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Jews in Serbia during World War Two:
Between “the final solution to the Jewish question”
and “the Righteous among Nations”*

Painter and writer Zuko Džumhur described the poignant first service held upon liberation in the only surviving Jewish temple in Belgrade, the Ashkenazi synagogue; the same synagogue that had from the start of the war been turned into a brothel for German soldiers: “In the monstrously ravaged premises of the so long abused temple, I came across a small group of tear ridden and pain stricken women dressed in rags. Among the women there were only two or three older men still disorientated from the enormity of the fears they had lived through. All of them were Belgrade Jews who, with their wives and relatives, had come to attend this solemn memorial service. I stood among them with head bowed thinking of all the horrors all of us, Jews especially, had lived through during those atrocious years of Nazi iniquity and insanity”.¹ These people were rare war survivals who had hidden inside Belgrade. In subsequent months they were reunited with their compatriots who had found shelter in villages and towns in the interior of the country. Together they would attempt to revive the heavily impaired Jewish community which had gone through its worst trials in the 2000 years of its history and existence in these parts.²

During 1941-1945, the four years of war, the Jewish Community in the territory of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia had been exposed to brutal acts of the occupying authorities and local collaborators’ anti-Semitic politics. The number of Jews killed inside the camps in Yugoslavia, or upon deportation to concentration and death camps in the territory of Germany and Poland, amounted to 80% of the Community membership. Together with people of other nationalities, Yugoslav Jews were also murdered as hostages by firing squads in places of execution. Of the total of 82.000 Jews who lived in Yugoslavia at the start of World War Two only 15.000 managed to survive the war by hiding, changing their identity, or escaping from one occupied zone to

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² *Zločini fašističkih okupatora i njihovih pomagača protiv Jevreja u Jugoslaviji.*, editor Dr Zdenko Levental, Beograd 1952, XIX.

another. In relation to their percentage in the total Yugoslav population, a significant number of Jews (4.572) joined the Partisan resistance and fought in units of the Yugoslav Liberation Army.³ There were also men survivors who spent the years of war in POW camps⁴ as officers and soldiers of the Yugoslav army. A similar fate was shared by those members of the Jewish community who were detained in internment camps in Italian territories. The number of those who managed to get to one of Europe's neutral states, or from there reach even farther (and safer) overseas destinations, was very small. The cold "language of numbers" speaks for itself about the scope of the slaughter of Jews in Serbia. Thus only 1.115 members of the Belgrade Jewish Community, amounting to approximately 16% of its prewar count (a total of 11.870), survived the war.⁵ Other Jewish communities in the interior of Serbia and in the region of Banat were exterminated to the last. All that is left of them are overgrown graveyards and the memories of some of their fellow citizens who speak "of their neighbours that are no more".

Jews in Serbia and Yugoslavia up to 1941

According to a number of assessments some 82.000 Jews lived in Yugoslavia prior to World War Two.⁶ Inside the territory of Serbia (i.e., its contemporary boundaries) up to World War Two there were 30.000 Jewish inhabitants, i.e., 40% of the total Jewish population living in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia.⁷ Ashkenazi Jews were predominant in the territory of Vojvodina while in regions south of the rivers Sava and Danube the majority of Jewish inhabitants were Sephardim Jews by tradition. From the mid nineteenth century, Ashkenazi Jews, mostly from Austro-Hungarian countries, began to settle in Serbia. Acts of anti-Semitism were not an unfamiliar event in the Principedom and Kingdom of Serbia. However, despite occasional incidents and adverse situations (arising mostly from the pressure of the newly established domestic class of traders who looked on Jews as fierce competitors in the domestic market), they were marginal group events. Full civic equality was granted to Jews by the decisions of the Berlin Congress; however, they were put into

³ Jaša Romano, *Jevreji Jugoslavije 1941-1945. Žrtve genocida i učesnici NOR*, Beograd 1980, p.14, p.84, pp. 201-202, pp. 302-306

⁴ On Jews, officers and soldiers of the Yugoslav army interred in German POW camps see: Jennie Lebl, *Jevreji iz Jugoslavije ratni zarobljenici u Nemačkoj. Spomen.album, pola veka od oslobođenja 1945-1995-A Memorial of Yugoslavian Jewish Prisoners of War - Half a century after Liberation 1945-1995*, Tel Aviv, 1995.

⁵ Ž. Lebl, *Do „konačnog rešenja“*. *Jevreji u Beogradu 1521-1942*, pp. 333

⁶ The last census carried out in Kingdom Yugoslavia in 1931 recorded 68.405 Jews living in the country. Approximations of the actual number of Jews in the territories of Yugoslavia range from 70.000 to over 82. 000; Jaša Romano, *Jevreji Jugoslavije 1941-1945.*, p.14, p. 84, pp. 201-202; Holm Sundhaussen, *Jugoslawien*, in: *Dimension des Völkermords. Die Zahl der jüdischen Opfer des Nationalsozialismus*, Wolfgan Benz (hrgb.), München 1991, p.312, p.330; Nebojša Popović, *Jevreji i Srbiji 1918-1941*, Beograd 1997, p.195, p.196

⁷ Milan Koljanin, „Tokovi 'konačnog rešenja jevrejskog pitanja' u Jugoslaviji“, in: *Seminar o holokaustu*, Zbornik radova, Novi Sad 2009, pp. 47-48

practice later, in 1888. Jewish integration into the major comprehensive surroundings to which the Jewish community, despite its small numbers, gave important economical and cultural input, would be significantly intensified from the end of the nineteenth century right up to the beginning of World War One.⁸

New circumstances, subsequent to 1918, and the founding of the new Yugoslav state came with a myriad of different collective historical experiences of its population. Such was also the case of Jewish communities from territories which comprised the new state; on many points, they differed from one another. Social equality of the new state's population, despite certain intimations perceived in the second half of the thirties that spoke to the contrary, was not critically impaired up to October 1940. It was only then that, German pressure from outside and the growing of anti-Semitic tendencies among the Yugoslav public⁹, the Government adopted a regulation introducing *numerus clausus* for Jewish pupils and students, and a second regulation on measures regarding Jewish engagement in businesses dealing in human nutrition articles. These regulations seriously impaired Jewish civic equality and at the same time marked the "general trend" of anti-Semitic politics which, spreading from its ideological centre, Nazi Germany, gained supremacy throughout most of Europe; they also intimated the future fatal measures¹⁰ that stood in wait for the Jewish population of Yugoslavia and Serbia.

During the period of 1933 -1941 approximately 55.500 Jewish refugees from Central Europe passed over the territory of Yugoslavia. Approximately 40,000 Jews entered Yugoslavia between

⁸N. Popović, *Jevreji u Srbiji*, pp.11-24

⁹ One such example would be *Jugoslovenski narodni pokret "Zbor"* whose leader was Dimitrije Ljotić, or the Croat Ustashi movement, whose activity during World War Two demonstrates the fact. On Ljotić see: Mladen Stefanović, *Zbor Dimitrija Ljotića 1934-1945*, Beograd 1984; On the Ustashi movement and the ISC see: Ladislav Hory-Martin Broszat, *Der Kroatische Ustascha-Staat 1941-1945*, Stuttgart, 1964; Gerd Fricke, *Kroatien 1941-1945. Der «USK» in der Sicht des deutschen Bevollmächtigten Generals in Agram Gleise von Horstenau*, Freiburg, 1972; Fikreta Jelić-Butić, *Ustaše i Nezavisna Država Hrvatska 1941-1945*, Zagreb 1977; Holm Sundhausen, *Wirtschaftsgeschichte Kroatiens im nationalsozialistischen Grossraum 1941-1945. Das Scheitern einer Ausbeutungsstrategie*, Stuttgart, 1983

¹⁰The chief spokesman and creator of anti-Jewish regulations was Dr Anton Korošec, Minister of education (and former Minister of Interior), a catholic priest and leader of Slovenian clerical National Party. Although some members of the government were opposed of these regulations they did not vote against their enforcement so as not to "stir matters up"; Mihajlo Konstantinović, *Politika sporazuma. Dnevničke beleške 1939-1941. Londonske beleške 1944-1945*, Novi Sad 1998, p.176, p.181, pp. 184 -190 More on the subject in: Милан Кољанин, *Јевреји и антисемитизам у Краљевини Југославији 1918-1941*, Београд 2008, pp. 404-462. M. Konstantinović was Minister of Justice in the Cvetković-Maček government which signed the accession to the Tripartite pact on March 25, 1941. Two days later the military backed by the bulk of the populace, especially in Serbia brought down the government which Hitler saw as a personal offense and issued the order to attack Yugoslavia. On this see: Martin van Creveld, *Hitler's Strategy 1940-1941 The Balkan Clue*, London, New York, 1973, pp. 139-177

1938 and 1940.¹¹ The arrival of Jews in masses was an added incentive for the Yugoslav government to bring directives to prohibit their entry and stopover in the country, and enforce the 1940 anti-Jewish regulations.¹² Although aided by the International Jewish Organization, their upkeep was too exorbitant for the relatively small community of Yugoslav Jews, who nevertheless, showed enormous solidarity and sacrifice in their relief endeavor. Refugee camps were set up in Serbia - in Niška Banja (160 persons), in Kuršumlijska Banja (380 persons). The largest camp was in Šabac on the river Sava where the stranded travelers of the “Kladovo transport”, 1,210 immigrants to Palestine from Austria, Germany and Czechoslovakia, were placed. Their journey down the Danube was stopped in October 1939 when, in addition to British government pressure to put a stop to further immigration into the Palestine coupled with the overall deteriorating situation caused by the beginning of war, the Romanian authorities banned further travel down river. The refugees were transferred from Kladovo to Šabac after its mayor indicated that the city would see to the accommodation of the exiles. The expense for providing such accommodation, i.e., their board and lodging, was borne by the Yugoslav Jewish Community devotedly. The Community’s leadership made unsuccessful attempts to persuade international Jewish organizations to intervene and secure the further progress of their journey. The destiny of the “Kladovo transport” was by far more tragic than that of the much noted destiny of the “St. Louis” ship, which ended in the death of 1,050 Jews¹³ at the beginning of the German occupation. During the Holocaust some 3,000 to 5,000 Jewish refugees perished inside the territory of Yugoslavia.¹⁴

Certain specifics of the Holocaust in Serbia

Among the specifics regarding the overall tragedy of Jews in Serbia (although one might doubtlessly say that each individual case, i.e., each country where Jewish citizens were

¹¹ 11. Harriet Pass Freidenreich, *The Jews of Yugoslavia. A Quest for Community*, Philadelphia, 1978, 180; *Pinkas jevrejskih opština Jugoslavije. Enciklopedija jevrejskih naselja od osnivanja do posle holokausta u Drugom svetskom ratu* (the manuscript of Serbian translation), Yad Vashem-Memorijalna ustanova za holokaust i herojstvo, Jerusalem, 5748-1988, pp. 496-498; Ženi Lebl, *Do «konačnog rešenja». Jevreji u Srbiji*, Beograd, 2002, p. 238

