed to unearth discrepancies from one set of responses to the next regarding his past. The goal of this *forcing of memory*, which Gall labels "terror by autobiography" to suit the party's purposes was eventually to enable the authorities to accuse Gall of lying to the party and expel him, or worse.²⁵

From the perspective of the current study, the key fact is that the principal focus of the traumatic assault on Gall's memory was precisely his experience at Vapniarka and his survival at Rîbnița prison. Gall was asked repeatedly to explain how he had managed to survive at Rîbnița when dozens of other loyal communist cadres had been systematically executed. The accusation, at first implicit, then stated explicitly, was that Gall must have had a relationship of some kind with the SS men who carried out the murders, and perhaps with the Romanian overseers at Vapniarka as well. If Gall had survived by betraying his fellow communists, thus

²³ From May 1948 through 1951, Romania's communist regime permitted relatively free Jewish emigration to Israel. Nearly 120,000 Jews took advantage of the opportunity during this period. In 1952, however, strict controls were imposed, and the number of Jews permitted to leave for Israel fell to 3,712, and then to just 61 individuals in 1953. The statistics are in (Ioanid, 2005, p. 185). On Romania's Jewish emigration policy during the 1948-1953 period, see (Levy, 2001, pp. 163-182 & passim).

²⁴ On the purge of Ana Pauker and antisemitism in internal communist party cadre policy in the early 1950s, see (Levy, 2001, pp. 134-162 and 194-219). For an extensive discussion of the era of "High Stalinism" across Eastern Europe, see (Applebaum, 2012).

²⁵ On the patterns that the search for "internal enemies" assumed across Eastern Europe, see (Applebaum, 2012, pp. 274-299); she describes "terror by autobiography," as experienced by Gall, at (Applebaum, 2012, pp. 289-290).

laying a degree of responsibility for their deaths at his feet, the consequences could have been fatal.

Fortunately for Gall, Stalin's death put an end to his "terror by autobiography." He was able to return to work, not at the foreign ministry, but at the state news agency Agerpres. His faith in the party and desire to belong, however, were broken. In his words, Gall realized that party life, which had been based on commitment to an ideal in the pre-World War II era of communist illegality, had been transformed after the war to an existence dominated by "formalism and a network of lies." In 1966, following five years in which the number of "ransomed" Romanian Jews permitted to emigrate had reached higher levels than ever, Gall applied, as a Jew, for emigration to Israel.²⁶ He was permitted to leave Romania in 1969. When the Jewish state did not provide Gall with a sense of belonging either, he left Israel in 1973 for Germany. Matei Gall's memory of Vapniarka, as revealed in his memoir, was essentially memory of a communist experience, but it became a memory betrayed. Gall's Jewishness provided an avenue of escape, but it seems not more than that. Ironically, Gall's real escape was not from the Transnistrian camp created by Romania's wartime fascist regime, where Matei Gall's communist commitment was forged. It was not even from the execution cells of Rîbnița prison. Gall's escape was from the communist ideology in which he put his faith and from the prison-like state that the Romanian Communist Party had created.

If one looks beyond memoir sources—that is, beyond specific versions of memory proposed by individual authors—to other sources, the interface of antisemitism, fascism, communism, and the Holocaust, while never in quite the same configuration, is never absent.

The perspective of the perpetrator, shaped by Antonescu's antisemitic prejudice, his regime's abhorrence of Bolshevism, and Romanian fear of the combination of these two arch-evils—so-called "Judeo-bolshevism" as embodied by the Soviet Union—dominates in the Vapniarka-related wartime documentation of the Antonescu government. The documentation is ample, and throughout one sees the manner in which the authorities of a militaro-fascist regime prepare to perpetrate crimes against certain categories of civilians, construct a camp in which to persecute them, denigrate and ultimately murder Jews, and in the face of waning

²⁶ For the emigration statistics, see (Ioanid, 2005). Following years of tight emigration controls, the communist regime's decision to permit Jewish emigration in exchange for per head payments in kind or in hard currency resulted in the following Jewish emigration statistics between 1960 and 1965: 1961—21,269; 1962—9,878; 1963—13,243; 1964—25,926; 1965—10,949.

military prospects, are forced to back away from total annihilation of their intended victims.

The Vinnitsa Regional Oblast branch of the Ukrainian National Archives and the archives of the Romanian Ministry of Defense include civilian and military administration records relating to the Vapniarka site before June 1942, in the site's first phase, when it was referred to as a ghetto, and then to the transformation of the site into a special camp for political prisoners. Conditions in the ghetto were clearly dire. A May 17, 1942, report from the infantry battalion in command of the site describes the prisoners as so infested with lice that it was impossible for the guards to get near them, lest they be "exposed to the lice and contract exanthematic typhus." The prisoners, "completely forbidden contact with the outside world," "full of lice, in rags, and living in filth," are complaining that "they are given little food." But, writes the major in command, "the kikes [jidani] are dying daily because they are no longer able to digest anything."²⁷ Three prisoners attempted to escape during the night of March 23-24, 1942, before the site was enclosed with barbed wire. Another 12 made the attempt at the end of the same month. When recaptured, Șloim Aron stated that he left the camp because "I was dying of hunger." Iser Reuter, age 15, declared, "I ran away from hunger, because all I got was 200 grams of bread and a little soup." A third escapee, Iașa (Jacob) Komski, age 16, also pleaded hunger as his motive. Komski's death on April 14, however, was recorded by the camp commandant as due to typhus.²⁸ Either way, death was clearly the constant in the Vapniarka ghetto. These perpetrator documents record in matter-of-fact language the death toll of the typhus epidemic and the removal from the site during July 1942 of 786 Jews from among the first contingents who had been sent to the ghetto from Odessa and elsewhere, leaving behind just 71 individuals who actually had been convicted of crimes or were suspected of having done so.²⁹

