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Report on Rabbinical Thesis of Haim Asa
Entitled
"The History of the Bulgarian Jewish Community
During the Second World War"

Mr. Asa has raised a significant question. How did Bulgarian Jewry manage to escape extermination during World War II? Bulgaria was a cooperative ally of Nazi Germany, implemented anti-Jewish measures, yet refrained from the final solution. This anomaly is all the more striking in view of the fact that the Jews of Thrace and Macedonia -- territories given to Bulgaria by the Nazis -- were annihilated. How then is one to account for this perplexing phenomenon: the survival of Bulgarian Jewry, and Bulgarian Jewry alone?

The answers hitherto given have either attributed this miracle to the intervention by the Bulgarian people on behalf of the Jews or to the personal benevolence of Czar Boris. Mr. Asa is not satisfied with these explanations. He offers a more simple and satisfying hypothesis. Bulgaria was an anomalous ally of the Nazis; for it did not participate directly in the war. Since its territories were not a battleground, the need to remove the Jews was not dictated by military considerations. Thus as long as the Nazis were on the offensive, the Jews of Bulgaria were spared, because Bulgaria was not in the war. Once it was evident in 1943 that the Nazis might very well lose the war, the ruling circles of Bulgaria, with Czar Boris as their spokesman, were interested in extricating themselves from the consequences of collaboration with Hitler. They thus adopted a policy of delaying the final solution by continuously assuring the Nazis that they were agreed in principle but were finding implementation difficult. When the Russian armies overran Bulgaria in 1944, Bulgarian Jewry was still alive.

Mr. Asa's hypothesis is buttressed by an array of original documents that he gathered from all quarters. These documents from Yad Vashem and the Centre Documentation Juive Contemporaine (along with those served by the Attorney General of Israel at the Eichmann trial which arrived too late for use in this thesis) were either microfilmed or photostated through the efforts of Mr. Asa and now form the Bulgarian Documents Collection of the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in Cincinnati. He uses these documents effectively to support his case.

Though the bulk of the thesis deals with Bulgarian Jewry during World War II, a useful chapter is devoted to the history of the Bulgarian Jewish community.

Mr. Asa has written a valuable thesis, a thesis that gives evidence of his diligence and of his intelligence. It clarifies a perplexing problem. It makes available in the appendices translations of basic documents. Although the thesis would benefit from a more tightly-knit presentation and from stylistic polishing it is an important contribution to our understanding of the holocaust by one of the Bulgarian Jews who anomalously survived.

It is with pleasure that I recommend the acceptance of this thesis.

Ellis Rivkin
Referee

THE HISTORY OF THE BULGARIAN JEWISH COMMUNITY
DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR

by

Haim Asa

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of
requirements for the Degree of Master of
Arts in Hebrew Letters and Ordination

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Referee, Professor Ellis Rivkin

To my father—a leader of Bulgarian Jewry

DIGEST OF THESIS

The Bulgarian Jewish Community was the only European Jewish community of a country involved in the war to survive the Nazi holocaust, in its entirety (the author does not consider Thrace and Macedonia as part of Bulgaria). This thesis represents a study of the history of this community based upon analyses of first hand source material, primarily Nazi documents.

In order to offer to the reader a better understanding of the history of the Bulgarian Jews during the war, a short introduction of the general history of the community has been offered in this thesis.

Bulgaria was Germany's ally and it fully cooperated with the Germans in the execution of the various anti-Jewish measures. Professor Hilberg in The Destruction of the European Jews defined the Nazi destruction of the Jews to follow the pattern of a) definition b) expropriation c) concentration d) annihilation. The Jews of Bulgaria were saved from annihilation on two different occasions during the spring of 1943.

Two main theories have so far been advanced to explain the causes for the salvation of the Jews of Bulgaria. Both theories try to explain the survival of the Bulgarian Jews in terms of intervention on their behalf. The more popular theory dwells upon the contention that it was the Bulgarian people who through their vigorous protests against the expulsion of the Jews had saved the Jews. The second theory attributes the redemption

of the Jews to Czar Boris' benevolence.

The author of this thesis accepts neither of the above theories to be a substantial explanation for the survival of the Jews of Bulgaria. They may only be considered, in his opinion, as supporting reasons to the primary cause for the salvation of the Bulgarian Jews, the turn of the war tide against Germany during the winter and spring of 1942-1943, which eventually resulted in the total defeat of the Nazi State.

PREFACE

It is the purpose of this thesis to explore in a scientific manner the events experienced by the Bulgarian Jewish Community during the Second World War. To the best of my knowledge, no similar work exists at present in the English language. A number of histories have been published about this subject in the Bulgarian and Hebrew language, but with one or two exceptions, their scope is narrow and fragmental.

My attempt to write the history of the Bulgarian Jewish Community during the Second World War is a pioneer work in a twofold sense. First, due to the lack of published bibliographies on the subject, I had to correspond with every Jewish historical archive, library, and center of documents in this country as well as in Israel and Europe, in search for source materials. After amassing documents and sources, I was faced with the problem of selecting and ordering the relevant material. Second, once the documents had been made available in the form of microfilms or photostats, there remained the problem of translating them into English before they could be used and incorporated into this work.

In the course of research, I was unselfishly assisted by a number of people. First, I am deeply indebted to Dr. Ellis Rivkin, Professor of Jewish History, of the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion for his initial encouragement,

continuous assistance, and invaluable suggestions.

I am grateful to Mr. Herbert Zaffren, chief Librarian of the Cincinnati School of the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, who facilitated my work by purchasing, on behalf of the college library, the microfilms and photostats needed for my research.

The following persons from the Yad Vashem Remembrance Authority in Jerusalem rendered valuable help: Miss Ora Alcalai, Mrs. M. Rositzkah, Mrs. B. Klibanski, and Dr. Joseph Kermish.

To Messrs. Eli Baruch, Benjamin Arditti, Nathan Greenberg, Rabbi Daniel Zion, and Mrs. Shoshana Ben Yoseph, all of them past leaders of the Bulgarian Jewish Community and at present citizens of Israel, my sincere thanks for the valuable time they allotted me in the course of my research, and for the permission to quote from their publications.

The Consistorie Central des Juifs en Bulgarie, Sofia, Bulgaria and the Centre de Documentation Juive Contemporaine in Paris made available to me all their materials pertaining to the Bulgarian Jewish Community.

Another institution, which lent me assistance in my work, was YIVO Institute for Jewish Research in New York.

And last but not least, my heartfelt thanks and gratitude to Elaine, my helpmate in life and partner in this work.

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INTRODUCTION

The Jewish scholar, as well as the layman, is presently flooded with a multitude of publications dealing with the destruction inflicted upon the European Jewish communities during the Second World War. Keeping in mind that the majority of these works deals with the tragic fate of the great Jewish centers of Europe, one may justifiably ask why one would write the history of the Bulgarian Jewish Community -- a community rather unimportant and unknown to most present day scholars.

The importance of the Bulgarian Jewish Community, unlike that of many of the European Jewish communities, is not found in its contributions to creative Jewish life, but rather it is signified by the fact that the Bulgarian Jewish Community, the only European Jewish community in a country that was a Nazi ally, survived the war in its entirety. This is a very broad statement, and it must be qualified. When I refer to the Bulgarian Jewish Community I mean the Jews living within the geographic borders of Bulgaria at the beginning of the Second World War. I exclude from the definition of Bulgarian Jewry the Jews of Thrace and Macedonia. These two territories were conquered by Hitler and were given to Bulgaria. The Jews of these two territories, however, had not been granted

citizenship by the Bulgarian Government. As a consequence, the twelve thousand Jews residing in Thrace and Macedonia met the tragic fate of complete annihilation.

An intelligent discussion about the history of the Bulgarian Jewish Community during the Second World War necessitates a brief history of the community up to that period. This history can be divided into four major periods:

1. The history of the community from its beginning till the liberation of Bulgaria in 1878.
2. The beginning of the modern period, from 1878 till the end of the First World War.
3. From the end of the First World War till the rise of Hitler in 1933.
4. The period of uncertainty -- the time between the rise of Hitler and the outbreak of the war.