¹² 12. On Jewish refugees in Yugoslavia up to 1941 see: Milan Ristović, «Jugoslavija i jevrejske izbeglice 1938-1941», *Istorija 20. veka*, 1, 1996: same author, *У поштрази за уточништем. Југословенски Јевреји у бекству од холокауста 1941-1945*, Београд 1998. pp. 23-64

¹³ 13. Mara Jovanović, «Wir packen, wir auspacken...» in : *Zbornik jevrejskog istorijskog muzeja*, No. 4, Beograd, 1979, pp. 246-174; Gabriele Anderl/Walter Manoschek, *Gescheiterte Flucht. Der juedische «Kladovo-Transport» auf der Weg nach Palestina 1939-1942*, Vienna, 1993

¹⁴ 14. *Albert Vajs, 1905-1964. Spomenica*, Beograd, 1965, p.127. Victims of the “Kladovo transport” should be included in the number.

exterminated in mass in the framework of the Nazi plan “of the final solution to the Jewish question” could lay claim to *specific circumstances*), one element was the horrific efficiency and the exceedingly short time period in which the greater part of Jewish victims perished. At the time of the conference of Nazi officials, organized by the Chief of Security police and SD, Reinhard Heydrich held on Berlin lake Wann (the Wannseeconference) in January 1942, when the planned strategy and coordination of various divisions of the Nazi mechanism in the intensification of the “final solution”¹⁵ were discussed, the very same issue was in its final stage in occupied Serbia. By then, systematic mass slaughter by firing squad in places of execution, - which were not carried out by SS or operational groups (Einsatzgruppen) as in the case of the majority of occupied European countries, but by Wehrmacht units, -wiped out nearly all the adult male Jewish population of Banat and central Serbia (over 5.000); by the beginning of May 1942, women and children interred in the *Judenlager Semlin* (Jewish Camp Zemun, Sajmište) camp were all murdered in a specially equipped gas-chamber vehicle sent to Belgrade¹⁶ for this purpose.

Beside mass atrocities against the Serbian population by Wehrmacht units, their leading role in killing Jews marked the Holocaust in Serbia. In the initial executions of large groups of hostages, the greater part of victims were apprehended Jews. As one researcher of Nazi atrocities carried out in Serbia during World War Two (V. Glišić) noticed, the executioners and their superiors paid no heed to the fact that the Jewish hostages as well as the greater part of Serbian citizens executed during 1941-42 “in reprisal” for Resistance movement actions, had absolutely nothing in common with either the Partisan movement or that of the Chetniks. When it came to Jewish citizens, the sole aim was their physical elimination as conceived by the “general politics” of the Nazi regime. Naturally, the additional intimidating effect of such acts on the Serbian majority, also exposed to mass killing, was counted on.¹⁷

As Christopher R. Browning pointed out, the annihilation of the Jewish community in Serbia came at the outset of the “final solution” in Europe; the first mass execution of Serbian Jews in the autumn of 1941 took place a few days before the planned deportation of German Jews.

¹⁵ Peter Longerich (Hrsg.), *Der Ermordung der europäischen Juden. Eine umfassende Dokumentation des Holocaust 1941-1945*, Serie Piper, München-Zürich, 1989, p. 69

¹⁶ *Zločini fašističkih okupatora*, p.15, p. 31

¹⁷ Венцеслав Глишић, Терор и злочини нацистичке Немачке у Србији 1941-1944 (Terror and Crimes of Nazi Germany in Serbia 1941-1944), Београд, 1970; Walter Manoschek, 'Serbien ist judenfrei. Militärische Besatzungspolitik und Judenvernichtung in Serbien 1941-42, München, 1993; Hannes Herr und Klaus Naumann (Hg.), *Vernichtungskrieg: Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941 bis 1944*, Hamburg, 1995; Christofer Browning, *The Fateful Months. Essay on the Emergency of the Final Solution*, New York, 1985; Ženi Lebl, *Do” konačnog rešenja”*. Jevreji u Beogradu 1941-1942, Beograd, 2001, pp. 287-338

Further, the murder of Jewish women and children by exhaust gases inside gas trucks was already completed by the beginning of May 1942, "... before the gas chambers in Sobibor were put into operation."¹⁸

Apart from the observance of "general guidelines" under which the extermination of the Jewish population functioned in the framework of "the new European order", the defining specifics already mentioned were the product of complex local circumstances: primarily, the tearing up of Serbia (within its current boundaries-MR) into occupied zones and annexed territories; secondly, the eruption of a mass guerilla uprising in Serbia in the summer of 1941 which resulted in widespread military campaigns of German occupying forces and their allies intended to suppress mounting resistance, and thirdly, the ensuing brutal reprisal measures against the civilian population, including camp detention and mass executions by firing squad of "hostages" with Jews regularly placed in line to the fore, until the moment this "source" simply petered out. Furthermore, contrary to the destiny of victims in the best part of European countries, the majority of Jews in Serbia did not perish inside Nazi "death factories" in Germany and Poland but were murdered only tens of kilometers, sometimes even less, from their homes (execution sites in Jajinci, Pančevački rit, Banjica, Sajmište...). In January 1942 during the Novi Sad "raid" and in other places in south Bačka, Jews were even killed in their own homes. However, it should be noted that everything that was happening in the territory of Serbia under German occupation, the mass crimes against the civilian population, Jews included, was by "methodology" and goals achieved, akin to circumstances and events taking place in the East of Europe and was integrated into the Nazi "general plan" to eradicate the Jewish population of Europe.¹⁹

The general framework of the Holocaust in Serbia

In order to better understand the circumstances of each survivor's life story and how Jews stayed alive, with the help of their cohabitants of different nationalities and religious beliefs - frequently completely unknown to them up to the moment when, risking their own lives and the wellbeing of their families, they gave shelter to Jewish escapees, - one must point to the extremely complex circumstances brought on by the division of Yugoslavia (and Serbia) and, in its aftermath,

¹⁸ Kristofer Brauning (Christopher R. Browning), «Konačno rešenje u Srbiji-Judenlager na Sajmištu-Studija slučaja», Zbornik Jevrejskog istorijskog muzeja-Beograd, Beograd 1992, p. 407.

¹⁹ See: Christian Streit, «Wehrmacht, Einsatzgruppen, Soviet POWS and Anti-Bolshevism in the Emergence of the Final Solution», in: David Cesarani (Ed.), *The Final Solution. Origins and Implementation*, London and New York, 1994, pp. 103-118

the annexation and formation of a series of occupying and collaborationist regimes that had direct bearing on the destiny of Jewish communities living within the territories, exposing them to a wide range of anti-Semitic politics and outright genocide with tragic consequences for the majority of Yugoslav Jews.

The general scene on which the drama of Jews in Serbia and their Serbian compatriots took place was a result of a tangible convoluted enemy division of Yugoslavia and Serbia. The basis for such a division of Yugoslav and Serbian territories were Hitler's guidelines of March 27, built-in and concentrated in the *Generalplan zur späteren Verwaltung des jugoslawischen Gebietes* (*The general plan for governing Yugoslav regions*) dated April 6, 1941 and the *Vorläufigen Richtlinien für die Aufteilung Jugoslawiens* (*Provisional guidelines for the division of Yugoslavia*). At the Vienna conference of representatives of Axis forces, held on April 21 and 22, 1941, the official division of territorial spoils of war was approved.²⁰ Already on April 10, 1941 as German troops entered into Zagreb, members of the Croatian Fascist Ustashi movement inaugurated the Independent State of Croatia. Apart from Croatia, the inclusion of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the eastern part of Srem, as well as a part of Sandžak and Montenegro, was envisaged inside the boundaries of the newly founded state.²¹

The territory of Serbia was reduced to its pre 1912 borders, approximately 51.000 square kilometers and a population of 3,8 million citizens. It was placed under direct German military occupation authority, with a complex and numerous organizational apparatus headed by the Commander of Military Administration; later the Bevollmächtigter Kommandirender General in Serbien - Official commanding general for Serbia. Serbia was divided into four *Feldkommandatur*. East Srem with Zemun was handed over to ISC in autumn 1941.²² Parts of southeast Serbia (with the towns of Pirot and Vranje), as well as a part of east Kosovo, were annexed by Bulgaria; Bačka

²⁰ On the division of Yugoslav territory see: Ferdo Čulinović, *Okupatorska podjela Jugoslavije*, Beograd 1970; Klaus Olshausen, *Die deutsche Politik gegenüber Jugoslawien und Griechenland von März bis Juli 1941*, DVA, Stuttgart, 1973, pp. 153- 256

²¹ Fikreta Jelić-Butić, *Ustaše Nezavisna Država Hrvatska 1941-1945*. Zagreb 1977, pp. 69-96

²² First appointed to the post was Luftwaffengeneral Helmut Forster replaced later in June 1941 by General Ludwig von Schroder. Upon his death in the summer of the same year air force General Danckelmann took over the post. In the second half of September 1941 he stepped down from duty and General Franz Bohme took over the post. In course he was replaced by General Bader in December 1941. On the occupation authorities in Serbia see: F. Čulinović, *Okupatorska podjela*, pp. 378-394.; D. G. Erpenbeck, *Serbien 1941. Deutsche Militäerverwaltung und Serbischer Widerstand*, Studien zur Militargeschichtliche, Militarwissenschaft und Konfliktforschung, Osnabruck, 1976; C. Browning, „Harald Turner und dei Militärverwaltung in Serbien 1941-1942“, In: D. Rebenitsch; K. Treppe (Hg.): *Verwaltung kontra Menschenführung im Staat Hitlers*. Goettingen 1986, pp. 315-373

was occupied and then annexed by Horthy's Hungary, while the remaining part of Kosovo and Metohija, with a part of Sandžak (the Raška region), was included in the Italian protectorate of "Great Albania".²³

Once implemented, the map of enemy division of Yugoslav territory and that of Serbia had substantial bearing on the varied "nuances" of anti-Jewish politics and the practice employed by each newly instated regime. It ranged from the monstrous, systematic and planned implementation of the procedure of physical extinction of the Jewish population (as part of the general European Nazi politics of "the final solution to the Jewish question"), as was the practice applied by German occupying authorities in Serbia, to the brutal Ustashi anti-Jewish politics of extinction linked to the pivot "programme resolution" of the Ustashi ideology – the extinction of the Serbian population under Ustashi authority. Next within this range came various phases and methods applied by Hungarian and Bulgarian authorities in certain parts of the occupied and annexed territory followed by the somewhat milder politics of the Italian authorities, which allowed those who reached the Italian occupying zone or Italy, to await the end of the war, liberation and the likelihood of survival in comparatively safer circumstances. The difference in the degree of "efficiency" and consistency of the implementation of anti-Semitic politics provided "gaps" in the complex system of extinction and repressive politics, which, although slight, offered the faintest chance for those who had a better insight into the situation, more audacity and determination, funds or connections, or simply more luck and stronger survival instincts to – despite all odds – "squeeze" through them and survive. In the territory of Serbia under German occupation and the territory of the Ustashi ISC the odds of survival were minuscule.

