

## Croatian-Slavonian Jews in the First World War\*

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### Abstract

*This paper seeks to present various levels of the Croatian-Slavonian Jews' experience of the First World War. To begin with, although several war memorials are known to have been preserved, the scope of Jewish casualties remains unknown, having been a controversial theme within the former Yugoslav framework. However, recent research has reconstructed the patriotic and social care activities of Jewish societies for the period of 1914–1918; this research additionally charts the life paths of various notable individuals, both Zionist and assimilationist. Furthermore, although various sources attest to an increase in the negative perception of Jews as a result of the war, which in turn contributed to the mass looting of 1918–1919, one can reach no simple conclusions about the character of this changed perception. Similarly, although Zionist representatives publicly vested great hopes in the emancipatory potential of the new Yugoslav state, the Austro-Hungarian Empire had for all intents and purposes shown itself to be not so deficient after all.*

**Marginalized Participants of the Forgotten Conflict**  
**The War and the Jewish Communities**  
**Notable Individuals**  
**The Perception of Jews**  
**Great Expectations, Great Disappointments**

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### Marginalized Participants of the Forgotten Conflict

Before the twenty-first century, Croatian historiography did not show much interest in researching the history of the Croatian-Slavonian Jews during the First

World War.<sup>1</sup> The reasons for this are manifold – ranging from the scarcity of histories of the smaller Jewish communities to the lack of more profound research into the great conflict. However, there are several recent books that show that the situation has slowly begun to change, and these books touch on Jewish history during the First World War in their chapters. Thus, Ivo Goldstein in a 2004 study describes the situation of the Jews of Zagreb during the war,<sup>2</sup> as does Alen Budaj, whose 2007 study gives a short overview of the status of Požega's Jews in the same period.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, Ljiljana Dobrovšak has recently published a book on the Osijek Jewish community, including its activities during the First World War,<sup>4</sup> and an outline of the contemporaneous position of Croatian-Slavonian Jews in general.<sup>5</sup>

Situated within the Yugoslav framework for the most part of the twentieth century, mainstream Croatian historiography had been concentrated mostly on the opponents of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and the monarchy's resulting downfall. As a result, loyalist political options remained unresearched or one-sidedly presented. Moreover, despite the fact that – willingly or not – the majority of the male populations of Croatia-Slavonia, Dalmatia, Istria, and Bosnia–Herzegovina fought within the Habsburg armed forces, one cannot find

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<sup>1</sup> Under the terms of 1867 and 1868 compromises, historical Kingdoms of Croatia and Slavonia were an autonomous entity (despite the plural form of its official title, this was a singular administrative unit) within the Lands of the Hungarian Crown (Transleithania). In October 1918 the South-Slav lands under Habsburg rule proclaimed their independence from Austria-Hungary, joining the Kingdom of Serbia in a new state, initially called the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, later the Kingdom of Yugoslavia.

<sup>2</sup> Ivo Goldstein, *Židovi u Zagrebu 1918-1941* (Zagreb: Novi Liber, 2004), 25–56.

<sup>3</sup> Alen Budaj, *Vallis Judaea – Povijest požeške židovske zajednice*, (Zagreb: D-graf, 2007), 139–142.

<sup>4</sup> Ljiljana Dobrovšak, *Židovi u Osijeku od doseljavanja do kraja Prvog svjetskog rata* (Osijek: Čarobni tim–Židovska općina, 2013).

<sup>5</sup> Ljiljana Dobrovšak, "Fragments from the History of the Croatian Jews during the First World War (1914–1918)," in *Review of Croatian Studies*, 10/1 (2014): 113–134. For further bibliography on the history of the Croatian Jews see also Lj. Dobrovšak, "Hrvatska, srpska, austrijska i mađarska historiografija o povijesti Židova od 1868. do danas," *Historiografija/povijest u suvremenom društvu*, (Zagreb: Hrvatski institut za povijest, 2014), 51–70 and Lj. Dobrovšak, "Povijest nacionalnih i vjerskih zajednica u Hrvatskoj od 1868. do 1941. godine," *Hrvati i manjine u Hrvatskoj: moderni identiteti* (Zagreb: Agencija za odgoj i obrazovanje, 2014), 25. Authors' note: unless implied otherwise, the terms "Jew" and "Jewish" in this article refer primarily to religious affiliation, following the practice of the official censuses and registries of the period (most of the Croatian-Slavonian Jewish municipalities were Neologist). However, the terms "Jewish identity," "Jewish legacy," "Jewish origin," etc., are here generally used in a wider sense, without prescribing the relative importance of any of the possible constitutive elements, albeit in practice a person's former or ancestral religious affiliation was typically a key factor in their self-definition.

even traditional military-historical treatments of the war, apart from the incomplete, sometimes even fuzzy overviews of 1943–1944 by Slavko Pavičić.<sup>6</sup> Consequently, although some recent studies, adopting a “history-from-below” approach to battlefield experience and everyday life in the rear, have brought some advance in scholarship, we still lack more thorough studies of various military, social, cultural, legal, and economic aspects of the Great War, which could also give us a clue to both general and special components of Jewish experience.<sup>7</sup>

Undoubtedly, the losses suffered on the battlefield, in POW and internment camps, but also in the hospitals and households, were immense. However, since the Austro-Hungarian Empire disintegrated after the war, those losses were never definitively tallied.<sup>8</sup> On the other hand, within the new Yugoslav framework, which was based on the state and military legacy of the Kingdom of Serbia, the fate of those who had fought on the side of the Central Powers, including their offensives in 1914 against Serbia and the occupation of Serbia from 1915 to 1918, was – to put it mildly – not a promising subject.

For instance, only beginning in the 1930s does one see the printing of several Croatian language memoirs by former Habsburg officers, which did not contain an outright demonization of Austria-Hungary, while the pro-Habsburg diaries and memoirs tended to remain unpublished until the 2000s; the one exception is the 1941 book by writer, nationalist, and Ustaša politician Mile Budak.<sup>9</sup> Generally speaking, the most influential literary presentations were that of leftist writer and notable Communist Party member Miroslav Krleža (1893–1981), situated in distant Galicia or Bukovina, and therefore – unlike those of neighbouring Serbia or the Italian front – easily prone to a simplistic depiction of the First World War as yet another pure case of Croats serving as *Kanonenfutter* (cannon fodder) sacrificed for “foreign interests.” In that sense,

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<sup>6</sup> Slavko Pavičić, *Hrvatska vojna i ratna poviest i Prvi svjetski rat*, (Zagreb: Hrvatska knjiga, 1943) and S. Pavičić, *Jugozapadno (talijansko) bojište u Prvom svjetskom ratu*, vol. 1, (Zagreb: Zagrebačka priradna tiskara, 1944).

<sup>7</sup> On this problem, with further bibliography, see Filip Hameršak, *Tamna strana Marsa: hrvatska autobiografija i Prvi svjetski rat* (Zagreb: Ljevak d. o. o., 2013), 177–192.

<sup>8</sup> Based on the seminal 1919 book by Wilhelm Winkler, Branimir Bunjac proposes a starting figure of approximately 58 000 dead soldiers from the territory of Croatia and Slavonia, i.e. around 2.2% of the total population. Branimir Bunjac, *Ratne i poratne žrtve sjeverozapadnog Međimurja 1914–1947* (Čakovec: Povijesno društvo Međimurske županije, 2012), 325.

<sup>9</sup> See Hameršak, *Tamna strana Marsa: hrvatska autobiografija i Prvi svjetski rat*, 239–254.

the post-1945 socialist Yugoslavia did not differ much from its dynastic predecessor.<sup>10</sup>

As it seems, remembrance of the dead was, in practice, limited for almost a century to individual families. Beginning with the First World War, the majority of the fallen on the territory of Croatia and Slavonia, in general, received no memorials, and lists of the dead were not collected adequately.<sup>11</sup> The existence of numerous – more or less maintained – cemeteries along the former frontlines is also a fact that has only recently been recognized. The same applies to the losses among the Jewish population as well as to their remembrance.