The remainder of my thesis will be concerned with the history of the Bulgarian Jewish Community during the Second World War.

I. FOUNDATIONS

A. The History of the Community From Its Beginning
Till the Liberation of Bulgaria in 1878

The oldest reference to the existence of a Jewish community in the general locale of Bulgaria is found in the commentary on Judges (20:15) by Rabbi David Kimhi (Radak). The twentieth chapter describes the defeat of the Tribe of Benjamin by the other tribes of Israel. Verse fifteen states the number of Benjaminite warriors as 26,000 men, and the next verse (20:16) adds to this number another 700 "left-handed" warriors, bringing the total number to 26,700. Verse thirty-five of the same chapter states that 25,100 Benjaminites were killed in the battle. Rabbi Kimhi, in his commentary to Judges 20:15, accounts for the missing 1,600 warriors by saying that 600 of them escaped to a certain location named, in Hebrew, "Seiah HaRimon." He assumed that the other 1,000 warriors had been killed in the battles previous to the major battle, or, as the Midrash relates, these 1,000 warriors journeyed to the land of "Romania" and settled there.

The above commentary would have been meaningless were it not for the fact that the Encyclopaedia Hebraica (Volume 7, p. 798) mentions that the Jews of Bulgaria, during the twelfth century, were under the influence of the Greek culture and were called "Romaniotim." Rabbi David Kimhi lived during the twelfth century, and one may safely assume that in his

commentary, "Romania" refers to the land of Bulgaria.

Mr. Benjamin Arditti, on the basis of Dr. Levi Herzfeld's historical research, comments that Jews took an active part in the Phoenician trade, and that some of these Jewish Phoenician traders settled in the different European countries before the destruction of the Second Temple.¹

Dr. Klausner comments that there has been found a Jewish-Greek inscription dating from the year 81 C.E. from the city of Panticapaeum -- now Kerch -- near the Cimmerian Bosphorus. Furthermore, Dr. Klausner thinks that Jews may have reached the north shore of the Black Sea as early as the days of the Hasmonseans.²

It is reasonable to say, therefore, that a Jewish community, or communities, may have been found in the Balkan lands before the destruction of the Second Temple. We have, however, no sources which would delineate the size and nature of this community.

Mr. Benjamin Arditti quotes Rabbi Solomon Rozanes, the well-known Bulgarian Jewish historian, who conclusively proved that during the fourth century of the Common Era there was a sizable Jewish community in the Balkan lands. As evidence, Rozanes quotes the Codes of Theodossius of Emperor Theodosium, the First; in this Code the Emperor commands the governors of the provinces of the Balkans to prevent further persecution of the Jews and to restore their civil and religious rights. Furthermore, the Code states that these local administrators

were to be held responsible if these persecutions continued.³

In the year 811, the Bulgarian Czar, Krum, brought to Bulgaria a large number of military prisoners, amongst whom were Jews from Salonika. Benjamin Arditti, on the basis of a Papal response issued in the year 866 (seemingly prompted by the threatening influence of these Jews) concludes that these Jewish prisoners, once liberated, engaged in proselytism in their new homeland.⁴

The Encyclopaedia Hebraica sheds further light on this period by citing that in the year 865, King Boris I accepted Christianity, which at the time was an odd mixture of Christian, Jewish, and pagan practices and beliefs. As proof of the religious confusion that prevailed among these new Christians we have the request on the part of these new Bulgarian Christians directed to Pope Nicolai I asking for clarification and guidance concerning the practices of their new religion. This request was formulated in one hundred and six questions, including: What is the correct ritual of the bringing of the first fruits? What animals and poultry are considered ritually pure? What should be the day of rest, Saturday or Sunday? Is it permitted to eat the flesh of animals who have not been slaughtered prior to their death? What is the burial law concerning people who have committed suicide? How soon after birth can the husband come to his wife? Is it necessary to fast during a drought? Must women cover their heads in the House of Prayer? The content of these questions, and the typically Hebrew names

B. The Beginning of the Modern Period-
From 1878 Till the End of the First World War

The years commencing with the liberation of Bulgaria in 1878 and terminating at the end of the First World War, for the sake of conceptualization, can be considered as one unit, despite the fact that not all events and conditions of these forty years can be synthesized into a unitary historic pattern. The outstanding characteristic of this forty year period is the relative freedom that the Bulgarian Jewish Community enjoyed, a freedom that the Bulgarian Jewish Community did not experience again for the rest of its existence, except for a short interval under the liberating Russian armies in 1944.

The Modern Period is divided into five major headings, each intrinsically related to the other:

- A. The Internal Structure of the Bulgarian Jewish Community.
- B. The Educational System of the Bulgarian Jewish Community.
- C. The Economic and Social Conditions of the Bulgarian Jewish Community.
- D. Anti-Semitism in Bulgaria.
- E. The Zionist Movement in Bulgaria.

A. THE INTERNAL STRUCTURE OF THE BULGARIAN JEWISH COMMUNITY

In 1878, the Congress of Berlin recognized the independent principality of Bulgaria. Article VII of the Treaty of Berlin required the newly-founded principality to grant equal civil and political rights to all of its subjects, including

the Jews.

According to N. M. Gelber:

The status of the Jewish and other minorities was governed by a new program, following Western European models, which was initiated by Dr. Konstantin Jirecek. The 'Provisional Law for the Cultural Administration of Christians, Muslims, and Israelites,' drawn up in 1880, included a code for the Jewish minority. Article III, Sections 40-47 recognized the synagogue as the local unit. Each synagogue was to be headed by a council of three to five members elected with the assistance of the rabbi.¹

In 1902, in a democratic vote taken by the Bulgarian Jewish Community, the Central Jewish Consistory was established as the official representative of the Jews of Bulgaria. Four years passed, however, before the Bulgarian Foreign Ministry and the Ministry of Religions would grant recognition to the Consistory as the official spokesman for the Bulgarian Jewish Community.² The Consistory, from its establishment until 1919, was headed by the Chief Rabbi of Bulgaria. The Jewish community was thus under a religious authority -- an internal structure similar to the system which prevailed in the majority of the Jewish communities of Western Europe prior to the modern period. This semi-autonomous arrangement was not always an amiable one. There was a constant conflict between the Chief Rabbi of Bulgaria and the membership of the Central Consistory. The first Chief Rabbis in Bulgaria were Gabriel Almozano and Moshe Tadger. In 1886, Dr. Simon Dankowitz was appointed to this post, and he was succeeded by Dr. Moritz Gruenwald who in

turn was succeeded by Dr. Marcus Ehrenpreis.³

The Jewish community in Bulgaria had its own judicial system which was authorized by the Bulgarian Government to deal with matters pertaining to domestic relations and religious questions. The community was governed by the National Jewish Council called Sbor. The Sbor was made up of delegates who represented every single Jewish community, and its most important function was to elect the twenty-one members of the Central Consistory once every three years.⁴

B. THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM OF THE BULGARIAN JEWISH COMMUNITY

Prior to the liberation of Bulgaria the level of schooling of the small Jewish community of Bulgaria was generally low. There were Jewish schools of the traditional type in all Jewish communities, but Jewish children rarely, if ever, received any secular education.⁵

The Alliance Israelite Universelle established its first elementary school in Bulgaria in 1870. After 1878 the number of the Alliance schools increased considerably, and by the turn of the century there were fourteen such schools operating in Bulgaria. These schools stressed, in addition to the Bulgarian studies, the study of the French language, and it also included a very limited number of Hebrew subjects. There is no question that the study of the French language in the Alliance schools enabled some of its graduates to develop successful export-import businesses in the beginn-

ing of the present century. French was at that time the commercial language of Europe, and proficiency in the French language was a necessity for those who were involved in international trade.

As early as 1903 the Zionists' faction within the Consistory demanded that the Alliance schools devote a greater part of their curriculum to the study of Jewish subjects.⁶ The conflict between the Zionists and the Alliance continued until 1920, when the Zionists gained control of the Consistory as well as of the individual Jewish communities. This victory of the Zionists brought about a complete reorganization of the Jewish system of education.