To this depiction of the complexity of the state of affairs in Serbia one must also add an exceedingly important element – the magnitude of both passive and active resistance of its citizens, which, in its essence, was polycentric with two politically and ideologically opposed Resistance movements, the Partisan (People's Liberation Movement) led by Communists, and the Royalist Chetnik movement (Yugoslav Home Army). Their initial cooperation in the mass uprising, instigated in the summer of 1941, upheld by the whole of Serbia was practically almost immediately turned into open civil war. The widespread liberation battles and actions against the enemy in towns in Serbia during 1941 greatly affected the destiny of Jews since they were

²³ Čulinović, dtto.

amongst the first victims of the German instated practice –execution of hostages as a form of reprisal.²⁴

The Holocaust in Serbia: executioners and their collaborators

The history of the Holocaust in occupied Yugoslavia, thus also Serbia, must be regarded as an episode of the destructive wave that spread over Europe. The Holocaust in territories of Yugoslavia took place alongside other destructive genocidal politics against the local population (above all the Serbian population in almost all occupied territories: in the ISC, in regions under Hungarian and Bulgarian occupation, inside Kosovo - which became part of “Great Albanian” state -, as well as in Serbia itself under German occupying authority), in the background of mass Resistance movements that ignited an ideological civil war and inter-ethnic battles.

Already at the time of the short lived “April 1941 war”, Jews in Serbia were exposed to the brunt of German occupying forces. On entering Belgrade and other towns in Serbia, the occupying forces and their soldiers began to plunder Jewish stores and other property with the help of the domestic German minority.²⁵ In the spring of 1941, the occupying forces in Serbia immediately initiated the passing of a series of anti-Jewish regulations; alongside the obligatory “registration” of Jews, the wearing of the yellow arm band, “Arianization” of Jewish real estate was set in motion by placing “commissars” inside Jewish establishments who, in many cases, were once again *volksdeutsche*. In Srem, *volksdeutsche* competitors for the “post” were members of the Ustashi movement. The initial measures were soon supplemented by new ones limiting living conditions for Jews in Serbia to the extreme.²⁶

An order by which Jews were obliged to register with the City protection police on April 19th was issued by the Chief of Operative Police security and the Security Services (*Chef der Einsatzgruppe der Sipo und des SD*) Dr. Wilhelm Fuchs as early as April 16, 1941. Violation of

²⁴ On this see: W. Manoschek, «Serbien ist judenfrei», pp. 155-168; W. Manoschek, «Gehst mit Juden erschossen?» Die Vernichtung der Juden in Serbien». In: Hannes Heer – Klaus Naumann (Hg.), *Vernichtungskrieg Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941-1944*, Hamburg, 2. Aufl., 1995, pp. 39-56; W. Manoschek - Hans Safrian, «717./117. ID. Eine Infanterie-Division auf dem Balkan», u: Hannes Heer / Klaus Neumann (Hg.), *Vernichtungskrieg: Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941 - 1944*, Hamburg, 1995, In: *Vernichtungskrieg...*, pp. 359-365

²⁵ *Zločini fašističkih okupatora*, .1, 2.

²⁶ Бранислав Божовић, *Специјална полиција у Београду 1941-1944*, Београд 2003, pp. 40-43

the order carried punishment by death.²⁷ The brief phase of anti-Jewish terror lacking in organization (referred to by W. Manoschek as “uncoordinated”) was quickly reaching its “organized” stage.²⁸ The first days of occupation saw the formation of the *Einsatzgruppe der Sicherheitspolizei und des Sicherchestdienst* (EG Sipo und SD), with its IV department – GESTAPO – inside which, in keeping with established practice, the *Judenreferat* (IV D4)²⁹, was established. A special *Commissariat for Jews* was also instated.³⁰ After banning all Jewish organizations, the German authorities founded a *Custodian Office for the Jewish Community in Belgrade*. Its projected role was a form of *Judenrat*. Barely any traces of its short lived operation exist.³¹

By April 19 the occupying forces formed a special “Jewish police” inside the Belgrade City Administration, as a branch of their own Special Police supervised by a German commissioner responsible directly to the GESTAPO officer for Jewish issues. Soon mass arrests began as an introduction to the ensuing measures of organized mass executions.³²

Action taken to eradicate Serbian Jews was organized in three phases. In the period from April to August 1941, registration and marking of Jews with yellow bands was carried out with the help of domestic collaborationist authorities. Registration of Jewish inhabitants inside the capital lasted three days and totaled approximately 8.500 individuals. In June 1941 out of approximately 12.000 Jewish people that had lived in Belgrade up to the war, the final list of registered Jews counted 9.145 names. The remaining 3.000 never responded to the German order to register and went into hiding inside the city or sought shelter by escaping to the interior of Serbia or territories beyond German authority.³³

²⁷ *Zločini fašističkih okupatora*, .1-2: Milan Koljanin, *Nemački logor na Beogradskom sajmištu 1941 - 1944*, Beograd, 1992, p. 23; Walter Manoschek, *"Serbien ist judenfrei". Militärische Besatzungspolitik und Judenvernichtung in Serbien 1941-42*, München, 1993, p. 35

²⁸ Walter Manoschek, "Gehst mit Juden erschossen?". Die Vernichtung der Juden in Serbien, in: Hannes Heer / Klaus Neumann (Hg.), *Vernichtungskrieg: Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941 - 1944*, Hamburg, 1995, p. 39

²⁹ Signatories of instructions against Belgrade Jews were Chief of SS Operation Command Major K.L. Kraus and his deputy SS-major Karl Hinze, head of Belgrade GESTAPO.

³⁰ The first commissar was Oto Winzent (real name Franz Riegler), later replaced by Egon Sabukoschek; Ženi Lebl, *Do „konačnog rešenja“: Jevreji u Beogradu 1941-1942*, Beograd, 2001, pp. 289-291

³¹ Ditto, p.306, p.307. Germans delegated Benjamin Flajšer as head of this body, due to infirmity he was subsequently replaced by Emil Dajč.

³² 16.700 Jews lived in the territories of Serbia occupied by Germans, including Banat 1941. On Holocaust in occupied Serbia see: Crimes of the Fascist Occupants and their Collaborators Against the Jews in Yugoslavia, Belgrade 1957; Christopher R. Browning, *Fateful Months Essays on the Emergence of the Final Solution* (revised Edit.), New York-London, 1991; Walter Manoschek, "Serbien ist judenrein".....Holm Sundhaussen, Jugoslawien, in W. Benz (Hrg.)"Dimension des Völkermords. Die Zahl der jüdischen Opfer des nationalsozialismus, München 1991, pp.325-326

³³ *Zločini fašističkih...p.2.*

In presenting a detailed systematization of all measures introduced by German occupying authorities in Serbia (including Banat and Sandžak), J. Romano lists them into three groups: “a) Measures to destroy Jews economically including looting and demolition of Jewish cultural and historical values; b) Measures for mental impediment ...; c) Measures for physical extinction of Jews - genocide”.³⁴

The forgoing activities of occupation authorities and the engagement of domestic police forces placed under German command (the formation of the *Jewish police* as a division of the *Special police*)³⁵, was a sinister intimation of the fast approaching physical annihilation of Serbian Jews by occupying forces. At the beginning of May, the German military commander for Serbia issued an order for blocking and seizure of all Jewish holdings, accounts and other valuables deposited in banks while at the end of the same month by “Order No. 7” the military commander proclaimed the obligatory registration of Jewish property and appropriation of Jewish shops in the territory of Serbia, Banat and Sandžak with commissars taking charge (in Serbia and Banat the commissars were mainly recruited from *volksdeutsche*s where as in Novi Pazar from the ranks of Muslim citizens); furthermore, the Jewish Community was burdened with a high rate of contributions.³⁶

An additional “legal regulatory measure” was implemented by the passing of the “Regulation pertaining to Jews and Gypsies”, dated May 31, 1941. By the said Regulation German military authorities publicly proclaimed persons who, in accordance with the “principles” determined by Nuremberg racial laws, were to be considered as Jews and ordered to register and be marked as such; also to be forbidden employment in all public services and trades, banned entry into public places, forbidden to use public means of transportation and to be stripped of almost all possessions. They were furthermore compelled to forced labour duty which was obligatory for men 14 to 60 years of age and women from 14 to 40 years of age.³⁷ As justly noted, the May 31, 1941 Regulation was “a sort of codification of all anti-Jewish measures decreed by then and

³⁴ Jaša Romano, *Jevreji Jugoslavije 1941-1945. Źrtve genocida i učesnici Narodnooslobodilačkog rata* (next: *Jevreji Jugoslavije*), Beograd, 1980, p.59, p.61

³⁵ The full name was Belgrade City’s Administration Special Police Division, Department for Jews. Its commissioner was Jovan-Joca Nikolić. JIM, Branislav Božović, *Jevrejska policija Odeljenja Specijalne policije u Beogradu*, 2001-2 (manuscript).

³⁶ J. Romano, pp. 62 - 65; *Zločini fašističkih...*, pp. 46 - 51.

³⁷ *Zločini fašističkih...*, p. 7.

intended to “legalize” all such ongoing persecution, as well as to publicize that Jews were a baser class of people whose defamation would not be penalized.”³⁸

Jews in Banat (approximately 4200)³⁹ shared a similar destiny in the first days of war; the major part of looting of their possessions, arrests and maltreatment, coupled with unavoidable physical abuse and degradation, was carried out by their neighbours, *volksdeutsche*s. The Jewish community in Banat was the first to experience almost total physical annihilation.⁴⁰ Jews of Banat, together with their Serbian cohabitants, were among the first victims of German occupation formations and their *volksdeutscher* collaborators. Such was the case of hangings and firing squad executions in the Pančevo Serbian Orthodox cemetery in April 1941. In an operation headed by the GESTAPO and aided by members of the *volksdeutsche*s *Deutsche Mannschafta* and German civilian population, Jews of Banat were arrested and transferred to Belgrade by the end of summer 1941. Men were imprisoned in the former artillery hangars («Topovske šupe» -Artillery Baracs) turned into a camp, together with Belgrade fellow sufferers, while women and children were taken to the Jewish camp at Sajmište.⁴¹

The first arrest of hostages was carried out in Belgrade on April 22, while the proclamation of Commander-in-Chief of the German 2nd army, Maximilian von Weichs, regarding execution of persons caught carrying weapons or wearing the uniform of the Yugoslav army, was publicized on April 28. The proclamation contained an announcement that in retaliation to an attack in which a few German soldiers had lost their lives, 100 hostages had been shot, “...Serbs from all ranks of society”. Future sanction for each wounded German soldier “would result in the execution of 100 Serbs”⁴² ⁴⁰. From August to November 1941, occupation forces rounded up adult Jewish males and imprisoned them in the improvised camp “Topovske šupe” where the Jews from Banat were also kept. The camp was the main “reservoir” of hostages to be shot. Thus in autumn

³⁸ *Zločini fašističkih...*, p. 7.

