Simon Geissbühler, ed.

In the Western European consciousness, the Holocaust represents an undisputed fact, but at the same time one that is untouchable, for to a considerable extent it has become a feature of identity formation. However, it took several decades for the Holocaust to attain this status in the western part of the world, and this required filling hundreds of pages of proof and arguments in order to confirm it.

Meanwhile, not only are the crimes against the Jewish population committed by the German armed forces (SS-troops but also the Wehrmacht) under the National Socialist banner recognized as the Holocaust, but all crimes against Jews that were assisted, i.e. enabled, by the National Socialist regime. It is increasingly certain that the German occupation troops in some countries used the previously accumulated anger and hatred towards Jewish fellow citizens on the part of the majority population by enabling them to ease their frustrations. Probably the most well-known example of a crime attributed to the Germans but not committed by them is the story of Jedwabne. Research by Jan Tomasz Gross considerably altered the understanding of the mass murder of the Jewish population in this Polish town, which coincided with the turn of millennium in the year 2000.

Simon Geissbühler, a Swiss historian and diplomat who spent four years posted in Romania, decided to deal with similar occurrences in this country, quoting the aforementioned study by Gross and also the studies of Jean Ancel, a Romanian-born Israeli author, as the starting point for his research. His stay clearly helped him in his writings, as evidenced by his numerous works on Romania and the history of the Jewry in this region. This book represents a cornerstone in a series of publications on Romanian Jewish history and the Jewish historical heritage in Romania, Bukovina, and in the Republic of Moldova.

The subject of his monograph Bloody July: Romania’s War of Annihilation and the Forgotten Mass Murder of the Jews 1941 is in fact the Romanian collaboration with the Third Reich, as well as the extermination of the Jewish population that had settled in the historic landscape that became Romanian in the period between the two wars – namely, Northern Bukovina and Bessarabia, and that had to be reoccupied after its re-annexation to the Soviet Union in 1940. It is in these regions where the initial phase of the Holocaust on the territory of Romania unfolded. The initial phase of the Holocaust in Romania, according to the author, has to be studied in the context of immanent
Romanian anti-Semitism and as a result of accumulated frustration and hatred in Romanian society against the Jews. The monograph attempts to cover the part of the topography of the Holocaust which to a large extent has not been fully researched, due to the fact that it was self-organized and autonomous of German instruction. The events in question took place during early July 1941 in the period of the interregnum – after the retreat of the Soviets and before the arrival of the German troops on their way to the East, when Romanian troops, on their own or together with the Germans, marched in the forefront against the Soviet Union. Listing the topography of the murders of Jews in the historical area of Northern Bukowina and Bessarabia – from the region around Czernowitz in the Northwest, over Edineti, Suceva, Balti, Iaşi to Odessa on the Black Sea – Simon Geissbühler tries to connect the mass murders of Jews committed in Iaşi with those in Odessa by researching the first phase of the Holocaust in Romania, which was committed mainly by Romanians. This phase has mostly been ignored until today and has not been perceived as a separate part of the atrocities committed against Jews. The author's aim is to point out three theses. The first is a refutation of the Goldhagen Thesis on the uniqueness of the Holocaust due to the immanence of German anti-Semitism. The second one intends to prove that the murders in Iaşi began a series of mass murders that lasted until August 1941. And the third thesis is to show that there was a specifically Romanian Holocaust which, in certain segments, was perceived as too excessive even by the Germans, who were observers for the most part.

In this 150-page volume, the author outlines the subject matter of his research and aims to fill the gap in this important chapter of Romanian history, which was mostly ignored in the main Romanian narrative of World War II even after the fall of the communist regime. Romania, on the victorious side after World War I, was a satellite state from 1940 and an ally of the Third Reich, as which it carried out an intense policy of Romanization in the areas awarded to it. It still seems to be a huge problem in Romanian public opinion to tackle the issue of the Romanian role in the Holocaust because it calls into question its self-definition, ranging from an ally to a state that switched sides by the end of the war. The author makes a great effort to outline the conditions of the period between two wars, which led up to the mass executions in the summer of 1941. Unfortunately, the explanation of the specifically Romanian anti-Semitism could have been more fully developed, e.g. in regard to the former German communities that had lived in this region and were displaced in 1940 (back) to Germany, according to the Molotov-Ribbentrop-Agreement. It is followed by a chapter with a chronological enumeration of the events culminating with the German invasion of the Soviet Union in the summer of 1941. The next