

ONE WAY ROAD AT THE 80TH COMMEMORATION OF THE FÂNTÂNA ALBĂ MASSACRE

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Abstract: *This article is a documentary opinion and a gesture of historical restitution on some sad events that the inhabitants of Northern Bukovina, a territory under Soviet occupation at the time, now part of the Ukrainian state, went through. On April 1st, 1941, a large number of Romanians from the region under Soviet occupation tried to cross the border into their homeland, The Kingdom of Romania, considering that the border was imposed illegally and abusively. They were reaped by the Soviet border guards' machine-guns, and this article is dedicated to the memory of these martyrs.*

Keywords: *Massacre, Fântâna Albă Soviet Occupation, Putna Monastery, Ukraine, Northern Bukovina, Hertza*

The Holy Putna Monastery is located just near the border with Ukraine, in Northern Bukovina, only a few kilometres from the site of the Fântâna Albă massacre. At the entrance, facing the monastery, was consecrated on July 2nd, 2018 the *Nation's Golgotha Fântâna Albă Portal*, which includes a monumental gate, a stone triptych, spaces for laying flowers and lighting candles, inscriptions with the names of the villages from where those killed on April 1st, 1941 started their journey, killed just because they wanted to cross the border and enter their country, and a well with fresh and cold water. On April 1st, established by law no. 68/2011, is the National Day honouring the memory of the Romanian victims of the Fântâna Albă massacres and from other areas, victims of the deportations, of the hunger and other forms of repression organized by the totalitarian Soviet regime in Northern Bukovina and Hertza Region.

In 1991, on the 50th commemoration of the Romanians' massacre on the Ukrainian border with Romania, in Varnița glade (Fântâna Albă), the Romanian community in Ukraine organized, for the first time, a memorial service in memory of the Romanians killed here by the Soviet border guards' machine-guns. The monks of Putna Monastery joined the brothers from Northern Bukovina in commemorating the Romanians who were killed in 1941 for their faith and independence. For three decades, the Romanians from Ukraine (Northern Bukovina) and Romania have been meeting every year at Fântâna Albă to commemorate ordinary peasants from Northern Bukovina machine-gunned by the Soviet border guards as they tried to cross the border peacefully into their country, Romania. All these years, Putna Monastery was on their side.

Unfortunately, this year, due to the sanitary restrictions imposed by the pandemic, it was not possible to travel to the place of the massacre, as the monks of the monastery used to do every year, together with some of the Romanian state officials. With the blessing of His Eminence Calinic, Archbishop of Suceava and Rădăuți, at Putna Monastery's Memorial Portal, a memorial service and a commemorative event took place on the 80th commemoration of the massacre. The memorial service for the souls of the Romanians massacred at Fântâna Albă because they wanted to cross the border newly imposed by the Soviet Union was officiated by His Holiness Father Damaschin Dorneanul, vicar-bishop of the Archdiocese of Suceava and Rădăuți. All the Romanians from Northern Bukovina, Hertza and Bessarabia who died in deportations were mentioned. Priests and deacons of the monastery served at the memorial service. In the evening, church bells were rung on both sides of the border.

The abbot of the Monastery, Archimandrite Melchizedek Velnic, mentioned that participating in the commemoration of the Fântâna Albă victims is a moral duty, to remember and learn from them what true love of the homeland means. The abbot used to go to Fântâna Albă every year, on April 1st. This year, he organized the victims' commemoration in Putna, saying that "suffering is given to the chosen ones" and that "God is the One Who held our hand and guided us, as we still feel God's guiding hand (...). We felt that this country is a garden of the Mother of God and that these Carpathians are our cathedral in which we have

taken refuge so many times. And in this cathedral we called the Virgin Mary to help us and we feel Her these days with Her Holy Mercy covering our nation and country". Viorel Badea, senator, Dorin Popescu, former Romanian general consul in Czernowitz attended the commemoration.

On the other side of the border, at the site of the massacre, a council of priests held a memorial service. The Consul General of Romania in Czernowitz, Mrs. Irina Loredana Stănculescu attended the ceremony; Aurica Bojescu, member of the National Council of the *Romanian Community in Ukraine* Interregional Union, and Nicolae Șapcă, vice president of the *Society Romanian Culture and Literature in Bukovina* laid wreaths. At 12.00, in the Northern Bucovina districts of Hlyboka and Storozhynets, memorial services were held for the Bukovina martyrs and the bells rang for 15 minutes in the memory of the approximately 3000 victims of this bloody episode in the Romanian history.

1940-1941, the first years of the Soviet occupation or, as it is written in the falsified history books from Ukraine, of the "liberation" from the Romanian "occupation" meant for the Romanians from Northern Bukovina and Hertza the beginning of a long suffering: massacres, deportations, artificial hunger during the period of collectivization and the displacement of the population in places as far away from the homeland as possible.