In the Kingdoms of Croatia and Slavonia the Jews were allowed permanent residence in 1783, gaining legal equality in 1873. According to the 1910 census, the Kingdoms' 21,103 Jews (according to religious affiliation) represented around 0.8% of its 2,621,954 inhabitants.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, applying the estimated 2.2% fatal casualty rate would bring us to a hypothetical total of 464 dead Jewish soldiers from the territory of Croatia and Slavonia. However, to this day, we must depend on highly fragmented data instead of detailed casualty lists. Unlike the situation for Jewish soldiers who had fought in the Serbian Army, there has been neither any systematic research of the individual wartime fate of Croatian–Slavonian Jews<sup>13</sup> nor the erection for them of a general public memorial.<sup>14</sup>

For instance, a memorial erected in 1930 in the central Mirogoj cemetery bears only the names of forty-nine Jewish officers, NCOs, and soldiers – not all of

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<sup>10</sup> On Krleža's influence, see F. Hameršak, "Nacrt za pristup kulturnoj povijesti Prvoga svjetskog rata iz hrvatske perspektive," *Dani Hvarškoga kazališta* (Zagreb–Split: Hrvatska akademija znanosti i umjetnosti–Književni krug Split, 2015), 21–49.

<sup>11</sup> According to the 1917 Croatian-Slavonian Government decree, a reform of the civil registry system should have been undertaken in order to make possible the reliable collection of evidence of fallen soldiers, first at the level of the parish or municipality and then at the national level, but at the moment only several partial lists have been found.

<sup>12</sup> Dobrovšac, "Povijest nacionalnih i vjerskih zajednica u Hrvatskoj od 1868. do 1941. godine," 34–35, 41.

<sup>13</sup> As early as 1927 an impressive book was published, which contained biographical data on 150 Jewish soldiers of the Serbian Army (out of 600 mobilised) who had been killed or had died of other causes between 1912 and 1918: *Spomenica poginulih i umrlih srpskih Jevreja u Balkanskom i Svetskom ratu 1912–1918* (Beograd: Odbor za podizanje spomenika palim jevrejskim ratnicima, 1927).

<sup>14</sup> The central memorial to the fallen Jewish soldiers of the Serbian Army was erected in the Belgrade cemetery, also in 1927.

them inhabitants of Croatia and Slavonia – who died and were buried in Zagreb [Fig. 1].



Fig. 1. Detail of the monument to Jewish war victims, Mirogoj cemetery (Zagreb, 1930)

Furthermore, a memorial erected in 1934 in the Koprivnica cemetery mentions eight casualties, while the one erected in 1935 at the Križevci cemetery testifies to six victims from the local Jewish municipality (all three memorials were sponsored by the *chevra kadishah* funeral societies).<sup>15</sup> All in all, combining these

<sup>15</sup> Dobrovšak, “Fragments from the History of the Croatian Jews during the First World War (1914–1918),” 125–127.

epigraphic sources with selectively researched casualty lists and death records, up to this day Ljiljana Dobrovšak has managed only to collect an incomplete total of 97 names of Jewish victims related to Croatian-Slavonian territory and the Međimurje region.

Symptomatically, the 1940 introduction of a *numerus clausus* for the Jewish students at Yugoslav universities reflected the division between the two opposing groups of former 1914–1918 combatants of Jewish affiliation, that is, those fighting on the side of Austria-Hungary, and those on the side of Serbia, since the *numerus clausus* was supposed not to affect the children of First World War veterans who served in the Serbian Army.<sup>16</sup>

### The War and the Jewish Communities

At the beginning of the war, the majority of Austro-Hungarian Jews were patriotically oriented and shared the national fervor of most of the Monarchy's peoples, even during mobilization.<sup>17</sup> The Jews in Austro-Hungary had been given permission to join the army decades earlier, and all the officer ranks were open to them. In the lands of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, between 300,000 and 500,000 Jewish soldiers were mobilized between 1914 and 1918, 25,000 of whom were officers – a significant statistical disproportion resulting from the higher level of education, on average, among the Jewish soldiers. Around 25 Jews or Jews by origin (some of them had converted to other faiths) had achieved the rank of general during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, with Sámuel Hazai (originally Kohn) even becoming the Hungarian minister of defense in 1910 and *Generaloberst* in 1917, the second most important officer after the general chief of staff.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Ženi Lebl, *Odjednom drukčija, odjednom druga: sećanja i zaboravi*, (Beograd: Čigoja štampa, 2008), 17–20.

<sup>17</sup> According to the 1910 census, 932.458 Jews representing 4,5% of the population resided in Transleithania, while 1.313.687 representing 4,6% of the population lived in Cisleithania. The largest groups of Austrian Jews lived in Galicia (871.906) and Bukovina (102.919); Marsha L. Rozenblit, *Reconstructing a National Identity: The Jews of Habsburg Austria during World War I*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 15.

<sup>18</sup> Rozenblit, *Reconstructing a National Identity*, 83; Raphael Patai, *The Jews of Hungary: History, Culture, Psychology*, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1996), 459; and István Deák, *Beyond Nationalism: A Social and Political History of the Habsburg Officer Corps, 1848–1918*, (New York–Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 172–178.

A special role played by the Jews in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy was that of financing the war effort. Their share in the war loans, whether through a corporation or individually, reached 10% of the entire amount. They also played a very important role in the production of war materials. In fact, some individuals made their fortunes during the war and were rewarded by the rulers with aristocratic titles and honours.<sup>19</sup>

While a portion of the wealthier Jews were financing the war, others were dying on the battlefields, and those who survived the horrors of war and captivity in Italy, Serbia, or Russia were often wounded, disabled, or gravely ill, and sometimes suicidal. Of course, the civilian population did not fare much better – for instance, the official count of displaced Jews in Cisleithania alone reached a total of 177.745 by June 1917.<sup>20</sup>

Besides the brief Serbian occupation of Eastern Sarmia in 1914, there were no military operations on the territory of the Kingdoms of Croatia and Slavonia. Their people had to participate in the war nonetheless. In the beginning, most of the Jews, like most other citizens of the Monarchy, were shocked by the events in Sarajevo. Jewish municipalities from Croatia and Slavonia played prominent roles in various manifestations related to that destructive event. The two largest Jewish municipalities – those of Zagreb and Osijek – held funereal meetings and organized commemorations for the late Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife Sofia on the day following the assassination. Telegrams of condolences were sent to Croatian-Slavonian Ban Ivan Skerlecz, and a solemn funereal mass was held in synagogues, during which the heads of various municipalities gave moving speeches of remembrance for the late Crown Prince. Besides the Jews of the municipalities, the district leaders as well as prominent individuals from the Zagreb and Osijek communities were present at the memorial services. Lights for the salvation of Franz and Sofia's souls were kindled in synagogues over the next thirty days in keeping with the Jewish custom of *shloshim* for mourning the dead.<sup>21</sup>

After the outbreak of the war, young Jewish men were, like all others, mobilised into field units, mainly the Common Army 36<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division and the Hungarian-Croatian 42<sup>nd</sup> Honvéd (Home Guard) Infantry Division. Both

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<sup>19</sup> Patai, *The Jews of Hungary*, 460.

<sup>20</sup> "Broj židovskih evakuiraca," *Židov*, October 15<sup>th</sup>, 1917.

