

# СРПСКИ ЈЕЗИК, КЊИЖЕВНОСТ, УМЕТНОСТ

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## GENOCIDE AGAINST THE JEWS IN SERBIA IN 1941–1945

Nazi Germany, which invaded the Kingdom of Yugoslavia on April 6, 1941, and then occupied it, had in its conquest plan the physical destruction of the Serbian and Jewish people. The German occupier began realizing the plan of destroying the Serbian and Jewish people immediately from the earliest days of the occupation. A total of 16,000 Serbian Jews lived in pre-war Serbia. Most Jews lived in Belgrade, about 12,000, while the rest lived in the above cities and settlements. During World War II, about 14,500 Serbian Jews were killed, or 90% of the total number who lived on the territory of Serbia. Also, more than 90% of the total Belgrade Jews perished. As few as 1,115 Belgrade Jews survived. The surviving Jews managed to hide in other places and villages in the heartland of Serbia, or few joined the partisan detachments. The annihilation of the Jews by the German occupier was part of the "final solution to the Jewish question" implemented throughout occupied Europe. Male adult Jews, but also women and children were killed in the Sajmište camp and in gas vans, which were specially made and brought from Germany. The shootings of Jews were carried out by the Gestapo, SS units and units of the German Wehrmacht army. Members of the Serbian special police as well as the armed detachments of Nedić's "Government of National Salvation" took part in the annihilation of Serbian Jews, primarily in raids and arrests. Then, they handed over the arrested Jews to the German authorities, who killed them in various ways. Serbian Nedić's special police also formed a special 7<sup>th</sup> subdivision in charge of Jews and Roma. The German occupation authorities did not have complete lists of Jews in Serbia who should be arrested. Here they were wholeheartedly aided by Serbian special police and Nedić's armed forces. Many Serbian Jews had changed their names and surnames to Serbian decades before. However, the special police were aware of that and delivered those names to the German occupier and arrested them and later killed them at Sajmište and Jajinci.

*Keywords:* Serbia, Jews, World War II, genocide, Holocaust, Nedić's special police, Topovske šupe, Banjica, Sajmište, Jajinci

### 1. Introductory considerations

As this paper deals with the genocide that was committed against the Jewish people in Serbia during World War II in the period 1941–1945, this introductory part of the paper should give a summary of who the Jews are, from their origin to the thirties of the twentieth century, when mass crimes of genocide or the Holocaust were committed in Nazi Germany and later spread to all occupied European countries. Namely, one cannot write a paper on the Holocaust and start by describing the essential elements of the Holocaust, because the concept of the Holocaust in World War II in Serbia was created for and is related to the physical destruction of Jews as a state criminal project and

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plan in Nazi Germany back in the fall of 1938. This program and plan for the physical extermination of Jews first referred to the execution in Germany and included all occupied European states, including the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. For this reason, we give a brief summary of historical events related to the Jews in general as well as to the Jews in Serbia in the observed time period. With their history and thousands of years of existence, Jews are one of the oldest peoples. During their long history, they have been persecuted from the Roman Empire to the modern times. In these persecutions, they moved in various directions, mainly towards Europe, Africa, and less towards Asia.

Escaping persecution, they also moved across the territory of medieval Serbia. However, there is very little relevant data about the settlement and presence of Jews in Serbia in the Middle Ages. The first relevant data about the settlement of Jews in then medieval Serbia dates back to the middle of the X century, in Belgrade. The information is found in the correspondence of Rabbi Hisda Ibn Shaprut from Cordoba with Khazar Kagan Joseph XI from 950, mentioning Jews in Belgrade. The religious tradition of the Jews in Belgrade claims that the Jews lived on the territory of then medieval Serbia back in the ancient Jewish state age (Popović 1997: 11). Some documents from medieval Serbia mention Jews in the southern parts of Dušan's empire. Recent research in Vojvodina in Čelarevo near Novi Sad has found reliable data of Jews in excavated necropolises dating from the VIII and IX centuries. The Jews arrived in Serbia from Greece and Bulgaria, and later from the northern countries from which they were expelled. Jews from the north who settled in Serbia in the XIV and XV centuries and who were persecuted from the northern countries were called Ashkenazi. Turkish authorities benevolently accepted the Jews as they needed craftsmen, merchants, and financial experts. In the Middle Ages, Jews settled in large numbers in Spain. However, as early as 1492, by the decision of Catholic Spain, over 100,000 Jews were expelled in three months. The largest number of persecuted Jews from Spain settled in the Turkish Empire, and then they continued to emigrate to various countries in then Europe. These exiled Jews from Spain were called Sephardim (Ibid 1997: 11–13).