Ironically, these documents reveal that the convicted criminals held at Vapniarka, unlike the Jews sent there solely because they were Jews, but perhaps in a manner analogous to the convicted communists who would soon arrive, could assert some rights, in particular the right of appeal. Leora Rosenberg from Moghilev pleaded her innocence of charges of gold trafficking and asked for her

²⁷ USHMM Archives of the Romanian Ministry of National Defense, RG-25.003, Reel 393, Folder 36, "Camps, warehouses. Ghettos from March 1942 to 30 June 1942."

²⁸ USHMM RG-25.003, Reel 20, Folder 1128, "Camps for Jewish communists from [Romania] from 1 April 1942 to 2 July 1942."

²⁹ The records show slight variations in internee counts during the evacuation of the ghetto. The count of Jews removed from Vapniarka comes from army reports dated July 24 and August 1, 1942. The distinction between the "ghetto" for most Jewish internees and a "camp" also at the site to hold common criminals (among whom there were 23 Jews) comes from a table prepared by the camp commandant dated July 4, 1942. See USHMM Records of the Vinnitsa Regional Oblast Archives, RG-31.011, Reel 31.

case to be reviewed. David Vaisman, age 52, claimed he was wrongfully sent to Vapniarka from his home in Odessa. Pointing out that the deportation order was supposed to apply only to able-bodied Jews between ages 18 and 50, Vaisman asked to be reunited with two members of his family in the Berezovca ghetto. Tâncasim Druk did the same, in all likelihood unaware that the Jews of Odessa who had been deported to Berezovca, Bogdanovca, Domanovca, and Acmeçetka, and Jews sent there from other districts in Transnistria, Bessarabia and Bucovina had been massacred months earlier by German and Romanian forces, local *Volksdeutsh*, and police collaborators.³⁰ Apparently, to be a Jewish common criminal, or a convicted Jewish communist, conveyed a legal status, a stature, in the system of perpetration that was denied to Jews whose “criminality,” persecution and deportation stemmed solely from the fact that they were Jews.³¹

The manner in which the Antonescu regime managed the diet of the special prisoners in the Vapniarka camp took on more precise dimensions in archival material that was captured by the Red Army as the Romanians made their hasty retreat from Transnistria and is in the collection of the the Odessa Regional Oblast Archives. A file entitled “Supporting documents for expenses paid in December 1942 to feed the internees in Vapniarka camp” reveals that only 30 lei (1/2 of one R.K.K.S., the occupation scrip in use in Transnistria) per day were allocated to feed each prisoner, and the folder contains a daily accounting of the number of prisoners who had to be fed and the supplies purchased to feed them. On most days the diet provided 400 grams of fodder peas, 200 grams of bread, 15 grams of salt, and 500 grams of wood per prisoner to feed the stoves. On a few days, between 2 and 10 grams of oil was allotted for each prisoner, and on rare days, Christmas eve and Christmas day for example, horse meat was included. The addition of meat was unusual enough that separate, dated documents in the file record the purchase and slaughter of the horses. Only on Christmas day were small quantities of carrots, onion and potato added to the prisoners’ diet. Subsequent files for the first three months of 1943 reflect the slight improvement in the diet, mainly through the addition of potatoes and sour cabbage, noted in internee memoirs as a result of the regional medical officer’s visit. The slaughter of a 38-kilogram ram on March 2 specifically for the purpose of providing meat to the prisoner infirmary is the only instance in any of these records where the patients stricken with lathyrism in the infirmary received an extra provision of food from the authorities.³²

The effect of the substantial perpetrator documentation which has survived regarding Vapniarka, only a small segment of which has been referred to here, is to confirm the factual accuracy of the accounts provided in survivor memoirs

³⁰ For the petitions of internees, see USHMM, RG-31.011, Reel 31.

³¹ On the issue of Jewish criminality in Nazi ideology, see (Berkowitz, 2007).

³² USHMM Records of the Odessa Regional Oblast Archives, RG-31.004, Reel 8, Fond 2255, Opis 1c, Folder 1617.

regarding the creation of the camp and its administration. Even the differences of character and attitude among the four camp commandants, described by some of the survivors, are reflected in the documentation relating to the periods when they, respectively, were in charge of the camp. This confirmation of accuracy of the memory of the survivors makes it possible to accept the many aspects of the camp experience related by the survivors that the camp authorities would have had little or no ability to understand or record. The systematic work of the clandestine camp committee to gain the sympathy and cooperation of some camp guards, the network of relationships outside the camp developed once some of the internees were permitted to go to work sites at the rail station and elsewhere beyond the barbed wire, the interactions between the communist-led clandestine committee and the official prisoner committee, even the existence of a radio receiver that enabled the clandestine committee to follow developments outside the camp, and many other elements of the dynamic at work inside the prisoner community, all only sketchily acknowledged, if at all, in the perpetrator records, can be regarded as authentic because of the confirmation we have of the authenticity of the survivor memoir literature.

