

**Ze'ev (Walter) Ellenbogen**

**Nathan Klipper**  
**and the Underground Aid**  
**to the Transnistria Deportees**

“... in your concern for our brethren who are suffering [in Transnistria], you are performing the greatest Jewish mission of our time.” (In a letter to Romania from the Jewish Palestinian mission in Istanbul, July 2, 1943.)

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# **Nathan Klipper and the Underground Aid to the Transnistria Deportees**

## ***The Beginning of the War on the Eastern Front***

At the beginning of the summer of 1941, preparations for the attack on the Soviet Union in the eastern frontier districts of Romania were nearing completion, and the German-Romanian war machine commenced operation. The “war on the Jews” was also stepped up. Pronouncements of the central government of Romania, initiatives of the military command in the area, and “grass-roots initiatives” all combined to strike at the Jews. After the outbreak of hostilities on June 22, 1941, brutal pogroms occurred, most of them in the “liberated territories” recaptured from the Soviets, who had taken them from the Romanians a year earlier, but some also in places which were not previously under Soviet rule.

In several places the pogroms began with an order for all the Jewish men to report to a gathering point, under threat of severe sanctions on those who failed to appear. This is what happened, for example, in the city of Iassy, where many thousands of Jews, mostly men, were massacred. Similarly, in several towns in southern Bukovina, Jewish men were ordered to gather in such a manner. About two of them, Gura-Humora and Vatra-Dornei, there are written testimonies. In these two towns the detainees were released shortly after their arrest, due to the intervention of a man named Nathan Klipper.

### **The Arrest of the Men in Gura-Humora**

About the first town, Gura-Humora, Ze’ev Ellenbogen wrote the following in a memorial book about the town and its Jewish community: <sup>1</sup>

“There came a day full of events and turn-about, which began with terror and fear but fortunately ended well. The memory of the events of that day still haunts me and does not leave me. It was the day when, near noon, all the Jewish men were ordered to gather in the big empty lot at the end of the Jewish street, next to the city square. When the order was received, my father rushed home from his shop, took a small satchel, and went to the appointed place. My mother and I escorted him. The scene which appeared to us when we reached the men’s gathering place filled me with terror. The lot was surrounded by armed soldiers. On the other side of the street, in the small park, stood a machine gun. The barrel of the gun was aimed at the crowd of people gathered opposite it. Long chains of bullets streamed down alongside it. The eyes of the soldiers manning the gun followed the people in front of them. In the lot itself the crowds of our fathers, the Jewish men, grew thicker.

“In a bleak mood we left the place and headed home. Knowing what had happened in similar situations in other places with substantial Jewish populations

through which Romanian army troops passed, in those days in which triggers were easily pulled, in the first days of the war on the Eastern front, I am still horrified by what could easily have happened to us, and from which, perhaps by miracle, we were spared. At dusk the men who had been gathered earlier were led under guard down the Jewish street, passing our house, to the great synagogue. Several women gathered behind the fence and gate of the front yard of our house, among them my mother and me beside her. The wives anxiously watched the lines of the husbands. Some of them wept.

“Later that same evening, in the parlor of our home, which was reserved for festive meals, an unusual “business dinner” was held, which my mother served. Four men took part in it. Two of them were officers in army uniform: one was a Romanian army colonel and the other was a German officer in Wehrmacht [German army] uniform. The other two participants were the husbands of my aunts: Nathan Klipper, my mother’s sister’s husband; and Dr. Abraham Mosberg, my father’s sister’s husband. The Romanian colonel was the military *pretor*, the officer in charge of internal security affairs on behalf of the division stationed in our region. His realm of authority included taking measures against the Jewish population. My uncle Nathan Klipper was summoned to our town from his place of residence, Vatra-Dornei, to help handle the situation in our community which had resulted from the arrest of the Jewish men. He immediately answered the call and it was he who initiated this dinner.

“Nathan Klipper was a businessman, and a man with charisma, courage and a strong sense of public duty. These qualities served him greatly in developing connections and successful contacts with powerful men of that time. Although he did not hold an official position, he was called time after time to appeal to those in power in order to help Jews in distress – both individuals or communities. Sometimes he supplemented his appeals with bribes, which made their way into the pockets of officials, from his personal resources. He hastened to our town that same day in the German military vehicle of his friend, a Wehrmacht liaison officer, and escorted by him. At this dinner a “deal” was made by Nathan Klipper and the Romanian colonel, the military *pretor*, for the release of the Jewish men who had been arrested earlier in return, of course, for a suitable “payment” to the military *pretor*.

“The *pretor* honored the terms of the deal. Several hours later the Jewish detainees were sent home, and my father, too, came home.”

### **The Arrest of the Men in Dorna**

About the event in Vatra-Dornei, a Dornean man, Benjamin Brecher, testifies:

“During that period we experienced a night of terror and dread. By order of the Germans and Romanians, every Jewish man above the age of sixteen had to report to the courtyard of the great synagogue in the city. The Germans surrounded and guarded us, armed with rifles and machine guns. It was our luck that a member of the Klipper family, who were known to be extremely wealthy, forest owners,

who had connections with the Germans, arranged our rescue in the following manner:

“The next day the Germans began calling the names of people whom they needed for manufacturing lumber for the German army and the aircraft industry. This is how it continued throughout the day, and in the evening it was all over. This thing cost a lot of money, which Klipper paid. He saved us all.”<sup>2</sup>

### ***Biographical Details***

According to the collection, *History of the Jews in Bukovina*, edited by Dr. Hugo Gold, Nathan Klipper was “one of the most outstanding figures among the industrialists of Vatra-Dornei”<sup>3</sup> in the years preceding World War II. At that time he was the leading partner in the Klipper family’s lumber production and sales business. The other partners were his father Mayer and his younger brother Fritz. The family businesses encompassed logging rights in forest tracts which were owned mainly by the “Church Fund” of the Romanian Orthodox church, sawmills, lumber warehouses, auxiliary services and marketing facilities. Sales were directed toward both the local market and export. At the end of that period an important client joined the customers of the firm: the Wehrmacht (German army). Nathan Klipper quickly succeeded in turning this fact into an instrument for helping fellow Jews who had fallen into trouble.

Born in 1898, Nathan Klipper was the son of a religiously observant family originally from Vizhnitz, the Hasidic center, the second of five children born to Mayer Klipper (the eldest, Leo, was killed in World War I). Nathan Klipper was a typical cultural product of the Bukovinian Jewry, which embodied a syncretism of deep-rooted Judaism and German-Austrian culture. After World War I and the annexation of Bukovina by Romania, a Romanian envelope was added to this cultural blend. In 1931 Nathan married Luzzi Bronstein, who was also from Dorna. They had two children, Ariane and Jonel-Nelu (whose Hebrew name, Yoel, is for his maternal great-grandfather, Joel Weitzner).

In his youth Nathan appears to have been active in the *Poalei Zion* (Laborers of Zion) movement. He had a close friendship with Dr. Mayer Rosner, a young intellectual, who was among the prominent leaders and activists in the *Poalei Zion* movement in Bukovina. Rosner died at a young age, after contracting typhus during one of his journeys as an emissary of the movement. The untimely death of this talented and idealistic young man from Dorna struck the people of his hometown community with shock and grief. In later days, the leader of the Dorna exiles in Transnistria, Dr. Jonas Kessler, will assert to Nathan Klipper in the underground correspondence between them, that the legacy of this friendship obligated Nathan most strongly to support the exiles. It appears that Klipper was also among the active contributors to the *Keren Kayemet* (Jewish National Fund) and even transferred sums of money through it for the purchase of land in Palestine. Among the few documents remaining from this period is a photograph taken in 1936 of a Zionist group with the emissary from the Jewish National Fund. Nathan Klipper, his wife and his aunt/step-mother can be seen in this photograph.<sup>4</sup>

Although he did not have an official position in its administration, Nathan Klipper was active in Jewish community affairs in Vatra-Dornei, apparently chiefly in matters of connections with the authorities. The people of the community saw him as a public advocate (*shtadlan*). Although the acts mentioned at the beginning of this article were most significant, they were apparently not his only ones. The Klipper family played an active role in operations aimed at providing aid to the community's needy.

On October 10, 1941, on the eve of the deportation of the Vatra-Dornei community to Transnistria, Nathan Klipper evaded the deportation and escaped, together with his wife and children, to Bucharest. They were smuggled from Dorna to the "Old Kingdom" (where the deportation order was not in effect) in a German military vehicle by his friend, the aforementioned Wehrmacht liaison officer who greatly assisted Nathan.

However, the fate of the family's property, both commercial and private, was the same as that of the property of all the Jews in Bukovina who were deported: they were confiscated. The home of the Klipper family home with all the furnishings and belonging were taken over by the Jew-hater Nichifor Robu, the leader of the antisemitic National Christian (Cuzist) party in Bukovina, and formerly a representative of this party in parliament.

Upon his move to Bucharest, a new chapter began in Nathan's business and community activities. Despite the confiscation of the family's properties that were left in Bukovina, he continued his traditional lumber business together with his brother Fritz through the Dacia Forestiera company, and even expanded the scope of his businesses. He became a partner in ownership of the chain of Sora department stores and of the Vitrometan glass factory in the Transylvanian city of Medias. In his efforts to assist his suffering brethren, he succeeded in establishing connections with heads of government agencies in whose hands laid the fate of Jews – both communities and individuals. According to documents and testimony, these connections encompassed the powerful Deputy Minister of Interior, General Picki Vasiliu, who was in charge of the internal security services (which included the gendarmerie, the body responsible for internal security in the Transnistria deportation area and for escorting the deportation convoys), and Radu Lecca, who was appointed the man in charge of Jewish affairs on behalf of the Romanian government and the one who actually ran the *Centrala Evreilor* (Jews' Center). Klipper even found channels to Mihai Antonescu, the Deputy Premier, who was second in power to the "State Leader" [dictator] Ion Antonescu. However, it appears he also maintained useful connections with officials at lower levels, such as commanders and officers of the police and the *siguranta* (security police). His connections with the leaders of Romanian Jewry, such as Dr. Wilhelm Filderman and A.L. Zissu, also grew closer.

It should be emphasized that his charm, daring and talent for making connections and persuading alone were not enough to soften the hearts of those officials who controlled the fate of the Jews. The primary means for this were the generous bribes they received. It seems that not a few of these bribes were paid from Klipper's personal funds.

In his aid and advocacy efforts Nathan was motivated both by the distress and despair of those in trouble and their families, by the encouragement of community leaders, and primarily by the leaders of Romanian Jewry mentioned above.

On August 23, 1944, the Romanian regime was overthrown. King Mihai (Michael) ousted state leader Marshal Antonescu and his associates and ordered their arrest. The country ended its alliance with Nazi Germany and joined the Allied nations in the war against the Germans. Democratic rule was restored to Romania and a period of relative freedom began. Civil rights were restored to Jews, Holocaust survivors began returning to their homes and tried to rebuild their livelihoods. The Jews began to fight for the return of their dispossessed property. The reconstruction of the country provided new business opportunities. At the same time, large Jewish communities began to consider leaving Romania and immigrating to Palestine. The communal needs of Romanian Jews also changed accordingly. The Klipper family also became a part of this scene. But this period of relative political and economic freedom did not last long. Throughout this period, the communist party, which had emerged from the underground after the 1944 change of regime and become a minority partner in the new government, strove persistently to increase its power and influence. The party was successful in its efforts, in large part due to the support of the occupying Soviet army and the influence of the powerful neighbor to the east – the Soviet Union.