It is possible to sum up the development of Jewish education in Bulgaria during this forty year period in a few words. In the late nineteenth century the function of Jewish education was in the hands of the local synagogues (through the Mildar system, which is the equivalent to the Eastern European Talmud Torah). With the liberation, the Alliance system gained a predominant place. Its neglect, however, of Hebrew and Jewish subjects caused such dissatisfaction that the educational system was centralized under the Consistory, which in turn resulted in an increased emphasis on Hebrew and subjects of Jewish importance.

C. THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL CONDITIONS OF THE BULGARIAN JEWISH COMMUNITY

In 1881 the first census of independent Bulgaria was taken. At the time there were in Bulgaria 14,342 Jews out of a total population of 2,607,919. The 1887 census, after Rumelia had become a part of Bulgaria found the number of Jews to be 24,352 out of 3,154,375. Expressed in percentage, the number of Jews in Bulgaria in 1887 was 0.8 per cent of the total population.

Despite the fact that the number of Jews in Bulgaria doubled during the half century following the 1887 census, the percentage of Jews as part of the total population never exceeded 0.9 per cent.

The Jewish population of Bulgaria was concentrated primarily in a number of the larger cities. Those Jews who lived in the small villages and earned a living as "the middle man" between the farmer and the city merchants were forced out of their economic functions by the farmers' cooperatives between the years 1910-1926.⁸

Mr. N. M. Gelber presents an accurate description of the economic life of the Bulgarian Jewish Community:

The general economic situation of the Jews in Bulgaria resembled that of the Jewish minorities throughout central and southeastern Europe. They were pre-eminently engaged in trade but, industrious and persistent as they were, did not dominate commerce or banking. In a few enterprises leading positions were occupied by Jews, but not in the country's infant industry. They were typical tradespeople and only in a few cases merchants of higher rank. The economic structure of Bul-

garian Jewry was, in fact, not particularly diversified. The Jews had clung to certain occupations for decades, if not for centuries. Jewish business leaders, such as appeared in Germany, Austria, or Czechoslovakia, simply did not emerge from the small Bulgarian-Jewish group. Even where a particular branch was exclusively controlled by Jews, they did not dominate the field in question as a whole. This circumstance is to be attributed to the activity of the Greeks and Armenians as well as of the Bulgarians in commerce, industry, and later also in banking, which surpassed that of the Jews. The weakness of the Jews' social and political position in Bulgaria during these decades made them no match for their Christian competitors. Emancipation had indeed opened up for them careers in the medical, legal and engineering professions, but even there Jews were not well represented.

The census of 1920 enumerated 13,444 gainfully occupied Jewish persons (11,522 men and 1,922 women), or thirty per cent of the total Jewish population. As may readily be seen from Table II, the wage-earners outnumbered the self-employed class to some extent, while in the category of commerce, on the other hand, comprising somewhat more than half of the gainfully occupied Jewish population, the self-employed merchants formed the majority (63 per cent). In this connection it may be noted that among all persons engaged in commerce the Jewish merchants formed 10.6 per cent of the self-employed class.⁹

In banking, the Jews played a negligible part. The only banks that employed Jews were those which operated with foreign capital. Some Jews acted as brokers for the insurance companies prior to 1918; most of them, however, were displaced by demobilized officers and Russian refugees.¹⁰

D. ANTI-SEMITISM IN BULGARIA

The Jews of Bulgaria took an active part in the Serbo-Bulgarian War of 1885, and for their devotion to their fatherland many of them were cited for heroism by Prince Alexander

Batemberg. The participation of the Jews in this war dissipated some of the anti-Jewish feelings that had become manifest when Jews remained neutral during the Bulgarian War of Liberation.

According to N.M. Galber, additional reason for the presence of anti-Semitism in Bulgaria following the establishment of the independent state, was the hatred felt against Benjamin Disraeli, Britain's representative to the Congress of Berlin, who was held responsible for the territorial sacrifices imposed upon Bulgaria under the Berlin Treaty.¹¹

During the 1880's there were two ritual murder accusations levelled against the Jews. Also in a number of towns, the market day was held on Saturday -- the equivalent of an economic boycott on the Jews. There was no overt anti-Semitism in Bulgaria, however, until the economic crisis after the First World War. All evidence indicates that the Bulgarian people, who had been persecuted by the Turks were, on the whole, tolerant toward the Jewish minority during the first half century of their independence. One can account for the small number of Jews who were employed by the Bulgarian Civil Service during this period by the better opportunities found in the private enterprise. In addition, the Civil Service positions were distributed according to party allegiance, and very few Bulgarian Jews were actively involved in the Bulgarian political life.

2. THE ZIONIST MOVEMENT IN BULGARIA

The first local Zionist organizations in Bulgaria were established in 1895 by Mr. Joseph Marco Baruch in Sofia, Pazarjik, and Plovdiv. During the following year a National Zionist Organization was set up with central offices in Sofia.

Herzl's Jewish State had been translated into Bulgarian shortly after its publication in German. Herzl himself visited Bulgaria twice in 1896, and he was welcomed by the Jewish community as though he were the Messiah.¹²

In 1897 Herzl invited delegates from the Bulgarian Zionist Organization to participate in the First Zionist Congress. Delegates from Bulgaria continued to participate in every one of the World Zionist Congresses.¹³

Many of the Jews of Bulgaria became ardent Zionists. Internal struggles between the members of the different factions within the communities continued taking place until the meeting of the Second Congress of the Bulgarian Jews in 1920. At that time the Zionists claimed a majority, and new statutes were adopted that proclaimed the national and religious solidarity of all Jewish inhabitants of the country.¹⁴

The principles of the Zionist movement served as guidelines for the Bulgarian Jewish Community. Thus, the Bulgarian Jewish Community proclaimed itself an integral part of the Jewish people of the world. This meant that each Jewish community in Bulgaria had to allocate a portion of its budget to the Jewish

national organization. Despite the victory of the Zionists, the internal struggles between the different factions continued. On the extreme right were the so-called "notables" (the wealthy Jewish element), who remained anti-Zionists. Their antithesis was made up of socialists and communists, who, following the "Bund" principles, desired to abolish the religious life of the communities and substitute the Ladino language for Hebrew.

The Zionists were the only group who could present a united front, and for that reason they became the leaders of the Jewish community of Bulgaria until 1948.

C. FROM THE END OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR
TILL THE RISE OF HITLER IN 1933

Bulgaria was Germany's ally during the First World War, and the defeat of Germany was also the defeat of Bulgaria. From that time on these two countries -- these partners in defeat -- were joined in destiny. One can hardly say that this comradeship between Bulgaria and Germany was brought about by sheer idealistic convictions, but rather, it was based on a number of practical considerations which will be explored in this chapter.

The German-Bulgarian alliance during World War II seems to account for the salvation of the Bulgarian Jewish Community during the war. This alliance dated back to their common fate during World War I. Had Bulgaria been on the victorious side, that is, on the British-French side during the First World War, chances are that it would have remained neutral during the Second World War, relying upon its mutual defense pacts with England and France. Hitler would have overrun neutral Bulgaria, just as he overran the other neutral countries. And once Bulgaria would have become a conquered territory, nothing could have prevented the annihilation of the Bulgarian Jews by the Nazis.

History does have its paradoxes. The defeat of Bulgaria in the First World War, a defeat highly lamented by the Bulgarian Jews who had taken an active part in this war, indirectly brought salvation to the Jews twenty-five years later.

In this chapter I intend to discuss primarily two sub-

jects: first, Bulgaria's internal position in the post First World War Europe, its relationship with Germany, and the rise of anti-Semitism in Bulgaria; second, economical, social and political changes that took place within the Bulgarian Jewish Community during the fifteen years 1918-1933.

1. Bulgaria's Internal and External Conditions From 1918-1933

At the end of the First World War the European nations were divided into two camps, the victorious nations, and the defeated nations. Germany, Austria, Hungary, and Bulgaria were among the defeated nations. The victors were not concerned with the fate of the victims and were not willing to help them rehabilitate their ruined economies. There was no Marshall Plan, nor the flow of private investment capital into the defeated countries. Bulgaria, having suffered territorial annexation and having undergone severe financial strain during the war, was left with a shattered economy.