It is not surprising that the memory of Vapniarka remained a focus at the governmental level in Romania in the early postwar period. It had been a priority of the Antonescu regime to ensure that the Jewish communists taken from imprisonment in Romania to internment at Vapniarka be returned to incarceration inside Romania if they survived, when control over Transnistria was lost.³³ After 23 August 1944, when those communists were set free, together with their non-Jewish comrades, taking revenge on their tormentors and simultaneously telling the story of their suffering was only natural. How did the Romanian government, which very quickly came to be dominated by the communist party, deal with what had happened at Vapniarka?

The archives of the Romanian National Council for Study of the Archives of the Securitate (CNSAS: *Consiliul Național pentru Studierea Arhivelor Securității*) contain massive documentation, transferred from the archives of the Romanian Information [Intelligence] Service, of the postwar trials of war criminals in Romania. The initial trials were carried out by a People's Tribunal during the years when the communist party was solidifying its hold on power and, working closely with Soviet occupation authorities, using such trials to purge Romania's military

³³ The survival of the Vapniarka prisoners actually was not anticipated by the regime. The initial order received by Comandant Motora instructed him to take the group east toward the Bug, where executions of Jews who had survived typhus and the mass executions of 1941-42 continued, especially at the hands of retreating Wehrmacht and SS units. Motora requested permission to take the group westward toward Tiraspol, on the Dniester, and received revised orders to take the group to the Grosulovo ghetto, about 30 kilometers from Tiraspol. Motora's exceptional efforts to protect the group, and eventually to move them across the Dniester and then on to Tîrgu Jiu are described in detail by Nathan Simon in his memoir.

and civilian institutions of people deemed to be actual or potential opponents. Later trials took place in military and civilian courts of the by-then communist regime. As a camp for communists, albeit Jewish communists, addressing the crimes committed at Vapniarka was a particular focus. There are ample records of the trials of Vapniarka camp commandants Ioan Murgescu and Sever Burădescu, Deputy and then Acting Commandant Cristodor Popescu, and others who played significant roles in overseeing the camp. The case against informer/collaborator Bubi (Benjamin) Finchelstein, recalled in some of the survivor memoirs, is also documented in detail.³⁴

At the trials, the defendants tried to justify or excuse their actions, typically by consciously distorting their memory of events, mis-remembering the facts, or suggesting that no course was open to them other than the one they adopted. By contrast, the memory of their recent experience presented at the trial in numerous written affidavits and testimony by surviving internees was sharp and remarkably consistent from one survivor to the next. Former Commandant Murgescu, for example, pleaded that the camp presented unmanageable challenges and that in spite of his best efforts he was unable to ameliorate the conditions faced by the internees. He described a situation so severe that Transnistria Governor Gheorghe Alexianu visited the camp in December 1942. Acknowledging that he had received funds from the Government of Transnistria to supplement the prisoner diet with horse meat, however, he claimed that he had been unable to do so because he was not able to find out the authorized price to be paid for horse meat. In the same affidavit, signed on 28 February 1945, Murgescu claimed that no prisoner had been beaten or tortured while he was in charge. Yet, confusingly, several sentences later he acknowledged ordering the whipping of prisoners – “15 lows each across the back” – for refusing to work in the prisoner sanitation service. He justified ordering the beatings as his “right as commandant.” In an affidavit of March 1, 1945, Murgescu claimed that he had protested regarding the inadequacy of the prisoner diet, but that he was obliged by orders to prevent additional food from coming into the camp. Burădescu, who served under and then succeeded Murgescu as hundreds of prisoners developed symptoms of lathyrism and became invalids, also sought to camouflage his role. To project the image of having had a sympathetic attitude

³⁴ For the trials, sworn statements, and/or appeals of Murgescu, Burădescu, and Constantin Ștefănescu-Drăgănești, see USHMM Archives of the Romanian Information [Intelligence] Service (SRI), RG-25.004, Reel 20, SRI File 40011, Volume 8; Reel 21, SRI File 40011, Volumes 18 and 19; Reel 22, SRI File 40011, Volume 36. Ștefănescu-Drăgănești’s unsuccessful appeal of his conviction and testimony is in RG-25.004, Reel 122, SRI File 19670, Volumes 1 and 2. As deputy military commander in the region, on September 1, 1943, Ștefănescu-Drăgănești had drafted the draconian regulations for guarding the prisoners still in the Vapniarka camp. The World Jewish Congress list of Jewish prisoners still in the camp, referred to earlier and found at ITS, is based on a handwritten list of prisoners in this file, which Ștefănescu-Drăgănești notes he received directly from a prisoner representative.

toward the internees, he included four former prisoners on the list of witnesses that he asked the court to call in his defense. Others on the list, whom he hoped would corroborate his altered memory of events, included the former commander of the Vapniarka guard brigade, the former camp cashier, and Christache Popovici, Burădescu's successor as commandant, who was also under arrest pending trial, in Bucharest's Malmaison military barracks.

The memory of Vapniarka as presented in numerous affidavits of former internees, on the other hand, was very different. The internees remembered, with virtual unanimity Murgescu's and Burădescu's "welcoming remarks" and threats when contingents of new deportees arrived in the camp. Multiple sworn statements attest to Murgescu telling new arrivals that while they had arrived on their feet, they would leave crawling on all fours... if they managed to survive. Both the commandant and his deputy threatened the internees with execution at any sign of resistance. Pointing just outside the barbed wire fences to the mass graves of the typhus victims and executed internees from the first contingents of prisoners sent to the Vapniarka ghetto, they made it clear that an early grave would be their fate if they attempted to escape or to communicate with anyone outside the camp for any reason.