In the years 1947-1948, the party stepped up its determination to grab the remnants of political power which still remained in the hands of others, and to take control of the economy (in Marxist jargon – to deprive the capitalists of the means of production). Hard times fell on anyone who presented an obstacle to these goals. Malicious reports and articles about the wealthy began appearing in print. Nathan Klipper was not excluded from among the vilified. Provocative attempts were made to incriminate him. In the years 1948-1949 nationalization of the economy began, and most of the Klipper family's property was also targeted for nationalization. Negotiations which Klipper held in 1949 with secret branches of the government/party over the payment of a ransom for permission to emigrate were unsuccessful, and he remained trapped in Romania, which the communist party now ruled without constraint. In 1950 he was arrested. A few months after his arrest, his family was asked to come collect his body from the military hospital. In the last years of his life, Nathan suffered from severe diabetes and required insulin injections several times a day. The direct cause of his death was his being denied insulin. It appears his death was an intentional act. Nathan's funeral in the Jewish cemetery Filantropia was attended by a very small circle of family and friends, as befitting an outcast of the regime. But the family remembers well the graveside eulogy of Rabbi Zvi Gutman in honor of the deceased and his good deeds. Under the circumstances of those days, of a regime of fear and intimidation, the eulogy was a daring act.

Nathan Klipper's family, his wife and two children, remained in the Socialist Republic of Romania in difficult circumstances for nearly a decade, until they were allowed to emigrate to Israel in 1959-1960.

Nathan Klipper did not have the privilege of leaving behind his own comprehensive testimony about his efforts in saving Jews, in aiding and alleviating the suffering of his brethren during the Holocaust, as did many who toiled like him. His work in this realm was performed primarily in underground conditions. It can thus be assumed that many of his acts will never be known. His only public statement in this regard was made in 1945 during the trial of the first group of Romanian war criminals (which will be discussed later). The author of this essay has tried to gather the bits of information about those acts which left traces, in the few documents which have survived and are available for study, in recorded testimonies, and in some of the recollections of his family and friends, and to set them together into a comprehensive picture.

### ***Bucharest***

The Klipper family's home in Bucharest, after they had settled there in the autumn of 1941, was always open to anyone in need. Frequently Nathan was asked to solicit the authorities on behalf of a relative who had been arrested on suspicion of "communism." This "crime" was attributed not only to actual communist activity, but also to various forms of activity which displeased the regime, such as Zionist activity. Frequently, it was a matter of fabrication, provocation and false accusation. Mere suspicion of communism, even if not accompanied by hard evidence of the alleged "crime", was sufficient for harassing those implicated, and for having them arrested and brutally interrogated.

Family members remember that among those who turned to Nathan Klipper was Rabbi Rosen from Falticeni, regarding his son Moshe, who was suspected of being a communist. In later days, with the change of the regime in Romania, the young Rabbi Moshe Rosen was elected Chief Rabbi of Romania, through the support of the communist party which remembered his sympathizing with communist ideas as a youngster.

One episode which has been documented, typical of the many others which remain unknown, was that of Dov (Berl) Schieber. He, too, was from Dorna, and at the time was the leader of the underground Zionist youth movement HaNoar HaZioni. The account was included in Berl Schieber's testimony to Yad Vashem.<sup>5</sup>

"In the summer of 1942 I was arrested by the police, after one of the members of the Bucharest branch was caught with a suspicious letter. She divulged that I was her contact. Although she had torn up the letter, the shreds had fallen into the hands of the secret police who pieced them together. I was held for several days in the *prefectura* (the Bucharest police headquarters). A wealthy Jew from Vatra-Dornei, who had very good connections with the authorities, managed to keep me from standing trial. I was sent to Vatra-Dornei as a suspected communist, and thus I reached the city whose Jews had all been deported nearly a year earlier." (After a brief time Berl was brought back to Bucharest. Fritz Klipper, Nathan's brother, was instrumental in bringing Berl back.<sup>6</sup>)

Another instance of the cooperation between Berl Schieber and Nathan Klipper was in the arrangement for a young woman from the HaNoar HaZioni



*halutzim* (pioneers) to work as a maid in the Klipper home. That young girl, M.K., the daughter of a family from Czernowitz, was rescued from the ghetto in that city and brought to the capital. Among Berl's roles in the movement was to take in and find shelter for movement member refugees who reached or were smuggled into Bucharest from more dangerous areas.<sup>7</sup> With the help of Nathan Klipper, the young girl was provided with a valid identity card and a legal Bucharest residence permit. It can be assumed this was not the only instance of his arranging legal residence permits for Jewish refugees in this city.

As was customary, the young woman was given an attic room adjoining the apartment. However, it turned out, this caused the Jewish neighbors in the building unease and even moments of fear. M.K. was deeply involved with a group of fellow movement members, and it seems her room served as a meeting place for this group. The activity around M's room aroused the attention of those in the vicinity. One day, the Romanian landlord appeared at the home of one of the Jewish families in the building, telling them he was convinced the room had become a communist "nest" and declaring he had to inform the police. (At that time every landlord was accountable to the police for whatever took place on his property, including reporting on temporary residents.) This of course caused panic among the Jewish residents of the building. They explained to the landlord the serious consequences at the time of suspecting Jews of communism and they begged him to drop the idea of reporting the matter to the police. After much persuasion he agreed to their pleas. However, the girl was severely warned against bringing her friends to her room again.

Escapees from trains to the death camps in Poland who were smuggled into Bucharest in the years 1943-44 were hidden by Nathan Klipper in the homes of his relatives. Children from Dorna who had been orphaned in Transnistria also found temporary shelter in the Klipper home after the authorities permitted them to return to Romania at the beginning of 1944. The Klipper home also provided shelter and support to relatives who had returned from Transnistria, to those who had escaped from the Czernowitz ghetto, and to those who had been evicted from their apartments under the laws of nationalization, the "Romanization" of apartments belonging to Jews.

After the government in Romania was overthrown in August 1944 and communist prisoners of the previous regime were released, Klipper helped equip released prisoners with shoes and clothing. Immigrants to Palestine received charitable loans from him.

In the realm of his community activities for the general public, we note the funding of the construction of a public bomb shelter in one of the public parks next to the Klipper family home, which was intended for use by area residents and passers-by.

Of the activities that took place in the Klipper family home in Bucharest in the years 1941-44, the numerous comings and goings in the matter of dispatching money and letters to Transnistria deserve special mention. This complex activity was essentially illegal, and thus involved risks which required measures of caution. Mr. Itzchak Arzi, a public figure among expatriate Romanian Jews in Israel, who

in those years (then known as Itziu Herzig), was a member of the Aid and Rescue Committee affiliated with the underground Romanian Zionist executive, described how he would deliver money and letters to Nathan Klipper for dispatch to movement members in Transnistria: he would wait outside the house until he received a signal to enter. (The subject of the aid to the Transnistria deportees will be expanded upon later.)

## ***Efforts to Relieve the Situation of the Jews in Czernowitz***

### **Bribes to Major Stere Marinescu**

Documents from the first trial of Romanian war criminals, held in Bucharest in 1945, reveal the efforts of a small group of wealthy ex-Bukovinians residing in Bucharest to alleviate the injunctions against the 16,000 Jews of Czernowitz who remained concentrated in that city's ghetto, after more than 30,000 members of the community had been deported to Transnistria. Nathan Klipper, who was part of this group, testified at the trial. The others were Sumer Wolf and Salo Schmidt. The matter was about the continuous payment of bribes to Major Stere Marinescu. This man served as chief of the military cabinet of the Governor of Bukovina, General Corneliu Calotescu, and headed the government's "Bureau 2-Jews." In these roles he was responsible for implementing the decrees against the Jews ordered by Governor Calotescu, including the concentration of the Jews in the ghetto and their deportation to Transnistria. He became infamous primarily for his brutal implementation of the second expulsion from Czernowitz in the summer of 1942. It seems that Marinescu was among the most greedy, corrupt and cynical of those officials who were responsible for the fate of the Jews. An excerpt from his indictment reads: "The establishment of the (Czernowitz) ghetto and the deportation provided a tremendous source of illicit income for those who ordered (the directives) and those who implemented them. (The man) who was most prominent in this unfathomable organized looting and who brought terror on the population of Czernowitz, was the defendant Stere Marinescu.

"Stere Marinescu extended his antennae towards the Jews and made them believe at first that for large sums of money he would be willing to ease the tortured lives of the Jews of Czernowitz and particularly (he would be willing) to recommend abolishing the (order) to bear the Jewish star (badge) and extending the period of (permitted) movement in the city. One after another, different Jews fell into the trap of his spider's web, which he spread with devilish skill, believing that for large sums of money and jewelry they could ease their life and existence. In this manner the witness Nathan Klipper, Sumer Wolf and Salo Schmidt came into contact with the defendant in the autumn of 1942, at his apartment in Bucharest. The witness Nathan Klipper declares he gave the defendant a sum of 500,000 lei every month for six months [in his testimony before the court Klipper stated "at least three times." Z.E.] and a (monthly sum) of 200,000 lei for two (additional) months."

It appears that those paying the bribes to the man eventually felt that he did not fulfill his part of the deal for the large sums he was paid. Thus Nathan Klipper provided incriminating evidence against him. In his testimony before the court, Klipper confirmed the main facts presented in the indictment, but added to the reasons specified in the indictment for his appeals to the authorities over the fate of the Jews of Czernowitz another goal: “to halt the deportations, for the Jews of Czernowitz were living the entire time under the fear of the resumption of deportations to Transnistria.”<sup>8</sup>

### **Material Aid to the Community and Individuals**

The efforts of a group of ex-Bukovinians living in Bucharest to alleviate the material distress of the Jews of Czernowitz in the years 1941-1944 and to assist in maintaining community institutions, are reported by Dr. Manfred Reifer, a Zionist leader and one of the leaders of Czernowitz Jewry, in his book *Death's Journey*.<sup>9</sup> According to Reifer, thanks to these efforts, “it was possible not only to maintain the community institutions, but also to add new ones (... and in addition to that ...) individuals were sent sums of money every month for their sustenance.” This group also employed means of appeal in Bucharest, which were successful, he states, “for thwarting mishaps on more than one occasion.” According to Reifer, the head of this group and its main contributor was the industrialist from Czernowitz, Berthold Sobel, and its members included Nathan Klipper as well as Dr. Sigmund Bibring, Joachim Landau, Isidor Schwarz, Itamar (Sumer) Wolf, Salo Schmidt, Dr. Adolf Neudorfer, and others.

Sumer Wolf, Berthold Sobel, Salo Schmidt and apparently other members of the group also cooperated with Nathan Klipper in aiding the Transnistria deportees, which was the most important arena in which he worked in his efforts to help his brethren in distress during the Holocaust. He spoke about this subject in the introduction his aforementioned testimony: “Together with a number of ex-Bukovinian friends, I worked to extend help to the deportees in Transnistria; mostly I, as I also had relatives who had been deported there together with other Jews (among them) from Czernowitz.”

About Nathan Klipper's efforts to aid the deportees in Transnistria we shall expand later.

## The Transnistria Deportation

The name Transnistria refers to the area in western Ukraine, between the Dniester and Bug rivers, which was transferred to Romanian authority after it was conquered by the German-Romanian forces in the summer of 1941. This area overlaps to a great extent the region known as Podolia. Until the German-Romanian invasion, this area had a large, traditional Jewish population, estimated as more than 300,000. The vast majority of this population was destroyed in mass killings by the Germans and the Romanians at the start of their occupation of the area. The region was reoccupied by the Soviet army in March 1944.

Over 180,000 Jewish subjects of greater Romania were deported to this area in the years 1941-42, most of them from the country's eastern districts, Bukovina, Bessarabia and the district of Dorohoi. About two-thirds of them were exiled to the northern part of Transnistria, and about one-third, residents of central and southern Bessarabia, were sent to the south.<sup>10</sup> A large part of the latter was sent to a group of extermination camps in the Golta district, along the Bug river, in which tens of thousands of local and deported Jews were shot and burned alive. This area of camps earned the name "Kingdom of Death." About 55,000 deportees were still alive at the end of the German-Romanian occupation of the region, particularly in its northern districts.<sup>11</sup> In the southern districts very few survived. About 25,000 gypsies were also deported to Transnistria. Many of them also perished.