<sup>21</sup> Goldstein, *Židovi u Zagrebu 1918-1941*, 25; Dobrovšak, "Fragments from the History of the Croatian Jews during the First World War (1914-1918)," 116.

divisions – their regiments and accompanying units – were highly active in the 1914 Serbian campaign, having been transferred to the Eastern (Russian) Front in early 1915. After Italy declared war on Austria-Hungary, some units of the 36<sup>th</sup> Division were dispatched to that front; these were followed by the rest of the division and by the core of the 42<sup>nd</sup> Division, but only in 1918, after the signing of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk.<sup>22</sup>

Those who died in the first days were buried with the highest honours at local cemeteries, and mourning services were held for them in synagogues. Later, however, the fallen were buried near their place of death so that even their families did not know the locations of their gravesites. Numerous Jews from Croatia and Slavonia distinguished themselves during military operations and were decorated multiple times for their outstanding bravery and devotion to the homeland.

As in the rest of the Monarchy, the wealthier Croatian-Slavonian Jews were inclined to financially support the war effort beginning in November 1914, when the first war bonds (*Kriegsanleihe*) were created and fixed at a 6% interest rate.<sup>23</sup> The more affluent gave large sums for the bonds, which by 1918 numbered eight cycles in total and which were a major source of financing for the war. For example, Šandor Alexander (1866–1929), an industrialist from Zagreb offered a million Austrian gold crowns for war bonds.

On the other hand, socio-political life in the Jewish municipalities came to an almost complete halt at the outset of the war, a situation that lasted until 1917. The publishing of the Zagreb Zionist magazine *Židovska smotra* [Jewish Review] stopped, with the last issue dated August 14<sup>th</sup> 1914 [Fig. 2]. Its former

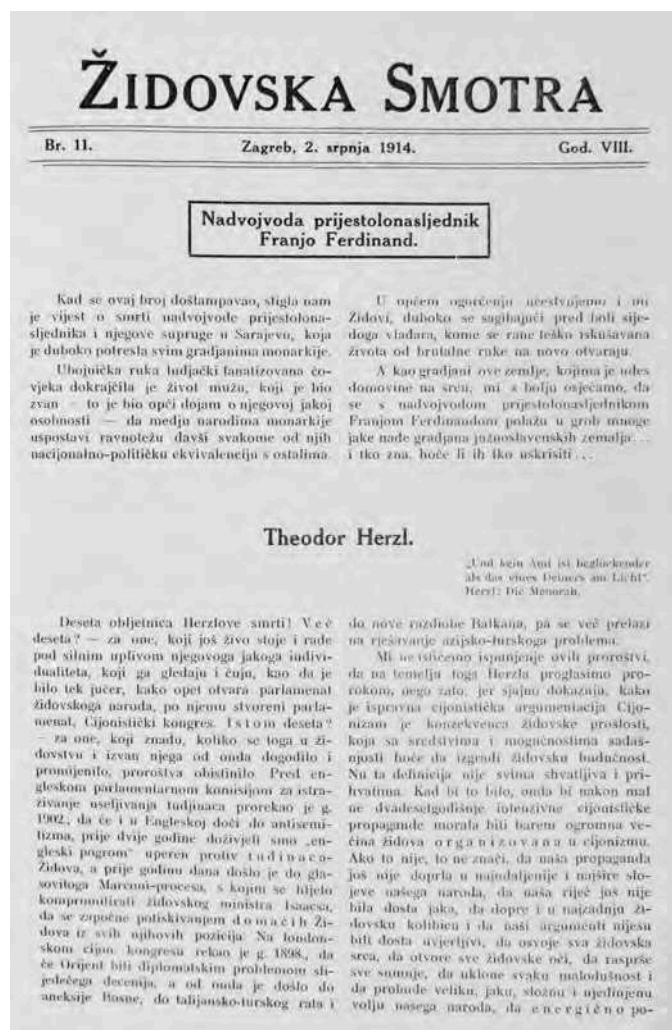
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<sup>22</sup> Apart from sporadic mentionings in standard general overviews and Pavičić's work of 1943–1944, Croatian-Slavonian units of the Austro-Hungarian army were, practically speaking, not given special attention. Notable recent exceptions are Nikola Tominac's research on the Rijeka/Otočac 79<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment and the Bjelovar State Archives publications on Varaždin/Bjelovar 16<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment; see also Dinko Čutura and Lovro Galić, "Veliki rat: pregled ratnih operacija," *Hrvatska revija*, 3/4(2004): 13–60, and Filip Novosel, "Hrvatsko-slavonske postrojbe u sastavu Austrougarske vojske za vrijeme Prvog svjetskog rata," in *Scrinia Slavonica*, 10/10 (2010): 267–289.

<sup>23</sup> Unless stated otherwise, the following paragraphs in this section are based on Dobrovšac, "Fragments from the History of the Croatian Jews during the First World War (1914–1918)," 116–125. That article also includes references to the Jewish press and the earlier works of Ivo Goldstein, Alen Budaj, Mira Kolar, Vijoleta Herman-Kaurić, Ivan Mirnik, Lucija Benyovsky, Aleksandra Muraj, Ivan Balta, and others.



editor was a lawyer and poet named Aleksandar Licht (1884–1948),<sup>24</sup> who was soon mobilized. Numerous Jewish sports, Zionist, and cultural societies ceased their activities. These included, in Zagreb, the Israelite Croatian Literary Society, the Jewish Academic Support Society and the Jewish Academic Cultural Club “Judeja.”<sup>25</sup> The Zionist society “Zion” ceased to be active in Vinkovci, as did the Jewish Zionist Civil Society in Bjelovar, the Zionist Society “Jehuda Halevi” in Brod na Savi (today, Slavonski Brod), the Jewish Youth of Karlovac, the Zionist society *B’ne Jisroel* in Križevci, and the Zionist society “Theodor Herzl” in Osijek, etc.



<sup>24</sup> Paulina Radonić Vranjković, “Licht, Aleksandar,” *Hrvatski biografski leksikon*, vol. 8, (Zagreb: Leksikografski zavod Miroslav Krleža, 2013), 668–669.

<sup>25</sup> As far as “Judeja” was concerned, 16 out of 18 members were sent to the front, of which one was considered missing, three were captured, and four decorated.

Fig. 2: “Židovska Smotra”, August 14<sup>th</sup>, 1914.  
Obituary for Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria.

This was a consequence of the Ban's Decision from 27 July 1914, which completely halted the activities of all societies save for the Red Cross. However, the Ban could, in agreement with the military command and with the recommendation of the county and city authorities, allow individual societies to continue their activities. Soon, on September 22<sup>nd</sup> 1914, the Ban re-formulated this decision and allowed government commissioners independently to give societies that dealt with child support and nutrition or offered support in the case of illness and/or death permission to continue their activities.

Accordingly, Zionist and culturally-oriented Jewish societies had to freeze their activities, while women's and charitable societies were permitted to work, but still had to adapt to the new circumstances. The members of those Jewish societies that had ceased to operate found other ways to participate in humanitarian work, mostly through the charitable societies, so that Jewish women were engaged in various volunteer associations or Red Cross subsidiaries where they collected food, clothing, various supplies, funds for wartime relief, and even sent packages to the front. The wives of distinguished Jews often worked as nurses or caregivers in hospitals, where they gave solace to the wounded and dying.

The leaders of Jewish municipalities, who had not been mobilized for the war, played a prominent role in these efforts as did their wives and daughters. As noted above, humanitarian activists continued their work, with the presidents of Jewish municipalities trying in various ways to assist the wounded as well as those who had lost a family member or were left suddenly impoverished. To that end, the Committee for Assisting Unemployed and Disabled Commerce, Industry, and Accounting Office Workers, later renamed *Prehrana* [Nutrition], was established in Zagreb. The most prominent role in the activities of this committee was taken by the aforementioned Šandor Alexander, a distinguished member of the Jewish Municipality of Zagreb, who on 13 August 1918 received a hereditary title of Hungarian nobility from King Charles IV.