Since 1942, journalists began searching for survivors and recording the shocking stories of people who, unable to bear the iniquities of their new masters, demanded permission to retreat to Romania, as the Germans and Poles were allowed to return to their countries. We will not find anything about these events in the history textbooks, but they are part of the history of the Romanians from Bukovina and Bessarabia. No documents related to this event can be found in the archives of Czernowitz. However, the testimonies of the participants in this march of death recorded and published in the press of the time by the Romanian journalists from Czernowitz have remained, documents of inestimable value. A special merit for the restoration of the road to Fântâna Albă belongs to the writers and journalists who, since 1991, attended the commemorations, the conferences dedicated to these events, recording important data from those who survived. Amongst the journalists, we mention Maria Toacă Andrieș and Felicia

Toma, who have published in the newspaper *Zorile Bucovinei*, Dumitru Covalciuc, the tireless editor of the *Țara Fagilor* almanac. In the last decade, several monographs of the villages have appeared in Czernowitz, in which the tragic events were inserted and the names of their martyrs were mentioned. Monuments have been erected in their memory in the villages of Northern Bukovina.

More than 50 years after the Fântâna Albă massacre, the *Golgotha* Society was founded. It received from the Regional Party Committee a certificate from the border guards' archive stating that, on April 1st, 1941, "24 people were killed while trying to cross the border illegally." No one knows the number of those massacred. Each official source indicates a different figure. Thus, in the report of the commander of the border picket from April 1st, 1941, it is written concisely that "force measures were applied," and in Nichita Khrushchev's report to Stalin about the incident on the border with Romania, we read:

"Some of the inhabitants of the nearest villages of Hlyboka district went to the Hlyboka district's centre, asking to be allowed to cross into Romania. The crowd was about a thousand people, mostly men. Around noon on April 1st, the crowd entered Hlyboka, approached the building of the district section of the NKVD, some wore crosses, there was a white flag (this, according to participants in the march, symbolized its peaceful character). There was an inscription on one of the crosses: 'Unite you brethren, these are the crosses that the Red Army soldiers ridiculed.' No weapons were found in the crowd. After the clarifications given to the crowd, near the NKVD district section building, about the illegitimacy of such a gathering in the border area and the crowd was asked to disperse, the crowd disappeared. The head of the State Security Directorate ordered the arrest of the agitators, which was done today. Two days ago, several groups of villagers came with analogous demands to the district executive committee of the Storozhynets border district. We clarified the fact that they were guided by scoundrels and guards (members of the fascist organization 'Iron Guard'). The discovered agitators from Storozhynets district were arrested.

Around 7 pm on April 1st, a crowd of 500-600 people tried to cross the border into Romania in Hlyboka district. The border guards opened fire at them. As a result, about 50 people were killed and injured, the others fled. No one crossed the border.”

The misinformation regarding the bloody events at Fântâna Albă is picked up today by the Ukrainian authorities (Czernowitz State Administration' Department for Culture) who released, just on the eve of the 80th commemoration of the massacre, a video relaunching the information from Nichita Khrushchev's report, stating that the massacre “against the Bukovinians” (it is not mentioned that they were Romanians) was an instigation of the security organs in Romania. The Soviets are not to blame, the culprits are being sought elsewhere. Of course, the publications were not consulted, the testimonies that are reliable documents of the events of the first Soviet years and not even archival materials are not taken into account. The hypocrisy and misinformation launched by the directors of this video, intentionally or unintentionally, justify Moscow's actions and raise many questions, including on the policy of the Ukrainian authorities towards the Romanian community in Ukraine, against Romanian-language schools.

This time as well, Putna Monastery is on the side of the historical truth, which, if even now we do not find it in our history textbooks, we find it in the *Bukovinian Destiny* project. The first volume, *Fântâna Albă, drum fără întoarcere*⁴¹ (Nicodim Caligraful Publishing House, Putna Monastery), was launched at the consecration of the *Nation's Golgotha – Fântâna Albă Portal* on July 2nd, 2018; the second volume, *Drama românilor din regiunea Cernăuți: massacre, deportări, foamete în anii 1940-1941, 1945-1947*⁴², appeared in 2019. The third volume in the series *Destin Bucovinean*, initiated in the Centenary Year by Nicodim Caligraful Publishing House, Monastery Putna, is dedicated to the resistance of the Romanian Church from the north of Bukovina in the Christian faith's worst period – under the Soviet rule, in an atheist state. The coordinator of the volumes is Alexandrina Cernov, honorary member of the Romanian Academy.

⁴¹ *Fântâna Albă, one way road.*

⁴² *The drama of the Romanians from the Czernowitz region: massacres, deportations, famines in the years 1940-1941, 1945-1947.*

These volumes include archive materials, testimonies, excerpts from the periodicals of that time – newspapers and magazines. What was impossible to investigate in the secret archives about the victims of retaliation in the early years of the Soviet power was discovered from the survivors' testimonies. The researches conducted by Putna Monastery try to restore the historical truth.

Alexandrina Cernov (b. November 24, 1943, Hotin, Romania, today in the Czernowitz region, Ukraine) is a literary critic and historian, professor at the University of Czernowitz, and honorary member of the Romanian Academy (since 1992). She is a founding member of the "Mihai Eminescu" Society for Romanian Culture from Czernowitz, founding member and executive director of the "Alexandru cel Bun" Publishing House and Editor-in-chief of the quarterly history and culture magazine Glasul Bucovinei (The Voice of Bukovina). In Romania was awarded the Romanian Cultural Foundation Award, the "150 years since the birth of Mihai Eminescu" Commemorative Medal and the National Order of "Faithful Service" in the rank of Officer.