The former prisoners described sadistic beatings inflicted personally by Commandant Murgescu, who is described as having been "drunk most of the time," and the routine speculation (profiteering) by camp authorities with the food supply, including, for example, by procuring "rotten potatoes" for the prisoners after the medical examiner's visits to the camp, when the prisoner diet was supposed to be improved. Given the near starvation ration and the fragile health of many of the internees, it would be unreasonable to question their testimony that the commandants and guards routinely stole the food and other contents of packages sent to prisoners by family members and the Jewish community inside Romania once receiving this kind of aid was authorized by Antonescu.³⁵ Several prisoners cite a guard named Cristodor Popescu, also on trial, not only for withholding from prisoners even the meagre rations they were supposed to receive, but for extorting significant sums of money for promising to carry messages between some prisoners at Vapniarka and families and other contacts in Bucharest, and then, as often as not, failing to deliver the messages or keeping for himself food, money, and other items intended for the camp internees.³⁶

The manner in which the former internees remembered the betrayal of detainee collaborator Bubi Finchelstein was equally vivid. One former internee recounted

³⁵ See, for example, the depositions of Moise Zimmer, Ernest Burger, Pavel Donat, Alexandru Blumenfeld, Simion Bercovici, Emanoil Veinstein-Vinea, Jac Mendelovici, Moise Avram, Alfons Nachtigal, Moritz Sonnenstein, David Fridrich, and Izu Goldenberg in USHMM RG-25.004, Reel 21, SRI File 40011, Volume 18.

³⁶ On Cristodor Popescu, see USHMM RG-25.004, Reel 30, SRI File 40013, Volume 3, "Investigative file Mihailescu Ștefan and others."

in detail Finchelstein dividing with Murgescu money collected for the prisoners from family members during a trip on which Finchelstein accompanied the commandant to Iași. Another accused Finchelstein of serving as an informer not only for the camp commandants, but also for the regime's Secret Intelligence Service (Siguranța) and the German. Several survivors testified that Finchelstein had lobbied camp authorities to put him in charge of the prisoner committee, arguing that otherwise the camp committee would continue to be "controlled by communists." Murgescu and guard Captain Cristodor Popescu even threatened to execute prisoners or turn them over to the Germans if they refused to accept the change. In spite of such threats, the witnesses testified, the solidarity among internees that had been fostered by the communist small committee resulted in maintenance of the status quo. Former internee Rașela Topper accused Finchelstein of procuring women from the camp and joining with the guards in abusing them. Given the power of these accusations of betrayal, still raw in the memories of the former internees, Finchelstein's lengthy record of prewar communist activism did not save him. The People's Tribunal condemned him to death. Later, the sentence was commuted to life at hard labor. Finchelstein was amnestied and released in 1958, but was rearrested the following year and sentenced to five years in prison for "speculation."³⁷

While certain documents of the court found in this extensive body of trial records make reference to the "ethnic" nature of some of the crimes committed, in general the defendants were accused not of *antisemitism* or crimes against *Jews*, but of crimes against *communists*. Still, the ethnic factor was not completely absent. Sever Burădescu's request to have four former prisoners called as defense witnesses, including Arthur Kessler, is a case in point. In the aftermath of the Holocaust, Burădescu surely hoped that having *Jewish* victims of Antonescu's fascist regime testify for the defense might shield him from the severe sentence he feared. While Kessler had already fled Romania, the written record that he had created of what transpired at Vapniarka was present, serving as vital witness to authentic memory of the place. Lt. Col. Gheorghe Tătăranu, who served from 1941 to 1944 as Director of Health and then as Advisor for Sanitation for the Government of Transnistria, provided the court with detailed descriptions of his two visits to Vapniarka, the first focused on the continuing danger of typhus, and the second, in January 1943, in response to reports of "spastic paralysis" among prisoners in the camp. According to his deposition, Tătăranu met with the Jewish doctors in the camp, "led by Dr. Kessler," who "presented all their clinical reports, which included all the data collected right from the beginning of manifestations of this disease." These were surely the notes now in the archives of the International Tracing Service. In addition, Tătăranu's trial affidavit is accompanied by copies of

³⁷ USHMM RG-25.004, Reel 22, SRI File 40011, Volumes 22, 34 and 40. Volume 22 contains five lengthy internee depositions.

the memoranda and appeals addressed by Kessler and the other doctors in the camp to the commandant and to Governor Alexianu, describing the advance of the disease and requesting relief. The memoranda are dated, respectively, January 20, March 3, March 8, and April 17, 1943. After conducting his own tests which confirmed the findings of Kessler and his team, Tătăranu ordered the camp commandant to stop feeding fodder peas to the internees. This was followed a few days later by an order to the same effect from the Governor of Transnistria.³⁸

After just a few years, Romania's postwar trials of individuals accused of committing war crimes came to an end, as did the inclination of the by-then firmly installed communist regime to focus attention on crimes committed against Jews. The publication of books regarding the Holocaust in Romania, which had been possible in the immediate postwar years, came to an end as well.³⁹ Clearly what did not end was the suffering, both physical and emotional, of many Vapniarka survivors. Nor did the desire of the Jewish leader of the team of Jewish doctors in Vapniarka to fully understand the crippling disease that had afflicted the camp's internees and, to the extent possible, continue to observe and care for them. Arthur Kessler kept track of the Vapniarka survivors who, like himself, emigrated to Israel after the Holocaust. He participated in a Vapniarka survivors association in Israel and published scientific papers on lathyrism. His papers contain a list from 1961 of 164 survivors living in Israel, recording in nearly every case the individual's former profession, job in Israel, age, and degree of disability (e.g., Nathan Simon, 64%; Avram Solomovici, 84%; etc.).⁴⁰

³⁸ For Tătăranu's affidavits and the camp doctors' memoranda, see USHMM RG-25.004, Reel 21, SRI File 40011, Volume 18.