During the First World War, a Soldiers' Home was also opened in Zagreb, as was a shelter for soldiers returning from the front and refugees, while free hot meals were also handed out. The chambers of the Zagrebian Jewish municipality's

Nursing Home were for the most part converted into a military hospital. The Care Centre for the Poor of the Jewish Municipality was active in Zagreb from the beginning of the war, where one department was set about collecting gifts and donations for wartime relief. Monetary aid was offered by Jews from the entire territory of Croatia and Slavonia, not just Zagreb.

Jewish owned companies also participated in the collecting of relief funds and offered a considerable sum of aid money. The Centre used the funds collected to provide weekly food supplies to the families of mobilized soldiers. It also covered the expenses of treating wounded soldiers, acquiring bandages, medicines, and of lighting and heating the hospitals. In addition, the Centre secured the supplying of Jewish soldiers with ritually prepared food on holidays. The Jewish Municipality of Zagreb played an especially prominent role in providing aid to its members. Its leaders arranged for all mobilized Zagrebian Jews, as well as those Jews from other municipalities who were stationed in Zagreb, to be present at the celebration of all major Jewish holidays. In addition, the Jewish Municipality of Zagreb organized a Foundation for the Care of Jewish War Orphans. Founded in 1917, it was named after King Charles. As many as 18 foundations were registered with the Zagreb municipality in late 1916, most of them founded by its prominent members.

From the very beginning of the war, the president of the Jewish Municipality of Zagreb, the distinguished attorney Robert Siebenschein (1864–1938), participated in the Central Committee for the Protection of Families of Mobilized Soldiers from the Territory of the Kingdoms of Croatia and Slavonia Who Died in the War. The Committee was established in 1914, with the aim of helping to provide for the families of mobilized soldiers who were left without a source of income after the death of their breadwinners. In order to coordinate the activities of the foundations and various initiatives, the Zagreb Jewish municipality organized a Board of Trustees for the Poor and a War Relief Station. The school of the Jewish Municipality of Zagreb started producing sandbags in 1915 to be sent to the front. The municipality also collected funds for helping the Jews of Galicia and Bukovina, who were left impoverished because of military operations there. The Jewish municipalities in Osijek were in a similar position, since their members participated in the activities of the Red Cross, the Society for Supporting the War Disabled of Osijek and Virovitica, and the like.

Some of the Jewish women's societies ceased their activities, but others continued, having adapted themselves to wartime conditions. For example, the

Israelite Women's Charitable Society of Zagreb "Jelena Pristerova" continued working as a society for the support of the "bashful poor" in general, and the "poor widows and orphans of Israelite faith" residing in Croatia in particular. The Society also supported the "Israelite Youth" (which intended to devote itself to crafts), covered dowries for poor fiancées, founded and maintained humanitarian institutions, hospitals, and alms-houses. During the war, it founded a central depot for various types of goods that were then sent to Jewish soldiers on the front and in hospitals, while special attention was given to Jewish refugee families throughout the Monarchy. The Society took part in various actions together with other Zagrebian societies, collecting monetary contributions and various materials (bandages, sheets, cigarettes, and food) for all wounded soldiers regardless of religious affiliation.

The Israeli Ferial Colony continued its activities, the goal of the society being to "heal and mitigate the wounds caused by the war" and to provide child care by arranging for children to stay at the Adriatic coast or in spas. Colony members also organized settlements for underfed children. By 1918, the Israeli Colony had founded several subsidiaries in Bjelovar and Koprivnica.

We know little of the activities of the Israelite Women's Charitable Society of Vinkovci, except that it worked together with the First Women's Charitable Society of Vinkovci (renamed the Croatian Women's Society in 1917) to organize parties, and that members of both societies helped with the feeding of poor schoolchildren. The Israelite Women's Charitable Society of Sisak organized "entertainment evenings" to help the widows and orphans of soldiers who died in the war. Members of the Israelite Women's Charitable Society of Osijek took part in all charitable actions intended to help the Jews of Osijek, and also the other inhabitants of that city.

The *chevra kadishah* societies played an especially prominent role in charitable activities. Their goals included the visiting and care of the sick, conducting religious ceremonies for dying or dead Jews, funerals, and the administration and maintenance of Jewish cemeteries. Thus, the *chevra kadishah* of Zagreb helped organize care for the wounded in the nursing home of the Jewish Municipality and paid for a doctor to treat every poor Jew. In addition, already by summer 1915, it had organized for separate burial plots to be set aside in the Mirogoj Cemetery for the Jews who had died in the war.

Besides participating in the activities of charitable societies of their own faith, Jewish citizens also worked with other non-religious voluntary associations and committees, sometimes even serving as the presidents of such organizations.

They were active in the Child Protection League, later called the League for the Protection of the Families of Mobilized Soldiers, the aforementioned Central Committee for the Protection of the Families of Mobilized Soldiers from the Territory of the Kingdoms of Croatia and Slavonia who Died in the War, and the Red Cross.

In Osijek, which was initially relatively near the front line, Jewish women took part in the activities of the Red Cross and the Society for Assisting the War-Disabled. The situation was similar in Koprivnica where Jews participated in the activities of the local societies, the Red Cross, and the societies of their own faith (such as the Israeli Women's Society), while helping the locals provide for the children from Istria and Dalmatia.

Whereas social activities had for the most part died down, religious ceremonies and holidays continued to be observed, especially Rosh Hashanah, Chanukah, and Yom Kippur. As a consequence of the war, there was an influx of refugees into the Jewish Municipality of Zagreb from Bosnia, Rijeka, Trieste, and other areas affected by the war. Along with the refugees, Jewish POWs from the Russian Army attended sermons, under the watchful eye of two sergeants. The Jews of Zagreb at first talked to the POWs, and in later years accepted them as their own. In 1916 and 1917 they even took them for dinner at a restaurant on Zagreb's main square.

Hand in hand with the general process of liberalisation in 1917 and 1918 the political, social, and cultural life in the Jewish municipalities experienced a gradual rekindling. In place of the former *Židovska smotra* magazine, a new Jewish organ called *Židov: Hajehudi, glasilo za pitanja židovstva* [The Jew: Hayehudi, An Organ on Jewish Issues; see Fig. 3] began publication on September 16<sup>th</sup>, 1917 (the date of the Jewish New Year, *Rosh Hashanah*), while a number of Jewish organizations became active again (the Jewish Youth literary meetings, the Jewish Youth of Osijek, the Jewish Academic Support Society, as well as various local Zionist organizations). Elections were organized in the Croatian-Slavonian Jewish municipalities, and in early 1918 the municipalities slowly started returning to their usual activities.



Fig. 3: Židov: Hajehudi, glasilo za pitanja židovstva

## Notable Individuals

The previous section dealt primarily with activities of various Jewish organizations. In order to represent in all its complexity the Jewish legacy in Croatia and Slavonia as a part of Austria-Hungary, an additional look on the individual level is also needed. As opposed to the aforementioned activists, the common denominator of the following people is that they participated in some sort of activity related to the war effort. Some of them had become irreligious, converted to Catholicism, or otherwise assimilated, but they all shared at least an element of Jewish identity.