The Transnistria exiles also had to suffer most of the experiences that were the trademark of the entire Jewish Holocaust in Europe: expulsion in suffocating boxcars, exhausting death marches, concentration in ghettos and camps, violent deaths by being shot, burnt alive, hanged and drowned in the rivers, beatings and torture; death from diseases which spread like plagues, particularly typhus, starvation, exhaustion and freezing; existence in subhuman conditions, beatings, rape, humiliation, terror, despair to the point of suicide, and more. The Transnistria deportees were spared only from the industrialized killing in gas chambers. In the area known as the "Kingdom of Death," being shot or burnt alive were the main causes of death among the deportees. As for the entire area of Transnistria, typhus was the foremost cause of death, although the various causes of death described above did exist in varying strengths and combinations in each and every place of deportation.

In one way, however, the fate of the exiles in Transnistria was better than that of other Jews communities which were caught in the web of the "Final Solution of the Jewish Problem in Europe": Jews from the regions of Romania who were not deported managed to establish contact with their deported brethren, and to maintain it despite the many obstacles laid in their path by those bent on harming the Jews, and to transfer to the deportees a thin stream of material assistance and moral support.<sup>12</sup> The leaders of Romanian Jewry never stopped working to alleviate the condition of the deportees and even to repatriate them, and they even had some success in their efforts. Some of the contact between the

deportees and their brethren in Romania was open and visible to the eyes of the authorities, and some of it was clandestine. The support of the deportees by organizations, support groups and individuals can be credited in large part for the relatively high survival rate of the Transnistria deportees compared with other Jewish communities in the Holocaust. It would not be mistaken to say that thousands owe their lives to this assistance, although it must be regretfully noted that the aid operations were effective mainly in the northern districts of the region. Due to the circumstances that prevailed in the south, the hand of assistance was unable to save many, and it reached only a few there in time.

The Jewish assistance from outside provided support and a source of funding for the activities of the deportees' committees in maintaining a minimal level of internal order, public services and security. The combined effect of the activities of these committees was in itself also a factor of survival. Added to these two factors was the resourcefulness of individuals in adjusting to the difficult conditions which they faced and to make do as best as possible in the situation they were in. The lack of goods, professional services and laborers among the local Ukrainian population provided a wide range of opportunities for developing such resourcefulness.

### ***Institutional Aid to the Transnistria Exiles***

With the execution of the deportation order for the main wave of deportation in October 1941 (in which about 120,000 Jews were exiled to Transnistria), it was also forbidden to provide aid to the deportees, under threat of harsh punishment against those who violated the prohibition. However, when the first news was received in the capital Bucharest about the severe condition of the exiles together with desperate calls for help, the Jewish leadership, headed by Dr. Wilhelm Filderman, immediately began to appeal to the authorities for permission to send aid to the deportees. Meanwhile, a powerful typhus epidemic broke out and spread, striking many victims among the deportees. But the epidemic did not stop in the face of the gendarmes who escorted the deportation convoys. It seems that their officers, too, began to worry about their men and to demand that their superiors take measures to eradicate the epidemic among the Jews. As result, in mid-December 1941, the authorities notified the Union of Jewish Communities in Romania of permission to dispatch money and medicine to the deportees via the authorities. (Permission was endorsed by the Transnistrian authorities only at the beginning of February 1942.) However, at exactly the same time, an order was also issued disbanding the Union of Jewish Communities and replacing it with a government-directed agency – the “Jews’ Center” (*Centrala Evreilor*). Thus began a period of confusion and deliberation regarding the continuation of the aid organizations which were operating within the framework of the Union. Only in March 1942 was there an agreement over the manner in which the Jewish aid organizations would operate under the auspices of the Jews’ Center, and the “Autonomous Aid Committee” was reestablished by the consent of all parties

concerned: the established Jewish leadership, the Romanian authorities and the heads of the newly created Jews' Center.<sup>13</sup>

From this point the committee indeed began to operate vigorously. In such, it pressed for extending the permit for aid shipments to include additional goods. Over time the requested permits were in fact received, and many trainloads of clothing, lumber, glass, coal, caustic soda for making soap, tools and salt were sent to the deportees' committees. But the permit was restricted to goods for direct use by the deportees only. However it quickly became clear that the transmittal of cash, which was required primarily for the purchase of food, in a manner which met the authorities' approval, was completely inefficient. The Transnistrian government required that the Romanian money (lei) be exchanged for "occupation" marks (RKKS), the legal tender in the region, at an unrealistic exchange rate, several times higher than what was usual on the open market. This was in addition to long delays in transferring the money.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, ways were needed for circumventing the legal restrictions on transferring cash funds. To a certain extent the salt shipments were used for this purpose. This commodity had a great demand among the local Ukrainian population, especially for cattle, and its sale to the Ukrainians provided the ghetto committees with significant cash. However, eventually, it seems that the Autonomous Aid Committee was also compelled to use underground channels for dispatching to Transnistria liquid means.

During the years 1942-44 the Aid Committee succeeded in obtaining permission to send three delegations to study at first hand the needs and to handle the repatriation of orphaned children. Indeed, the heroic task of gathering thousands of orphans into children's homes and bringing back nearly 2,000 of them to Romania and then on to Palestine, is considered the outstanding achievement of the Autonomous Aid Committee. This task was led by committee member Fred Saraga.

### ***The Underground Contact and Aid***

Relatively much information exists, in archives and organized collections of documents, regarding the institutional contacts and aid to the exiles in Transnistria which was primarily overt. This information has been presented and properly analyzed in published research projects and books.<sup>15</sup> Remnants of information about the underground contact and aid are naturally much more fragmented and scarce. But even the small amount of information on this subject is enough to determine that the scope of the underground contact and aid was very large, and provided a most significant contribution to the survival of the deportees in the area and the alleviation of their suffering. Nathan Klipper, whom this essay discusses, was one of the main activists in this scheme of underground aid, but he was certainly not the only one. The following discussion aims to shed light also on the entire phenomenon of covert aid and rescue.

## ***Aid Operations with which Nathan Klipper was Connected***

### **(1) The Bukovinian Committee**

Soon after the first deportations to Transnistria in October 1941, an active aid group for the deportees and those being forcefully held in the Czernowitz ghetto was formed in Bucharest by private initiative. Dora Litani, a researcher of the Jewish Holocaust in Romania, termed this group “the Bukovinian Committee.” This aid initiative began principally as an outgrowth of the arousing of the ex-Bukovinians in Bucharest to help their relatives and friends who had been deported to Transnistria. The center of this arousing was in the small synagogue established by Rabbi Rubin from Kimpolung near his home in the capital. Rabbi Rubin had moved to Bucharest after being publicly humiliated in the streets of his city by the Legionary (fascist) Police in 1940. Most of the worshippers in this synagogue were also former Bukovinians who had recently settled in the capital and who were strongly connected to their relatives and friends now in Transnistria. Testimony of the circumstances surrounding the beginning of this group’s formation was given in Yad Vashem by attorney Dr. Rivka Ruckenstein, who became one of the main activists in assisting the Transnistria deportees, and particularly the children who were orphaned there:<sup>16</sup> “On Succoth 1941, I received a postcard from my father.... He informed me that they were waiting any moment for the deportation of the entire Jewish population [of his city Suceava] to an unknown destination. ‘God help us,’ he wrote. With postcard in hand, I ran to Rabbi Rubin.... I burst into the Yizkor service shouting and crying, and the postcard with the awful news passed from hand to hand. We gathered to find advice on how to help our brethren. Among those gathered were Mayer Falik and Sumer Wolf from Suceava [actually Radautz, Z.E.], Rabbi Rubin, Dr. Jacob Schechter, and Bibring from Czernowitz. We decided to send an officer or a senior official to follow the deportees in order to determine the location of the deportation. This was the beginning of aid activity for the deportees.”

We do not have information about the circumstances under which Nathan Klipper, who at this time had just evaded deportation and found refuge in Bucharest, joined the nucleus of this group. But it is clear he became a main activist early into the group’s operation, and was the acting coordinator of the dispatches to Transnistria and communications with the deportees in the area. In this way Dora Litani determined that the Bukovinian Committee in Bucharest was founded “at the initiative of the wealthy philanthropist Nathan Klipper.”<sup>17</sup>

Additional names connected to the committee at different periods in its operation were Sumer Wolf, Gerzer, Salo Schmidt, Akiba Ornstein, Berthold Sobel,<sup>18</sup> as well as a non-Jew, the engineer Traian Procopovici, who served as the treasurer at the beginning of the group’s operation.

In his book, *The Black Book of the Suffering of the Jews in Romania 1940-1944*, M. Carp expressed the following about the committee’s activity: “This committee (which was formed) of private initiative operated discreetly but

intensively. The sums that were collected by this handful of people reached about \$200,000 in value at that time.”<sup>19</sup>

Rabbi Rubin’s synagogue served as the first quarters for the activities of this aid group, and it seems that donations and pledges of the worshippers when they were called to Torah were an important source of income for the committee at its inception. After some time the management of the group’s operation moved to a room, which was rented by Klipper for this purpose, in the home of the widow of a Romanian general. These secret quarters served both for meetings of the group and for organizing the dispatches to Transnistria and preparing the lists of recipients.<sup>20</sup>

The funds collected by the committee came mainly from two sources: donations from people of means and from solicitations in the synagogues, which took place mostly on Sabbath and the holidays. As attorney Ruckenstein testified, “the rabbis allowed this activity (on Sabbath and holidays) since they saw it as a duty for saving lives” [which overrides Sabbath laws].

The Bukovinian Committee undoubtedly deserves the credit for being the first in community aid to the Transnistria exiles. It began its activity at a time when any help to the Transnistria deportees was utterly forbidden, when those who violated this prohibition could expect severe punishment, and at a time when the exiles were at the height of their distress. From the testimony of Saul Schnap in Yad Vashem we learn that “the dispatch of the first aid (of the committee) was medicine for typhus. About 5,000 capsules of Cardiazol [medication for strengthening the heart, Z.E.] were gathered from all that was available in the pharmacies in Bucharest. The shipment was taken by a Romanian courier to the Mogilev Committee, and its receipt was acknowledged.... The first sum which was handed over (to the committee) was 500,000 lei. It was brought by Gelber, the treasurer of the Jewish community, who had not received instructions from his superiors to do so. He declared that if thousands of Jews were dying there, he would also take (upon himself) the risk of being accused of having authorized the use of the community’s (the union’s ?) money without receiving instruction.”<sup>21</sup> Indeed, the first entry in the bookkeeping accounts of the Mogilev Deportees Committee which list the receipts and expenditures of the “Aid Committee” for the period December 4, 1941 through July 2, 1942, is “the Union of Communities (*Uniunea*) by Klipper 300,000” (apparently net, after payment of transfer fees).<sup>22</sup>

Saul Schnap testifies that after several months of underground operation, a somewhat legal cover was given to the work of the committee, by connecting it to the social welfare system of the Jews’ Center; this, due to the efforts of Filderman and the heads of the social welfare department of the Jews’ Center and the Autonomous Aid Committee. According to the witness, this arrangement allowed the group to intensify its activities.

The significance of the aid shipments to the deportees’ committees by the committee in which Nathan Klipper was the central activist, can also be learned from the fact that due to his request and to allow him some supervision on the outlay of aid funds, Nathan’s brother Moritz was appointed as a member of the first committee of the Mogilev exiles<sup>23</sup> and his father-in-law Karl (Yehezkiel) Bronstein as a member of the committee of the Shargorod exiles.