³⁹ Important examples among these early publications include (Carp, 1947; Mircu, 1945; and Brunea-Fox, 1944). While several studies of Hungarian perpetration of the Holocaust in Northern Transylvania appeared during the communist era, Romanian responsibility for crimes committed in wartime Romania and Transnistria remained an essentially taboo subject until the fall of the communist regime.

⁴⁰ See USHMM Accession Number 2019.183.1, Dr. Arthur Kessler Papers.

I

„VAPNIARKA“

NUMERUL	PRONUMELE	VÂSTA	GRUP. INVALIZI	INCLERȚIA	INCAZAREA
1	ALTER IOEL	52	26%	TEXTILĂ -	AUTO - MASA
2	ADLER MENDEL	58	57%	BRĂNĂR -	CHIAȘK
3	RYDIK. KALMAN	56	49%	MĂCELAR -	MĂCELĂRIE
4	SIMON NATHAN	39	64%	CROITOR -	CROITORIE PĂV
5	TALIC IANCU	38	30%	CROITOR -	CINEMA
6	COHEN ALUM. CLARA	36	52%	-	CINEMA
7	DAVID. H. DAVID	83	100%	-	PENIE
8	HENDL ESTER	42	-	CALCIERDAMĂ -	CONFRAȚI
9	HAYON ADA	44	32	-	MĂCOLET
10	BERCOVICI KALMAN	59	40	BĂCAN -	MĂCOLET
11	MATIERSON MOSE	63	37%	MORAR -	MURĂȘ CEREBLE
12	NATHAN HERSCU	40	33%	COMERCIAŢ -	PĂVĂLIE GRAB.
13	ZABINOVICI PINHAS	62	-	JUNC. FARMACIT -	MĂCOLET
14	NATHAN LIBA	40	46%	VEZI N° R	SOTUL
15	LES PEREANU ADA	65	-	BRĂNĂR. COP	BRĂNĂR
16	CERBU BERLA	44	64%	TETATOR -	CINEMA
17	GALATZIN HERSCU	44	100%	JOGER. -	MĂCOLET
18	PEKEL GHENS	57	-	NEGUSTOR -	CINEMA
19	MITELMANN MIPE	71	60%	NEGUSTOR -	PENIE
20	LIPNER MAIER	63	-	NEGUSTOR -	MĂCOLET
21	BUDANJIN MAIER	63	42	NEGUSTOR -	MĂCOLET
22	WALDMAN HAIM	54	50	BĂCAN -	MĂCOLET
23	BLAU TIBERIU	40	61%	TEIATOR -	PĂVĂLIE
24	LIBER Solomon	71	-	NEGUSTOR -	PENIE
25	SARFITEIN GHENIA	50	-	BĂCAN -	PENIUNE
26	LUPU IOEL	60	-	BOBĂNĂ -	SPĂLĂTORIE
27	COTER AVRAM	45	24%	PROFETOR -	COOPERATIVĂ
28	KOHN HERSCU	61	40	NEGUSTOR -	CINEMA
29	STEIF RIECA	41	25%	TEXTILĂ -	PĂVĂLIE
30	STEIF. HAIM	36	48%	LEMNAR -	PĂVĂLIE

Graphic 7: Arthur Kessler’s list of Vapniarka survivors in Israel, first page, 1961. Source: USHMM—Arthur Kessler Collection.

A quarter century after the majority of Romania’s postwar trials had concluded, Vapniarka surfaced again, as part of the communist regime’s effort in the early 1970s to obtain a lump-sum hard currency settlement from the government of the Federal Republic of Germany for damages suffered by Romanians during World War II as a result of German persecution and Romania’s wartime alliance with Nazi Germany. The Romanian government assembled some 189,000 compensation claim files, organized geographically according to the pre-war or wartime residence of the claimants. The German government doubted that the Romanian government would pass any compensation on to the actual victims

of persecution, and the Foreign Ministry shipped the wooden cases in which the claim files had been delivered by the Romanians to ITS. The only section of this extensive body of documentation that was separated out and dedicated to a specific site of perpetration consisted of 450 claim files from Vapniarka survivors.⁴¹

The claims in the full set of records range from claims by fisherman who were deprived of the ability to earn a living during the period when the Danube delta was a restricted military zone, to claims from people in whose homes German soldiers were billeted, to the claims of Jewish, Roma, and political victims of persecution by both Romanian and German authorities. Each claim file in the Vapniarka section describes, on special forms printed in both Romanian and German, the claimant's transfer to Vapniarka from a penal facility in Romania or the claimant's arrest from freedom and deportation to the camp. In a significant number of cases, the claimants identify themselves as having been communist activists or as having been arrested for "anti-fascist" activity. While true, it was also politically correct, even politically advantageous, to make such a declaration in Romania in the early 1970s. Only some of the claimants self-identify as Jews, mainly those swept up and sent to Vapniarka from their homes or from the street, not from a prison cell. Many of the files contain extensive postwar medical records and medical certificates recording the long-term effects of lathyrism, including permanent paralysis and other debilitating and painful conditions. Some claims were filed by the spouses, siblings, or children of internees who had died in the camp or died prematurely after the war as a result of medical conditions contracted there. The names of the claimants match names on the World Jewish Congress list. Zalman Broder, author of one of the unpublished memoirs about Vapniarka, filed a claim, as did Geza Kornis, Ihiel Benditer, and other camp survivors, only a few of whose names have appeared in this study. Simion Bughici did not file a claim. Perhaps it was deemed inappropriate for a man who had been Romanian ambassador to Moscow, foreign minister, and deputy prime minister, who was still serving in high party and government posts, and who had been awarded the Star of the Socialist Republic of Romania, the country's highest award during the communist era, to request compensation from West Germany. Bughici's wife Ana, on the other hand, did file. Her claim includes medical certificates that showed recurrent postwar hospitalizations linked to the lasting symptoms of muscular and nervous diseases traced back to her incarceration at Vapniarka.