To start with, several Croatian-Slavonian politicians of Jewish origin exerted a notable influence on wartime events in the region. For instance, Osijek-born lawyer Josip alias Josef Frank (1844–1911) was a founder of the Pure Party of Rights whose adherents became known as *frankovci* [the Frankists]. The uneasy combination of his pro-Habsburg and nationalist Croatian views was also present during the 1914–1918 period when Josip's sons Vladimir (1873–1916) and, especially, Ivo (1877–1939) continued to be active in the Frankist Party of Rights. Following the fall of Austria-Hungary, Ivo, a staunch opponent of the new Yugoslav state, presided over the Committee of Croatian Emigrants in Vienna, Budapest, and Graz.<sup>26</sup>

At the other end of the political spectrum stood Hinko Hinković alias Heinrich Mozer or Mozes (1854–1929), a Vinica-born lawyer whose manifold activities are too numerous to describe in brief. After being persecuted as a defence attorney in the 1909 Zagreb High Treason Trial, he was elected as an adherent of the Serb-Croatian Coalition to the Croatian-Slavonian as well as the Hungarian-Croatian Diet. Leaving Austria-Hungary in 1914, he became a vice-president of the Yugoslav Committee, thus taking part in the creation of the new Yugoslav state, an experience he would describe in his 1927 memoirs.<sup>27</sup>

Viktor Alexander (1865–1934) was another member of the influential Alexander family. Born in Zagreb, his career was strictly connected to the Croatian-Slavonian judiciary. During the war he was the chief public prosecutor of the Kingdoms. In late 1917 or early 1918 he addressed an elaborate communication to King Charles concerning the high treason accusations by the *Military General Government for Serbia directed against several hundred residents of Croatia and Slavonia, which he judged to be false*.<sup>28</sup>

His half-brother, Artur Oskar Alexander (1876–1953), a renowned painter and art-collector, served as an official war painter of the Habsburg Army, producing at least a hundred pictures.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> See Stjepan Matković, *Čista stranka prava 1895-1903* (Zagreb: Hrvatski institut za povijest-Dom i svijet, 2001); Stjepan Matković, *Izabrani portreti pravaša*, (Zagreb: Hrvatski institut za povijest, 2011), and Stjepan Matković, Marko Trogrlić, *Iz korespondencije Josipa Franka s Bečom: 1907–1910* (Zagreb–Split: Hrvatski institut za povijest–Odsjek za povijest Filozofskog fakulteta u Splitu, 2014).

<sup>27</sup> Mladen Švab, "Hinković, Hinko," *Hrvatski biografski leksikon*, vol. 5 (Zagreb: Leksikografski zavod Miroslav Krleža, 2002), 575–577.

<sup>28</sup> Ivan Mirnik, "Referat dr. Viktora Alexandra caru Karlu," *1918 u hrvatskoj povijesti* ed. Željko Holjevac, (Zagreb: Matica hrvatska, 2012), 395–417.

<sup>29</sup> I. Mirnik, "Obitelj Alexander ili kratka kronika izbrisanog vremena," in *Radovi Zavoda za hrvatsku povijest*, 28/28 (1995): 117–121.

Even greater was the reputation of Alexander Roda Roda (born Sandór Friedrich Rosenfeld, 1872–1945), a writer and war correspondent for the influential Viennese newspaper *Die Neue Freie Presse*. Moving to Slavonia in his early infancy, he served from 1894 to 1901 as an artillery officer in Osijek. Although he presumably left no writings in Croatian, themes connected with Osijek and Slavonia occur rather frequently in his literary work, and his scandals were well remembered among the population.<sup>30</sup>

Born in the Slavonian town of Našice, Mavro Špicer or Moritz Spitzer (1862–1936) had for decades prior to 1918 been an administrative Honvéd officer in Zagreb and Budapest. A former Viennese student of classical and Slavic languages, he retained a lifelong interest in Croatian, German, and Hungarian literature, being also a lexicographer, translator, and anthologist, as well as an Esperanto pioneer, associate of various Vienna, Budapest, Prague, München, Leipzig, and Berlin periodicals. He was a contributor, presumably the key one, to the official Hungarian-Croatian (1900) and Croatian-Hungarian (1903) military dictionaries, and probably also a participant in other Honvéd translating activities, since, under the terms of the 1868 Compromise, Croatian was the official language of all the Croatian-Slavonian Honvéd units.<sup>31</sup> From 1906 to 1911 he gave a series of public lectures (to be published as pamphlets in German) for the Zagreb *Militärwissenschaftlicher Verein*, espousing a mixture of social Darwinist attitudes on art, warfare, and upbringing.<sup>32</sup>

Even if one knows little about how he was attached to Jewish life, Leo, alias Lavoslav, Pfeffer (1877–1952) should also be mentioned, for he had been the judge trusted with leading the 1914 investigation into the Sarajevo Assassination.<sup>33</sup> Apart from serving in Bosnia and Herzegovina from 1901 to 1918, Pfeffer was educated in Zagreb and Karlovac, living there for most of the time. It

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<sup>30</sup> The Roda bird (stork) is a common sight in Slavonia; see Vlado Obad, “Eine eigenartige Gegenseitigkeit: Roda Roda und Slawonien,” in *Zagreber Germanistische Beiträge*, 4/4 (1996): 97–132.

<sup>31</sup> Velimir Piškorec, “Iz života i djela Mavra Špicera (1862-1936),” in *Našički zbornik*, 8/8 (2007): 145–210. Contrary to given information, Špicer was buried in the Catholic section of Zagreb Mirogoj cemetery.

<sup>32</sup> Kristian Novak, “Muze pod oružjem: estetizacija rata u govorima Mavre Špicera,” in *Fluminensia*, 2/23 (2011): 85–97.

<sup>33</sup> See Christopher Clark, *The Sleepwalkers: How Europe Went to War in 1914*, (London: Penguin Books, 2013), 381–386.



was also in Zagreb that he published a controversial book on the investigation,<sup>34</sup> contributing to the subject in several periodicals. In his book, Pfeffer declares himself to be a Croat and a Catholic,<sup>35</sup> but several authors also refer to him as a convert, albeit without substantiation. Most notably in the 2014 Austrian-German movie *Sarajevo* (directed by Andreas Prochaska), the military authorities put pressure on his character, who plays a decisive role in the investigation, to blame the official Serbia, “reminding” him in the process of his Jewish background.

Somewhat more humble was the social standing of Lavoslav, alias Leo, Kraus (1897–1984), author of a lesser-known memoir published in 1973.<sup>36</sup> Although written more than a half century after the First World War by a retired physician of the Yugoslav People’s Army who had joined Tito’s partisans in 1943, the book nonetheless represents a valuable perspective on the events of 1914–1918. Born in Osijek to a working class father, Kraus was drafted soon after his high school graduation. Spending the second part of 1915 as a reserve officer trainee in Ogulin and Rijeka, he was transferred in spring of 1916 to the Eastern Front, serving there in the ranks of the Common Army 78<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment almost continually until early 1918. Following a student’s leave of several months in Budapest, he spent the final weeks of the war on the Italian river Piave.

Writing his recollections in Croatian, Kraus was somewhat cryptic about his Jewish identity as well as his position toward the Habsburg Monarchy. For instance, although he declared himself to have been a Zionist until 1917,<sup>37</sup> Croats and Serbs (of Yugoslav orientation) tend to predominate among his pre-war friends and acquaintances, and he was proud to mention his participation in the 1912 general strike of high school students, as well as in the boycott of German songs and demonstrative singing of anti-Hungarian Croatian songs in Rijeka in 1915.<sup>38</sup>

Surely, he was unhappy to be drafted and had problems accepting the crude ways of the Ogulin school, but he soon enough began to view the training as a

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<sup>34</sup> Leo Pfeffer, *Istraga u Sarajevskom atentatu*, (Zagreb: Nova Evropa, 1938; two editions), annotations by Milan Ćurčin; see “Pfeffer, Leon,” *Karlovački leksikon* (Zagreb: Naklada Leksikon–Školska knjiga, 2008), 455.

<sup>35</sup> According to the birth register, Pfeffer was born in the Croatian coastal town of Novi, today Novi Vinodolski, and baptized in early infancy – for this information we are indebted to Jadran Jeić of the National and University Library, Zagreb.

<sup>36</sup> Lavoslav Kraus, *Susreti i sudbine: sjećanja iz jednog aktivnog života*, (Osijek: Glas Slavonije, 1973).