In XVII, XVIII, and XIX century Serbia, Belgrade and other smaller places were mostly settled by Sephardic Jews. Jews were well received as they were much more literate, educated, professional, and well-mannered than the then Serbian population, which was under centuries of Turkish slavery and did not have the opportunity for professional, economic, cultural, and educational development. Immigrant Jews were needed by Serbia, which did not have professional and educated staff in any of the fields of economy, trade, finance, healthcare, education, culture, crafts, and a whole range of infrastructural activities. Apart from Belgrade, Jews also lived in the following cities: Niš, Priština, Novi Pazar, Pirot, Leskovac, Kragujevac, Šabac, Smederevo, Požarevac, as well as a number of smaller towns. According to the 1884 census, the number of Jews was 4,160 in Serbia and 2,177 in Belgrade. Even then, many Jews felt like Serbs of the Moses faith, and even "Serbianized" their surnames by adding the characteristic "ić". For example: Levi-Lević, David-Davidović, Mošić, Baruhović, Kojenović and others.

It is important to mention that in November 1917, the British government adopted the Balfour Declaration, which recognized the full right of Jews to establish their Jewish state, the "people's homeland" in Palestine, from where they were expelled two thousand years ago. At the initiative of Captain David Albala, MD (Albala 2004: 85), a Jew from Belgrade, who was then a member of the Serbian war delegation to the United States, proposed and suggested to Milenko Vesnić, MD (Jovanovic 2006: 168–169), the Serbian Minister Plenipotentiary and the head of the Serbian war delegation to the United States, to publicly support the Balfour Declaration (Goldberg and Rayner 2003:

188) before the Serbian Government. The Serbian government adopted the proposal of David Albala, MD and Milenko Vesnić, MD and Serbia was the first after the British government to support and recognize the renewal of the Jewish state in Palestine (Albala 2010: 18–19; Balugdzic 1940: 227).

The Jews in the Kingdom of Serbia, back then, displayed loyalty and devotion. That loyalty and devotion continued in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. Many Jews participated as Serbian soldiers, non-commissioned officers and officers and volunteers in the 1914–1918 World War I. In the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, apart from Belgrade, Jews lived in Novi Sad, Subotica, Senta, Veliki Bečkerek, Vršac, Pančevo, Zemun, Priština, Novi Pazar, Skopje, and Bitola. A large number of Jews also lived in Croatia, Bosnia, Herzegovina and (North) Macedonia.

Between the two world wars, there was a great economic crisis followed by a great political crisis in the thirties. Namely, first in Italy, the leader of the fascist party, Benito Mussolini, took power in 1922, armed Italy, and invaded Ethiopia and Libya. Adolf Hitler took power in Germany in 1933, armed Germany and openly threatened with wars. Thus, the outbreak of World War II was expected, as it was openly propagated and announced by Germany and Italy. The allied powers, France and Great Britain, refrained from reacting to all the threats, underestimating Germany and Italy and relying on their military power (Balugdzic 1939: 546). The United States was quite aloof, applying its policy of Drago doctrine not to interfere in politics and wars in Europe. The United States did not even join the League of Nations in 1920 (Balugdzic 1941: 556–561).

With the founding of the League of Nations in 1920, the international community at that time expected that the League of Nations would prevent wars or armed conflicts and establish “collective peace” in international disputes. The fact was that the League of Nations did not fulfil any of the expected and set goals in terms of preserving peace. This was evidenced by Germany leaving the League of Nations in October 1933; Germany appropriating the Saarland in March 1935; contrary to the Treaty of Versailles, Germany restored military service and was fully armed in March 1935; creation of the Berlin-Rome Axis in October 1936; annexation of Austria to Germany in March 1938; annexation of the Sudetenland to Germany in September-October 1938; alliance of Germany and the Soviet Union (Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact in August 1939); the Sino-Japanese War and the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1931; Italian invasion of Ethiopia 1935–1936, Spanish Civil War 1936–1939; German attack on Poland in September 1939, and the outbreak of World War II (Jisrael, Haim 2010: 25–55).