⁴¹ For many years, this large collection was not included in ITS's registers of holdings, and it has not yet been scanned as part of ITS's massive digitization project. Nor have the names on the claim files been entered into ITS's Central Name Index. It was recently discovered that there is a microfilm copy of much of this documentation at CNSAS.

132

<p style="text-align: center;"><u>CERERE - DECLARAȚIE</u></p> <p>I. <u>Solicitant</u></p> <p>Numele Broder</p> <p>Prenumele Zalman Numele in deportare</p> <p>Data nașterii 1 aprilie 1914 Locul nașterii Botoșani Domiciliul actual București</p> <p>str. Bitolia Nr.24,sect.1</p> <p>Starea civilă căsătorit Posesor al buletinului de identitate seria S nr. 442973/68 emis de Circ.1 mil prin prezenta solicit despăgubire pentru persecuțiile suferite de mine : pentru crime politice - luptător antifascist și pentru motive rasiale - evreu.</p> <p>1. Vătămarea libertății De la 25 martie 1941 până la 26 august 1944, am fost internat în lagărele: Tg. Jiu, Vapniarka și Grosulova (Transnistria).</p> <p>2. Vătămarea integrității corporale In perioada sus-menționată , datorită tratamentului inuman din La- gărul Vapniarka (Transnistria), am contractat paraplegie spastică , ră- minând paralizat de ambele picioare boală ireversibilă, declarată invalid sută la sută , conform actelor anexate.</p> <p>3. Prejudiciu în activitatea profesională dependentă Până în anul 1941, am fost funcționar particular la Firma Grim- berg din Botoșani, de unde am fost con- cediat, nemaiîntinzând coupe nici o muncă salariată pînă în 26 aug. 1944, conf. II. <u>Persecuții</u> (se va completa numai dacă se solicită despăgubiri pentru prejudicie- rea unei alte persoane).</p> <p>Numele</p> <p>Prenumele Numelē in deportare</p> <p>Data nașterii Locul nașterii Ultimul domiciliu</p> <p>a suferit următoarele persecuții :</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>ANTRAG - ERKLÄRUNG</u></p> <p>I. <u>Antragsteller</u></p> <p>Name Broder Zalman Während Vorname der Deportation geführter Name</p> <p>1. April 1914 Geburts- Botoșani ort Geburts- Bukarest Setzler Wohn- Haus nr. Bitolia 24 Sekt. I sitz Strasse und Haus nr.</p> <p>Zivilstand: verheiratet Inhaber des Personalausweises Serie : S Nr. 442973 ausgestellt von Mil. Sekt. 1</p> <p>begehre mit diesem Antrag Entschädigung wegen folgender Verfolgungen die ich zu erleiden hatte : aus politischen Gründen - antifaschistischer Kämpfer und aus Gründen der Rasse - Jude.</p> <p>1. Schaden an Freiheit Von 25. März bis zum 26. August 1944 war ich in den Lagern: Tg. Jiu, Vapniarka und Grosulovo/Trans- nistrien/ interniert.</p> <p>2. Schaden an körperlichen In- tegrität. In obiger Periode, zufolge der menschennwürdigen Behandlung im Lager Vapniarka/Transnistrien/ bin ich an spastische Paraplegie er- krankt, meine beiden Flüsse sind ge- lähmt, irreversible Krankheit, bin als 100% Invalide erklärt, laut beiliegenden Akten.</p> <p>3. Schaden an unselbständiger beruflichen Fortkommen. Bis zum Jahre 1941 war ich Beamter bei der Firma Grimberg in Botoșani, von wo ich entlassen wur- de und konnte bis zum 25. August 1944 keine bezahlte Arbeit mehr leisten, laut beiliegenden Akten.</p> <p>II. <u>Verfolgung</u> (nur dann ausfüllen, wenn Persecutionen gegen andere Personen begehrt werden)</p> <p>Nachname Während Vorname der Deportation geführter Name</p> <p>1. April 1914 Geburtstag Botoșani Letzter Wohnsitz Bukarest Hausnummer</p> <p>erlitt die nachstehenden Verfolgungen :</p>
---	---

Format A4 (V)

Copy in conformity with the ITS Archives

Graphic 8a: Claim form of Zalman Broder, first page, noting irreversible paralysis of both legs, 1970. Source: International Tracing Service-Arolsen Archives.