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

challenge to be taken.<sup>39</sup> In fact, Kraus argues economically in his memoirs about the ethical basis of official war aims and the overall chances of military success. Curiously enough, he was inclined to note that as of late 1917 he stopped believing in the victory of the Central Powers, a victory he in any event did not want to see.<sup>40</sup> Was this a victory he did not want to happen in 1973, in 1917, or already in 1914? – this is a question we can ask to no avail. As he recalls, having become an atheist, it was the armistice of 1917 and the fraternization with Russian officers that had made him into a kind of pacifist Bolshevik who would later become an active member of the illegal Communist Party of Yugoslavia. Perhaps all of that constituted an evolution too radical to be openly confessed? At the same time, all of the battlefield exploits that had earned him the highly esteemed Golden Bravery Medal and the promotion to lieutenant are depicted as irrationally motivated, a result of the *fight or flight* heat of the moment.<sup>41</sup>

All in all, as the only known example of a published First World War battlefield memoir published by a Croatian-Slavonian Jew, Kraus's book should be approached with caution, in order not to make general conclusions before other relevant ego-documents are interpreted. For instance, it could be compared with an unpublished 115-page German language manuscript diary by a technician named Oskar Schwarz or Švarc (1882–1962), born in the Slavonian village of Vrpolje and drafted into the Osijek-based Common Army 38<sup>th</sup> Field Canon Regiment. Albeit without enthusiasm, Schwarz tried to adapt and to fulfil his duties. A weary veteran of the Eastern and Italian front, promoted to the rank of lieutenant, he had by mid-1918 finally had enough, and was transferred to the rear because of a simulated illness. Interested in the fate and ways of Galician Jews, he photographed their cemeteries, and also recorded some conversations that led him to conclude that he was in fact a “half goy.”<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 69–71.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

<sup>41</sup> Kraus was decorated by the Corps commander General Maksimilijan Čičerić who offered not only to have him promoted to an active officer status but also to provide a letter of recommendation for the Vienna *Kriegsschule*. Some of his apparently well-meaning colleagues also advised him to convert to Catholicism if he decided to pursue a military career; *ibid.*, 96–97.

<sup>42</sup> Schwarz's diary is in the private possession of his Zagreb relatives whom we would like to thank deeply for the exclusive information of its existence and overall content. Steps are being taken that will hopefully result in its publication in the near future.

## The Perception of Jews

As the war years went by, the general level of dissatisfaction grew steadily among both the Croatian-Slavonian political elite and the general population. On the one hand, despite numerous battlefield casualties, none of the desired political reforms – for instance, those which would really unite Croatian lands or democratize voting rights – were introduced, at least not until it was too late. On the other hand, everyday life in the rear became increasingly demanding – there was less and less food, and speculative tendencies were not adequately dealt with. The population grew gradually poorer and was threatened with hunger. As a result, existing negative stereotypes were boosted, and Jews were subjected to various levels of suspicion or sometimes even maltreatment.

For a part of the non-Jewish public, Croatian-Slavonian Jews were considered to be hostile foreigners, namely Austrian Germans or Hungarians, because a part of the Jewish population still spoke German or Hungarian. For instance, even in the pre-war years the aforementioned Josip Frank was publically denigrated for his Jewish origins. Accordingly, his party was accused of being corrupted by particular Jewish interests and therefore not genuinely nationalist.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, it seems that even within the opposing émigré circle of the Yugoslav Committee the vice-president was sometimes referred to as “that Jew Hinković.”<sup>44</sup>

Furthermore, already in 1914 the Jews in general began to be seen as war profiteers and exploiters, enriching themselves at the expense of the rest of the population, and becoming dominant in certain branches of the economy. Apart from the usual charge of usury, Jews were accused in public of exploiting their neighbors and the unfit soldiers, having them perform various forms of work. It was also believed that many Jews had acquired prominent positions in the army through favoritism, and that a large number of them had, through bribery or their education, kept themselves safe far behind the front lines.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> See Matković, *Čista stranka prava 1895-1903*, 23, 31, 296, 313 and, for instance, Zvonimir Kostelski (Krga Galoper), *Jozua I. car horvacki ili Tko će stvoriti veliku Horvacku*, (Zagreb: Tisak S. Marjanovića, 1907) or “Zašto Židovi trgovci pomažu Jozefa Franka?,” *Hrvatski narod*, May 7<sup>th</sup>, 1908.

<sup>44</sup> Filip Hameršak, “Josip Jedlowski: životopis (s bilješkama za transnacionalnu povijest jedne građanske obitelji),” in *Časopis za suvremenu povijest*, 1/37 (2005): III.

<sup>45</sup> Dobrovšak, “Fragments from the History of the Croatian Jews during the First World War (1914–1918),” 125–129.

War diaries, memoirs, and autobiographies also testify to the existence of various levels of anti-Jewish sentiment, at least among the literate Christians of both the Catholic and the Orthodox denomination. Be it mild or severe, laconic or elaborate, around ten out of forty published book-length texts of (in a wider sense) Croatian low-ranking officers, non-commissioned officers and soldiers, direct participants in the First World War, contain some sort of pejorative comment. Notably, on several occasions the actual face-to-face interaction was much more humane.

In that sense, the most radical example is given by the aforementioned war memoirs of lawyer, writer, and politician Mile Budak (1889–1945). Probably written in 1917, in Italian captivity, they were first published only in 1941, after the Independent State of Croatia had been founded. First, according to Budak, not the true-born Hungarians but the Hungarian Jews, who have allegedly taken over the public affairs in Transleithania, are to be held responsible for Hungarian chauvinism, resulting in the subordinated position that Croatia-Slavonia found itself in.<sup>46</sup> Second, apart from Greater Serbian schemes, the main cause of the war should be ascribed to profit-driven capitalism – and, according to the author, the Jews, capable of inciting international quarrels as they seem fit, stood behind 80 percent of the capital.<sup>47</sup> However, Budak also declares himself not to be a principled anti-Semite, stressing that ordinary, poor Jewish people were getting killed as well.<sup>48</sup> Also, recalling a debate on whether the Jews really do systematically evade the frontline, he neutrally transmitted various views, including those on their troubled national identity.<sup>49</sup>

Although in more casual manner, university professor Antun Vrgoč (1881–1949) expressed a similar mixed set of attitudes in his 1937 war memoirs, probably written several years earlier. Maintaining that pre-1918 Hungarian Jews had superficially embraced radical nationalism as a means of social climbing,<sup>50</sup> and that twentieth-century wars were caused by materialist ethics and the greedy “hooked nose” (i.e. the Jewish capitalists),<sup>51</sup> Vrgoč also stressed the dominant

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<sup>46</sup> Mile Budak, *Ratno roblje: albanski križni put zarobljenih časnika*, vol. 1, (Zagreb: Matica hrvatska, 1942), 54–57.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 172–173.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 172 and *ibid.*, vol. 2, 126–127.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 2, 171–172.

<sup>50</sup> Antun Vrgoč, *Moje uspomene na Svjetski rat (godina 1914–1920)*, vol. 3, (Zagreb: tiskara Dragutina Spullera, 1937), 429.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 546.

Jewish character of Soviet communism.<sup>52</sup> His personal experience included critical remarks on an allegedly sadistic Habsburg reserve officer from a wealthy Jewish background, a quarrel over high prices with a Jewish dealer in spirits, but also a sympathetic acquaintance with an old, solitary Galician Jew whom he had talked into taking fatherly care for two displaced Jewish girls.<sup>53</sup> Finally, seeing the anti-Jewish pogroms in the 1914 Russian-occupied Lemberg he was simply horrified, not trying to ascribe it to any putative guilt.<sup>54</sup>

The supposed nationalism of the Hungarian Jews is also offered as an explanation for a 1917 flag incident on the Isonzo front, as presented by the former military chaplain Ante Messner-Sporšić (1876–1956) in his 1934 memoirs.<sup>55</sup>

That image cannot be found in the 1930 book by Grgo Turkalj (1884–1953), a former NCO whose elementary school education level made him of all authors probably the closest to the oral culture-dominated world of common soldiers. Transmitting sentences spoken by his illiterate brother Mato, Grgo's memoirs include depictions of an allegedly incompetent Jewish physician (mocked also because of his weak knowledge of Croatian) and general statements on the warmongering, mostly Jewish, frontline service-evading capitalists.<sup>56</sup> Furthermore, the author views the entry of the USA into the war as primarily motivated by protection of its financial, again mostly Jewish interests.<sup>57</sup>

In his 1939 memoirs even the open-minded Pero Blašković (1883–1945), a highly decorated former Habsburg active officer, gives a somewhat caricatured portrait of a Bosnian Jewish NCO named Loewy,<sup>58</sup> also not failing to mention that during his days in a French POW camp the apathetic senior active officers allowed the junior reserve officers “of a large part of the Israelitic faith” to take over the leadership, resulting in the demise of discipline (except for the

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<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 486.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 52–53, 73–74, 105.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 2, 178–179.