Anti-Semitism is one of the forms of prejudice and hostility towards Jews in various ways, starting from racial, religious, political, to economic, legal, and other forms. Anti-Semitism manifested itself in these forms centuries ago, but it was most pronounced in the XIX and XX centuries. In the XIX century, the most famous case was the Dreyfus trial of 1894, when the captain of the French army, Dreyfus, of Jewish origin, was accused of being a German spy. After many years, he was proved to be completely innocent and rehabilitated. There were several other lawsuits in Hungary and Tsarist Russia about alleged crimes committed by Jews. (Vajs 1965: 13–20)

In 1936–1945, Nazi Germany manifested itself in the cruelest form, when the greatest and the most horrible crime in human history, the Holocaust, was committed, killing over 6 million Jews in various ways in death camps. It is quite certain that the greatest anti-Semitism manifested itself in Adolf Hitler's book *My Struggle* (*Mein Kampf*), which became the Bible of Nazism. It is important to note that finally the Second Vatican Council of the Catholic Church in 1960 rejected the idea that Jews were responsible for the suffering of Christ, and condemned racism and genocide as crimes

that are not Christian (Krivokapić 1965: 56–57; Vajs 1965: 17–25). While on the subject, anti-Semitism has not yet disappeared from the modern international community and international relations, so it occasionally emerges in various parts of the world to a greater or lesser extent.

From the first days of Hitler's coming to power, Nazi Germany enacted a whole series of laws, the so-called Nuremberg Laws of 1935, which in various ways discriminated against Jews who were citizens of Germany, starting with citizenship, which classified Jews as second-class citizens. Based on all these series of laws, Jews were fired from all state and public services, cultural and educational institutions, schools, and universities. The plan for the "final solution to the Jewish question", or the physical destruction and extermination of all Jews in Nazi Germany, as well as in all occupied European countries, was adopted on January 20, 1942, at the Wannsee Conference by Senior Nazi Officials. The original plan was for all Jews from Germany to emigrate to the island of Madagascar, but this did not happen. Then, a plan was made for all Jews to emigrate and be pushed from Germany to the East, to Poland, and further when the territory of the Soviet Union was conquered. That part of the plan was realized because the largest number of concentration camps for Jews was on the territory of Poland and Ukraine, where they were physically exterminated.

Violence against the Jews began from the earliest days of Hitler's rule, when Jewish shops, stores, doctors' offices, law offices, and craft workshops were demolished. At that time, 7,500 Jewish shops were destroyed, and over 1,000 synagogues and houses of worship were burned or demolished. There is the so-called Crystal Night of 1938 when numerous attacks and murders of the Jews were carried out (Benc 2012: 26–31). The plan for the "final solution to the Jewish question" was as follows: confiscation and looting of Jewish movable and immovable property and establishment of ghettos for Jews. Then, en masse sending to concentration camps where they were massacred in various ways, but mostly using gas chambers with poison gas Zyklon C. The most famous concentration camps were the infamous Auschwitz, Treblinka, Majdanek, Belzec, Buchenwald, Dachau, Mauthausen, Birkenau, Sobibor, Stutthof, and tens of thousands more concentration camps across European countries (Jisrael, Haim 2010: 140–160).

At that point, the aggression of Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy emerged, backed up by their allies Hungary and Bulgaria, against the Kingdom of Yugoslavia on April 6, 1941. The Kingdom of Yugoslavia could not resist the aggression and consequently capitulated on April 17, 1941. Immediately after the capitulation, the Kingdom of Yugoslavia was dismembered. Three protectorates or "puppet states" were formed: the Independent State of Croatia, Nedić's Serbia and Independent Montenegro. Parts on the periphery of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia were immediately annexed by neighboring fascist states: Germany, Italy, Hungary, Bulgaria, and Albania. In those puppet states, throughout the World War II period of 1941–1945, unprecedented and mass war crimes were committed against Serbs, Jews, Roma, anti-fascists, as well as all those who did not obey the occupying authorities.

## **2. The Concept of the Holocaust**

The term Holocaust has several different definitions that depend on the country and legislation from which the authors come. The general assessment is that all these terms of definition are more or less similar. The term Holocaust comes from the Greek word *holokaustos*, meaning *holos* – whole and *acostos* – burned. In English, the Holocaust is generally accepted in international terminology.