POLICLINICA Nr. 10

REPUBLICA SOCIALISTA ROMANIA

Str. Rozelor, nr. 8 — București
Telefon : 33.29.80

Nr. 3020 din 20.VII 1970

CERIFICAT MEDICAL

Tov. FLORIANU BARBU (FUX BERIS) se află în evidența și tratamentul policlinicii noastre din anul 1954, cu diagnosticul: Schele poliomielită membrul inferior dr., schele latirism membru inferior stg. (după alimentație cu măzre furajeră în lagărul Vapniaroca), hipertensiune arterială, tulburări nevrotice, ocolită cronică cu constipație cronică, sindrom alergic cronicizat.—

Pentru aceste afecțiuni pacientul face tratament medicamentos de specialitate continuu.—

MEDIC PRIMAR DIRECTOR,
Dr. Paul Iacobini

Copy in conformity with the ITS Archives

Graphic 8b: Medical certificate from file of claimant Florianu Barbu (Fux Beris), noting lasting consequences of lathyrism, 1970. Source: International Tracing Service-Arolsen Archives.

What is problematic in this otherwise extraordinary record of the postwar consequences of internment at Vapniarka? The answer is multi-dimensional and relates to the politics of memory. Separated out as a special case in the massive collection of files the Romanian government had collected, memory of Vapniarka resonates principally as the memory of a communist experience, not a Jewish one, even though being a *Jewish* communist was the sine qua non criterion for deportation. Imprisoned communists who were *Jewish* and suspected sympathizers who were *Jewish* were deported to Transnistria, as were tens of thousands of other Romanian Jews. Non-Jewish communists and sympathizers, while imprisoned and persecuted, stayed in Romania. Also problematic, the particular targeting of Jews by the Antonescu regime is trivialized by being submerged in tens of thousands of claims from fishermen, people forced to billet soldiers, or whose daughters were aggressed by German soldiers, but who may have been true believers in the need to rid Romania of its Jewish population and who were willing, even enthusiastic, instruments of the Antonescu regime's antisemitic policies. Memory here was memory that nearly submerged the lethal fate of Romanian Jewry in a sea of pseudo-claims of often pseudo-suffering or pseudo-loss. It was memory intentionally distorted in the hope of a cynical, already antisemitic communist government that it might obtain a hard-currency bonanza.

The interface of antisemitism, fascism, communism and the Holocaust. Vapniarka, a single site of horror in Romanian-administered Transnistria illustrates the intertwining of these elements in historical fact and in postwar memory of what transpired there. By definition, *memory* is different from *historical fact*. Memory is selective. A case study of Vapniarka reveals the powerful, and perhaps inevitable, effects on memory of the time and place where memories are made public. The historical context in which the representation of historical events presented as memory of the past is formulated also weighs heavily. And of course, the identity, “sense of self,” and self-interest of the person bearing witness makes a huge difference.

With so many factors impacting the shape and content of memory, it is not surprising that postwar memories of Vapniarka are a web of sometimes overlapping, but rarely identical perception, memory and representation of what happened there. Of course, *the undeniable physical reality of lathyrism* and the crippling effects of the fodder pea diet inflicted on Vapniarka internees is always present, no matter whose memory is in play, where or when the story is being told. Beyond that, however, memories rarely coincide. One encounters misrepresentation, or at the least cleansing, of the history by survivors who downplay or expunge the Jewish essence of the story in order to avoid running afoul of political correctness in Romania’s postwar totalitarian regime. One encounters memory shaped by a desire for glorification, for retribution and, later, for exploitation, trivialization, and relativization of the history by committed communists resident in Romania and by Romania’s increasingly antisemitic communist regime. Disaffected party members living outside Romania present renditions of their experience that straddle between memory of Vapniarka as a praiseworthy example of communist solidarity and memory of the place as a case study of antisemitic barbarity during the Holocaust. Finally, in an analogous if less extreme fashion, one encounters among survivors living in emigration memory of Vapniarka that is largely devoid of the communist essence of the saga. For these individuals, dwelling on the leftist, communist element of the story, and of their own pasts, would have been an inconvenient part of the historical record to remember in their countries of refuge, in particular during the Cold War years that lasted longer than most of their lives.