According to the testimony of his brother, Fritz Klipper, Nathan Klipper also sent some food shipments that were intended for Faivel Laufer, the head of the social welfare department of the Mogilev Committee. These were transported by the Wehrmacht liaison officer, Nathan's friend, in a jeep belonging to Fritz.<sup>24</sup>

## **(2) Continuation of Aid to the Deportees' Committees**

The correspondence stored in the file *Corespondenta Bucuresti* (Correspondence–Bucharest) of the Jaegendorf Archive deposited in Yad Vashem, points to significant sums of money that were sent by Klipper to the Mogilev Committee and to the heads of the exiles, which were intended both for the use of the committee and for transfer to others. This correspondence also attests to the continuous contact between them throughout the period 1942-1944.<sup>25</sup> Attorney Dr. Gideon Kraft, who served as an assistant to Nathan Klipper in matters of aid shipments to Transnistria, testifies that similar shipments were sent by Klipper and his group to most of the locations to which deportees had been sent [referring apparently to the north of Transnistria, Z.E.]. Sometimes instructions were given to designate the aid for a specific purpose. Thus Klipper instructs his correspondents regarding the designation of the dispatch of 600,000 lei: “Use these funds ... primarily for helping those returning from Tulcin” [an area of harsh forced labor camps, Z.E.]. Subsequently, however, it is no longer possible to determine whether and how much of these transferred sums were donated or collected by Klipper's support group (which the Mogilevians termed “our few friends”) and to what extent he served as a channel for transferring money which originated elsewhere. It seems that towards the end of this period, the large sums of money which passed through this channel were most probably greater than what the group was able to collect. It seems that over time, most of the funds which Klipper transferred for community use originated from the Autonomous Committee (which was a formal branch of the Jews' Center). These funds came from solicitations and collections of the Autonomous Committee and from money received from the Joint (JDC). The correspondence between the Autonomous Committee and Mogilev, as well as reports from Mogilev, point to the close cooperation and coordination between the Autonomous Committee and Nathan Klipper.<sup>26</sup> It therefore seems that the weight of Klipper's activities relating to aid to the committees of the deportees gradually moved from independent activity to operations coordinated with the Autonomous Committee.

## **(3) Aid to the Dorna Deportees**

The aid to those who came from Vatra-Dornei, Klipper's home town, ranked second of the community aid operations for the Transnistria deportees which Klipper supported. It can be assumed he was also the principal contributor to this operation. His trustees in Mogilev for this operation were Jehoschua Weisselberg and Kolika Rosenrauch. From the correspondence with the community leaders in Mogilev, we learn also about the existence of a “Dorna Kitchen.”<sup>27</sup> We also have reports about food parcels which children of Dorna occasionally received from Klipper.

#### **(4) Aid to the Vizhnitz and Czernowitz Deportees**

Among the aid operations which Klipper supported, the one which received the most publicity was that which served the people from Vizhnitz.<sup>28</sup> The work of this operation in the Djurin ghetto and the conditions under which it existed are described in the important testimony of Shlomo Erbsental to Yad Vashem.<sup>29</sup> This witness was one of the leaders of the Vizhnitz community. He stated: "In the beginning (after the deportees had reached their destination), after they had run out of belongings that could be bartered (for food), many families began to starve. Many families existed on sugar beets alone, and others on lentil flour. These foods were their only nourishment.... Despite all the hardships, help began to arrive from Romania, from the Old Kingdom (the area from which Jews had not been deported). For example, for a long time, a German officer, a captain, regularly brought money every month from deportees' relatives and friends in Bucharest. Another officer, a Romanian, brought money to the aid operation set up by Nathan Klipper for distribution to the people from Vizhnitz and Czernowitz. The money was sent by Klipper or other Jews. For several months, the committee for Klipper's aid operation distributed daily rations of 200 grams of bread. The local administration (of the community) ... also distributed barely soup from its kitchen every day to about 2,000 people [according to another source, 1,000 people, Z.E.]. The budgeted sum of 11 Pfennig was only enough for this ration. For some time the people of Vizhnitz and Czernowitz were denied the soup ration, under the assertion that they were receiving help from Klipper's operation."

Mr. Erbsental also reports about the end of the independent activity of Klipper's operation in this place. According to him, the community committee (the *Obshchina*) which was appointed by the Romanian government, did not look favorably on the independent activity of the two privately initiated aid operations: the one headed by Rabbi Baruch Hager who served as a local trustee of the Zionist Aid and Rescue operation as well as the distribution of other funds; and that of Nathan Klipper. The community committee also wanted to be in control of the funds of these two operations, and exerted heavy pressure on the local leaders to halt their independent activities. The members of the *Obshchina* were unable to persuade Rabbi Baruch Hager, who enjoyed great personal prestige. "On the other hand, they managed to halt the activity of the other committee which received funds from Nathan Klipper."

It must be noted that the 200 gram bread ration which was distributed by Klipper's operation was valued at about 70 Pfennig; that is, much more than the sum budgeted for the soup ration of the local committee's kitchen. From this it can be understood why "the privileged" who received this bread ration were not allowed to also receive the soup ration from the public kitchen.

#### **(5) Aid to the Seret (Siret) Deportees**

According to the book *Chai veBaruch* (Part 2), which describes the work of the rabbis from the Vizhnitz dynasty, the Hager family, during the Holocaust, "some of the funds (for distribution by Rabbi Baruch Hager) came from the

committee of former residents of Seret and its surroundings which was headed by Nathan Klipper from Vatra-Dornei, who was residing in Bucharest.”<sup>30</sup>

### **(6) Aid to the Radautz Deportees**

The burden of aiding those from Radautz was carried primarily by Sumer (Itamar) Wolf, a resident of Bucharest from Radautz, a friend of Nathan Klipper and his partner in the aid operations to the Transnistria deportees and those in the Czernowitz ghetto. According to the testimony in the book *Radautz*, this aid reached Mogilev and Bershad. The kitchen operating in Mogilev provided a daily meal to about 1,000 people.”<sup>31</sup>

### **(7) Transfer of Funds from the Aid and Rescue Committee (“The Zionist Funds”)**

An important underground aid operation for the deportees was that of the Aid and Rescue Committee affiliated with the underground Zionist executive of Romania. This committee was established at the initiative of the Palestinian mission in Istanbul, which began operating at the beginning of 1943, and also became a branch of the Aid and Rescue Committee affiliated with the Jewish Agency. The Palestinian missions in Istanbul and Geneva succeeded in establishing, by means of couriers, underground channels of communication with groups of Jews, particularly Zionist activists and members of pioneer youth movements, in most of the countries which were under Nazi control, and to also send through them a small flow of material aid. However, the Palestinian missions had scant resources for aiding the deportees. The Istanbul mission’s attempts to raise more funds in Palestine, and particularly in the United States, were not successful. Therefore, those sending this aid directed their trustees in the various countries to restrict it to their Zionist fellows only (“*Mishpachat Hamoledet*”, “the Homeland Family”). However, those responsible for the matter in Romania sometimes deviated from these directives and used certain sums for other urgent needs.”<sup>32</sup>

The Aid and Rescue Committee in Romania was headed by attorney Misu Benvenisti, who also served part of the time as the chairman of the underground Zionist Executive of Romania. Other members of the committee were representatives of the various Zionist movements. Most of the funds were distributed to the movements according to a certain proportional basis. By the end of 1943 the extent of funds transferred to Romania from this source reached about 50 million lei. Nearly half of this sum was designated for the Transnistria deportees. The rest of the funds were directed to helping refugees who had escaped mainly from Poland, to those enlisted in forced labor battalions, to those in the Czernowitz ghetto, to the training farms of the Zionist youth and to activities of the youth movements. The number of Zionists in Transnistria who were supported by the Aid and Rescue Committee reached, according to its reports, about 1,500.<sup>33</sup> Locating and reporting to the coordinators in Bucharest on the members entitled to and needing aid, who were scattered among the various ghettos and camps in Transnistria, was a complex project in itself.”<sup>34</sup>

Itzhak Arzi was the representative of his Zionist movement HaNoar HaZioni in the Aid and Rescue Committee of Romania. This movement apparently had the largest number of members among the Transnistria deportees.<sup>35</sup> According to Itzhak Arzi's testimony, the dispatches sent through Nathan Klipper were nearly the only channel for transferring money to Transnistria for members of his movement and for General (*Klal*) Zionists, and the dispatches usually reached their destination. Also I. Levanon (then Leiwandman), the representative of the religious Zionists in the Aid and Rescue Committee, told us that he too used this channel from time to time, since, as he said, "Klipper had reliable couriers." We do not have information as to whether other movements made use of this route, but it does seem likely.

### **(8) Other Community Aid Operations**

To complete the picture about what is known of privately initiated community aid operations for the Transnistria deportees, we also note the following: the women's committee which worked primarily for assisting orphans, in which Madams Schwefelberg, Bibring, Anderman, Landau, and others participated; the work of the *Admor* [chassidic rabbi] from Vizhnitz, Rabbi Eliezer Hager, who transferred money from Timisoara where he now resided, to his brother Rabbi Baruch Hager in Djurin, which was intended primarily for the Vizhnitz Hasidic community; and the committees which aided those deported from Bessarabia and the town of Secureni.

### **(9) Aid to Individuals**

Together with the dispatch of aid on a community basis, there was also a wide scale private transfer of money. Many families in Transnistria were sustained entirely or partially by dispatches from relatives and friends in areas from which Jews had not been deported, particularly Bucharest, but also Timisoara, Czernowitz and other localities. Usually money was brought collectively by a courier, who delivered it, together with a list of recipients, to a "trustee" of the sender. Sometimes the deportees' committees also served as "trustees" for the delivery of private money transfers. Sometimes these committees, who were severely lacking funds, were tempted into charging a tax on the privately transferred money.<sup>36</sup> This practice aroused the objections of both the senders and the dispatchers such as Nathan Klipper, since the senders paid a costly "dispatch commission," and because the dispatchers sometimes collected from them a contribution for community needs for making the dispatch. Thus, for example, Klipper demanded from the Mogilev Committee "that the money be delivered to the recipients just as it was received." Nathan Klipper's couriers carried dispatches both to communities and to individuals, and these two forms of transfers complemented one another. His first emissary reached Mogilev soon after the deportees arrived there.

## ***Organization of the Aid Shipments***

The organization of large scale aid shipments in underground conditions and the maintenance of regular communication between the dispatchers and the recipients was not a simple task, and required caution and cunning. The first difficulty was in finding suitable couriers, enlisting them and in testing their reliability. Thus Romanian, German and even Italian army officers, clergymen and personnel in the Transnistrian administration, were enlisted for this purpose, for single and repeated missions. At the beginning, the task of finding and recruiting couriers fell on the dispatchers. But over time, members of the Transnistria deportees' committees as well as other deportees also began to take part in the task, particularly in recruiting personnel of the Transnistria administration.

The main obstacle in these deliveries was greediness of certain couriers, who were not satisfied with their high fees of 20-30 percent, and took the entire shipment entrusted to them for themselves. Sometimes this happened after the courier's trust had been earned and he had been given a particularly large shipment. One instance is documented in a joint affidavit given after the war by the Jewish heads of the *turnatoria* (foundary) in Mogilev against the engineer Eugen Popescu, a commissar of the Transnistria government attached to the foundary. The affidavit states, among other things, that "he (Popescu) pretended to offer his services to bring aid from the country to the Jews (in Transnistria). Under this pretense he took a sum of 500,000 lei together with a fee of 100,000 lei from Nathan Klipper, and gave his commitment to take the sum that was entrusted to him to Mogilev and to deliver it to those (recipients) for whom it was intended. He did not deliver the money, claiming that the suitcase with the money and letters had been stolen from him."<sup>37</sup> Fritz Klipper, Nathan's brother, testifies about another instance of dealing with a courier, a clergyman, who did not deliver a large sum of money: "Nathan sued the clergyman in a state court, doing so at great personal risk, and in this way forced him to return the money. But mostly," notes Fritz Klipper in his testimony, "these kind of matters were settled discreetly."