This is an opportunity to provide several definitions. The first was given by the famous legal writer, Professor Boris Krivokapić, PhD:

“Destruction of something or someone by burning. 1. Among the ancient Greeks and Romans, burning the sacrifice to honor gods. 2. Genocide of Jews in Hitler’s Germany, carried out in concentration camps (‘death factories’). It is considered that only in the Auschwitz concentration camp (German Auschwitz, Polish Oswiecim), about 1.5 million people, mostly Jews, were killed. They were most often massacred in special rooms with poison gas (“Zyklon B”), and then burned in crematoria specially built for that purpose. However, it is forgotten that such program of planned destruction was prepared and, to a lesser extent (compared to the tragic fate of the Jews), carried out against some other nations as well. In that sense, we can talk about the Holocaust of the Roma people, whose extermination Hitler also planned, so they were massacred in concentration camps in Germany, but also in the territories of its allies. Among other camps, in the infamous Jasenovac alone, in the ‘puppet’, at the time, Independent State of Croatia, among hundreds of thousands of victims, primarily Serbs, over 26,000 Roma and more than 15,760 Jews were killed. 3. Synonym for genocide. There is also the ‘African Holocaust,’ referring to the millions of Africans who were killed at the flourishing time of slavery.” (Krivokapić 2010: 336)

Professor Milo Bošković, PhD, defines the Holocaust as following:

“Holocaust (Greek *holos*-whole, *kaustos*-burned) in the original sense, referred to a victim burned for religious reasons. In a derived sense, the genocidal method of the Nazis in World War II was used primarily against Jews and other undesirable ethnic groups in German crematoria (see Genocide, Racism, Fascism).” (Bošković 1999: 386)

The definition of the Holocaust is also given by the Encyclopedia of the Lexicographic Institute:

“The Holocaust (Greek) among the Greeks and Romans was a sacrifice, a burnt offering to the earthly and underground gods or souls of the deceased when the entire sacrificial animal was usually burned. The Holocaust appeared already in the Aegean civilization and was passed to Greece. The rite was performed at night, and the sacrificial animal had to be black. There was also a solemn rite of burning the lamb (*olam kalil* – destruction by fire) among the old Jews. Later, in a figurative sense, Holocaust signified prayer.” (*Enciklopedija Leksikografskog zavoda* MCMLXVII: 57)

The definition of the Holocaust is also given by Bratoljub Klaić: “Holocaust (Greek *holos*-whole, *kaustos*-burned) among the ancient Greeks was a sacrifice when an entire animal was burned.” (Klaić 1990: 551)

### 3. Holocaust of the Jews in Serbia in 1941–1945

The occupying German army took over Belgrade practically without a fight on April 12, 1941, and the capitulation of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia took place on April 17, 1941. Interestingly, the German army that occupied Serbia was mostly composed of Austrians. Mass shootings of students and civilians in 1941 in Kragujevac and Kraljevo were carried out by the Austrians in the German army. It was the revenge of the Austrians for the defeat in the 1914–1918 World War I by Serbia. The first commander of the German occupation army in Serbia was the Austrian General Franz Böhme, who issued a series of orders to shoot hostage Serbs, Jews and Roma.<sup>3</sup> General Franz Böhme gave an order to the German soldiers stating, among other things: “Your task is to

3 General Franz Böhme (1885–1947) was accused of war crimes committed in Serbia in subsequent trials in Nuremberg in 1947, but committed suicide in prison.

cruise the country where German blood flowed in streams in 1914 because of insidious Serbs, men and women. You are the avengers of those dead. Anyone who acts gently will sin against the lives of their friends. They will be called accountable, no matter who they are, and brought before a court-martial.” (Božović 2012: 151)

The first Order of the German Occupation Army, called the Order Relating to Jews and Gypsies of May 30, 1941, was given by the German Military Commander in Serbia. The Order specified the utmost discriminatory and racist status of Jews and Gypsies in Serbia, limiting their fundamental rights, calling for the looting of their movable and immovable property. Apart from a series of prohibitions, wearing special yellow markings, as well as punitive measures for non-compliance with this Order, in severe cases they were punished by imprisonment or death. Gypsies are equated with Jews with this Order (Božović 2012: 294–299). The main and crucial role in implementing the “final solution to the Jewish question” was practically the physical destruction of Jews in all occupied territories of the European countries, including occupied Yugoslavia and Serbia, by high-ranking SS officers Heinrich Himmler, Reinhard Heydrich and Adolf Eichmann (Jusrael, Haim 2010: 134–145).