It is not surprising, therefore, that Bulgaria witnessed the rise of a number of super-nationalistic organizations.¹ The first such organization, the Kobra, was not anti-Semitic; indeed, it even welcomed Jews into its ranks.² In the early 1920's, the Homeland Defense (Rodna Zashchita) and the National Society for Political Renaissance (Natsionalna Zadruga Za Politichesko Vozrazhdane), under the leadership of Dr. Alexander Stalinski, were established. Both of these organizations were anti-Semitic.³

In its publications, The Homeland Defense continuously printed news about the pogroms and persecutions which were taking place against the Jews in the different parts of the world, hoping, thereby, to lay the foundations for similar treatment of the Jews in Bulgaria. Gelber says that at that time, the majority of the Bulgarian journals, realizing the goal desired by the anti-Semitic publications, protested vigorously by pointing out the loyalty of the Bulgarian Jews toward their homeland.⁴

The infamous Der Stuermer was already appearing in Germany; many of its cartoons were being reprinted in the Bulgarian language by the Homeland Defense and similar organizations.⁵

The State of Bulgaria never had enough academic facilities to train its professional and academic cadres; subsequently, many Bulgarian students were studying in German universities. Many of these students, who during their stay in Germany were exposed to the ideology of the National Socialist Party, became active supporters of the Bulgarian anti-Semitic movement upon their return to Bulgaria.

The climax of tension between the anti-Semites and the Jewish community was reached in 1932 with the Kalpakchiev Trial.

Dimitri Kalpakchiev was one of the leaders of the Homeland Defense in Sofia. During the fall of 1931, he and some of his strongmen began attacking Jews at random. Most of the victims were attacked while on public premises (streets, parks,

etc.). In December, 1931, the police finally apprehended the young criminals and their leader, and on the 6th of June, 1932, the trial was held. The trial was more than an ideological duel between the anti-Semites and the Jews. During the trial violent scuffles took place outside the court house between the members of the Homeland Defense and the members of the Jewish youth and Jewish veterans organizations. The court found Kalpakchiev guilty of violence, kidnapping, and attempt to kill, and sentenced him to fifteen years in jail.⁶

The general economic and political conditions in Bulgaria during the early 1920's made good soil for an active Communist Movement. Fearing Communism, extreme right elements toppled the democratic government in 1924 and put an end to democracy in Bulgaria for the following four years. There is no evidence that the dictatorial government was anti-Semitic; the atmosphere generated by the ruling elements, however, was not favorable to socialistic ideals or movements, and for that reason the Zionist socialists, "Poalei Zion," suffered a temporary setback in their attempts to unite all of the Bulgarian Zionists under the Poalei Zion leadership.⁷

Democratic life in Bulgaria was restored in 1927, but not for long. In 1934, seven years later, another coup d' etat took place, and this was the end of true democracy for Bulgaria.

2. THE BULGARIAN JEWISH COMMUNITY FROM 1918-1933

Bulgaria always was, and still is, primarily an agricultural country. Industry has always been scarce and of little importance to its national economy. Bulgaria, since the Industrial Revolution, received its industrial goods from other European countries, and it exported agricultural products in exchange. When, therefore, European agriculture as early as 1922 sank into economic depression Bulgaria was especially hard hit by the depression.

The restriction on foreign currency and foreign trade, brought about by the defeat in the war and the depression that ensued after the war, jeopardized the economic solvency of the Bulgarian Jews. Many Jews during the 1920's, primarily the petty merchants, were thrown into the ranks of the working class. This displacement of the Jewish merchants was also accelerated by the establishment of a large number of purchasing and marketing cooperatives among the Bulgarian farmers, which, by eliminating the need for the middle-man, deprived many Jews of their livelihood. N. M. Gelber indicates in his statistical tables that between the census of 1920 and that of 1926 the number of self-employed Jews decreased from 49.3 per cent to 41.2 per cent.⁸ This sixteen per cent decrease of self-employed Jews in the short span of six years indicates a severe economic crisis.

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the new government of Bulgaria had more in common than ideological similarities. According to statistics presented by Arditti, 52.60 per cent of Bulgaria's total exports in 1935 went to Germany, whereas in 1926 only 19.49 per cent of Bulgaria's total exports had been shipped to Germany. This constituted an increase of over 150 per cent in less than ten years.⁸

During the six years, 1934-1940, the Bulgarian Jewish Community concentrated all its resources on achieving two goals: ONE,

1. The establishment of a united Jewish community
2. The mobilization of all available means to dissipate the increasing anti-Semitic atmosphere among the Bulgarian people

The leaders of the Bulgarian Jewish Community were aware of the difficult times that awaited the Jewish community. The uncertain future called for a united front, free from internal strife. The conflict in the Jewish community was twofold: among the Zionist groups themselves, and between the Zionists and the non-Zionists. In 1935 David Ben Gurion and Zeev Zobotinsky signed an agreement calling for cooperation between the two opposed Zionist factions in the face of the Nazi danger in Europe. The Ben Gurion-Zobotinsky Agreement, which later was rescinded, was not accepted by the Bulgarian Poalei Zion.⁹

Poalei Zion, however, finally realized the gravity of the situation, and on May 22, 1938, the Poalei Zion Newspaper called for internal armistice because of the external danger.¹⁰ The practical results of this proposal were that Poalei Zion tried to include in the Jewish community, councils, and in the Con-

slatory, representatives of the opposition parties (the non-Zionists and the revisionists), even though the votes of these representatives were not needed since Poalei Zion had a majority without them.¹¹

As early as 1934 the Bulgarian Jewish Community, through its elected representatives, appealed to the government to put an end to the increasing anti-Semitic propaganda. The government consented to these appeals, and, for a time, intervened in the activities of the organizations, which under the mask of nationalism, were spreading anti-Jewish propaganda among the population. The government's intervention was short-lived and ineffective.

The most important attempt to fight the increasing anti-Semitic propaganda and feelings among the Bulgarian population was undertaken by Boko Piti, a Jewish journalist, who in 1935 and 1936 interviewed fifty-seven of the leading Christian Bulgarians, asking them the following questions: "What is your opinion about the race theory? How do you explain the occurrence of anti-Semitism? What is your opinion about the Jews in general, and the Bulgarian Jewish Community in particular?" The personalities interviewed by Piti included previous prime ministers, former secretaries of government departments, generals of the army, and leading representatives from the arts and sciences. All those interviewed expressed themselves clearly and unequivocally against anti-Semitism. In 1937 Piti published the results of his interviews under the title, Bulgarian Public Opinion About the Race Theory and Anti-Semitism.¹² Piti's book was published

at a proper time; it could not, however, influence the official position of the government, which was becoming completely dependent upon Nazi Germany economically.¹³

On the 19th of July, 1936, the Ratnik Movement was founded by nine prominent anti-Semites, including Peter Gabrovski (who became the Secretary of the Interior during the war), Alexander Belev (who in 1942 was appointed as the head of the newly established Commissariat for Jewish Affairs), Kalitzin (who became Belev's assistant in the Commissariat) and others.

Ratnik was anti-Semitic, and its leaders were responsible for the wording of the anti-Semitic legislation passed by the government in 1940.

Another anti-Semitic movement, Branik, was founded early in 1940. It was sponsored by the government and its ultimate purpose was to indoctrinate the Bulgarian youth into serving their country faithfully. Branik was financially supported by the government, and shortly after its establishment, it became an effective tool for the Bulgarian Fascist Government.¹⁵

II. THE HISTORY OF THE JEWS OF BULGARIA DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR

A. Bulgaria's Role in the Second World War

The study of the Nazi holocaust demonstrates that the fate of the Jews in a particular country at war was directly related to the war enthusiasm in that country. To know and understand the history of the Bulgarian Jewish Community during the war, therefore, necessitates a short discussion of Bulgaria's participation in this war.