Sometimes a courier decided to raise the rate of the commission which had been agreed upon. This was reported about a courier, the wife of an officer in Trihati, a hard labor camp by the Bug river. During a trip to Bucharest she brought desperate requests for assistance from those held in this camp to their relatives in the capital. She was supposed to return to Trihati with aid dispatches. This "goodwill courier" paid the aid recipients half the sum that was due them, but had them sign receipts for the entire sum – this in addition to a 30 percent agreed upon commission which she received from the senders.

To overcome these types of risks, a system was gradually implemented in which the courier himself paid the sums to be dispatched, and was reimbursed only after showing receipts proving they had been delivered. On November 11, 1942, Klipper writes to Mogilev: "I will pay the sum of 600 *alufim* [thousand], with commission added, only upon signed receipt (of three recipients)."

The second obstacle were the difficulties raised by the authorities. As already mentioned, their policy was that contact between the deportees and the sources in Romania aiding them could take place only through the authorities, and

that the dispatch of aid had to be in accordance with conditions set by the authorities. They thus exerted great effort in enforcing this policy. The inspections at the border crossings into Transnistria were meticulous, both upon entry and departure.<sup>38</sup> The Romanian gendarmerie established a network of informers (*malshinim*, in Jewish jargon) among the deportees, for surveillance of illegal contacts between the deportees and Romania.<sup>39</sup> The censor also tracked letters which were sent legitimately through the mail, and delivered to the security police those which contained requests for help and clear or implied instructions about the possibility of sending aid in ways other than through the authorities.<sup>40</sup>

Sometimes couriers were forced to destroy the lists and the letters they carried, as was reported in a letter from Mogilev to Bucharest dated December 5, 1942: “The judge (*Der Shoifet*) was forced to destroy the letters (*ksives*) and the land owner (*Der Poretz*) also was unable to bring anything from you, except verbal (messages) and now we are completely disoriented.” One instance is reported of the need that arose for “breaking off contact” between the courier and his recipients and about the way the dispatch was later delivered: “We hid in a cornfield (outside the ghetto) and waited cautiously. The courier returned two days later, tossed the package from his car, and sped away.”<sup>41</sup> In a number of instances the courier was indeed caught, brought to trial in a military court, and severely punished.

From time to time there were lapses by Jews, when dispatches were given to those other than the intended recipients. There is testimony about a case of cunning deception in the receipt of a money transfer, which was not delivered to its destination, in which a Jew and a German impostor courier cooperated.<sup>42</sup>

In one of the letters to Mogilev, Klipper writes that “vast sums have been lost.” Despite that, most of the sums transmitted through the underground reached their destination.

In their correspondence the two sides used code words. The correspondence was mostly in German, and sometimes Romanian. The code words were Hebrew, in Ashkenazi pronunciation. Thus *muss* (coins) was the code word for money. In one of the letters it was requested, “not to send *muss* with the bearer of this letter, but only a detailed letter.” In other letter it is noted that the “*Jeckisches Muss*, that is the German occupation monetary unit (RKKS), equals 25 lei.” *Alufim* were thousands. As mentioned previously, sometimes the couriers were also referred to by Hebrew words. Nathan Klipper was called *Ionatan*, and he would use the signature Ion.

The accounting of the sums which reached the committees through the underground was also a problem that required sophisticated solutions. Aid dispatchers in Bucharest demanded orderly reports about the money’s use. But the accounts were also exposed to the authorities. Jaegendorf, the head of the Mogilev Committee, recounts in his memoirs one of the solutions to the problem. Sums received in Romanian currency were converted on the black market to German occupation marks. The burial department was ordered to keep lists of the deaths of individuals without family, and the money which had been exchanged was reported as being found among the remains of these deceased.<sup>43</sup>

It can thus be noted that despite the many difficulties and obstacles, the mechanism for communicating and transmitting underground aid to the deportees operated considerably well, and it provided a vital service to the deportees.

### ***Service in Transmitting Vital Information and Public Advocacy*** **(“Shtadlanut”)**

From the correspondence with the leaders of the deportees in Mogilev, we learn that aside from arranging the logistics of the delivery of aid, Nathan Klipper also served as a messenger of information and urgent requests to those in Bucharest who could help. Occasionally in his letters of reply to the people of Mogilev, Nathan noted that “your request was passed to a competent person” (*An massgebende Stelle weitergeleitet*). It seems that this person was the now unofficial Jewish leader, Wilhelm Filderman. In one instance Klipper reports to Mogilev that “Visan (Filderman’s code name) has promised to take care of the matter.” In some matters Klipper was asked to turn to one of his friends who had a position in the Transnistrian government in Odessa. The following were among the requests for urgent and vigorous attention from those able to help in Bucharest.

#### **(1) Preventing the Second Deportation from the City and Region of Mogilev**

In April 1942 four thousand Jews living in Mogilev were deported to isolated former military barracks in Scazinetz. This deportation was equally traumatic to those deported there, to those remaining in Mogilev and to the leadership. In a long and detailed letter to Nathan Klipper, dated September 14, 1942, the writer (apparently the attorney Jonas Kessler) determines that at the time of writing about 1,700 persons remained alive in Scazinetz. And now, a plan for another deportation from the city and district of Mogilev, to restore the number of deportees in Scazinetz to 4,000 and to expell an additional 5,000 persons, was about to be implemented. In the opinion of the letter writer, the plan means “certain death” for about 7,000 Jews. People of influence in Bucharest were thus asked to act with utmost urgency to dissuade the Transnistria government from implementing the deportation plan and to work to getting the Scazinetz camp shut down. An urgent reply was requested in a coded telegram.

It seems that in Bucharest they did indeed act as requested, and even achieved the desired outcome. In a letter from Jonas Kessler dated September 27, 1942, it says, “Dear Nathan, many thanks for your endeavors. These thanks are also intended for our few friends who support your aid operation. A most terrible tragedy has now been averted. An additional deportation has been postponed at the moment, and it can even be expected that the Scazinetz camp will be closed.”

#### **(2) Additional Requests to Exert Influence in Bucharest**

Appeals to Bucharest through Klipper asked for their intercession regarding various administrative orders which affected their existence in Transnistria, such as: the return to Mogilev of four committee members and their families who had

been deported by the *prefect*, the district governor, to the Vapniarca camp and other locations, after two of the committee members were involved in an attempt to bribe one of the officials; preventing the naming of appointees who were bad for the Jews; promoting appointees who were good for the Jews, and more. Some of the problems were in fact solved as desired by the leaders of the deportees in Mogilev. The letters also reflect the strong pressure on Klipper and the people of Bucharest to take a stand in the power struggle between two groups of leaders of the deportees – the Jaegendorf group and the Katz group. In Bucharest, however, it seems they were not eager to take a stand in this conflict. On December 3, 1943, Nathan Klipper writes to his friends in Mogilev from the Jaegendorf group: “This is really not the time to fight over questions of prestige at the expense of the misfortunate. (This conflict) makes even more difficult the aid operation, which is hard enough without it.”

### **(3) Preparation for the Repatriation of Deportees**

At the end of this period, beginning in the autumn of 1943, the various aspects of the plan to repatriate the deportees, which at the time was under discussion by the Romanian government, were being considered. The repatriation of the deportees appeared to be a difficult task, considering their precarious state. The aid activists in Bucharest began preparing for the task of repatriation. On November 11, 1943, Nathan Klipper writes to Mogilev: “I hope that soon you will be brought to the country and we will take care of sending you aid dispatches in time.” After several months of deliberations and hesitations, the Romanian government finally decided, in March 1944, to repatriate the deportees. But several days after the final decision was made, the area of Transnistria was reoccupied by the Red Army, and so the repatriation plan became irrelevant.

### ***Rescue of Transnistria Deportees***

Nathan Klipper was able to rescue a small group of deportees from Transnistria and bring them back to Romania. This act earned mention in the memoirs of Radu Lecca, which were found in the archives of the Romanian security police and published in 1992.<sup>44</sup> Lecca, the man in charge of Jewish affairs in the Antonescu government, was sentenced to death as a war criminal in 1946, but just before his execution the King commuted his sentence to life imprisonment. In his accounts, Lecca hints that Professor Mihai Antonescu, the second highest in rank in the government, practically forced him, against his will, to add to the list of 100 candidates for repatriation, which he was about to present to Marshal Antonescu for approval, twenty more people from Klipper’s group. The first hundred were, according to Lecca, former state employees, holders of military honors and long-time converts to Christianity. Lecca also suggests the likelihood that Mihai Antonescu even arranged for the revised list’s approval by the ministers of interior and justice. According to Lecca, the mother of Mihai Antonescu’s mistress, Ileana Kerciu, sponsored the repatriation of Klipper’s group from



Transnistria. He supposed, “it can be assumed that many millions were paid in order to achieve the repatriation (of the group).”

### ***Contemporary Appreciation of Nathan Klipper’s Work***

Among the many words of gratitude for the work of Klipper and his friends on behalf of the Transnistria deportees, it may be difficult to distinguish between polite words obligated by the situation and honest appreciation. However the correspondence between Mogilev and Bucharest shows two instances of undoubtedly authentic appreciation of Klipper’s work – one originated in Mogilev and the other is a self-evaluation by Nathan Klipper regarding his activities.

At the end of 1942 or the beginning of 1943, Klipper was diagnosed with acute diabetes, which necessitated his making a drastic change in his life style. It seems that following the diagnosis, his wife Luzzi turned, through others, to his friends in Mogilev, with the request that in light of his illness they relieve him as much as possible from their affairs. To this Jonas Kessler replied to the “friends” in Bucharest in a letter (in Romanian) dated January 28, 1943, with the postscript: “Dear Markovitz, please inform Nathan that I honor his wife’s request. But as much as his illness pains us, we cannot do without his services, for so many hopes are tied to his name.... If his condition does not enable him to be with us all the time as in the past, (we ask him) to find any way, together with Saraga and other friends, for us to receive as much aid (shipments) as possible and as quickly as possible.”

In retrospect it seems that Nathan’s illness did not affect his work for the Transnistria deportees, for throughout 1943 there is much correspondence between Klipper and the community leaders in Mogilev.

After a number of unanswered requests to his correspondents in Mogilev that they make sure his wife’s relatives from the Bronstein family write and acknowledge money that had been sent them, Nathan writes on December 12, 1943 in an angry tone: “I and my wife are very angry at J\_\_, for despite our repeated requests over six months, he has not sent us any sign of life from the Bronstein family. Nachum, Shaye and Anna [uncles and aunts of Nathan’s wife Luzzi] should acknowledge all the sums and write to us in detail! Indeed I have already earned for myself so much (*So viel habe ich schon verdient*) as to receive this small service in return for all the hard and risky work I am performing for you nearly single-handedly. If it is possible to send so much mail to individuals that I am also obligated to transfer, I (too) am entitled to demand that my wife receive from her family a few lines ... after six months.”

Such words of persuasion! (After this message the matter of receiving news from the Bronstein family was apparently resolved.)

## **Cooperation with A. L. Zissu: Two Public Affairs**

Uncovered documentation about the investigation of the Zionist leader A. L. Zissu by the Romanian security police in the years 1951-52 reveals Nathan Klipper's involvement in two episodes of public significance. The first relates to events during the final days of the alliance between Romania and the Nazis, and the second to the days of the communist regime.