Also, one of the biggest war criminals in occupied Serbia committing crimes against Serbs, Jews, and Roma was the Austrian German SS General August Meyszner (Lopičić 2009: 99–155) together with his team and closest associate SS Colonel Emanuel Schäfer, who led the physical extermination of Jews in Serbia (Božović 2012: 51–104). One of the priority tasks of the German occupation authorities in Serbia was to urgently register all Jews, and then to intern them in several concentration camps. The Belgrade headquarters of the Gestapo, as well as its sections, were the main organizers of the persecution of Jews and Roma in Serbia. The fact is that the German occupation authorities, like the Gestapo, did not have precise lists and knowledge of who (names and surnames) and where (at which addresses) Jews and Roma were located in Belgrade, as well as in other cities and places in Serbia. They probably had the names of certain Jews, Roma, communists, Western sympathizers, anti-fascists, and Freemasons, previously provided by undercover German intelligence officers, members of pro-fascist organizations as well as Vojvodina’s Volksdeutschers, whose numbers were significant in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia before World War II.

The main helpers to the German occupation authorities, primarily to the Gestapo, then to military and police units, primarily to SS formations, were the Serbian Quisling authorities, the Special Police in Belgrade, the Gendarmerie, and the Ministry of the Interior of Nedić’s Serbia. At first, the Special Police collected data with the addresses of Jews and Roma and entered them into their registries, which they submitted to the German occupying authorities, primarily to the Gestapo. Then, the Special Police made arrests of Jews and Roma in Belgrade and carried them to the camps in Topovske Šupe, Banjica, or handed them over directly to the Gestapo (Božović 2014: 395–464). The arrested Jews and Roma were usually transported to Jajinci at the military shooting range, where they were shot by German soldiers. Jews and Roma were previously brought to dig mass graves, where, after the shooting, they were thrown and buried.

The German occupation authorities very quickly organized specialized concentration camps for already interned Jews, which were camps for the physical extermination of Jews and Roma. At the beginning of the occupation, there were two concentration camps for Jews and Roma on the territory of Belgrade: Topovske Šupe in Belgrade, the Jewish camp Zemun (Judenlager Semlin), generally known as Sajmište, and later as Staro Sajmište (Brauninig 1992: 407–415; Romano 1980: 72–84). Although Staro Sajmište camp was on the territory of the Independent State of Croatia, Nazi Germany

declared it its territory and carried out its criminal activity of physical extermination of all camp inmates, primarily Jews (Kovač 2015: 369–372). Then, there were the following camps in Serbia for Jews: Banjica camp (Anhaltelager Dedinje) in Belgrade, “Crveni krst” in Niš (Anhaltelager Nisch), in Petrovgrad, Novi Bečej, Pančevo, Kragujevac, Šabac (Jewish camp), as well as labor camp “Borski rudnik” (Romano 1980: 59–85).

In addition to the above concentration camps, Jews and Roma were physically destroyed in other camps and prisons in Serbia or were often killed on the spot during discoveries and arrests. In these concentration camps, apart from adult men, women, children, the elderly and the helpless were also arrested and taken to the camps, all of whom were ruthlessly tortured in various ways and eventually killed. The most interned Jews were Jews from Belgrade, as most of them lived and worked in Belgrade. So, in the concentration camps Sajmište, Banjica, and Topovska šupa, most Jews were from Belgrade, accounting for 91.83% of the victims in the camps. Smaller groups of Jews from the interior of Serbia as well as from other parts of then occupied Yugoslavia were brought to these concentration camps in Belgrade (Božović 2012: 211–284; Đoković 2016: 99). A part of the Jews from Belgrade died in the Jasenovac concentration camp in the Independent State of Croatia, as well as in the Auschwitz and Treblinka camps (Cvetković 2020: 70–78).

The head of the German Supreme Command, Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel, made an order on September 16, 1941, to his soldiers in the East to kill between fifty and one hundred communists, Serbs, Russians, and Poles for every German soldier killed, explaining that human life in Eastern Europe was worth nothing (Nirnbërška presuda 1948: 164–168). On October 1, 1941, Keitel further ordered his commanders to take revenge on the hostages if the soldiers were attacked (Lopičić-Jančić 2012: 71). Keitel’s order to shoot a hundred Serbian hostages for every killed German soldier and fifty Serbian hostages for a wounded German soldier was enforced in Serbia during the entire occupation. When there were no more Serbs and Roma there, Jews from the mentioned concentration camps in Belgrade, Niš, and Banjica were also taken. Practically, these concentration camps for Jews in Serbia were reservoirs for filling the number of hostages executed in revenge for the killed or wounded German soldiers.