<sup>55</sup> Ante Messner-Sporšić, *1915–1918: odlomci iz ratnih uspomena* (Zagreb: Tipografija d. d., 1934), III. Interestingly, the alleged chauvinism of Hungarian Jews was also criticized by at least one contributor to the aforementioned Zagreb Zionist magazine. See Nikola T., “Nekoliko riječi k jugoslavenskom problemu,” *Židov*, August 16<sup>th</sup>, 1918.

<sup>56</sup> Grgo Turkalj, *1609 dana na fronti*, (Winnipeg: Knjižara “Kanadskog glasa,” 1930), 24, 92.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 235.

<sup>58</sup> Pero Blašković, *Sa Bošnjacima u Svjetskom ratu* (Beograd: Globus, 1939), 227–229.

Blašković's Bosnian regiment, where – it follows – even the Jews retained high spirits).<sup>59</sup>

Minor critical remarks can also be found in the 1940 memoirs of Petar Grgec (1890–1960), a renowned Catholic humanistic intellectual. Apart from being highly irritated by the fact that Alice Schalek, described here as a “war-correspondent of the Jewish *Neue Freie Presse*,” visited the Isonzo front, he reports that his colleague, having been assigned a favorable duty in the rear, had been squeezed out by a Jew,<sup>60</sup> and that the renowned lieutenant colonel Stanko Turudija has picked up a selection of German subalterns who despise “the Semitic calculating spirit.”<sup>61</sup>

Additionally, in the opinion expressed in 1923 by Ante Kovač (1897–1972), a Croat who joined the Serbian (later nominally Yugoslav) volunteer division consisting almost entirely of former Austrian-Hungarian POWs in Russia, the unrest of 1916–1917 among the volunteers was caused not by their inequality, but by Austrophilia, Frankism and, above all, “hellish Jewish agitation” in the city of Odessa.<sup>62</sup> A similar line of thought is also present in the 1937 memoirs by another former volunteer, a Slavonian ethnic Serb named Jovan Korda (1894–1967). According to Korda, Serbs and Croats quarreled because of foreign influences, so the German, Hungarian, Jewish, and other elements should be cleansed from the Serbo-Croatian “national substance.”<sup>63</sup>

A view that mirrored that of Mile Budak on the chauvinism of Hungarian Jews was also expressed in the 1927 memoirs of another ethnic Serb, Živko Prodanović (born in 1884). A physician from what is today Northern Vojvodina, mobilized into a Karlovac-seated regiment, Prodanović claimed that around the time war broke out “Croatized Jews, Germans, and Hungarians were bossing around the barracks, preparing a hanging noose for everyone not up to their taste.”<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 455.

<sup>60</sup> Petar Grgec, *U paklenom trokutu* (Zagreb: Hrvatsko književno društvo sv. Jeronima, 1940), 24, 124.

<sup>61</sup> Petar Grgec, *Krvava služba*, (Zagreb: Hrvatsko književno društvo sv. Jeronima, 1940), 109–110.

<sup>62</sup> Ante Kovač, *Impresije iz jedne epohe* (Zagreb: Hrvatski štamparski zavod, 1923), 22–23.

<sup>63</sup> Jovan Korda, *Odesa, Arhangelsk, Solun* (Osijek: Štamparski zavod Krbavac i Pavlović, 1937), 59.

<sup>64</sup> Živko Prodanović, *Iz ratne torbice* (Novi Sad: Zastava, 1927), 4.

However, on a more personal basis, when meeting one Lieutenant Pollak, Prodanović described him as “a Jew, but a good and pleasant man.”<sup>65</sup>

Similar conceptions can also be found in the literary fiction of the period. As early as 1915, a comedy by renowned Croatian author Milan Begović (1876–1948) titled *Easy Service* was staged at the Zagreb National Theatre. Its plot revolved around a young Jewish conscript trying to evade the frontline service with all the help he could get from his family of military suppliers. While the Catholic newspapers praised the play for satirizing the phoney patriotism of a Jewish business family and liberal ones criticized it for the most part only on artistic grounds, the Frankist newspapers branded it as an unjustified anti-Semitic attack on the self-sacrificing Croats of the faith of Moses, conceding only that perhaps some contracts made by Hungarian Jews deserved to be questioned. Subsequently, the play was banned after two performances.<sup>66</sup> Interestingly, an analogous but minor Jewish character would later find his place in the 1930s novel *Giga Barićeva and the Seven Suitors* by the same author.

On the other hand, the notion of a warmongering “shallow Jewish daily press,” as opposed to the solidarity of common soldiers, and probably alluding to the aforementioned *Neue Freie Presse*, can also be found in 1920s and 1930s editions of Krleža’s *Royal Hungarian Home Guard Novella*, a part of the *Croatian God Mars* cycle.<sup>67</sup>

Finally, in an autobiographical satirical novel about the First World War, written and partially published in the 1930s by Bosnian Croat writer Ante Neimarević (1891–1965), several characters also discuss the thesis of Jewish capitalists guilty for their wartime activities, with the skeptical one seeming to take the upper hand in the end.<sup>68</sup>

During the war, disfavor towards the Jews was shown even in the Croatian-Slavonian Diet (Sabor), especially when it enacted the Law on Usury (27 April 1916). The law contained sanctions against all the usurers, mentioning no particular ethnicity or creed, but only the Jews were singled out during the

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<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 129.

<sup>66</sup> Mislav Gabelica, “Dramski repertoar Kraljevskog zemaljskog hrvatskog kazališta tijekom Prvoga svjetskog rata” in *Časopis za suvremenu povijest* 47/1 (2015): 103–138.

<sup>67</sup> Miroslav Krleža, “Magyar király Honvéd novella,” *Hrvatski bog Mars* (Zagreb: Minerva, 1934), 99. Spoken by the omniscient narrator, the relevant words were removed from the post-1945 editions.

<sup>68</sup> Ante Neimarević, *1914–1918* (Zagreb: Štamparski zavod “Ognjen Prica,” 1976), 339–340.

preliminary discussions, prompting the editors of *Židov* to caustically point out that the real target was not the usurers but the Jews. Another argument for such a worried conclusion was the alleged fact that within the economies of the Central Powers, nationalization or similar regulatory steps were taken primarily in those industrial branches in which Jews tended to be very prominent.<sup>69</sup>

Undoubtedly, certain members of the Diet, such as Ivan Kovačević (1873–1953), publically expressed their displeasure with the Jews. It is interesting to note that none of the other members reacted either positively or negatively to Kovačević's particular statement, given in late 1917.<sup>70</sup>

Another member of the Diet, Stjepan Radić (1871–1928), who would later become a renowned Croatian national leader, also expressed a negative opinion of Jews during his wartime public appearances. He did not consider himself to be an anti-Semite but, in his own words, opposed the idea that Jews should be able to take prominent positions in Croatian-Slavonian society, viewed them as usurers and speculators, and excluded them from his Croatian Peasants' Party.<sup>71</sup> Until mid-1918, anti-Semitism was usually expressed in writing or orally, but the increasing poverty and generally desperate situation in the country near the end of the war resulted in the escalation of anti-Semitic outbursts, which sometimes resulted in physical attacks on Jews.<sup>72</sup>

For example, in late 1917 in the town of Ludbreg the chief fireman shouted "Let the Jewish houses burn!" to one of his men, after a fire had spread to a neighboring Jewish house. In August 1918, there were anti-Semitic demonstrations in the Daruvar Beer Hall because a Zagrebian opera singer of Jewish origin sang Croatian and German songs during his performance. In November Jewish tombstones in Stubica were devastated, while soldiers of the Daruvar infantry unit of the new State of Slovenes, Croats, and Serbs Army insisted that their Jewish comrades be excluded from serving in the military. According to *Židov* magazine, at the same time the unconverted Jews ceased to

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<sup>69</sup> Lav Stern, "Ratno gospodarstvo i Židovi," *Židov*, November 15<sup>th</sup>, 1917.