### **Delay of Immigrant Ships**

The spring and the beginning of the summer of 1944 seemed like an auspicious time for immigration from Romania to Palestine and on an unprecedented scale. The repercussions around the world after the *Struma* catastrophe (in 1942), in which nearly 800 immigrants drowned off the coast of Turkey, and the growing reports of the annihilation of the Jews in Europe by the Nazis, weakened the British determination to prevent at all costs the arrival in Palestine of immigrants who had not previously obtained immigration permits (*certificates*). Turkey's policy towards the passage of immigrants through its borders became more considerate after the *Struma* disaster. Ira Hirshman also arrived in Istanbul, on a mission on behalf of the U.S. government, with the aim of helping to rescue as many Jews as possible from the Nazi inferno. Within the Romanian government and circles of influence within the country there was also growing recognition that war on the side of the Germans was lost. They began seeking channels to the west for the purpose of causing their country to surrender, if possible, to the western allies, and under the best possible conditions for Romania. Some of the country's leaders hoped to acquire "credits" for themselves which would serve as some sort of counterweight to their crimes against the Jews. Opening routes to world Jewry on the backdrop of immigration to Palestine seemed to them a suitable way to achieve both of their goals.

Even the German objection to the position of their junior allies, the Romanians, regarding the emigration weakened. The Germans began to accept Romanian policy on the matter and allegedly even cooperated with the Romanians in securing "safe passage" for the emigrant ships through the mines which they had scattered in the Black Sea. At the beginning of the summer of 1944, three small ships – *Marina*, *Bulbul* and *Mefkure* – in the Constanza harbor were in the final stages of preparation for carrying emigrants, and plans were being discussed for sending off additional emigrant ships.

A short time earlier, at the beginning of 1944, A. L. Zissu assumed leadership of both the Palestine Bureau in Bucharest (the "Office of Emigration") and the underground Zionist executive. He was an uncompromising Zionist leader, unaffiliated, and widely known as a man of honesty and integrity of the highest level. Indeed, upon assuming his role, Zissu strived to establish the queue for aliya (emigration) according to objective criteria and thus eliminate any kind of arbitrary or corrupt decision making.

However, a crisis over the departure of the ships suddenly erupted. Their departure was delayed and a harsh power struggle developed between Radu Lecca,

the authorized representative of the Romanian government for Jewish affairs, and A. L. Zissu, the head of the Office of Emigration. As a result of the crisis, it became questionable whether the ships would sail and if the entire emigration process would continue.

Radu Lecca turned the Jews' Center, among other things, into a tool for extorting funds for the "Sponsorship Council of the Welfare Operations" (*Consiliul de patronaj al operelor sociale*) which was headed by Maria, the wife of Romanian dictator Marshal Ion Antonescu. Until then Lecca's primary resource for this purpose was "the certificates of exemption from compulsory labor" for which those who were able paid large sums of money. Now Lecca wanted to make immigration to Palestine another instrument for extorting funds for his goals. He also wanted to have some control in compiling the lists of immigrants and for the Jews' Center to supervise the entire immigration process. A. L. Zissu objected strongly to these intentions and the issue came to a deadlock. Meanwhile, thousands of Holocaust survivors who had escaped to Romania mainly from Poland and Hungary and were there illegally, *halutzim* (pioneers) – members of Zionist youth movements, orphans who had been repatriated from Transnistria, and simply Jews of means who were willing to give everything they had in order to obtain passage, were waiting anxiously to emigrate to Palestine.

After weeks passed without a solution, Zissu asked Nathan Klipper to try to resolve the dispute which had developed and delayed the ships from sailing. Klipper consented. His talents stood him well again this time and he succeeded in reaching an agreement with Lecca which substantially satisfied Zissu's intentions. The crisis ended and the ships sailed.

This episode was mentioned in two statements which A. L. Zissu made while he was a prisoner of the *Securitate*, the Romanian security police, before his trial, on June 2, 1951 and March 1, 1952. These accounts were published by the Romanian historian Mihai Pelin in his book *Zionists Under Interrogation*.<sup>45</sup>

From the first testimony: "The work of (organizing) emigration was suddenly disrupted by a message from the Jews' Center to the office of the International Red Cross ... in which it was brought to their attention that the activity of the Palestine Bureau in organizing emigration was illegal, as it violated the law governing the organization and operation of the Jews' Center. Therefore, it was demanded (of the International Red Cross) that in the future they refuse to give any assistance (to the Office of Emigration). Since an immediate response was not received, the head of the office (of the International Red Cross), Kolb, received another message, this time from the office of the Deputy Premier, the Commissioner for Jewish Affairs, which repeated the same warning more firmly." (Subsequently Zissu reports on meetings initiated by Kolb between people from the Jews' Center and a number of Jewish leaders, but without Zissu, since he refused to negotiate with representatives of the Center. With Zissu absent, these meetings ended without results.) "After eight days the order was received to detain in Constanza the three ships which were ready to sail. From the lumber industrialist Nathan Klipper on the one hand, and from Cahane, the leader of the Jewish community of Iassy, on the other, I learned that Radu Lecca, the initiator of

this maleficent order, demanded: (a) a billion lei for the “Council of Sponsorship”; (b) integration of the Palestine Bureau within the Office of Emigration of the Jews’ Center – the only body legally allowed to fulfill this role (of organizing emigration). If these demands were not met, the three ships would not sail and all immigration activity would cease. Horrified by this (nightmarish) vision, I agreed, after two week of refusal, to meet with Lecca. (This in light of the fact that) aside from the Jews of the country who saw themselves in danger of death if they did not leave, there were (in Romania) 14,000 (Jewish) refugees from Poland, Yugoslavia, Austria, Bulgaria who had been smuggled into the country and were without documents. They were a constant target of hunts, persecution and extortion by Antonescu’s police. Klipper attended the meeting. During the meeting Lecca repeated his conditions and added to them a new one: my allowing twenty people “under his protection” to depart on one of the three ships.... I refused to accept this (last) condition. I also refused with equal determination to cooperate with the Center, and as for the exorbitant sum of a billion lei, I refused to make a counter offer (to Lecca’s demand).” (Later Zissu reports on the pressure and threats exerted on him by Deputy Premier Mihai Antonescu, but Zissu did not relent.) “A few days later, Klipper reached an agreement with Lecca, in which I would consent to pay the Sponsorship Council 75 million lei and no more.... The three ships finally departed and the immigration activity continued.”

From the second testimony: “Pandelis came to me alarmed and informed me that by order of the Office of the Commissioner for Jewish Affairs, it was forbidden for the three ships – which were in Constanza nearly ready to load passengers – from leaving port either with or without emigrants. Pandelis was the concessionary for transporting emigrants from Romania to Palestine, according to a contract made directly with the Jewish Agency.

“Very worried by the news, he (Pandelis) rushed to Lecca. Lecca told him that considering the hundreds of millions of Swiss francs which Pandelis was collecting for his firm in London, Lecca demanded that he contribute a billion lei to the Sponsorship (Council) of Madame Antonescu. In addition to this, he must present two more conditions to Zissu: to take twenty Jewish friends (of Lecca) on the firsts ships to set sail, and to place the activity of the Office of Emigration under the supervision at least of the Jews’ Center, if not its direct management. Pandelis replied that the billion lei donation was also a matter for Zissu. Lecca responded: I have warned you as the ship-leaser. You need only to bring Zissu here. I (for my part) will not call him again. I am in no rush.

“Being aware of the good relations between the lumber industrialist Nathan Klippers and Lecca, and since Klipper was assiduously taking interest in matters of emigration and came frequently to the Office (of Emigration), I called him and charged him with the task of approaching Lecca and bringing up the problem in their first meeting. From that moment the two engaged in serious discussions which culminated with my visit to Lecca, in order to personally and conclusively make clear what I was willing to offer.” (Zissu repeats and explains his known position). “I left without our reaching an agreement. But Klipper continued his discussions with Lecca, who finally agreed, after six weeks of holding up the

ships, to waive his stipulations and to be satisfied with a 50 million donation for the Sponsorship (Council), although he warned he would ask for a new donation if the number of ships increased.”

After this crisis was resolved, the ships sailed on August 3, 1944, packed with about 1,100 immigrants. As is known, however, one of the ships, the *Mefkure*, was sunk and about 280 passengers drowned with it.

### **The Plan for Aiding Families of Non-Jewish Political Prisoners**

Another project in which Zissu wanted to involve Nathan Klipper was the idea that Jews provide humanitarian aid to the families of non-Jewish political prisoners of the communist regime in Romania. The idea was conceived by the Zionist leader, attorney Jean Cohen, most probably in the year 1949.

The political structures of the pre-communist regime, such as monarchic rule and political parties, were disbanded and many former political leaders were languishing in prisons. The process of nationalizing the economy was in advanced stages. The Zionist movements were also disbanded, but their leaders were still free and could convene and consult with each other. The proportion of Jews among the new elites of the regime was significantly higher than their percentage within the general population, and this gave credence to the old Nazi theory which had penetrated deeply into the minds of the masses, of identifying Judaism with communism. The suffering of those languishing in prisons and of their families who were left in severe distress, as well as the suffering of large social groups who had been stripped of their status and livelihood, raised their anti-communist sentiments together with the level of their hatred for the Jews. The Cold War was at its height and there was a fear that if the Cold War were to turn into a violent conflict, the latent antisemitism would also turn into violent rampages of Jew-hatred as in the “good old days” of the past. In this state of affairs, the idea was raised among the Zionist leaders to start a Jewish humanitarian aid operation for the families of prisoners, whom no one was helping, and for the prisoners themselves – as an instrument for dulling the anti-Semitic spearhead and for demonstrating that Judaism cannot be equated with communist oppression. The first thought was to raise funds for this purpose from world Jewish organizations, primarily the Joint (JDC). The conceivers of the idea, friends of Zissu, asked him to be the one to approach these organizations. Zissu rejected the idea, believing it might be construed as external intervention of world Jewish organizations in the internal affairs of the Republic of Romania. However, Zissu adopted the concept of an aid operation to the families of the regime’s prisoners and took it upon himself to try to raise funds within the country for this purpose.

According to Zissu, “I turned to Klipper, (formerly) an industrialist and large exporter of lumber, one of my political disciples, whom I assumed was still wealthy despite the nationalization of his factories; I felt he might be likely to show an understanding of the problem.

“He was going to give me the first contribution, and in addition, since he was a man of wide connections among wealthy Jews, he was going to determine for me whether I might have a chance of raising significant funds (for this

purpose). Klipper soundly discouraged me. Although he did at first promise me (a contribution of) 300,000 lei, he later reneged. According to Klipper, the number of wealthy Jews was significantly diminished and the few that remained would refuse to make any contribution for this purpose whether because they wanted to hide what wealth they had left or because they were not at all concerned with the issue. Klipper felt this operation would thus be halted at its start, and it would be a pity to waste his money without purpose.

“Once I was refused by Klipper, I resolutely refused to ask any others, which I would have done had I succeeded with Klipper.” [Zissu was eventually persuaded by his friends to appeal nevertheless to the Israeli ambassador Rubin, with a request to pass the idea on to the Jewish Agency and to other Jewish organizations, and to even examine the possibility of setting aside funds of the Israeli embassy for this purpose. However, the staff of the Israeli embassy also expressed doubt over the project, and thus the idea came to an end.]<sup>46</sup>

Soon after the idea of Jewish humanitarian aid to the families of non-Jewish political prisoners was determined to be unrealistic, the Zionist leaders, including the conceivers of the idea, were also imprisoned. The idea now became an excellent allegation for their indictment, and it was thus brought up repeatedly in their interrogations in the years 1951 and 1952. At that time Nathan Klipper was no longer alive and thus was spared from having to serve as a witness against his Zionist friends in this matter.