³⁹ J. Romano., p. 14; Holm Sundhausen, „Die Zahl der jüdischen Opfer des Nationalsozialismus“; in: *Dimension des Volkermords...*, p. 313.

⁴⁰ J. Romano, n.d., 63; *Zločini fašističkih...*, pp. 9-15; B. Ivković, „Uništenje Jevreja i pljačka njihove imovine u Banatu 1941 – 1944“, in: *Tokovi revolucije I*, Beograd, 1967; Karl-Heinz Schlarp, *Wirtschaft und Besatzung in Serbien 1941- 1944. Ein Beitrag zur nationalsozialistischen Wirtschaftspolitik in Südosteuropa*, Stuttgart, 1986, pp. 294-302.

⁴¹ In some places in Banat arrests were made by members of *volksdeutsche* organizations before the GESTAPO took over.

⁴² Branislav Božović, *Beograd pod Komesarskom upravom 1941*, Beograd, 1998, p. 36, p. 37. The subsequent quota was determined by the Chief Commander of military administration general Franz Bohme following Hitler’s orders; from mid September 1941, for each wounded German soldier 50 hostages were executed for each dead German 100 hostages. Manfred Messerschmidt, „Rassistische Motivation bei der Bekämpfung des Widerstandes in Serbien“ in: *Fascismus und Rassismus. Kontraversen um Ideologien und Opfer*; Hrsg. Von W. Röhr u.a. Berlin 1992, p. 322, p. 323

of 1941, each act of intensified Partisan and Chetnik unit's warfare was penalized by mass executions carried out by Wehrmacht units.⁴³

In the aftermath of the subversive act of seventeen year old Elijas Almosino when he attacked a German truck on July 25, 1941, 122 Jewish hostages were shot.⁴⁴ Once the concept to transfer Jews from Serbia and concentrate them somewhere in Poland or Romania, preferably an island in the Danube delta, had been abandoned in September 1941, the occupation authorities concluded that the "Jewish question" in Serbia should be treated radically and swiftly within its own territory. On the very day of the appointment of the new German Commander-in-Chief Bohme, (Bevöllmächtigter Kommandirender General in Serbien, Franz Bohme) the head of the OKW Field Marshal Keitel issued an order by which hostages were to be executed in a ratio of 100 to 1 for each killed, and 50 to 1 for each wounded German thus legalizing the practice already in process.⁴⁵

The chief of the German civilian administration, Turner, (Harald Turner, der Chef der Militarverwaltung in Serbien, SS-Gruppenführer der Chef der Militarverwaltung in Serbien) explained how mass executions by firing squad had a double purpose: "retaliation" for rebel actions against German authority, and a quick elimination of Serbian Jews, passing on "responsibility" for mass crimes against Jews to the Resistance movement. Inclusion of Jews in the "quota" 100 to 1 (a hundred Serbian hostages for each killed member of the German occupation authority) was explained how "...they, too, were in fact Serbian citizens and must also be dealt with to extinction".⁴⁶ In these mass executions of civilians, according to certain approximations, some 5000 Jews above the age of 14 were shot. Thus at the beginning of November "...there were almost no living male Jews and Roma who could be used as hostages".⁴⁷

⁴³ Thus, for instance in the vicinity of Šabac on September 12 and 13 approximately 400 Jewish men natives of Yugoslavia, Jewish refugees and some 160 Roma were shot; on October 7 soldiers of the 717 Wehrmacht infantry division executed 1,800 civilians in Kraljevo, on October 21 in Kragujevac 2,300 civilian hostages were slain; in Šabac and its vicinity the 1. Kompanie. des Polizei Reserve Battalion. 64 executed 1000 individuals in the Šabac prison, while in its "cleaning" actions the 342 infantry division under generala Hinghofer command executed 2,200 civilians. Within the short period from beginning of August 1941 to mid February 1942 the number of civilian hostages executed in Serbia reached 20,149; Manfred Meserschmidt, p. 326; W. Manoschek „Serbien ist judenfrei...“, p.78, p.79; Milan Koljanin, *Nemački logor na Beogradskom Sajmištu 1941-1944*, ISI, Beograd, 1992, pp. 38-39

⁴⁴ *Zločini fašističkih...*, 8; Ž. Lebl, *Do konačnog rešenja...*, p.

⁴⁵ M. Meserschmit,, dtto.

⁴⁶ Die Ermordung, p. 276, p.287, doc. 119, Brief des Chefs der Ziwilverwaltung in Serbien, Turner, an den SS-Gruppenführer Hildebrandt: Judenerschiessung in Serbien, 17. 10. 1941.

⁴⁷ M. Koljanin,, 39.

In the first half of December, the rounding up and imprisonment of primarily Jewish women and children in the newly established *Judenlager Semlin* was put into effect. A special vehicle-gas chamber had been sent for their obliteration. From March to the beginning of May 1942, all of them were put to death.⁴⁸ This precisely planned operation implemented by the German occupation authorities resulted in the fact that sometime later in August 1942 Haral Turner could inform the Commander of the South-East General Lohr, (A. Lohr, Wehrmachtbefelshaber Südost) that "...the Jewish question, as well as that of Gypsies, has effectively been completed. Serbia is the only country where the Jewish and Gypsy question has been fully resolved."⁴⁹

Dr. Emanuel Schäfer, the chief of Sipo in Serbia (Befelshaber der Sipo Serbien), reported at the meeting of high ranking German commanders for the South East on June 8, 1942, that in Serbia "there were no more Jewish issues. The only Jews still living were Jews married to other nationals".⁵⁰ The final "result" of the whole operation was the death of 11.000 Jews in central Serbia and approximately 3.800 Banat Jews.⁵¹ According to more recent research, of the 16.000 Jews who lived inside the German occupying zone in Serbia, 13.600 died in the Holocaust. In the case of Banat, out of its 3.504 Jews, 2.904 perished.⁵²

Collaboration and the Holocaust

The network of occupation authorities' military and civilian organizational bodies was initially reinforced in May 1941 by the establishment of a domestic collaborationist apparatus, the so called Commissioner government, which, due to German discontent with the outcome of the counteraction against the Resistance was replaced by general Milan Nedić's "Government of National Salvation" by the end of August. The domestic government was placed under full control of occupying authorities and turned into yet another instrument of brutal occupation oppression.⁵³

⁴⁸ Estimations of Jews killed in this camp range between 7,000 to 8,000; M. Koljanin. p. 61, p. 62; Ž. Lebl, *Do „konačnog rešenja“...*, p. 328, p. 329. The choice of Belgrade Fair, less than 1 kilometer from the city centre was intended to intimidate civilian population. C. Browning, *Fateful Months. Essay on the Emergence of the Final Solution*, Rev. Ed. New York, London 1991, p. 82

⁴⁹ "...Judenfrage, ebenso wie die Zigeunerfrage völlig liquidiert. Serbien ist einziges Land, in dem Judenfrage und Zigeunerfrage gelöst". Cit. po W. Manoschek, „*Serbien ist judenfrei*“, p.195

⁵⁰ Keine Judenfrage Mehr. Nur Juden in Mischehen“) Keine Judenfrage Mehr. Nur Juden in Mischehen“. Cit. as per : Ž. Lebl, *Do «konačnog rešenja...»*, p. 322

⁵¹ J. Romano. p. 40, maintains that 210 Jews from Kosovo and Metohija were killed, 260 from Sandžak and 13, 500 from Bačka and Baranja.

⁵² M. Koljanin, „Tokovi 'konačnog rešenja jevrejskog pitanja', pp. 54-55

⁵³ On collaboration in Serbia see: Branko Petranović, *Srbija u Drugom svetskom ratu 1939-1945*, Beograd 1992, pp. 217-228; pp. 245-252; pp. 363-431; pp. 455-595; M. Ristović, „General Milan Nedić-Diktatur, Kollaboration

In June 1941 the Ministry of Interior issued an order to all county councils and to the Administration of City Belgrade to give notice to all Gypsy and Jewish employees. Within the same Ministry there existed a separate subdivision of its Special Division, the Office for state protection responsible for Jews and Roma. In June 1942 prime minister of the “national salvation government”, Milan Nedić, made a request to the German military Commander Bader, to “take measures” against Jewish Yugoslav army officers – POWs in Osnabrück - for spreading “infamous Communist propaganda” inside the camp.⁵⁴

In the Holocaust in Serbia, the German occupation authority assigned the role of assistant instruments to domestic civilian, police and military collaborationist authorities which were responsible for registration, apprehending and imprisonment of fugitives and coordinated running of the concentration camp Banjica in Belgrade, since the camp had dual, domestic and German administrations.⁵⁵ The occupation authority issued guidelines and had a leading role in the realization of “the final solution for the Jewish question” in Serbia with GESTAPO’s Operational group (Einsatzgruppe) and its network of commands and departments in the forefront.⁵⁶ German occupation forces presided over “the death monopoly”: killing of Jews and Serbs was in their power, but the role of the collaborationist authorities must not be disregarded, since they functioned as a subservient instrument of the German administration.