Bulgaria is a Slavic country; the ethnic origin of its population is closer to that of the Russians than to that of any other people. In addition to this ethnic relation, the Bulgarian people had for the past two generations been grateful to the Russians for liberating them from the Turks in 1878. Three factors, however, alienated the Bulgarian people from their Russian ethnic brothers and persuaded Bulgaria to join the Tripartite Pact. First, the Russian Revolution put an end to its monarchical system, while Bulgaria, despite the dissatisfaction of a considerable part of its population, remained a monarchy. The monarchical family was a cross between the German-English house, on one side, and the Italian monarchical family on the other. Second, Bulgaria, which had territorial grievances against its neighbors, primarily Roumania and Greece, for the annexations imposed upon it during the Balkan War and World War I, was hopeful to retrieve its losses, in the event that Germany conquered the Balkans. And third, Bulgaria's economy had become

totally dependent upon Germany during the late 1930's.

In February, 1939, a special envoy of Hitler visited Czar Boris with the purpose of persuading him to join the Tripartite Pact. This visit was partially successful. Despite the fact that Bulgaria did not join the pact until the 1st of March, 1941, a pro-German cabinet was established in Bulgaria on the 23rd of October, 1939. It seems, however, that the Prime Minister of this pro-German cabinet, Giorgi Kiosivanov, was not considered loyal enough by the Germans and their Bulgarian supporters; and on the 15th of February, 1940, a new cabinet was established with Professor Filov as Prime Minister. Gabrovski, who was the leader of the Ratnik movement, was appointed Minister of Interior.¹

Bulgaria was now ready to play the game, but not until she received her reward. On the 9th of September, 1940, Bulgaria was given Dobrudja, which had been under Roumanian rule since its annexation from Bulgaria at the end of World War I. It was now Bulgaria's "turn to deliver." On February 8th, 1941, a secret agreement was made between Field Marshal List and the Bulgarian General Staff. According to this agreement, Bulgaria was to obtain Greek territory to the south, an access to the Aegean Sea, in return for which Bulgaria would permit the passage of German armies through Bulgarian territory. On the night of February 28, 1941, German army units crossed the Danube into Bulgaria, which on the next day, March 1st, became a member of the Tripartite Pact.² As reward for its cooperation, Bulgaria acquired in April, 1941, Macedonia from Yugoslavia and Thrace from Greece.

Bulgaria was and still is one of the least significant countries in Europe, and yet during the Second World War, Bulgaria played its cards so well, that despite its insignificance, it can be said that it was treated by Germany as if it were an important ally which Germany needed for its war plans.

Bulgaria, unlike Roumania, never sent troops to fight the allied forces. Despite its geographic proximity to the Eastern Front, not one Bulgarian soldier fought against the Russian armies. Furthermore, Bulgaria, even though a member of the Tripartite Pact since February, 1941, never declared war against Russia. It is possible that Czar Boris, who was a master politician and a very shrewd person, had convinced the Germans that it might have been demoralizing for the people of Bulgaria if they had to fight their ethnic brothers, the Russians.

Another anomaly was the continuation in Bulgaria, both prior to and throughout the war, of its parliamentary system. As mentioned in the previous chapter, constitutional democracy ceased to exist in Bulgaria with the coup d'etat of 1934. Subsequently, Bulgaria cultivated its own form of parliamentary government. And throughout the late 1930's and during the war years, the parliament continued to function as the legislative arm of the state. This parliament was no mere rubber stamp for the power behind the government; it contained an opposition, which often fought, however unsuccessfully, against the passing of certain laws. It is true that such political parties as the Social Democrats and the Communists were outlawed; other parties,

however, such as the Democratic Party, were legal and constituted the opposition in Parliament. The cabinet posts, of course, were divided among the members of the pro-German party, the majority party.

B. The Anti-Jewish Laws of Bulgaria

The first anti-Jewish laws in Bulgaria passed their first reading by the Sobranje on the 7th of October, 1940, five months before Bulgaria joined the Tripartite Pact; a month later, however, Dobrudja was delivered over to Bulgaria. The final reading of the law took place on the 24th of December, 1940. During the three months which elapsed between the first reading of anti-Jewish laws and their final reading, the Bulgarian Jewish Community, lead by the Consistory, did its best to prevent the final passing of the law. A committee was established to seek public support against the law, while another committee was appointed to gather, in a scientific manner, materials concerning the Jews and their contributions to society, and to prepare arguments proving the inequity of the law.¹

The Bulgarian Jews were supported by a number of prominent, secular and religious non-Jewish organizations, such as the Literary Guild of Bulgaria, the Bulgarian Bar Association, the Bulgarian Medical Association, the Greek Orthodox Church, particularly Metropolitans Stephan from Sofia, Kyril from Flavidiv, Sofroni from Vratza, Neofit from Viddin, and many other private citizens.²

Additional opposition to the law came from the Workers Party and their members in the Sobranje. On the other hand, the veterans' organizations were on the whole very enthusiastic about the law and saw in it a measure of protection for the state.³ Despite the opposition, the law was passed and enacted on January 21, 1941, and was published in the Bulgarian Official Gazette, number 16, on January 23, 1941.

These anti-Jewish laws formed part of the broader "Law for the Protection of the Nation." The first section of this law deals with secret and subversive organizations, the second section with persons of Jewish descent, and the third section with anti-national activities. The fourth and final section contains mostly penal provisions.

The translation of Section 2 of the law and of article 47 of Section 4 of the law is rendered in appendix A of this thesis.

C. The Implementation of the Anti-Jewish Laws

Since the Commissariat for Jewish Affairs was not established until September, 1942, the Department of Interior was the government^{AL} agency responsible for the implementation of the law in the interim. The person in charge of the Jewish division in the Ministry of the Interior was Belev, who eventually became the Jewish Commissar.

The task imposed upon the Jews was overwhelming: there were forms to be filled, cards to be issued, property declarations to be made, birth certificates to be sent for, and all in a limited number of weeks. The original deadline for all

On June 13, 1941, the Sobranje passed an additional tax law against the Jews. Every Jew, regardless of his age or citizenship, residing in Bulgaria, had to fill a declaration of his total assets, real or moveable, within a month. The property declared was subject to twenty per cent tax on its value. The declaration of one's total assets had to include assets one possessed in Bulgaria, as well as abroad.³

The officials charged with the execution of the new law were to make the evaluation of the property listed. Since the estimates given by these officials were very high, Jews were compelled to offer heavy bribes to bring them down to realistic levels.⁴

The new law brought to the Treasury of the Bulgarian Government close to one and a half billion leva, and economic ruin to Bulgarian Jews.

Ironically, at the very moment that the Jews in Bulgaria were being forced to close their businesses, Bulgarian citizens of Jewish origin, residing in countries occupied by Germany were receiving protection from the Bulgarian Legation. Thus, Menachem Abraham Confino was accorded protection by the Royal Legation of Bulgaria in Paris:

In view of the anti-Jewish legislation issued by the (occupational) authorities (in France) the Bulgarian citizens of Jewish origin enjoy the same protection as the Bulgarian citizens (residing in France) of Aryan origin.

Therefore, the Royal Legation issues upon request this letter to Mr. Menachem Abraham Confino, a Bulgarian citizen who resides in Paris, bearer of Bulgarian passport

number 132/1940.

This protection document issued in Paris, January 14, 1941.

Signed: Charge de Affairs of Legation, Mr. Contier⁵

The following document of September 24, 1942 testifies to the termination of the privileged status of the Bulgarian Jews in France:

From: the German Embassy in Paris
 To: Gestapo
 Subject: Jews who are citizens of Italy, Roumania, Bulgaria, Greece, Hungary living in occupied France

...
 The Roumanian Government consented that its Jewish subjects in France be treated as all other French Jews (i.e., can be sent to the East with the rest of the French Jews). Bulgaria also agrees to similar treatment of its subjects, however, demands a detailed list of all the candidates for deportation of its Jewish subjects who live in France.

Signed: Dr. Zeitschel⁶

The interventions of the Bulgarian Legation on behalf of the Bulgarian Jews in France can be explained as follows.