### ***Concluding Remarks***

We estimate that among those deported to northern Transnistria who died during their exile only about fifteen percent were killed by acts of violence carried out by Romanians, Germans and Ukrainians<sup>47</sup>. The vast majority of those who perished died of “natural causes” – disease, particularly typhus, starvation, cold and exhaustion. The battle between life and death was decided mostly by the presence or lack of scant economic resources in the hands of families and individuals, to the extent it sufficed to purchase a minimal amount of food and to rent space in a modest room, in which it would be possible both to prevent the spread of typhus and, when necessary, to provide minimal care to those who had fallen ill. The most needy sometimes received meager support through a basic system of community services established primarily by the deportees’ committees, but also by private initiatives. This support was crucial in saving thousands of orphans.

When the few resources that the deportees had brought with them were depleted – mostly clothing that could be bartered from the baggage they carried with them into deportation, there were two means of acquiring minimum resources – from the limited earning ability of some of the deportees and from outside aid. Many families were sustained in part or in whole by such aid. The overt external aid, mostly in the form of goods, provided the primary means for maintaining public services at a minimal level, and first and foremost, as mentioned, for supporting the orphans. The underground aid, which was primarily cash, provided

an important supplement for financing the services of the deportees' committees. For the direct support of families by relatives and friends, as well as private aid operations, the underground dispatches were practically their only source of funds. The faithful couriers who carried cash, letters and messages at great personal risk and not without difficulty – though usually for a high fee, but sometimes without pay – played a vital role in maintaining both the aid dispatches and contact with the deportees.

Had the Romanian authorities succeeded in effectively implementing their primary intention of preventing aid to the deportees, it is most likely that the number of survivors in Transnistria would have been significantly smaller.<sup>48</sup> To the credit of those who worked faithfully and persistently in opening channels of assistance, in securing funds, in organizing deliveries, and in distributing aid, the survival of many of the Transnistria deportees can be attributed. This credit belongs to the leaders and public servants who acted within their authority and far beyond it, and to those who acted as volunteers and in underground conditions, and took personal risks. Among the latter, the most prominent was Nathan Klipper.

On July 2, 1943, the Jewish Palestinian mission in Istanbul sent a letter jointly to the heads of the Zionist pioneer youth movements in Romania, who were operating underground at that time. In the letter they wrote, “the part of your letter ... telling us about your efforts to reach our brethren, our comrades in the Transnistria exile ... and those who are beyond the Bug ... can serve as a beacon and an example to our movement in Palestine, for in your concern for our brethren who are suffering, you are performing the greatest Jewish mission of our time.”<sup>49</sup> We believe this assessment of the aid operation for the deportees in Transnistria, as expressed by the mission in Istanbul at the time of the events, is true of the entire community of aid activists who served the Transnistria deportees, and is remain valid from an historical perspective. The mission in Istanbul was at the center of the efforts to aid and save Jews who were being persecuted in the countries under German control and crushed by the Nazi death machines. This mission is thus the most authoritative body for judging the efforts on behalf of the Transnistria deportees and in giving credit to those who bore the weight of the task.

\* \* \*

Dora Litani, an outside reviewer of Nathan Kipper's activities, calls him “the philanthropist,” as expected of a wealthy man who does good for the community. Haim (Kurty) Hammer, an observer from his home town of Dorna, calls him “the Jewish *shtadlan* (public advocate) from Dorna”.<sup>50</sup> It can be assumed this is how he was perceived by the persecuted people of Bucharest on whose behalf he acted. The community leaders in Mogilev, who corresponded with him through the underground, saw him first and foremost as an aid organizer and operator, although they too benefited from his philanthropy and occasionally from his mediations. As we have noted, Klipper himself described his actions on behalf of the Transnistria deportees as “work of great effort and risk,” which he performed “almost entirely alone.” His actions embodied all the traits described above – aid organizer and operator, advocate and philanthropist, tireless worker

and risk-taker – nearly “a one-man army.” However, if we are to judge by the results, the quality to be credited most is that of aid organizer and operator.

As noted by J.K. in one of his letters from Mogilev, “so many hopes are tied to his name.” Naturally, such great expectations are sometimes thwarted. Indeed, there are those who expressed disappointment at the extent of Klipper’s philanthropy. It seems that as a donor he was deliberate and cautious, and refrained from ineffective distribution of his funds. However, in times of need he did not hesitate to open his wallet, even if the sums were considerable.

\* \* \*

Nathan Klipper was a businessman. His ambitions for success were focused on and achieved in the business field. Even though he was active in the community of Vatra-Dornei and over time formed close ties with the Jewish leaders in Romania, he never aspired to a position of public leadership. Nevertheless, his activities for community goals were not marginal nor the leisurely pursuit of a man whose time and interests were focused elsewhere. His public work demanded a great deal of time, and intellectual and emotional efforts which undoubtedly competed seriously with the time and emotional resources he invested in his businesses. Today we commonly look for the motives for human action. Klipper was a man with a sense of public responsibility and sensitive to the needs of others. But it is doubtful these traits alone can explain the extent and intensity of his activities, as we have described them. It is easier to identify the processes which led to his actions within the circumstances of those days – first initiating a response to needs, then responding to the requests of both those in distress and public leaders, who recognized the abilities of the man to help, until the cycle of response and initiative, due to conditions and needs of the time, becomes a process of historical significance. This model indeed fits the centuries-old tradition of the Jewish Diaspora, of activists and people of influence among their countrymen, coming to the assistance of those in distress.

\* \* \*

The cooperation between A.L. Zissu and Klipper contains an historical symbolism. Zissu was a proud, uncompromising, Jewish nationalistic leader, an outstanding “Jewish warrior” (*evreul soldat*), as he was termed by the Romanian historian Mihai Pelin – unlike the bending and pleading Jew of the stereotype perceived by the Romanians.<sup>51</sup> However, when he reached a position of active leadership, Zissu was also forced to compromise his loathing of “cooperating with the enemy” – the government representative for Jewish affairs supported by the Nazi Germans and its instrument in the Jewish community, the “Jews’ Center,” and to ask Nathan Klipper to resolve through his mediation the crisis of immigrant ships being prevented from sailing. There was in this a certain Zionist legitimization for a means of operation which Zionist education so disdained.

\* \* \*



Nathan Klipper's death while a prisoner of the Romanian security police comprises a triple tragedy:

- The fact of the untimely death of a highly talented and capable man, at a relatively young age, leaving his family in distress.
- The fact that the biblical verse "you have killed and have also taken possession" was manifested in regard to the great wealth he had accumulated; most of it was nationalized. After his death his wife and children were able to enjoy only a minute portion of his fortune.
- The fact that his numerous acts in saving Jews and in alleviating their suffering have remained mostly unknown to the public, and even to his children and descendants, more than fifty years later.

The first two components of this tragedy cannot be undone. But as for the third element, the author of this essay saw it as his privilege to disperse the fog of oblivion over the acts of Nathan Klipper and to commit his memory to its deserving place in the gallery of men who significantly contributed to the rescue of Jews and the alleviation of their suffering during the darkest days of the Jewish people – the Holocaust.

## **Appendix A: Nathan Klipper's Testimony at the Trial of the First Group of Romanian War Criminals - May 1945**

\* The witness Nathan Klipper is brought in.

State Prosecutor Bunaciu: Do you know the defendant Stere Marinescu, and under what circumstances (did you meet him)?

Klipper: I know him. Together with a number of friends, I worked to extend help to the deportees in Transnistria; mostly I, as I also had relatives who had been deported there together with other Jews (among them) from Czernowitz.

Chairman: You were in Czernowitz?

Klipper: No. In Bucharest. We especially sought (a way) to intercede to prevent any more deportations and to rescind the measures restricting the mobility of the Jews and requiring the (wearing of the) yellow badge. A request was brought to our attention that we seek a way to appeal to the authorities, and particularly to Major Marinescu, who could be of great help to us regarding the easing of the measures against the Jews in Czernowitz. We sought and found, through friends, a connection to Major Marinescu. When I made contact with him personally, I asked him about improving the condition of those in Czernowitz, and particularly, as I have told you, to rescind the restrictions on movement and to revoke the yellow badge, as well as to halt the deportations, since the Jews in Czernowitz were living the entire time under the fear (*teroare*) of the resumption of deportations to Transnistria. He promised me he would extend this assistance to me, within the possible limits, and I told him – there was another person with me – that we would be grateful to him. A number of times I gave him 500,000 lei per month, and twice 200,000 lei.

Chairman: How many times did you give him 500,000 lei?

Klipper: At least three times. And 200,000 lei twice.

Chairman: In what year?

Klipper: Approximately the autumn of 1942, if I am not mistaken.

Chairman: Did you give any more after that?

Klipper: No.

Prosecutor: Where did the witness see the defendant?

Klipper: At his home, on Sabinelor Street.

Prosecutor: Who introduced you (to him)?

Klipper: Saro (Salò) Schmidt and Wasser.

Prosecutor: Were there any discussions regarding the price, or did you simply offer him a price and he accepted?

Klipper: We offered, and he accepted.

Prosecutor: Does the defendant wish to ask a question?

Defendant Marinescu: No.

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\* Translated from the *Romania Libera* newspaper account, May 5, 1945

**Appendix B: Letter from Nathan Klipper to Mogilev**

(1)

Am achitat pentru cele 25 blufim mării și suma de susținere la  
 românii cu să se va socoti acolo cu administratorul prezentei aso-  
 ciumi ab. avut convenția. Teți primi încă pasăntinii la metru  
 pentru care suma va de confirmare și Ly. Jägerhof, Kap. n. Lapa-  
 yowker. Acesti bani veti intratinta exclusiv pentru colectivitatea  
 în special ajutorarea celor reintrași dela Tulein. Suma de 600 blufim  
 plus comisionul vor achita numai contra chitanță scimată  
 de cei indicați. Sper că în curând veti fi aduși în țară și  
 vom avea grija să vă mai trimitem ajutorare la timp. Multe  
 salutări la toți dela Ion. 11.11.

(2)

Dr. H. Teich în Friedrich Prieber, Sp. -  
 pentru colectivitate: 500

|         |
|---------|
| 852     |
| - 196 - |
| -----   |
| 656     |
| -----   |

Hans Khlomenei în Josef Stern  
 500

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> *Gura-Humora: Koroteiha shel Kehilah Yehudit (Gura-Humora: The History of a Jewish Community)*. Published by the Community Memorial Association, 1992, pp.208-209.
- <sup>2</sup> Benjamin Brecher. *Lo Eshkach Otach Mogilev!!! (I Shall Not Forget You, Mogilev!!!)*. Privately published booklet. 1945, p.3. Yad Vashem Archives 033/4747.
- <sup>3</sup> Dr. Hugo Gold. *Geschichte der Juden in der Bukowina (The History of the Jews in Bukovina)* Vol. 2, 1962, p.82.
- <sup>4</sup> The photograph was published in a memorial booklet about Mali Nahmanovitch, the daughter of Leon-Leib Hauslich, the representative of the Jewish National Fund in Vatra-Dornei at the time.
- <sup>5</sup> Published in a collection in memory of Dov (Berl) Schieber, *Chinuch l'Emunah u'leMasoret (Education for Faith and Tradition)*. Yesodot, 1964, p.43.
- <sup>6</sup> S. Avny. *Dov (Berl) Schieber Halutz Umehaneh (Dov (Berl) Schieber, Pioneer and Education)*, Tel Aviv, 1999, p.67.
- <sup>7</sup> Schieber. *Education for Faith and Tradition*, p.46.
- <sup>8</sup> The indictment against the Romanian war criminals (first group), including Stere Marinescu, was published in its entirety in the newspaper *Romania Libera* on May 13, 1945. Yad Vashem Archives, P-9/13. Nathan Klipper's testimony at the trial of the war criminals appeared in this newspaper on May 20, 1945.
- <sup>9</sup> Manfred Reifer. *Massa Hamavet (Death's Journey)*, Tel Aviv, p.47.
- <sup>10</sup> The numbers are based upon the data collected and analyzed by Dr. Jean Ancel, in his book *Transnistria*, Bucharest, Atlas Publishers, 1998, Vol. 3, pp.271-303. These data were collected mainly from secret reports of Romanian government agencies which were uncovered only in 1995. Earlier estimates placed the number of deportees to Transnistria at less than 150,000. According to Ancel, they underestimated the number of deportees to the southern districts and the extent of the killings there.
- <sup>11</sup> Our estimate is an adjusted estimate of that of Dora Litani's in her book, *Transnistria* (in Romanian, Tel Aviv, 1981, p.105), which has also been adopted by other publications. It places the number of survivors in Transnistria at about 59,000. Our adjustment relates to her assumption that the 51,000 Jewish subjects of greater Romania whom the Romanian gendarmerie reported as being alive in Transnistria in September 1943 is also the number of the survivors in March 1944. We adjusted this estimate based on indicators of the mortality rate among the exiles in the last half-year of the Romanian regime in

the district: a statistical analysis of the “Winninger-Apter” list regarding the 1,135 victims from Gura-Humora, by year of death. The list was published in the *Gura-Humora* book, pp.320-355.