In May 1941 the operation of the Administration of the City of Belgrade⁵⁷ and its subordinate Special police was reinstated. The Special police with its large number of organized regional bodies was given broader authority over the entire territory of Serbia. The domestic police answered to the German commander of the SS and police (Befelshaber der Sicherheitspolizei und

und die patriarchalische Gesellschaft Serbiens 1941-1944“. In: Erwin Oberlander (Hrsg.) *Autoritäre Regime in Ostmittel-und Südosteuropa 1919-1944*, Padreborn-München-Wien-Zürich, 2001, pp. 633-689

⁵⁴ Б. Божовић, *Страдање Јевреја*, pp. 208-219

⁵⁵ Б. Божовић, *Страдање Јевреја*, pp. 257-265

⁵⁶ Б. Божовић, *Страдање Јевреја...*, pp. 277- 279

⁵⁷ The territorial authority of the UGB (Belgrade City Authority) was significantly reduced by the exclusion of Pančevo and Zemun, and was effective in the remaining ten boroughs. In restoring UGB’s operation and the police apparatus Dragomir-Dragi Jovanović’s role was of great importance. As former UGB’s Chief assistant and consultant of the Ministry of Interior, he was a man trusted by the occupation authorities, especially Hans Helm, Chief of GESTAPO Department in the Command group for Yugoslavia and Karl Kraus, Chief of Gestapo Command group and SD for Serbia. Jovanović was appointed “specially employed commissioner” for Belgrade. He was instrumental in changing the name of the Belgrade police organization renaming it: the Special police; Бранислав Божовић, *Специјална полиција*, pp. 12-16

des Sicherheitsdienstes)⁵⁸, while inside the GESTAPO IV Department for fighting political adversaries the police had an Office for Jewish issues (IV D4).⁵⁹

The collaborationist police had three sectors: beside the (III) sector for foreigners it also had the (IV) sector for “suppression of Communist actions”, and a separate sector for “Jews and Gypsies” responsible for effecting orders and regulations issued by the occupation authorities regarding Jews and Roma.⁶⁰ This section functioned from April 1941 till the spring of 1943. Beside the existing subordination to German police authorities, primarily that of the GESTAPO, after the establishment of the Commissioner administration, the Special police was also answerable to the Commissariat of home affairs. Apart from his position as first man of the Commissioner administration, Milan Aćimović held to the post of chief of the home affairs Commissariat. The police numbered 850 policemen and was a docile instrument of the occupation authorities in the business of suppressing “all subversive activity” and persecution of enemies of the occupation order.⁶¹

Compliance with the horrific results achieved by the occupying forces in annihilating Jews in Serbia was expressed in one document of Milan Nedić’s “Government of national Salvation” by putting accent on the fact that “how, owing to the occupier, we have freed ourselves of Jews, and that it is now up to us to rid ourselves of other immoral elements standing in the way of Serbia’s spiritual and national unity.”⁶²

For reason of peremptory realization of all assigned orders, the role which collaborationist armed units (Serbian State Guard, Serbian Volunteers Corps) and the domestic police under both “Commissioner” and Milan Nedić “National Salvation” governments, (primarily the VII department of the Special police) had in raids, arrests of Jewish cohabitants and their subsequent delivery into the hands of occupying authorities, ranges among the most hideous episodes of collaborationism in Serbia during World War Two.⁶³

⁵⁸ Dr Wilhelm Fuchs held this post from the beginning of the occupation to January 1942, he was replaced by the notorious SS-general August von Meyszner who remained in office up to April 1944; dtto. pp. 76-80; W. Manoschek, p. 175 (Serbian edition)

⁵⁹ Ženi Lebl, *Do „konačnog rešenja“*, pp. 290-291

⁶⁰ Б. Божовић, *Страдање Јевреја*, pp. 230-323; Venceslav Glišić, *Teror i zločini nacističke Nemačke u Srbiji 1941-1944*, Beograd, 1970, p. 67; *Zbornik dokumenata NOR*, I, 1, 571.

⁶¹ Б. Божовић, *Страдање Јевреја*, pp. 209-214

⁶² Vojni Arhiv (ranije: AVJ), Nedićeva arhiva (Nda), k-1 Predsedništvo ministarskog saveta, 1/9-5, «Osnovi jugoslovenske propasti i nacionalnog preporoda srpstva», 1942., f 9.

⁶³ Ženi Lebl, *Do „konačnog rešenja“*. Jevreji u Beogradu 1521-1942, Beograd, 2001, pp. 287-338

Camps in Serbia

A number of camps for mass imprisonment, killing of civilians and members of the Resistance movement were founded in the territory of occupied Serbia. Three camps were set up in the territory of Belgrade located in the city core and its near surroundings.

The Banjica camp (Anhalteleger Dedinje), founded on July 9, 1941 had a distinct role in the history of the Holocaust in Serbia. According to preserved records based on camp registrars containing more than 23.000 names, 688 individuals of Jewish nationality of both genders and all age groups, including children and babies, were prisoners in the camp.⁶⁴ Apart from Belgrade Jews, Jews from Serbia's interior and Banat were brought to the camp; Jews of foreign citizenship, mostly refugees from various European countries caught up by the war that broke out in Yugoslavia, were placed inside the camp. 382 Jews were killed in camp Banjica, another 186 were transferred to the Zemun Camp for Jews (Sajmiste), 103 Jewish prisoners were taken from the camp by the SS and the GESTAPO, while a small number of Jews listed in the registrars who stayed alive were sent to forced labour, released, transferred somewhere else, or have not been accounted for due to lack of information. Researching documented facts B. Božović perceived that the relevant data, compared to data from other sources, is sufficient ground to assume that the number of Jewish prisoners and victims of Banjica camp "was greater by 100 to 200 individuals."⁶⁵

Responsibility for crimes against Jews and other victims of the Banjica camp "rests with a number of entities i.e. individuals from invader and collaborationist encampments accountable in one way or another for taking part in these crimes. The actual "feats" of these entities varies from less to great in both importance and scope. Again, in the case of camp Banjica the GESTAPO and German army took on the role of decisive factors and executioners. Among the collaborationists who were given a supporting part, the bulk of responsibility in contributing to these crimes rests with the camp administration staff and camp employees answerable to the Special police".⁶⁶

⁶⁴ See: *Logor Banjica- Logoraš. Knjige zatočenika Beograd-Banjica (1941-1944) I, II*, Istorijski arhiv Beograda (Belgrade Historical Archive), Beograd 2009

⁶⁵ Бранислав Божовић, *Страдање Јевреја*, p. 300, p. 301

⁶⁶ Dtto, p. 308

Research work regarding Topovske šupe camp has yielded the least information because of the lack of relevant data. The camp was founded on August 20, 1941 in Belgrade inside abandoned artillery garrison buildings. Initially, the camp was set up to receive and detain Jewish men from Banat. However, these first prisoners were soon joined by imprisoned adult male Jews from Belgrade. The GESTAPO was in charge of the camp; it was guarded by the domestic gendarmerie. The camp inmates became a source of hostages to be killed in mass in reprisal for acts of resistance and sabotage. Executions by firing squad were carried out in locations in Jajinci and Jabuka where the dead were buried in mass graves. Already in the first half of October, soldiers of the German garrison in Belgrade executed by firing squad approximately 200 Jews and 200 Roma. By October 18, 1941 when new prisoners, (rounded up in the last great raid on Jews) were brought to the camp, there were barely some hundred survivors from the initial group of prisoners. They too, met with their end in mass executions during November that same year.⁶⁷ One author justly asserts that “the involvement of units of the Belgrade garrison in the killing of Jews and Roma was evident in both massacres... in both instances...during October and November 1941, when 2.200 people (per episode) were executed. With 4.400 Jews and Roma murdered in just two reprisals, Belgrade became the leading death pit of the Holocaust and according to the total of victims, a truly gunned down city.”⁶⁸

Once the plan to build a camp in Zasavica near Šabac was abandoned, the camp at the Belgrade Fair (Sajmište), today’s Staro sajmište, was founded on October 28, 1941.⁶⁹ From the end of 1941 up to April 1942 the camp was called *Jewish camp Zemun* (Judenlager Semlin). The inmates, Jewish women and children, were taken from Sajmište to execution locations and mass graves in Jajinci. The premises of the Belgrade Fair, which had been demolished in the April bombardment of Belgrade, were subsequently partly refurbished and turned into accommodation space for prisoners and camp guards. The camp was situated on the left bank of the river Sava, a territory within the independent State of Croatia.⁷⁰ The GESTAPO Office for Jews appointed SS Untersturmführer Herbert Andorfer, as commander of the camp. The number of inmates cannot be strictly determined as no lists of inmates have been preserved. In January 1942 there were some

⁶⁷ Ž. Lebl, *Do „konačnog rešenja“*, pp. 312-315

⁶⁸ Б. Божовић, *Страдање Јевреја*, p.186 i dalje.

⁶⁹ Milan Koljanin’s history of the Sajmište camp is most comprehensive, *Nemački logor na beogradskom Sajmištu 1941-1944*, Beograd 1992. Also: Menachem Shelach, “Sajmište. An Extermination Camp in Serbia”, in: *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 2 (1987), pp. 243-260; Christopher Browning, “The Final Solution in Serbia. The Semlin Judenlager. A Case Study”, *Yad Vashem Studies*, XV, Jerusalem 1983; isti: *Fateful Months. Essay on the Emergence of the Final Solution* (Revised Edition), New York-London, 1991. pp. 321-327

⁷⁰ The Roma were also detained inside

6.500 prisoners, in mid February round 5.500 (332 men, 3.933 women and 1.238 children), while at the end of the same month there were 5.780 prisoners. By April, the number decreased to a count of 1.884. The changes in the number of inmates speaks of the “pace of the crime” and the pattern of inmate extermination.⁷¹

The camp was later renamed to *Concentration camp Zemun* (Anhaltelager Semlin) and served for temporary imprisonment of last surviving groups of Jews arrested upon the capitulation of Italy, for imprisonment of captured Partisan members and those of the Chetnik movement, members and sympathizers of the Greek and Albanian Resistance movements, Serbian peasants from villages in Srem, from the area of mountain Kozara and other territories under Ustashi rule transferred from Jasenovac to the camp in Zemun.⁷²

Along with a number of prisons and improvised camps, the largest camp with a brief, but exceptionally bloody history, was the makeshift camp in Sabac and the camps in its vicinity where in autumn 1941 inhabitants of Sabac and neighbouring villages were imprisoned and killed. Members of the small Jewish community that existed in Sabac, as well as Jewish refugees from central Europe, the “Kladovo transport”, were also killed in these camps. Inside camp Šabac in October 1941 there were 20.000 prisoners, captured in the massive action of “sweeping up the terrain” of Resistance forces in Mačva. The inmates lived in rudimentary conditions, sleeping in the open for lack of space. By October 20, for reasons of “easing” camp conditions, some 5000 were set free while 1000 inmates were executed by firing squad. The total number of murdered inmates in the period September 21 to November 15 1941, was 2.685, including Jews from the “Kladovo transport”.⁷³

In central Serbia the largest concentration camp named “Crveni Krst” (Red Cross) was in Niš. It was initially a transitional camp – Durchgangslager – however, from September 1941 it was turned into concentration camp Niš (Anhalterlager Nisch). The camp was inside the garrisons of

⁷¹ Ženi Lebl, *Do “konačnog rešenja”*, p. 328

⁷² The labour camp of TOT Organization was in the very neighbourhood Organistion Tot (Arbeitslager OT). One part of this camp was an admission camp for prisoners (*Anfanglager Semlin*). Prisoners who were not executed as hostages or transferred to other camps inside the Reich and the territory of Poland became part of a multi million forced and “volunteer” workforce toiling for the German war economy. At the beginning of 1944 the camp was due to “tactical reasons”, with no bearing whatsoever on the life of its inmates, formally handed over to the SS Reichfirer’s Administrator for Croatia SS general Kamerhofer and later in May to the Security Services of the ISC. M. Koljanin, *Nemački logor na beogradskom Sajmištu 1941-1944*, pp. 293-300