1. From an economic point of view, the Bulgarian Legation was not willing to let the Germans capitalize from the property of the Bulgarian Jews in France, and when the Jewish businesses in France were placed under non-Jewish administrators (the Germans prepared a pool of trained personnel for this particular purpose), the Bulgarian Legation insisted that the businesses of the Bulgarian Jews in France be placed under Bulgarian (non-Jewish, of course) administrators, rather than the administrators appointed

by the Germans.⁷

Additional evidence that economic factors were the primary motives behind the Legation's protection of the Bulgarian Jews in France is found in a document from the German authorities instructing the General Commissioner for the Jewish question in France. The document reads:

...
 In the case of Bulgaria and other states... their legations will protect their Jews and their businesses in France... The total monies resulting from the sale, liquidation or operation of Jewish businesses must be deposited in the consulate's bank account.⁸

2. Besides the economic reason, there was also the factor of Bulgaria's reluctance to abandon its sovereignty by surrendering its subjects. It was only when other countries consented to have their Jews treated as French Jews that Bulgaria altered her policy.

D. Further Anti-Jewish Decrees in Bulgaria and The Desire for a Continental Solution to the Jewish Problem

The persecution of Jews has had a long tradition in Christian Europe. And yet, the persecution during the Second World War had no antecedents. It was not a mere pogrom or spontaneous short-lived riot brought about by accusations of ritual murder. Because of their lack of precedent, the persecutors themselves were confused at first; they had no past experience on which to draw. This confusion was evident also to Bulgaria.

The Bulgarian Foreign Minister, Popov, visited Foreign

the opening statement of this verbal note is absolutely deceptive. While reconsidering the matter [the Jewish problem] in the past the Bulgarian Government always met with difficulties since it was impossible for it up to now to evacuate the Bulgarian Jews in whole or in part [This statement is likewise deceptive in that no such evacuation attempt had ever been undertaken or considered]. For that reason the Bulgarian Government very readily agreed to the German proposal that a general evacuation of the Jews of Bulgaria and Roumania take place, without the creation of difficulties in the political and economic stability of the country. On the other hand, the utilization of the labor of the Jews, which is cheap labor power for the public roads construction projects, must not be delayed any longer. It must be utilized at present since we cannot divert agricultural labor power to these projects.

The Bulgarian Government will be grateful if the German Government would inform us about the plans for the evacuation of the Jews of Roumania, so that we would be able to pass similar regulations for the fundamental solution of the problem.

The Bulgarian Government in principle is ready to pay a total sum for the removal of the Jews but feels that the proposed 250 marks per person is a very high sum.¹⁸

The content of the above verbal note was forwarded by Beckerle to Berlin on the 16th of November, 1942.¹⁹

A thorough analysis of the above-quoted documents does convey the impression that a certain progress toward the solution of the Jewish problem in Bulgaria was taking place. The German Minister, Ribbentrop, initiated this development by indicating that Germany was now ready to help Bulgaria. The Bulgarian Government, following Germany's lead, was now acting toward the solution in what seemed to be a manner satisfactory to the Germans. And yet, certain events occurred in Bulgaria during the fall of 1942 which must be interpreted by a keen observer as a relaxation of the anti-Jewish measures.

What were these events that serve as the complete antithesis to the conclusions that may be drawn from the documents just cited? First, on September 27, 1942, about 350 Jews gathered before the Ministry of the Interior (Gabrovsky's office) to protest their expulsion from Sofia to the small towns in the country. (See regulation #29 of the August, 1942 laws, in Appendix B of this thesis). The date for this expulsion for all the unemployed Jews of Sofia was two days later, September 29, 1942.

To the amazement of all the employees of the Ministry, Secretary Gabrovski, instead of issuing an order to the police to disperse the Jews away from his offices, came to meet the protesters and delivered a half an hour speech to calm the Jews. Among other things, Gabrovski said that the worst was already over. At the completion of his speech Gabrovski personally accepted from each and every one of the Jewish persons assembled there their petition for the postponement of the expulsion decree.²⁰

Furthermore, according to both Arditti and Hilberg, on the following day, September 28, 1942, Gabrovski ordered that the press abstain from publishing any articles about the Jewish problem (In 1941-42 the press was the primary instrument in the anti-Jewish public opinion campaign), since the Jewish question in Bulgaria had already been regulated.²¹

In addition to lifting the anti-Jewish campaign of the press, Gabrovski told Commissar Belev, on a number of occasions during this period, that the Cabinet and the Czar desired an alleviation of the anti-Jewish activities and a less severe treatment of Jews.²²

Was Gabrovski's speech, warm reception, and order to the press just a bluff, a clever device employed to disperse the fears of the Jews and make them forget the coming danger? The following German source, quoted by Hilberg, would prove that perhaps Gabrovski was not bluffing, i. e., that the Bulgarian Government was procrastinating to gain time. Hilberg says:

On November 9, 1942 the RSHA [Reich Security Main Office] Foreign Intelligence Chief, General Schellenberg, sent a report on Bulgarian anti-Jewish developments to Luther. The report revealed evidence of deliberate procrastination. The Bulgarian Government said the RSHA had come to the conclusion that with the latest anti-Jewish ordinances the "point of toleration" [das Mass des Ertraglichen] had already been exceeded. [i. e., that the Bulgarian Government does not feel the need for further anti-Jewish measures] 23

Any student of the German war machine during the Second World War knows that there was great jealousy and rivalry between the departments of the different services. Often, officials from different departments worked on the same assignment with or without each others' knowledge. Beckerle was a S.A. man, while Hoffman, who was the police attache in the German Embassy in Sofia, was an S.S. man. In this capacity Hoffman served as the Bulgarian S.S. representative, and it was his duty to report to the RSHA.

It is possible that the RSHA complaint was based upon reports from S.S. Hoffman, rather than upon information which was sent by Beckerle to the Foreign Office and then passed on to the RSHA. Perhaps the S.S. was getting impatient with Ribbentrop's postponement of the solution of the Bulgarian Jewish problem. It is also

possible that the RSHA complaint was based upon information sent by Beckerle to the S.S. Office rather than the Foreign Office. Generally speaking, this usually was not the case since the Foreign Ministry attaches could communicate only with their home office in Berlin. Hilberg indicates, however, that Beckerle was in good relations with the S.S., despite his S.A. affiliation.²⁴ Beckerle, seeing that the Foreign Office (Ribbentrop) was reluctant to take action against Bulgaria's Jewry, may have tried to change Ribbentrop's mind by applying pressure upon him through the S.S. (RSHA).

Additional evidence for some relaxation of the anti-Jewish Laws in Bulgaria during the fall of 1942 comes from Arditti, who, on the basis of an unquoted source, says:

The Minister of Justice, Partov, met with Commissar Belev on the 30th of September, 1942. Partov insisted that the Jews should not be forced to wear the "yellow star" nor should they be evacuated from their homes [referring to the Jews of Sofia]. Also the Minister demanded from Belev that the pressure upon the Jews be eased.²⁵

A difficult phenomenon to explain with relation to the Jewish problem was taking place in Bulgaria during the months of September, October, and November of 1942. The Bulgarian Government, as stated by Beckerle on November 16 in his report to Berlin was satisfied that the Jewish problem in Bulgaria was going to be solved soon. At the same time we have internal evidence (Gabrovski's speech as well as external evidence, the RSHA report) that the pressure upon the Jews in Bulgaria was being reduced. The lack of enforcement of the wearing of the yellow star is further

evidence which attests to this fact. At the beginning of October, 1942, about 20 per cent of the Bulgarian Jews received the yellow star. At the same time, although 80 per cent of the Jews still had not received the star, the government ordered that the production of the stars be halted. The government's order was justified on the grounds that it was necessary to economize on electrical power. The factories producing yellow stars were shut down.²⁶

Hilberg says that following the halt in the manufacturing of stars "many Jews who had already been wearing the star took it off again, while others continued wearing it in an arrogant manner, pinned next to a patriotic symbol, such as a picture of the Czar or the Queen."²⁷

In an additional report from the NSHA, Schellenberg reported to Luther that a partial explanation for the reduction of the pressures on the Jews of Bulgaria is to be found in the protest of some foreign powers such as Italy, Hungary, Roumania, France, and Spain. These countries expressed dissatisfaction concerning the measures taken against their subjects of Jewish faith who were temporary residents of Bulgaria. The protest notes were served to Foreign Minister Popov by the legations of the respective countries, who in turn showed them to Belev with the intention of convincing him to reduce the pressure upon the Jews.²⁸

The events in the history of the Bulgarian Jewish Community during the concluding months of 1942 are permeated with contradictions. Despite the fact, however, that there are evidences

pointing to a certain relaxation, the official machinery, the Commissariat, under Balev, was planning for the final solution.