- <sup>12</sup> The efforts in raising resources in cash and in kind and the direct shipments of aid to the Transnistria deportees encompassed a great part of Romanian Jewry. We estimate that the total value of these efforts to be about 750-800 million lei of 1943, equal to about four million dollars at the official exchange rate at the time. The percentage of contributions among Romanian Jewry to the Transnistria deportees was without precedent at the time, in comparison to the aid efforts of any other Jewish community in free countries for the Jews in countries occupied or controlled by the Nazis. We note that many of the 300,000 Romanian Jews who remained in their homes were stripped of their property and livelihoods. About 40,000 of them were enlisted in compulsory labor. In addition they were subject to heavy pressure of taxes, arbitrary levies and extortion. For the purpose of comparison, see note 31, below.
- <sup>13</sup> Matatias Carp. *Cartea Neagra-Suferintele Evreilor din Romania*, Vol.3. 1940-1944, pp.264, 270-1.
- <sup>14</sup> The official exchange rate for the German Occupation mark (RKKS) was 60 lei. On the open market the rate was between 6–25 lei to the mark.
- <sup>15</sup> The most exhaustive essay on the subject appears in the book by Shmuel Ben-Artzi, *Jewish Children in Transnistria during the Holocaust (Yeledim Yehudim Betransnistria Betkufat Hashoah)*. Haifa University. 1989.
- <sup>16</sup> Testimony of Rivka Ruckenstein. Yad Vashem Archives, 1758/03.
- <sup>17</sup> Dora Litani. *Transnistria*. Tel-Aviv 1981, p.85. Attorney Gideon Kraft also testified to us that Nathan Klipper had organized the group. The witness served in the years 1942-43 as an assistant to Klipper in the organization of aid shipments to Transnistria, and in this framework he also served as the coordinator of the group’s meetings.
- <sup>18</sup> According to Reifer, Berthold Sobel was a main contributor and solicitor in the group; he apparently served as the coordinator for the activities in regard to Czernowitz.
- <sup>19</sup> M. Carp. Vol. 3, pp.303-4. (Second Edition, 1996, p.314).
- <sup>20</sup> Testimony of G. Kraft. His work, primarily the preparation of the lists of community and private recipients for the dispatches to Transnistria, was performed in these quarters.
- <sup>21</sup> Testimony of Saul Schnap. Yad Vashem Archives 011/39-8. The witness was an activist in the underground Communist party who was directed to work within the Jewish community, including the aid organizations.
- <sup>22</sup> Yad Vashem Archives, P-9/7.

- <sup>23</sup> Moritz Klipper was included in the list of 13 members of the “Committee for Coordinating Jewish Labor” (that is, the deportees’ committee) in Mogilev, which was approved by the Romanian authorities on December 18, 1941. Carp, Vol.3, p.315.
- <sup>24</sup> Testimony of Fritz Klipper, as recorded by Dan Hartstein. New York, 1992.
- <sup>25</sup> Yad Vashem Archives P-9/14. The section of the Yad Vashem Archives known as “the Jaegendorf Archive (P-9)” contains files of the Mogilev deportees’ committee and of the foundary in the same town. These files were brought to Romania by the engineer Siegfried Jaegendorf, the head of the Mogilev committee, several days before the area was reoccupied by the Red Army. This is the only archive of a ghetto administration in Transnistria which was deposited in Yad Vashem. We do not know whether other archives from other Transnistria ghettos survive or where they are deposited. Quotations presented later in this essay, whose source is not indicated, are also from letters preserved in the Yad Vashem file P-9/14.
- <sup>26</sup> In a letter from the Autonomous Committee for Assistance dated December 7, 1943, intended for “the friends” in Mogilev, it is stated, among other things, “Financial matters are handled by Ion” (Klipper’s code name); in a detailed report from Mogilev dated December 25, 1943 about financial arrangements, which was given to Fred Saraga personally, two instances note that “Ion has the receipt.”
- <sup>27</sup> Yad Vashem Archives P-9/14. Letter dated November 11, 1943.
- <sup>28</sup> *Pinkas Kehilot Romania (The Encyclopedia of Romanian Communities)*. Vol. 1, p.375; A. Shahan, *Bakfor Halohet (Burning Ice)*, chapter 7, note 16; in Dora Litani, p.82.
- <sup>29</sup> Yad Vashem Archives 03/1437.
- <sup>30</sup> *Chai veBaruch (Hai and Baruch), Part 2: Be’emek Habacha (In the Valley of Tears)*. Published by Makor Habrachah (Souce of Blessing) InSTITUTE.
- <sup>31</sup> Israel Margalit (Postelnik). *Radautz*. Irgun Yotzei Radautz (The Association of Former Residents of Radautz). 1990, pp.153, 160.
- <sup>32</sup> Two of the members of the Zionist Palestinian mission in Istanbul in the years 1943-44 published memoirs and accounts of this mission: Menahem Bader, *Shlihuyot Atzuvot (Sorrowful Missions)* 1954; Ze’ev Hadari (Vanya Pomerantz), *Tzomet Kushta (Istanbul Junction)*, 1992. In their books they bitterly complain, each in his own style, that their mission was unable to bridge the terrible gap between the desperate cries of help which wailed from every message and missive which reached them from the countries under Nazi control, and the limited resources which their dispatchers provided them for the purposes of aid and rescue. Also the report of the Rescue Committee affiliated with the Jewish Agency to the 22<sup>nd</sup> Zionist Congress states that “... the scarce resources have resulted in only a part of these possibilities (of aid and rescue)

being achieved...” The total of shipments to the Diaspora of the Aid Committee in the war years was less than a million pounds sterling. The majority of the Aid Committee’s funding came from the *Magbit Hahitgaysut* fund-raising organization which was established in Palestine in 1942, and which expanded its goals in 1943 to include rescue (and changed its name to *Magbit Hahitgaysut Vehahatzalah*). This fund appropriated only about 30% of its income in 1943 and 1944 to rescue and immigration (*aliyah*) purposes.

<sup>33</sup> Protocol of the auditor’s commission of the Romanian Aid and Rescue Committee, dated December 12, 1943. Zionist Central Archives, File S26/1441.

<sup>34</sup> Letter of the Romanian Aid and Rescue Committee, dated October 2, 1943. Zionist Central Archives, File S26/1441.

<sup>35</sup> S. Ben-Zion, *Jewish Children in Transnistria*, pp.206-211. In a letter to Palestine, via Istanbul, from Berl Schieber, a member of the central leadership of the underground Zionist youth movement, HaNoar HaZioni, dated July 18, 1943, it is stated: “No movement has shed so much blood as we have. We were strongly represented in Bukovina and recently also in Bessarabia. Thus we also have the greatest number of victims in the deportation...” Zionist Central Archives, File S26/1441.

<sup>36</sup> This is how the Shargorod Committee, headed by Dr. M. Teich, acted. Testimony of M. Sherf.

<sup>37</sup> Yad Vashem Archives. P-9/13.

<sup>38</sup> A report by the Romanian Aid and Rescue Committee to Istanbul, dated December 2, 1943, it states, “... there are great difficulties in finding a courier. Afterwards the courier has great difficulty in reaching Transnistria. Two of three (couriers) are detained at the border. After he finally delivers the money, the most difficult question arises: the receipts. The courier must undergo scrupulous inspections at the border. He must perform miracles in order to hide the receipts...”

<sup>39</sup> M. Carp. Vol.3, p.332.

<sup>40</sup> Report of Mrs. Melika Shaari regarding the content of some files of the Bukovina government from the years 1941-1944, which are kept in the government archives in Czernowitz. Visit in 1991.

<sup>41</sup> Testimony of Berthold Scheuerman. Fax communication from Dusseldorf to the author. 1997.

<sup>42</sup> Scheuerman, 1997.

<sup>43</sup> Siegfried Jaegendorf. *Jaegendorf's Foundry: Memoir of the Romanian Holocaust, 1941-1944*. New York, Harper Collins, 1991, p.50.

<sup>44</sup> Radu Lecca. *Eu I-am Salvant pe Evreii din Romania*. Bucharest, 1992, p.209.

- <sup>45</sup> A.L. Zissu (ed: Mihai Pelin). *Sionisti sub Ancheta*. Bucharest, 1993, pp.85, 228.
- <sup>46</sup> Extracted from the above source, from several testimonies, and primarily from Zissu's testimony on January 14, 1952, pp.160-161.
- <sup>47</sup> Our estimate is based on a statistical analysis of the causes of death of 1,135 victims in Transnistria originally from Gura-Humora which are included in the lists published in the *Gura-Humora* book (pp.320-355). The list was first compiled by the biographer-historian Shlomo Wininger during the years 1945-48, and was reexamined by Shlomo Apter prior to publication. It is therefore highly reliable. The people of Gura-Humora were not successful in organizing themselves as a group, and scattered among most of the ghettos in the region of Mogilev (some of them reached other regions). This list can be considered a representative sample of the Bukovina deportees in the Mogilev region: 13.4% of the deceased included in the list died from acts of violence, and 86.6% died of other causes, primarily typhus. Violent deaths were somewhat more common in other regions in north Transnistria, but it seems that they did not exceed a rate of 15%, except in regard to the first group of deportees from Bessarabia during the summer of 1941 in which 16,000 people were killed (Dr. Ancel's estimate).
- <sup>48</sup> An indication of the differences in the survival rates between a group of deportees which benefited from a high rate of assistance and the general average can be obtained from the numbers reported in the testimony of S. Erbsental, regarding the Vizhnitz deportees. According to him, there were only 70 cases of death in a group of 460 people from Vizhnitz who arrived with him to the Djurin ghetto (that is, a 15% mortality rate), as opposed to the 2,000 deaths of about 2,800 deportees from Vizhnitz to all of Transnistria (a rate exceeding 70%). Djurin was a focal point for the receipt of aid, which centered primarily around Rabbi Mayer Hager from the Vizhnitz dynasty. This included the Zionist Aid and Rescue operation, the operation of Rabbi Eliezer Hager, the *Admor* (Chasidic rabbi) from Vizhnitz, which was meant for his followers, and in addition, Nathan Klipper's aid operation. It seems that the people from Vizhnitz in Djurin were one of the favored groups for aid receipt.
- <sup>49</sup> The letter was published in *Tzomet Kushta (Istanbul Junction)*. Israel Ministry of Defense, 1992, p.277.
- <sup>50</sup> Haim Hammer. *Begerush Transnistria (In the Transnistria Deportation)*. Massua Yearbooks, Vol. 8, 1980, p.157.
- <sup>51</sup> M. Pelin, *Sionisti sub Ancheta*, p.11.