

CITIES AND TOWNS IN MOLDOVA

PAGES FROM THE PAST AND PRESENT

by
Miriam Weiner

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Jews have been living in Moldova (formerly Bessarabia) since the end of the fourteenth century.

The first Jews in Moldova (then Moldavia) were Sephardi. The Ashkenazi came from Poland and Germany in the beginning of the sixteenth century as a result of legislation that restricted their rights. During the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, Moldavia was under a Turkish regime. Then, as a result of petitions from a few Moldavian princes at the end of the eighteenth century, Russia took control of part of the territory of Moldavia. In 1812, Bessarabia (the entire territory between the Dniester and Prut Rivers, including Moldavia) was annexed by Russia as well.

In 1917, Soviet power was proclaimed in the region, but in 1918, Bessarabia became part of Romania. In 1940, Bessarabia was reclaimed by the Soviet Union. The region was occupied by German troops from 1941 until 1944, when the Soviet Army liberated Bessarabia. From then until 1989, Moldova was part of the Soviet Union. In 1989, with the political changes taking place throughout the Soviet Union, Moldova proclaimed its independence.

Moldova is situated in the southwest part of the former Soviet Union, between Ukraine and Romania. The territory covers approximately 13,500 square miles, with a population of about 5 million people. Moldovans consider themselves to be descendants of Romans and, therefore, the official state language is Romanian.

Today, the general population of Moldova is estimated to include about 35,000 to 40,000 Jews. Approximately 20,000 live in Kishinev.

Many travelers are now visiting Moldova in search of their roots, both in visits to ancestral towns and to conduct research in the Moldovan National Archives. The hospitality of the Moldovan people is well known; and, since it is a small country, it is not difficult to visit almost anywhere in the country and then in the evening return to Kishinev, where there are good hotels and an active Jewish community.

This chapter focuses on seven cities and towns in Moldova where the majority of the Jewish population once lived (see maps on the facing page). There are many Jewish and historic sites remaining in these towns and other smaller towns throughout Moldova. The resources described in Chapter 3 (page 51) are also applicable to the town entries in this chapter.



■ A Jewish street in Kishinev, pre-Holocaust

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