E. The Final Solution

It is befitting that I begin the writing of this tragic chapter by quoting from the personal experiences of my father, Abraham Asa, who during 1943 was the Vice President of the Jewish community of Burgas:

One morning about mid-February, 1943, a telegram addressed to the Burgas branch of the Commissariat for Jewish Affairs was delivered by mistake to the office of the local Jewish community. Not realizing that the telegram was not for us I opened it and read the following order sent from the Commissariat of Jewish Affairs in Sofia to the Commissariat of Jewish Affairs in Burgas:

'Please arrange that a Medical Doctor of the local office of Public Health visit the Jewish homes in Burgas for the purpose of performing delousing [it is my father's contention that the Commissariat wanted to justify the evacuation of the Jews from their cities on the basis of medical necessity, i.e., by proving that the homes of the Jews were a menace to the health of the public]. The results of the delousing must be reported to Sofia since this information is necessary for the planning of the forthcoming expulsion of the Jews.'

To my fortune the local director of the post office was a very good friend of mine. I brought the telegram to his office, explained the mistake that had occurred, and he promised that his office would correct the situation by re-typing the telegram and sending it to its addressee.

The next morning I visited Mr. Gershev, the local Commissar of Jewish Affairs who was a good friend of mine since our joint military service during the First World War. I used to visit Gershev at his office a number of times weekly and was always welcomed there. That particular morning the Commissar seemed nervous. As soon as I sat down he told me that he was going to share with me some secret information pertaining to the Jewish community of Burgas, and that I, under the risk of losing my own life, must not reveal to anyone the source that made this information available to me.

Then he showed me the telegram which by mistake I had already read the previous day. After reading the telegram and being told by Gerschev that deportation of the Jews of Burgas would ensue, I asked Gerschev for a travel permit [by that time Jews could travel only with a permit card issued by their local commissar] to Sofia so that I could inform the Central Consistory about the forthcoming evacuation [of course without revealing the source of my information].

I left for Sofia where I met with the Central Consistory members and informed them about the evacuation. At the time they had no knowledge of it as yet; I was told, however, by the members of the Consistory that they would employ sources of information and would inform the different Jewish communities about the future. I returned to Burgas.

During the last week of February, Commissar Gerschev called me to his office to show me a telegram sent from Sofia demanding that the local commissariat should send to Sofia a list of those Jews of Burgas who were considered to be the leaders of the Jewish community, political enemies of the regime, and wealthy and influential members of the community.

I left for Sofia again to see the members of the Consistory. This time I was told by them that they had also received information that "something" was in the planning. The members of the Consistory were going to try to meet with some of the philesemitic influential Bulgarians, asking for their intervention in the matter.

I returned to Burgas where we began preparing the Jewish community for the evacuation which was to take place for the Jews of Burgas on the early morning of March 10, 1943.¹

What stages of preparation and planning preceded the above orders for the evacuation of the Bulgarian Jewish Community? On December 4, 1942, the following letter was sent by Klingefus to Beckerle in Sofia:

We have come to an agreement with the Gestapo that S.S. Hauptsturmführer Dannecker will be attached to the German Police attaché in Sofia to be available for all the arrangements concerning the evacuation. Dannecker has already worked

in this capacity in France and is well equipped to deal with all problems that may come up.

With respect to the claim [on the part of the Bulgarian Government] concerning the rate of payment [demanded by us] for the expenses involved [in the evacuation] please make it clear that this sum has been arrived at after considering transportation, food, and camp expenses. On the other hand, the Bulgarian Government will handsomely profit from the expropriation of the assets of the Jews [after the evacuation].

It is left up to you to negotiate with the Bulgarian Government for the reduction of the asked price, however, without making a counter offer that will obligate us. As a minimum sum we would accept 100 marks per person.

Signed: Klingenfus²

Dannecker arrived to Sofia on Thursday, the 21st of January, 1943.³

On January 22, Beckerle sent the following report to Berlin:

The Minister of the Interior, Gabrovski, and I had a long conversation about the situation in Bulgaria. He dwelt on the Jewish problem and said that there is no point in having a discussion in public about the problem, but rather he calls for action. He has already done much in the past and will continue in the future....

In the course of our conversation we also spoke about an anti-Jewish exhibit, to which Minister Gabrovski objects. In my opinion the Minister is completely mistaken [with respect to the exhibit]. There is no question that the Bulgarian public shows enthusiasm in the execution of the economic anti-Jewish laws. But the true meaning of the Jewish problem, they still don't understand. In Bulgaria there are only a few rich Jews but a rather large number of poor Jews who earn their livelihood as workers or artisans. The common Bulgarian who has been raised with Greeks, Turks, and Armenians does not comprehend the true meaning of the Jewish problem and has no understanding concerning the race question....

...Gabrovski's position concerning the evacuation of the Jews is that we must first expel the Jews that reside in the liberated provinces [Thrace, Macedonia]. Since Dannecker is

about to arrive [at Bulgaria], I preferred not to enter deeply into the discussion on that subject without first informing you about it.⁴

Gabrovski, thus proposed that the final solution be applied for the time being only toward the Jews residing in Thrace and Macedonia. The Bulgarian Government including Gabrovski must have known well in advance, however, that the expulsion of the Jews from Old Bulgaria (which would have followed after the completion of the expulsion of the Jews from the new lands) would have caused considerable protest on the part of a large segment of the population, and that such an expulsion could have been conducted successfully only if carried out suddenly. The evacuation of the Jews from Thrace and Macedonia would have afforded an opportunity for the philo-semitic elements in the country to organize in protest against the expulsion of the Jews from Old Bulgaria, and this would have brought about results the very opposite of that which Gabrovski desired -- swift, orderly evacuation. Thus, it seems that as early as January, 1943, almost two months before the planned expulsion date, the government had already decided that only the Jews of the liberated provinces would be sacrificed on the altar of German-Bulgarian friendship. So much and no more. But this could not be told to the Germans; the game had to be played to the fullest, and so the Bulgarian Government did.

On February 8, 1943 Beckerle sent an additional report to Berlin:

Enclosed you will find two reports by Dannecker, the

first dealing with the evacuation of the Jews from Bulgaria and the second with the treatment of the Jews of foreign citizenship and converts to Christianity.

...Gabrovski again confirmed his desire to evacuate all the Bulgarian Jews, but for the time being we limit ourselves to the Jews of Thrace and Macedonia since the Jews of Old Bulgaria can be used as a labor force in Bulgaria proper.⁵

Before presenting the text of Dannecker's reports, I would like to raise the following question: If the Bulgarian nation was in such dire need for labor forces that its Jews could not be evacuated, why didn't the Bulgarian Government think about utilizing the Jews of Thrace and Macedonia for labor purposes, too? They were at least as healthy and capable of road construction projects as the Jews of Old Bulgaria. Second, the Jewish labor force that was mobilized never amounted to more than a few thousand men between the ages of 20 and 40 (In 1942 the age limit was raised to 42 years and in 1943 to 46 years). It is difficult to believe that these few thousand laborers (which ^{who} by the way in January, 1942, were not as yet mobilized for the current labor season) were so essential to the economy, that for the sake of their utilization Bulgaria had to put up with over 40,000 unproductive Jews. Germany desired an expulsion of the entire population, rather than of its unproductive element only. Thus, in my opinion, the indispensability of the Jewish labor to the economy of the country was not the real reason for the postponement of the evacuation of the Bulgarian Jews.

The following is the number on report of Dannecker to LV B4

(Eichmann's office) of February 6, 1942:

On February 2, 1942, I was introduced before Minister Gabrovski who expressed the desire for the evacuation of the Jews of Thrace and Macedonia...but he made it clear that according to him there is no possibility for the evacuation of the Jews of Old Bulgaria since he would like to utilize their labor for public works....

Finally, the Minister said that all the details [concerning the evacuation] should be worked out with Belev.