⁷³W. Manoschek, “Serbien ist...”, p. 63- 86

the Yugoslav Army. Jewish prisoners were completely separated from other prisoners. During the winter of 1941-1942 there were 500 Jewish prisoners. Jews from other central Serbian towns beside Niš, like Leskovac, Zaječar, Valjevo, were also taken to camp Niš. After the February 12, 1942 camp break-out and escape of 105 inmates (42 perished during the break-out, 6 escapees were captured later) from the part of camp where Serbians were held, German authorities initiated mass executions of Jewish prisoners. Women and children were transferred to the Belgrade Sajmiste camp and killed there.⁷⁴

The agony of Jews in other areas of Serbia under enemy occupation (Bulgarian, Hungarian, Albanian and the ISC)

From the end of April 1941, parts of southern Serbia (the towns of: Vranje, Pirot, Caribrod, Bosilegrad and part of the Leskovac region), a part of Kosovo (Gnjilane, Kačanik), and a greater part of the territory of Macedonia along the Vardar river, came under occupation of the Bulgarian army and were soon after annexed by Bulgaria. In January 1942 due to relocation of German troops to the Eastern Front, the Bulgarian zone grew larger by yet another five eastern Serbian counties (Nis, Leskovac, Jagodina, Knjaževac and Ćuprija). Further relocation of German troops saw the greater part of “Rumpf Serbien” (Remaining Serbia, or “Serbian Torso”, as the territory was named in German documents) handed over to Bulgarian troops.⁷⁵

Jews from Pirot shared the destiny of their nationals from other territories under Bulgarian occupation and subsequent annexation (Vardar Macedonia, Thrace). On March 12, 1943 Bulgarian authorities rounded up all Pirot Jews. After a week of imprisonment, they were transported by cattle wagons to the Danube port of Lom in Bulgaria where they were placed on steam ships and, together with Jews from Thrace and Vardar Macedonia, shipped to Vienna. Their final destination was the Treblinka death camp where all the Jews of Pirot perished. The only members of the Pirot Jewish community who survived the war and lived to see its end were a few men who spent the war in German imprisonment as POW officers and soldiers of the Yugoslav army and a few others who had escaped arrested by fleeing the town.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Ženi Lebl, *Do konačnog rešenja*, p. 328

⁷⁵ H. J. Hoppe, *Bulgarien-Hitlers eigenwilliger Verbündeter*, Stuttgart 1979, 121-124; Мирко Стојиљковић, *Бугарска окупаторска политика у Србији 1941-1944*, Beograd 1989, pp. 57-63; pp. 81-100

⁷⁶ Ženi Lebl, *Do “konačnog rešenja”. Jevreji u Srbiji*, Beograd, 2002, pp. 179-190. Data quoted by the author 187 individual by one source and 152 by a second one.

After the April war, the territory of Kosovo and Metohija was occupied by German troops. Once the border lines between occupation zones were in place, the greater part of this territory became a part of the zone under Italian "influence". That part of Kosovo and Metohija, integrated into the Italian protectorate of "Great Albania", was governed by domestic Albanian collaborationist authorities. The North of Kosovo with its town Kosovska Mitrovica remained within the boundaries of Serbian territory under German authority for reason of control over the Trepca lead mine. A part of Sandzak was attached to Italy's Montenegrin occupation zone.⁷⁷

Inside this territory there lived a small Jewish community (approximately 400 members) which was initially joined by a group of some 50 immigrants from Central Europe and later a large number of refugees from Serbia occupied by Germans seeking refuge in these parts on account of a more tolerant Italian policy toward Jews. The greater part of these refugees was interned inside an improvised camp in Pristina at the beginning of 1942. In March 1942, a part of the inmates-refugees was handed over to German authorities and transported to the Belgrade Sajmiste camp where they were killed during the month of April. Other Pristina prisoners, both Kosovo Jews and refugees from Serbia, were transferred to Albania to the camp in Berat where they remained up to the capitulation of Italy. After Italy's capitulation, authority over Kosovo was handed over to domestic Albanian Fascists endorsed by Germany. In May 1944 Albanian collaborationists, primarily members of the Wafen-SS division "Skenderbeg" - a volunteer formation of chiefly Kosovo Albanians - together with the local Albanian police and GESTAPO, arrested the remainder of Jews in Pristina and other Kosovo towns and transported them to the Belgrade camp Sajmiste. From there some 400 Jews together with a group arrested in Montenegro (mostly refugees from Serbia), were transported to concentration camp Bergen-Belzen. Out of this group, around 100 Jews survived the war.⁷⁸ In March 1942 the GESTAPO arrested almost all members of the Novi Pazar Jewish community (230 out of its 292 prewar membership). Jews from Novi Pazar were transported to the Sajmiste camp and all perished inside the gas chamber vehicle.⁷⁹

The region of Bačka (the area between the rivers Danube, Sava and Tisza), with a population of predominantly Serbs, a large numbers of Hungarians, Germans and other ethnic

⁷⁷ F. Čulinović, *Okupatorska podjela...*, pp. 523-527; Venceslav Glišić, „Albanizacija Kosova i Metohija 1941-1945“ in: *Srbi i Albanci u XX veku*, Zbornik radova, Beograd 1991, pp. 280-287

⁷⁸ Zločini, pp. 131-132; pp. 134-135; Ž. Lebl, *Do „konačnog rešenja“*, p. 243; Nenad Antonijević, „Holokaust na Kosovu i Metohiji i njegov kontekst“, *Izraelsko-srpska naučna razmena u izučavanju holokausta. Zbornik radova s naučnog skupa, Jerusalem, Jad Vašem, 15-20. June 2006*, pp. 395-401

⁷⁹ Ženi Lebl, *Do „konačnog rešenja“*, p. 135

minorities, was occupied and annexed by Hungary in 1941.⁸⁰ The neighbouring region of Serbian Banat with a similar ethnic structure, due to disagreement between Hungary and Romania, remained officially within the borders of Serbia although complete control and authority was given to the leadership of the German minority.⁸¹

The incursion of Hungarian troops into Bačka in the spring of 1941 was marked by atrocities against Serbian civilians when approximately 3.500 individuals were killed. Among the victims was a smaller number of Jews. From the first days of Hungarian occupation, Jews were exposed to plundering of property, maltreatment, forced labour, payment of contributions to Hungarian “commissars” placed inside Jewish shops, and internment into camps and prisons.⁸² Jews who had not been domiciles of Bačka prior to 1918 were banished to Serbia, to the territory of Banat, Croatia, or were directly handed over to German occupation authorities in Serbia. Apart from this prerequisite, Hungarian occupation authorities called for additional “verifications of status” as an excuse for further extortion and blackmail.⁸³

At the end of 1941 Hungarian anti-Semitic legislature was officially enforced in the territory of Bačka, a step which ostensibly proscribed “legal grounds” for the ruinous practice already adopted by Hungarian authorities regarding the Jews of Bačka, especially when it came to requisitioning of their property and complete banishment from public economic activities.

The joint engagement of the Hungarian army and the gendarmerie, assisted by one segment of domestic Hungarian Fascists and *volksdeutsche*s, initiated in January 1942 in Novi Sad and south Bačka under the pretext that it was triggered by acts of Serbian “rebels” and “Chetniks” against the Hungarian armed forces, announced an even more dramatic phase. The actual activity had been prepared, planned, and the reason for it fabricated in order to eliminate by one stroke any future resistance as well as Serbs and Jews “en masse”. Yet another incentive for the activity was to show Germany that Hungary’s priority was maintaining “order and peace” in

⁸⁰ F. Čulinović, *Okupatorska podjela Jugoslavije*, Beograd 1970, pp. 558-566; pp. 579-582; Josip Mirnić, «Mađarski okupacioni režim u Jugoslaviji». In: *Les systemes d'occupation en Yougoslavie 1941-1945*, Belgrad 1963, pp. 425-493

⁸¹ Sandor Vegh, «Le systeme du pouvoir d'occupation allemand dans le Banat Yougoslave 1941-1944». In: *Le systemes...*, pp. 495-561

⁸² A number of camps for internment were opened in Bačka like the camp of the Palić road to Subotica, in Stari Bečej, Ada, in Begeč, Bačka Topola, Odžaci, Vizić.

⁸³ Receipts as proof that either grandfather or father had paid county imposed taxes between 1870 and 1880 payable inside the territory of Hungary as evidence of “moral conduct” and sense of nationality during the period 1918-1941; Zločini, p. 142, p. 143

the territory under its control. Since this required substantial engagement of military and police forces, Hungary was not in a position to send to the Eastern Front the number of soldiers requested from the government in Budapest.

In the Novi Sad “raid” that took place from January 21 to 23, 1942 according to incomplete data, approximately 1250 Serbs and Jews (of which 819 were Jewish victims of both genders and all ages) were killed in a most brutal way (drowned in the ice-coated Danube, murdered by mallets and knives). In the territory of Šajkaska, arrests and killing commenced at the beginning of January and continued in stages up to the end of the month. In Stari Becej, of the 215 victims, 110 were Jews, in Čurug of the approximately 1000 victims, a hundred were Jews; in Žabalj, of the 30 Jews that lived there, 29 were killed. The result of the “raid” was that in many places in Backa there were no more Jews. The total number of victims of the “raid” was approximately 4000 people.⁸⁴

Horthy’s stepping down from duty and replacement by the leader of Hungarian Fascists, Szalasi and the German occupation of Hungary in the spring of 1944, marked the start of a new phase of terror against the non-Hungarian population which spread over the entire territory of Bačka. It began with the imprisonment of all remaining Jews in Novi Sad and other towns by the GESTAPO during April 1944. The prisoners were first taken to the Backa Topola camp from where they were transported to Auschwitz. A concentration camp for up to 4000 people was founded in Subotica too. Camps existed in neighbouring towns in Hungary; Bacalmas and Szeged. Some 8000 Jews from Vojvodina were imprisoned inside a camp in the Hungarian town Baya by mid May. A total of 14 to 15 thousand prisoners, mostly women, children, the old and ailing were sent by transport to their final destination, Auschwitz. A very small number (approximately 700) was sent to Austria as forced labourers. Round 1500 Jewish forced labourers, sent earlier as a “work unit” to the Ukraine, had already been killed; 2500 Jews from Backa had been mobilized into “work units” in various parts of Hungary; the greater part of them perished near Szopron at the end of December 1944.

Moreover, the fate of Jewish forced labourers in the Bor copper mines, mostly Hungarian Jews (grouped in two lines for retreat into Hungary, one line numbering 3.600 and the second

⁸⁴ Звонимир Голубовић, *Рација у Јужној Бачкој 1942. године*, Novi Sad, 1992; isti, «Genocid nad Srbima i Jevrejima u Vačkoj januara 1942.», *Vojnoistorijski glasnik*, p. 167, p. 168.

