

THE STORY OF TAMARA KOBLIK

The story of how a Jewish family from Rezina was torn apart during the Holocaust.

When World War II came and the Germans approached, Tamara and her parents fled on a train to Makhachkala. But while Tamara and her mother survived in evacuation, her father was taken to the Gulag, where he perished. Tamara's grandmother and cousins were first forced to live in the Rybnitsa ghetto and were killed later in Transnistria.

When Soviet troops had liberated Bessarabia in 1944, Tamara and her mother returned to Chisinau, where they started a new life, and where Tamara Koblik eventually raised her own family.

STUDY GUIDE

Moldova between two world wars

In the interwar period (1918-1940), the territory of modern Moldova was divided between the USSR, which inherited from the Russian Empire the left bank of the Dniester (Moldavian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic in the Ukrainian SSR), and the royal Romania, which got the interfluvium of the Prut and the Dniester, or Bessarabia. In 1930, there were 765,930 Jews in Romania (4.2% of the total population). Within the borders of old Romania there were 263,192 Jews, in Bessarabia - 206,958 Jews, in Bukovina - 92,080 Jews, in Transylvania - 193 thousand Jews. By 1940, thanks to the influx of refugees from other parts of Romania, the number of Jews in Bessarabia reached, according to estimates, 300,000 people. The native language of Bessarabian Jews, especially in small towns and shtetls, was predominantly or even exclusively Yiddish.

The 1930s in Romania were marked by a sharp rise of state anti-Semitism, which received an additional impetus after the rapprochement with Nazi Germany. In pursuance of the secret additional protocol on the division of spheres of interest in Eastern Europe to the non-aggression pact between the USSR and Germany of August 23, 1939, known as the [Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact](#), on June 28, 1940, the USSR seized the territory of Bessarabia, creating from the interfluvium of the Prut and the Dniester and the left bank of the Dniester the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic. Before the Second World War, according to the 1930 census, 321 Jews lived in the town of Florești, where Tamara was born. After the war, Florești is given the status of a city and a regional center, and the Jewish population here significantly increased - and then falls again, as a result of general demographic and emigration processes.

Judaism, Shabat and Pesach

Bessarabian Jewry in the 1920-1930s experienced a period of [emancipation](#), erosion of the orthodox Jewish tradition that can be seen from photographs of the Centropa Moldovan collection: on many of them representatives of different generations have been taken, and it is clearly visible how differently they relate to the requirements of external observance of the precepts of Judaism.

Nevertheless, in most families even after the war, during the Soviet persecution of religion, they remembered and observed the Jewish holidays that became the basis of Jewish self-awareness. Shabat (Saturday) is the most important Jewish holiday, which has both a religious, a deep philosophical, and a household stratum. At the Saturday meeting, on Friday evening (the Jewish dates begin with the eve), the whole family gathers at the festive table, the woman lights two candles, the hala (traditional woven bread) is served.

Another important holiday of the annual cycle is Pesach, the festival of Exodus, the feast of liberation from slavery. This holiday has its own rituals, also very persistent. So, the Easter meal - Seder - at least in a simplified and devoid of accented religious spirit way was organized even in the most secular homes.

Moldova in World War II

For the Soviet Union (part of which was the territory of modern Moldova since June 1940), World War II began on June 22, 1941 with the German invasion of the Soviet Union. Bessarabia and Bukovina once again became part of Romania, the land between the Dniester and the Bug rivers was turned into [Transnistria](#) governorate, ruled by the Romanian administration. More than half of the pre-war number of Bessarabian and Bukovinian Jews, about 160,000 people, were killed in the first few weeks of the war, 49 ghettos and concentration camps were created on the territory of [Bessarabia](#) and Transnistria, including the infamous [Bogdanovka](#), where in a few days in December 1941 55 thousand Jews were killed).

The history of [Rybnitsa ghetto](#) lasted two and a half years: from September 7, 1941 to March 29, 1944; very few out of 3,000 of its prisoners survived. Rybnitsa ghetto is related with the story of the Rybnitser Rebe [Khaim-Zamvl Abramovich](#).

The total number of Jews of Moldova (right-bank and left-bank) killed by German Nazis and Romanian fascists, is estimated as 250,000.

About 300,000 people, including Jews, were evacuated or fled on their own from Moldova to the interior parts of the Soviet Union: Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Georgia. Many did not return from the evacuation, where severe conditions, hunger and illnesses sometimes killed no less effectively than bullets. The swiftness of the German invasion in the first weeks of the war prevented the evacuation of the majority of the Jewish population from the areas annexed to the USSR in 1939-1940. Evacuation was also hampered by the fact that the Soviet authorities, who were very suspicious of the inhabitants of the newly annexed territories, frankly obstructed it. According to the official Soviet point of view, the greatest danger was exposed to workers of the Soviet and communist institutions, internal affairs bodies, the family of the Red Army commanders, the Communists. They were given the most reliable means of evacuation. Jews were not included in this list.

In Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina, the deportation of activists of political parties and public organizations, representatives of the big and middle bourgeoisie to the east, began on the eve of the Soviet-German war and continued on inertia and after its beginning. Thousands of Jews were deported to remote areas of Siberia, and this saved them from the Holocaust.

Post-war and Post-Soviet Moldova

After the war, Jewish cultural and religious life in Soviet Moldova was not renewed officially. Many Moldovan Jews suffered during the anti-Semitic campaign in the Soviet Union, culminating in the doctors' case, many Jewish doctors were arrested in the MSSR. According to the 1959 census, there were 95 107 Jews living in Moldova (3.3% of the total population - the highest percentage of Jews in the population of all Soviet republics).

About 50% of Jews continued to call Yiddish their mother tongue. In the late 1950's, persecutions on religious Jews intensified. After 1960, there was only one synagogue in the entire MSSR - in Chisinau. In a number of cities, Jewish cemeteries were closed and often destroyed. The Jews of Moldova are distinguished by a high percentage of people with higher education. For example, according to the 1961-62 academic year, in Moldova there were 1,225 Jewish students (6.4% of the total number of students, higher than the general index for the Soviet Union). In 1966, out of 500 scientists of the Moldavian Academy of

Sciences, 49 (that is about 10%) were Jews. Jews made a significant contribution to the development of culture, science, industry. According to the 1970 census, 98,072 Jews (2.7% of the total population) lived in Moldova.

Moldavia was the only republic in the European part of the Soviet Union where the Jewish population has increased since 1959. The percentage of Jews who called Yiddish their native language (44.6%) declined, but remained one of the highest in the Soviet Union. Since the late 1960's Moldovan Jews played an active role in the struggle for repatriation to Israel, and due to [aliyah](#) to Israel and emigration to other countries, in 1970-1990s the Jewish population of Moldova significantly decreased. However, the Jewish community continues to exist, and Jewish cultural and religious life has become an important part of the existence of the Moldovan society.