Meanwhile, Belev sent the following report to the Minister's Council for their approval: [Dannecker summarized the Belev report rather than enclosing the full text]

- A. The problem of the evacuation of the Jews from Thrace and Macedonia including undesired Jewish elements from the border provinces of Bulgaria [proper]. Thrace and Macedonia have about 14,000 Jews. Belev foresees the total number to be evacuated as 20,000.
- B. Later Belev [in his report] considers the eventual evacuation of all the Jews and expresses the opinion that caution must be used while the evacuation of part of the Jews is taking place so that the Jewish men will not join the resistance movement [the underground]. For that reason Belev suggests that immediately all Jewish men between 17 and 46 years from Old Bulgaria -- from Sofia first -- be called to labor groups and be put into labor camps. [This was Belev's report to the Council, and now Dannecker continues with his report to IV B4]

The forthcoming evacuation of the Jews depends upon the length of time used by the Minister's Council to approve Belev's proposal. This approval is necessary since orders must be given to the Department of Railroads [in Bulgaria the railroad was run by the state], the Department of Food and Provisions, the Department of Police, and eventually -- for there will be need for army trucks -- to the Department of Defense.

According to Belev, the culmination of the preliminary preparations [i.e. the gathering of the Jews in transitory camps in the railroad stations] may take 4-6 weeks. As soon as exact numbers of Jews and the railroad stations are decided upon, I will sign a written agreement [about the matter]

with Belev.

...Further reports will follow.

Signed: Dannecker⁶

It can be clearly seen from the Gabrovski-Dannecker conversation on February 2, 1943, that the Bulgarian Government was willing for the present to evacuate the Jews from the new territories only.

As soon as Dannecker heard the decision, in principle, as conveyed by Gabrovski on February 2nd, he managed to see Belev on the same day to work out with him the technical details about the expulsion.

The following is the report sent by Belev to his superior, Gabrovski, regarding his February 2nd meeting with Dannecker:

...According to Dannecker...

1. The evacuation must begin in March and approximately 10,000 to 20,000 Jews must be evacuated every month.

...The evacuees will lose their Bulgarian citizenship upon their transfer to the German authorities....

...Dannecker declared before me that according to his understanding the issue has been solved in principle between you [Gabrovski] and Beckerle. I told Dannecker that I am not informed about that agreement, and that I will report our conversation [between Dannecker and me] to you, hoping to come to an arrangement between us as soon as the Minister's Council approves the plan.

2. [The following is Belev's opinion and not the report on his conference with Dannecker]

If the evacuation of the Jews begins, it would be wise if it includes the Jews of Old Bulgaria. After the deportation of the Jews from Macedonia and Thrace, the

the Bulgarian Government was willing to evacuate the Jews of the new territories. 14,000 Jews were destined for this deportation. Belev, who is a convinced anti-Semite, from the very beginning of the evacuation plan included 6,000 Jews from Old Bulgaria. Gabrovski consented to this inclusion for a total of 20,000 deportees. The plan for the deportation of 20,000 Jews was approved by the Minister's Council....

- 2. Everyone who is familiar with the local conditions in Bulgaria knew that difficulties would develop with the approach of the time for the evacuation of the Jews. These difficulties developed with respect to the evacuation of the Jews from Old Bulgaria. Belev foresaw the coming of these difficulties and removed the influential Jewish leaders from the cities of Plovdiv, Kyustendil, Rusjuk, and Varna, and interned them in a local concentration camp. Belev was planning to do the same thing for the Jews of Sofia. The fact that some Jews of Old Bulgaria were also to be included in the "aktion" became known. Bulgarian political circles which were in disagreement with the government's anti-Jewish policies began to exercise pressure upon Gabrovski. Especially, a delegation from Kyustendil, headed by Peshev, the Vice-president of the Sabranje, intervened for the Jews before Gabrovski. It must be further admitted that Gabrovski received a hint from the highest source that the evacuation of the Jews from Old Bulgaria be stopped. At any rate, on March 9th, Gabrovski ordered, without consulting Belev, that the Jews from Old Bulgaria, who were already gathered for the evacuation, be released. This the release took place on March 10th. The release of these Jews caused serious unease feeling of insecurity to the police chiefs of the towns concerned.

- 3. Despite these facts, it would be erroneous to suppose that the Bulgarian Government, and especially Gabrovski, tried seriously to sabotage the "aktion." The German Ambassador intervened several times when some difficulties arose, for example, when he saw that the "aktion" did not progress.

With his repeated interventions before Filov, Beckerle secured the promise of Filov that the Bulgarian Government is resolved to deport all Jews. In order to understand properly the Jewish policy of the Bulgarian Government, it should be stressed that the Jewish problem which existed in the Reich does not exist in Bulgaria. Surely, there are Jews in Bulgaria who have succeeded in attaining key positions in the Bulgarian economy, but their number is very small.

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There doesn't exist here in Bulgaria the ideological and racial preconditions which are needed in order to motivate the people toward an immediate settlement of the Jewish problem, as was the case in the Reich.

The policy which the Bulgarian Government follows with regard to the evacuation of the Jews is based mainly on materialistic interests, for example, the distribution of the property of the deported Jews to reliable Bulgarians for the purpose of satisfying them, and at the same time, especially in the newly acquired territories, replacing the restless Jewish element with reliable Bulgarians.

The Bulgarian Government is without doubt ready to deport the Jews from Old Bulgaria, too, but it has decided to avoid by all means the possibility that the Jewish problem in Bulgaria be in the focus of the world press. Only thus, can we explain why the Bulgarian Government declared to the Swiss Ambassador, for example, its readiness to permit the immigration of several thousand Jewish children to Palestine. But at the same time the German Ambassador, who went immediately to see the Bulgarian Prime Minister [concerning the promise made to the Swiss Ambassador], received a declaration [another promise] that the transport of the Jewish children, to which the Bulgarian Government agreed in theory, will be sabotaged in practice.

The Bulgarian Government tries to save face in the outside world, but they will not obstruct the deportation of their Jews. Certainly, the German Ambassador must from time to time pursue the matter in order to keep it moving.

That this is the real attitude of the Bulgarian Government is seen from the following case:

Prime Minister Filov declared to the Swiss Ambassador, who represents the British interests in Bulgaria and in this capacity protested against the deportation of the Jews, that the Bulgarian Government is definitely resolved to carry out the deportation of the Jews since this is more human than the air bombardments carried out by the allied air forces against non-military objects, such as old people, women, and children. Also with regard to the question of permits for immigration to Palestine, Filov declared to the Swiss Ambassador that there are not any unemployed Jews in the State [The Swiss Ambassador was inquiring about possible immigration of unemployed Bulgarian Jews].

Furthermore, the anti-Jewish propaganda which was relaxed for a certain period is now gaining full speed.

As to Peshev, he submitted together with forty other deputies from the coalition parties a petition against the supposedly bad treatment of the Jews from the new territories during evacuations. During a secret meeting of the government parties [coalition] the government received the full confidence of the Saboranje for its treatment of the Jewish question. In a public session the Saboranje vice president, Peshev, was deposed from his office as Vice-president of the Saboranje [He was the first one to sign the petition protesting the treatment of the Jews].

If we consider the fact that in Italy, Hungary, and Spain all three countries are German allies the Jewish problem is not yet actively treated at all [i.e. the deportation of the Jews here has not been initiated yet], then we can conclude that the Bulgarian Government works actively in the solution of the Jewish problem despite the restrictions which usually arise in the Balkan countries [Hoffman is referring to the inefficiency of the Balkan countries' governments].

4. In addition to the Swiss Ambassador, who intervened in the capacity of acting representative of England, the Spanish Ambassador tried to protest to Prime Minister Filov against the deportation of Jews of Spanish nationality including Spanish nationals.

Also, the Catholic Bishop of Skopje, Macedonia, intervened with the chief of police in Skopje in favor of Jews who had converted to the Catholic faith. In cases where converted Jews were already interned in the camps he, the bishop, asked that he be allowed to render them religious guidance.

We have to assume that other foreign diplomatic missions in Sofia intervened against the deportation of the Jews, but the Bulgarian Government has not changed its attitude.

5. The repercussions of the deportation on the public opinion may be evaluated as being positive since there are many people here who have no steady income. It is hoped that with the removal of the Jews from the economy Bulgarians could profit by taking over the Jewish position in business.