⁸⁴ 85. *Zločinifašističkih okupatora*, pp. 182-188

2.500 prisoners), should also be taken into account. During the retreat of German and Hungarian troops from Serbia they were murdered (in the vicinity of Pančevo near the village Jabuka, in Srbobran, Crvenka, Sivac). Out of the first line, only 1200-1300 prisoners reached Baya alive. From there the greater part was transferred to camps in Germany. Of the 600 Yugoslav citizens working as forced labourers in the Bor mine, only 9 survived.⁸⁵

Out of the total of 13.590 Jews, living in the territory of Serbia under Hungarian occupation, i.e., in Bačka, 10.527 were killed, mainly inside death camp Auschwitz.⁸⁶

The proclamation of the Independent State of Croatia on April 10, 1941 announced the beginning of a four-year period of misfortune, suffering and mass murder for Jews, Serbs and the Roma living within its boundaries as well as all living in parts of Serbia like Zemun and Srem, basically the hinterland of Belgrade but nevertheless territories under ISC control.⁸⁷ In Zemun, Jews were initially persecuted by German units and the GESTAPO immediately upon their entering the town on April 12, 1941. Soon domestic *volksdeutsche*s joined up with the Germans in the plundering and killing of Jews. The usual restraining measures, standard procedure in territories under German occupation (forced labour, restricted movement, exclusion from engagement in all fields of economy, marking with yellow bands, forbidden access to public institutions, eviction from homes, requisitioning of property especially business facilities, shops and workshops) were enforced.⁸⁸

Upon the surrender of Zemun and east Srem to the Ustashi, the first weeks of their terrorizing rule in cities with Jewish communities were marked by chaotic plundering of Jewish property, eviction of Jewish families from their homes and unsuppressed “wild” violence, imposition of forced labour duty, extortion and ransome of Jewish communities, plundering and destruction of temples and graveyards (Sremska Mitrovica, Zemun).⁸⁹ When it came to the

⁸⁵ *Zločinifašističkih okupatora*, pp. 182-188

⁸⁶ Milan Koljanin, “Jevreji-žrtve rata 1941-1945.u Vojvodini”, in: *Istina...*, Zbornik radova, Novi Sad 2004, p. 202; Ljubivoje Cerović and others., *Na putu ka istini*, pp. 303-304

⁸⁷ Fikreta Jelić-Butić, *Ustaše i Nezavisna Država Hrvatska 1941-1945*, Zagreb, 1977, p. 106. J. Romano, *Jevreji Jugoslavije 1941-1945. Žrtve genocida i učesnici Narodno-oslobodilačkog rata*, Beograd 1980, p.14, stated data to the effect that the number of Jews in ISC was round 40.000.

⁸⁸ Danilo Fogel, *Jevrejska zajednica u Zemunu. Hronika (1739-1945)*, second revised edition, Zemun, 2007, pp. 124-130

⁸⁹ In the territory of the satellite Independent State of Croatia (with annexed territories of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbian territory of East Srem) persecution and killing of Jews (approximately in these territories 39.500 in all), Serbs and Roma began immediately upon “independence”was proclaimed on April 10,

plundering of Jewish property in Srem, the Ustashi had competitors in the *volksdeutsche*.⁹⁰ From nightfall of July 26 till daybreak 27, 1942 the Ustashi rounded up Jews of Zemun; before dawn on the 27th men were transported to Jasenovac, while the women and children were taken to Stara Gradiška. The greater part of the 573 Holocaust victims of Zemun as well as Jews from other parts of Srem, were killed in these Ustashi death camps.⁹¹

Out of the total of 2.800 Jews who lived in Srem up to World War Two, 2.515 (89,82%) were killed, which made Srem the region with the largest number of Jewish victims.⁹²

Survivors

Another side to the history of the Holocaust in Serbia is its finer part which speaks of the care shown by its citizens to victimized Jews. Providing shelter to their Jewish cohabitants inside their homes, assistance in procuring false identity papers for safe passage to destinations out of harm's way, accepting and protecting parentless Jewish children inside family circles for the duration of the war, meant placing one's life at risk and jeopardizing the existence of one's own family members, but also solidarity with a victimized nation. Just like other European countries that had to face up to and live through the challenging years of war under enemy occupation, in Serbia too, there were "onlookers" to the tragedy of their Jewish neighbours, but also sincere and courageous "supporters" of their struggle to persevere and stay alive.⁹³

From May 30, 1941 a rigorous ban on "aiding and abetting" Jews (*Beherbungs-verbot*)⁹⁴ was enforced. The sanction for breaking the rule and helping Jewish fugitives in any way was to share their terrifying fate in one of the camps or places of execution. War imposed

1941. Already by the end of April the first camp was opened ("Danica" near Koprivnica) and on June 26. a Special Act was passed on the establishment of camps. Racial laws and a series of other legal by-laws "legalized" measure pertinent to "the final solution" for both the Jewish and Serbian question within the ISC. Jasenovac, a system of camps for mass extinction of Jews, Serbs and other opponents of the Ustashi regime was founded in the summer of 1941. Approximately 20.000 Jews perished inside the camp complex.

⁹⁰ On Ustashi anti-Semitic politics and practice look in: Zločini fašističkih okupatora..., pp. 54-113; Hory. L.-Broszat M., *Der Kroatische Ustascha Staat*, Stuttgart, 1964; Fikreta Jelić-Butić, *Ustaše i Nezavisna Država Hrvatska 1941-1945*, Zagreb 1977, pp. 178-186; Antun Miletić, *Koncentracioni logor Jasenovac*, pp.1-3, Beograd-Jasenovac, 1986-1987; Ivo and Slavko Goldstein, *Holokaust u Zagrebu*, Liber, Zagreb 2001.

⁹¹ Danilo Fogel, p. 141, p.147

⁹² Mladenko Kumović, *Stradanje sremskih Jevreja u holokaustu*, Novi Sad 2007, 250-251; Lj. Cerović i dr., *Na putu ka istini*, 251; M.Koljanin, „Tokovi 'konačnog rešenja jevrejskog pitanja'”, p. 51

⁹³ On this European phenomenon see: David Cesarani and Paul A. Levine (ed.), *'Bystanders' to the Holocaust .A Re-evaluation*, London-Portland Or., 2000.

⁹⁴ *Zločini fašističkih...* p. 42. R. Hilber, *The Destruction .of European Jews*, Chicago, 1961, p. 683

conditions in Serbia and the very state of affairs Serbians had found themselves in by being placed at the top of Hitler's list of enemies (namely his admonishing statements regarding the Belgrade coup of March 27, 1941, the subsequent brutality of Germany's retribution against Serbia in its April attack on Yugoslavia, and later the reprisals as sanction for mass Resistance uprising against the occupier in the fall of the same year) were such that the survival of the prevailing Serbian population was seriously threatened. The population was exposed to acts of vengeance (execution of hostages, mass internment into camps, arrests, police torture, burning of entire villages as retribution, etc.) from various invaders and collaborationist authorities. The Serbian population was additionally embroiled in the confrontation on its domestic scene between former short-lived allies of the 1941 Resistance movement, the Partisans (NOV) and Chetniks (JVUO), which by the end of the same year, turned into outright civil war. Furthermore, Serbia had to deal with a stream of refugees (round 400.000) from territories under Ustashi, Hungarian, Bulgarian, Albanian-Italian occupation. All this strained living conditions in Serbia, already exposed to deprivation and plunder by its own occupying authorities. Daily life in war-time Serbia meant living in and surviving such conditions.

Individual insecurity and suffering caused by such brutal force and the ideology behind it all brought closer to home the reality of life of those facing a much graver situation and the need to do something about it by extending help. What should also be stressed is the collective historical experience Serbia had to overcome during the Austro-Hungarian-Bulgarian occupation during World War One and Serbia's long tradition of resistance and uprisings.

Fleeing towns in search of safer shelter before the approaching persecution began in the first days of the April war in 1941 Jews from Belgrade fled to villages and smaller settlements on the edge of the urban perimeter; subsequently their refugee trails continued mostly southward as far as possible from the German occupying zone. The majority of Jewish refugees from Serbia sought shelter in territories under Italian occupation along the Adriatic coast or in its hinterland; inside Serbia Jews headed for the territory under Bulgarian occupation, especially Toplica, or to the territories of Macedonia and Kosovo, again further south.

Jewish refugees from Serbia mostly sought provisional shelter inside Kosovo, which was under Italian occupation. In March 1942 Italian and Albanian authorities turned part of these refugees

over to the GESTAPO while the remainder were arrested and deported to camps inside Albania.⁹⁵ Approximately 300 Jews from Belgrade escaped to Skopje during 1941. In October 1941 Bulgarian authorities handed over 60 individuals from this group to the GESTAPO. The incident initiated escape to the part of Macedonia's territory under Italian occupation and further on to Albania.⁹⁶

Some 300 Jews, mainly from Belgrade and a smaller number from Sarajevo, managed to reach Boka Kotorska in April 1941 from where they were transported to camps in Albania⁹⁷, and in September shipped to the Feramonti camp for foreigners near Consenza in the south of Italy.⁹⁸

An undetermined number of Jews from regions of occupied Serbia managed to reach some neutral countries (Spain, Portugal, Switzerland, Turkey) from where the greater part tried to escape to the United States or some Latino-American countries.

Living illegally in hiding in towns or taking flight to the interior of Serbia were options ventured into by a number of Jews. In making such a choice they were obliged to seek help primarily from their "Arian" spouses or friends; however, help very frequently came from people completely unknown to them who chose to disobey the enforced occupation authorities' bans and expose themselves to death punishment rather than forsake or transgress norms of humanity.⁹⁹

In his report to the Yugoslav government in exile on the state of affairs in the country and the life of Belgrade Jews during the first months of occupation, the chief rabbi of Yugoslavia, Dr. Isak Alkalaj, stressed how, in conditions of depraving measures of the occupation authorities in Serbia "...Jews could carry on and live, if one can call it life, only by the grace of their non-Jewish

⁹⁵ Pavle Dželetović-Ivanov, *Jevreji Kosova i Metohije*, Beograd 1988, p.139, p.140

⁹⁶ Ženi Lebl, *Plima i slom*,p. 312, p. 385

⁹⁷ Arhiv Vojske Jugoslavije (Yugoslav Army Archive), Nr. 23/4 a-1, k 551, Cable from prefect Scassellati to the governor of Dalmatia G. Bastianini, Kotor, 20. July 1941; Ibid. Nr. 34/4a, k 551, gab. 552, Scassellati -G. Bastianiniju, 28. July 1941.

⁹⁸ On camp in Ferramonti see: Francesco Folino, *Feramonti un lager di Mussolini. Gli internati durante la guerra*, Cosenza, 1985; Carlo Spartaco Capogreco, "I campi di internamento fascisti per gli ebrei (1940-1943)", *Storia contemporanea*, anno XXII, Nr. 4, agosto 1991.