References

- Ancel, J. (2003). *Transnistria*, 3 vols. Goldstein-Goren Holocaust Research Center—Tel Aviv University.
- Applebaum, A. (2012). *Iron Curtain: The Crushing of Eastern Europe, 1944-1956*. Doubleday.
- Benditer, I. (1995) *Vapniarca: lagărele Vapniarca și Grosulovo, închisoarea Ribnița, ghetourile Olgopol, Savrani, Tridubi, Crivoi-Ozero și Trihati*. Anais.
- Berkowitz, M. (2007). *The Crime of my Very Existence: Nazism and the Myth of Jewish Criminality*. University of California Press.
- Brunea-Fox, F. (1944). *Orașul Măcelului—Jurnalul Rebeliunei și al Crimelor Legionare*. București.
- Bughici, S. (n.d). Din Amintiri. In United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives (henceforth USHMM), Records of the Federation of Jewish Communities of Romania, RG-25.021, Reel 15, Folder 374.
- Carmelly (Steigman), F. (Ed.) (1997). *Shattered: Fifty Years of Silence—History and Voices of the Tragedy in Romania and Transnistria*. Abbeyfield Publishers. Online: <http://www.nizkor.org/hweb/people/c/carmelly-felicia/benditer-ihiel.html>.
- Carp, M. (1947). *Cartea Neagră - Fapte și Documente: Suferințele Evreilor din România, 1940-1944*. Societatea Națională de Editura și Arte Grafice “Dacia Traiană,” vol. 3.
- Consiliul de Stat. (1971). Decretul nr. 157/1971 privind conferirea unor ordine ale Republicii Socialiste România pentru activitate îndelungată în mișcarea muncitorească și merite deosebite în opera de construire a socialismului,” at <https://lege5.ro/Gratuit/gu4tqoju/decretul-nr-157-1971-privind-conferirea-unor-ordine-ale-republicii-socialiste-romania/2> (viewed 31 August 2019).
- Gall, M., (1997). *Eclipsa*. Du Style-Colectia Destine.
- Gall, M., (1999). *Finsternis—Durch Gefängnisse, KZ Wapniarka, Massaker und Kommunismus: Ein Lebenslauf in Rumänien, 1920-1990*. Hartung-Gorre Verlag.
- Ghetto Fighters House Archives (1957). “Ärztlicher Bericht” of Dr. Arthur Kessler, dated 18 July 1957, Item 4878, Beit Lohamei Haghetat.
- Goldberger, N. (1949). *Lazăr Grunberg și Bernat Andrei*. Editura Partidului Muncitoresc Român.
- Hirsch, M & Spitzer, L. (2010). *Ghosts of Home*. University of California Press, 2010.
- International Commission on the Holocaust in Romania. (2005). *Final Report*. Polirom.
- Ioanid, R. (2000). *The Holocaust in Romania*. Ivan R. Dee in Association with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.
- Ioanid, R. (2005). *The Ransom of the Jews: The Story of the Extraordinary Secret Bargain between Romania and Israel*. Ivan R. Dee.
- ITS Digital Collection (available at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and at ITS/Bad Arolsen) (n.d.). “Register of Jews interned in the Camp of Wapniarka – Transnistria, September 1, 1943,” List Material of Various Camps, 1.1.47.1, Folder 19, Digital Object Identifier (DOI) 5160365-5160376; the identifier for this file in the paper records is VCC 176/c Ordner 19.
- Kornis, G. (2004). *Überlebt durch Solidarität—KZ Wapniarka, Ghetto Olgopol in Transnistrien, Arbeitslager in Rumänien: ein Zeitzeugenbericht*. Hartung-Gorre Verlag.

- An excerpted translation into English is accessible on line, as of 31 August 2019, at www.bjt2006.org/GK01-GK16.html.
- Levy, R., (2001). *Ana Pauker: The Rise and Fall of a Jewish Communist*. University of California Press.
- Mircu, M. (1945). *Pogromurile din Bucovina și Dorohoi*. Glob.
- Shafir, M. (2018a). The Nature of Postcommunist Antisemitism in East Central Europe: Ideology's Backdoor Return. *Journal of Contemporary Antisemitism*, 1(2), 33-61.
- Shafir, M. (2018b). Romania—Neither “*Fleishig*” nor “*Milchig*”: A Comparative Study. In A. Florian (Ed.). *Holocaust—Public Memory in Postcommunist Romania*. Indiana University Press, 96-150.
- Shafir, M., (2016). Ideology, Memory and Religion in Post-Communist East Central Europe: A Comparative Study Focused on Post-Holocaust. *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies*, 15(44), 52-110.
- Shapiro, P. (2013). Vapniarka: The Archive of the International Tracing Service and the Holocaust in the East. *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 27(1), 114-37.
- Simon, N. (1994) “... *auf allen Vieren werdet ihr hinauskr kriechen*”: ein Zeugenbericht aus dem KZ Wapniarka. Institut Kirche und Judentum.
- Stănculescu, I. (2010). Report on the Situation of the Jews in Transnistrian Ghettos, submitted by attorney I. Stănculescu, undated but 1942. In O. Trașcă, “*Chestiunea evreiască*” în documente militare române, 1941-1944. Institutul European-Institutul Elie Wiesel, pp. 728-31.
- Trașcă, O. (2010). “*Chestiunea evreiască*” în documente militare române, 1941-1944. Institutul European-Institutul Elie Wiesel.
- USHMM (2019). United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Accession Number 2019.183.1, Dr. Arthur Kessler Papers.
- USHMM Records of the Vinnitsa Regional Oblast Archives ,RG-31.011, Reel 31
- USHMM RG-25.021, Reel 15, Folders 367, 370, and 371.
- USHMM Archives of the Romanian Ministry of National Defense, RG-25.003, Reel 393, Folder 36, “Camps, warehouses. Ghettos from March 1942 to 30 June 1942.”
- USHMM RG-04.027*01 (Acc.1992.A.0113). Broder, Z. “Amintiri din Lagărele Vapniarca și Grosolovo, 16 Sept. 1942 – 4 Aprilie 1944.”
- USHMM RG-25.003, Reel 20, Folder 1128, “Camps for Jewish communists from [Romania] from 1 April 1942 to 2 July 1942.” RG-31.011, Reel 31.
- USHMM Records of the Odessa Regional Oblast Archives, RG-31.004, Reel 8.
- USHMM RG-25.004, Reel 22, SRI File 40011.
- USHMM Archives of the Romanian Information [Intelligence] Service (SRI), RG-25.004, Reel 20, SRI File 40011, Volume 8; Reel 21, SRI File 40011, Volumes 18 and 19; Reel 22, SRI File 40011, Volume 36. USHMM RG-25.004, Reel 22, SRI File 40011, Volumes 22, 34 and 40.
- White J. R. (Ed.). (2018). *The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos, 1933-1945*, vol. 3, Camps and Ghettos under European Regimes Aligned with Nazi Germany. Indiana University Press in association with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 811-13.