<sup>70</sup> Dobrovšak, "Fragments from the History of the Croatian Jews during the First World War (1914–1918)," 129.

<sup>71</sup> For further bibliography on Radić's opinion on Jews, see *ibid.*, 129.

<sup>72</sup> For further bibliography, see Dobrovšak, "Fragments from the History of the Croatian Jews during the First World War (1914–1918)," 130–132; Ivo Banac's article, "I Karlo je o'šo u komite – Nemiri u sjevernoj Hrvatskoj u jesen 1918," in *Časopis za suvremenu povijest*, 24/3 (1992): 28–29, is a seminal contribution to this history.



be seen as trustworthy enough to continue to serve in the Zagreb Academic Guard unit of the National Council of Slovenes, Croats, and Serbs; Jewish businessmen in general were not included in the consultative commissions of the new Zagreb-seated government; and the wealthy Jews of Varaždin were pressed into “voluntary contributions” for the new authorities.<sup>73</sup>

Most important of all, as public security had practically collapsed with the fall of Austria-Hungary, a massive wave of civilian- and military-related unrest swept through Croatia and Slavonia in late 1918 and early 1919. Previously existing groups of “Green cadre” deserters were now joined by soldiers from disbanded units, impoverished peasants, and riotous citizens, who directed their discontent towards former state and municipal officials, gendarmes, clergy, war profiteers, wealthy peasants, shop and tavern owners, businesses, and nobles’ estates. Many traders, often rural Jews, fell victim, and robberies and arsons against Jewish shops and other property became commonplace in the whole of Croatia and Slavonia, as almost all urban and rural settlements were affected.

The general scope of events makes it hard to ascertain the exact degree to which the perpetrators were motivated by anti-Semitic attitudes. For instance, several reports from local authorities pointed out that Jewish property was the first to come under attack after the magazines of the former Habsburg Army. Additionally, some officials excused such destructive behavior by claiming that the victims were actually war profiteers, a term which was probably destined to connote the notorious “rich Jewish capitalists.” On the other hand, among small shopkeepers and traders the Jews simply constituted a statistical majority, thus also prone to assault on more general anarchist-socialist or agrarian grounds.<sup>74</sup>

On November 16<sup>th</sup> 1918, a Zionist delegation from Zagreb was received by the presidency of the National Council. As reported in *Židov*, during ensuing talks the presidency expressed the opinion that the mass robberies were not of an anti-Semitic character “save perhaps” in a few places. If, moreover, there has somewhere been anti-Jewish haranguing, the presidency most strongly condemned it.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Lavoslav Šik (L. S.), “U eri slobode,” *Židov*, December 1<sup>st</sup>, 1918.

<sup>74</sup> See Andrea Feldman, “Židovi u Kraljevini Jugoslaviji,” *Dijalog povjesničara-istoričara*, vol. 2 (Zagreb: Friedrich Naumann Stiftung, 2000), 453–454.

<sup>75</sup> “Spomenica ‘Zemaljske organizacije cionista iz jugoslavenskih zemalja’ Narodnom vijeću Slovenaca, Hrvata i Srba,” *Židov*, November 17<sup>th</sup>, 1918.

Unappeased by such a conditional statement, the *Židov* magazine returned to the subject two weeks later. True, non-Jews were also affected by the unrest, but only as collateral victims, for the troubles were exclusively the consequence of the anti-Semitic harangues by the press, intellectuals, and government officials, who not only failed to take adequate measures even in cases where they had foreknowledge of what would happen, but also instigated anti-Semitic actions of their own.<sup>76</sup>

### Great Expectations, Great Disappointments

At this time, it is hard to conclude whether the majority of Croatian-Slavonian Jews welcomed the demise of Austria-Hungary. On the one hand, the foreseeable future must have been full of worries. On the other, even for the most apolitical people that demise was a way for the war finally to come to an end.

As far as the Zagreb Zionist magazine *Židov* was concerned, since late 1917 it had run a regular news feature titled “From the Yugoslav Lands,” thus implicitly acknowledging the line of the May Declaration, which proposed a South-Slav unificatory government under Habsburg rule.

Gradually, during 1918 one finds expressions of more direct support in several instances. This include a declaration signed by fifty-eight “Young Jews of Osijek” that was published in March,<sup>77</sup> another article in August;<sup>78</sup> a declaration of open support for the struggle for “complete freedom and independence” of the Yugoslav peoples in mid-October,<sup>79</sup> followed by the October 21<sup>st</sup> proclamation,<sup>80</sup> and a November 16<sup>th</sup> communication of the Zagreb-based Committee of the Zionist Organization of the Yugoslav Lands addressed to the National Council of Slovenes, Croats, and Serbs.<sup>81</sup>

These last two documents stated that while the Zionists did not wish to involve themselves in the politics of the newly-created state, they welcomed every solution to the South Slavic problem that would best suit the ideals of the

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<sup>76</sup> L. Šik (L. S.), “U eri slobode.”

<sup>77</sup> “Izjava židovske omladine o jugoslavenskoj deklaraciji,” *Židov*, March 1<sup>st</sup>, 1918.

<sup>78</sup> Nikola T., “Nekoliko riječi k jugoslavenskom problemu.”

<sup>79</sup> Šalom ben Cvi, “Jugoslaveni i Židovi,” *Židov*, October 16<sup>th</sup>, 1918.

<sup>80</sup> “Zemaljska organizacija cionista iz jugoslavenskih zemalja,” *Židov*, October 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1918.

<sup>81</sup> “Spomenica ‘Zemaljske organizacije cionista iz jugoslavenskih zemalja’ Narodnom vijeću Slovenaca, Hrvata i Srba” (see footnote 76).

Yugoslav people and be implemented by their elected representatives. The Committee also expressed the hope that Yugoslavia would secure equality before the law and free development for all the minorities, including special Jewish representatives in the parliament,<sup>82</sup> and that the new “Yugoslav press” would help reduce public antipathy toward Jews.

However, even once the 1918–1919 turmoil had calmed down the post-war period did not bring any great relief. Having been born outside the borders of the new Yugoslav state and therefore unable to obtain citizenship, numerous Jews were forced to either return to their “home” countries or migrate to other parts of the world. Predictably, no special parliamentary representatives were granted. Of course, the negative stereotypes persisted. Indeed, they were actually disseminated with increasing frequency by the media as the Second World War approached a conflict that would result in the almost complete destruction of the once prosperous Jewish communities of former Croatia and Slavonia.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Introduction of a single Jewish representative to the Croatian-Slavonian Diet was already proposed in 1917. See “K izbornoj reformi u Hrvatskoj,” *Židov*, October 1<sup>st</sup>, 1917.

<sup>83</sup> Ivo Goldstein, “Židovi u međuratnoj Jugoslaviji – problem ravnopravnosti i jednakovrijednosti,” *Dijalog povjesničara-istoričara*, vol. 2, eds. Hans-Geroge Fleck, Igor Graovac, (Zagreb, 2000), 465–482.

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