⁹⁹ One such case in occupied Belgrade has been stated by Ruth Bettina Birn in her literary piece *Austrian Higher SS and Police Leaders and their Participation in the Holocaust in the Balkans*, *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 4, 1991, p. 359, p.369, note 65.

cohabitants, who try as best as they can to be of help and ease their terrible fate.”¹⁰⁰ Touching on the same subject in his letter to the Presidency of the Jewish God abiding community dated November 2, 1945 Dr. Lavoslav Glesinger reflected that “...in Serbia peasants hid not only Jewish children in their homes but adults also, with sporadic success; however, the goodwill of the people to save victims of persecution was evident. I believe that a few peasants in Croatia did the same.”¹⁰¹ The exact number of individuals who found shelter in Serbia during the war is hard to determine, but the assumption that a couple of hundred persons managed to survive the war in villages inside the country is credible; to survive in Belgrade meant assuming a false identity and living with fake documents.¹⁰² Larger groups went into hiding in Toplica, in the south of Serbia, on the slopes of mountains Kopaonik and Rudnik, as well as in villages of east Serbia.

When it comes to “Arians” who hid and rallied round their Jewish compatriots and neighbours in their wish to help them to survive, it can be surmised from available data that there was no single “behavioral model” applied within parts of the country or social groups. Furthermore, among those who helped, there was not one political or ideological orientation (members of parties and movements with clear-cut Fascist and anti-Semitic program stipulations - like the Dimitrije Ljotić “Zbor” in Serbia - excepted) that could be taken as decisive criteria. In deciding to act and carry out one’s resolution to aid the persecuted in conditions that existed in the territory of Yugoslavia during the war, an individual had to count on the resolve of a great number of other persons to also be of help (family members, neighbours, at times even entire communities, like a hamlet). The social status and level of education of those who helped also varied; from peasants, the city poor, craftsmen to intellectuals and wealthy industrialists. Among them were very prominent and influential members of local communities; however, the greater part were ordinary people living in towns and in the countryside also afflicted by war-instated conditions. They were the ones who best understood how their Jewish cohabitants were up against a dire fate because of their ethnicity, religious beliefs and origin.

Helping persecuted Jews meant risking the safety of one’s entire family; furthermore, organized rescue of a Jewish cohabitant implied that a smaller or greater circle of accomplices, who frequently for a shorter or greater period of time took into their homes the persecuted as their

¹⁰⁰ AJ 370, AKJ Ankara, f 37, dos. 14, nr. 984, Unutrašnje prilike u Jugoslaviji (Internal affairs in Yugoslavia). Report by chief rabbi Dr. Isak Alkalaj "Naši doživljaji i utisci o poslednjim događajima u Jugoslaviji", ("Our experiences and impressions regarding the latest events in Yugoslavia") 14. July 1941.

¹⁰¹ JIM, k 63, Jewish community Zagreb/1943, f 1, letter by Dr. L. Glesinger, Zagreb, November 2, 1945.

¹⁰² Zločini fašističkih... p. 42

“relatives”, had to be involved; it also meant that rescuers would have to provide clothing, medicines, food and fake documents and, if needed, search and find a new safer place of refuge. Frequently facing danger, fugitives had to change up to ten families in several places. The families would hand them over from one to another as they would a sacred object or secret. To take on the task to provide shelter to the persecuted for prolonged periods of time (months or even years) in conditions that existed in Serbia at the time entailed not only a desire to provide aid and a safe haven, but to demonstrate resistance and protest, a specific intimation that one did not accept occupation and the inhumanity of its “laws”.

Such deeds at times necessitated risky alliances with representatives of occupation and collaborationist authorities willing to “turn a blind eye” or sell documents necessary for travel in exchange for money. In some cases (very rare instances!) they even volunteered to be of help.¹⁰³ According to one testimony, the former Prime Minister of the Yugoslav government, Dr. Dragiša Cvetković, during whose mandate anti-Jewish regulations were passed in 1940, and whose signature introduced Kingdom Yugoslavia into the Tripartite alliance on March 25, 1941, sheltered an entire Jewish family inside his villa in Niška Banja.¹⁰⁴

“Local particularities” engendered by the war in Serbia shaped conditions for keeping Jewish refugees alive. The massive inflow of hundreds of thousands of Serbian refugees from Croatia, Bosnia, Macedonia, Kosovo and the banished colonists from Vojvodina all sought refuge in Serbia, so that frequently in their search of a new identity to shield them from persecution and death, Jews chose to become “refugees” from Bosnia. In reality, those who remained and sought shelter in towns, primarily Belgrade, or fled to smaller towns and country villages were actually turned into refugees inside their own city, i.e., country. Forced to abandon their identity, nationality, religious and “racial” individuality, they had to blend into their new social surroundings (while hiding in mountain villages) in order to become less conspicuous. Better conditions for hiding rested in villages far from the main roads. Occupation and collaborationist

¹⁰³ An example is how the secretary of the Jewish community in Skoplje Josef-Papa Alaluf received warning prior to the arrest of all Jews in Macedonia in March 1943 from the secretary of Skoplje county hall Mr. Železkov to flee the territory.: Ženi Lebl, *Plima I slom*, p. 372

¹⁰⁴ Ž. Lebl, statement made by the author in January 1997 in Belgrade. The Minister of labour in the marionette government of Milan Nedić, retired General Čolak-Antić issued a certificate to his class mate, former commander of Pančevo garrison, Colonel Avram Berah, as confirmation that German occupying authorities have exempted both Avram and his wife from anti-Jewish regulations, allowing them unrestrained movement without the wearing of the yellow band. The minister’s intervention enabled Behara and his wife to live through the war in Belgrade; Dr. Isak Eškenazi, p. 18

authorities had a harder time to reach such areas; however, for Jews cooped up inside cities guarded by sentries and extensive check points, such places of shelter seemed and frequently were unattainable.

The complexity of the actual act to save a Jewish life and its motives is specific for each case. In Toplica, where, according to agreement reached with Bulgarian occupation authorities (deadly enemies from World War One) and the acquiescence of Nedić and the Germans Chetnik leader Kosta Milovanović – Pećanac was given run of the territory, some dozens of Belgrade Jews and fugitives from other parts of Serbia found refuge; furthermore, Jews on their way to Macedonia and Kosovo were also given provisional refuge on their way to safer locations. Peasants from villages around Toplica and mountain Kopaonik,- like Konjuve, Blaževo, Grgure, Dankoviće - were aware who they were giving shelter to. In an attempt to explain what induced him to provide help, a villager (Predrag Vasić from Dankoviće) reasoned that “I regarded everything I did to help Jews as my patriotic duty, for each one of the 98 souls I helped along.”¹⁰⁵

Blanka Karić- Alkalaj fled from Belgrade to the village of Stepojevci in the Belgrade vicinity. Milinka Lazarević, the peasant woman in whose house she was staying, on learning that Blanka was a Jewess and that the police was on the lookout for her, asked Blanka to explain “what a Jew was” and the reason why they were being persecuted and hunted down. After the talk they had, Milinka continued to shelter her fugitive and took into her house yet another refugee, Malvina Vajs from Zagreb. She hid both women right up to the end of the war.¹⁰⁶

The fifteen year old Julije Kemenji, left without family members, came to the door of his school friend, Aleksandar Pejić in July 1941. For Belgrade authorities he became the third child of the Pejić family and stayed with them up to liberation day.¹⁰⁷

A number of Belgrade’s most prominent individuals well known to the general public, like the president of the Federation of Jewish Religious Communities in Yugoslavia, Dr. Fridrih Pops, or the famous psychiatrist and stage director, Dr. Hugo Klajn, remained in occupied Belgrade during the length of the war. Dr. Miloslav M. Stojadinović from Belgrade, who was high-posted at the beginning of the occupation in Belgrade City Authority, is one of Serbia’s best-

¹⁰⁵ JIM, Dosije pravednika, pismo P. Vasića dr Lavoslavu Kadelburgu, 18. oktobar 1994.

¹⁰⁶ Jaša Almulji, „Šta je to Jevrejin?“, Politika, 6. maj 1989

¹⁰⁷ Jaša Almulji, „Pejićevi postaju „pravednici“, Politika, 3. maj 1989

known “Righteous”. According to testimonies, he saved approximately 80 Jews. Inside churches of Serbia wedding ceremonies between Serbs and Jewesses were held during the war even though a strict veto was imposed by occupation authorities.¹⁰⁸

After the war a number of them received the recognition and “Righteous among Nations” award as a token of gratitude.¹⁰⁹ 129 names of the “Righteous of Serbia” listed (as recorded in 2010) in Jerusalem’s Yad Vashem fail to lend sufficient insight into conditions under which help was given to Jews in the territory of Serbia.

The support and solidarity of their often completely unknown rescuers, non-Jewish cohabitants, enabled a small part of the prewar Jewish Community in Serbia to stay alive and witness the end of the war. Together with refugees who returned to Serbia, POWs released from camps, survivors of Partisan guerrilla warfare, and the few who managed to survive the hell of concentration and death camps, the Jewish survivors of Serbia embarked on the difficult task to renew the life of one of its Communities ravaged by the atrocities of the Holocaust to a point bordering on extinction.

¹⁰⁸ JIM, Dosijea "Pravednika"; Milan Ristović, *U potrazi...*65-82; "Bez žute trake", *Večernje Novosti*, dec. 1959, Jaša Almulji, „Život i stradanje“, *Politika*, 8. maj 1989. Beginning with 1964 and up to January 1996, 135 individuals from Yugoslavia (of which number 75 from Serbia) received the award “Righteous among Nations”. By 2010 the number of Righteous from Serbia rose to 129. Marriages between “Arians” and Jews provided some kind of protection even for Jews in the ISC. A special aspect of induced refuge into a new identity was conversion to another faith most frequently Catholicism and Islam in Croatia and Bosnia. In the eve of World War Two a few hundred of Zagreb’s Jews converted to the Catholic faith which roused protest among their co-nationals. In Sarajevo in 1941 in fear of Ustashi slaughter 190 Jews converted to the Catholic faith and Islam (only 6 to the Orthodox faith since in light of Ustashi anti-Serbian politics it could not grant protection). However, Ustashi racial laws ruled out change of Jewish status by conversion to another faith.

¹⁰⁹ In 1953 the Israeli parliament (Knesset) adopted an Act by which persons who putting their lives at risk helped in the rescue of persecuted Jews during World War Two were to receive recognition in the form of a special decoration “Medal of the Righteous among Nations” as a token of gratitude; Mordecai Paldiel, "To the Righteous among the Nations Who Risked Their Lives to Rescue Jews", *Yad Vashem Studies XIX*, 1988, pp. 402-425. According to data of the Jerusalem memorial centre “Yad Vashem” up to 1991 the “medal of the Righteous” was granted to 135 Yugoslavs; more than a half of these individuals were from the territory of Serbia.