One of the frequent questions asked about the mass suffering of Jews in Serbia and in other parts of the occupied Kingdom of Yugoslavia was why they did not flee abroad when they saw what the German Nazis were doing to Jews in Germany, Austria, the Netherlands, Belgium, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Ukraine and that they would certainly do even worse in Yugoslavia and Serbia. Then, after Austria joined Germany, 20,000 Jews from Austria, Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary fled in transit in an attempt to get to Palestine or any other country where they did not persecute Jews. From these Jewish refugees, people learned what mass crimes the German Nazis committed against Jews in Germany, Austria, and other countries. Most of these Jewish refugees from European countries failed to move to a foreign country but were captured and exterminated by the German occupiers in several places and camps.

The largest part of the Jewish population in Serbia believed that they had done nothing hostile to Nazi Germany, that they were only merchants, bankers, clerks, doctors, dentists, lawyers, pharmacists, veterinarians, engineers and technicians, notaries, professors, writers, painters, artists, musicians, singers, artisans, and that they did not participate in any state authorities or in the army or police. They thought that the first registrations and censuses of Jews by the German occupier, which were done already in May 1941, meant that the German occupier would take them to forced labor in Germany. Certainly, their assessment that the German occupation authorities would not

arrest and kill them was completely naive and wrong, and it cost them terrible physical destruction by Nazi Germany as well as their helpers and allies, primarily the Independent State of Croatia, Hungary, Bulgaria, and Romania. Even the very convincing evidence communicated to them by the Jewish refugees was not clear to them.

A small part of the Jews from Serbia escaped by fleeing to Dalmatia, and from there they escaped to Italy. The attempted escape of Jews in 1939–1942 called “Kladovo” transport on the port on the Danube is well known. Also, a small number of Jews, a total of about 400, survived because they were in the German war camp in Osnabrück from 1941–1945, where they were held as reserve officers of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. The German occupation authorities constantly harassed these Jewish reserve officers, tortured them in various ways and constantly threatened to shoot them. The Jewish reserve officers captured in the Osnabrück camp were all anti-fascists, and under the existing circumstances, they constantly resisted the camp authorities (Vinaver 1975: 225–275). The Prime Minister of the Serbian Quisling Government, Milan Nedić, sent a letter to the German commander of Serbia, demanding that about 340 Jewish prisoners of war, reserve and active officers in the Osnabrück camp, be separated into a special camp with a strict regime that “calls for destructive action”. After some time, the Germans formed a special part, “D” camp in the Osnabrück camp, where they housed 700 Yugoslav communist and Jewish camp inmates, with extremely unbearable conditions (Borković 1985: 112–113). The German camp authorities violated the existing international law of war and international public law: the Convention on the Treatment of Prisoners of War of July 27, 1929 (Petković 1979: 337).

The number of Jews in Serbia who correctly estimated that they could not surrender to the German occupation authorities as well as the Quisling Special Police but joined the partisans in time and participated in the People’s Liberation War, or managed to escape in various ways, was relatively small.<sup>4</sup> There were 30 Jews from Serbia, the holders of the “Partisan Memorial of 1941”. Ten Jews are holders of the Order of the People’s Hero of Yugoslavia (Romano 1980: 203–215). Jews from the then Kingdom of Yugoslavia were in most cases anti-fascists and belonged to progressive, leftist, socialist, and communist movements and parties. One of the mentioned proofs is the participation of a total of seventeen Jews as volunteer-fighters in the Spanish civil war of 1936–1939 (Perić, Drechsler 1965: 96–102).

After the establishment of the concentration camp at Sajmište, the first groups of Jews were brought in the first half of December 1941. The conditions in this concentration camp at Sajmište were very bad and unbearable. Starting with poor nutrition, poor accommodation, poor hygiene, lack of medical and hospital care, freezing temperatures during the winter in inadequate rooms, the outbreak of deadly epidemics, causing mass infectious diseases, such as tuberculosis, typhus, typhoid fever, and diphtheria. However, most of the Jewish detainees were killed with poisonous deadly gas. Namely, the German occupier determined that German soldiers could not mentally endure the daily mass shootings of Jews, Serbs, and Roma in Jajinci, so they decided to avoid committing mass murders and instead use poisonous deadly gas in a special gas van. In that way, from the camp Sajmište, they filled that hermetically sealed van with hundreds of camp inmates every day, including women and children who were told

4 *Mi smo preživeli... Jevreji o Holokaustu*, Jevrejski istorijski muzej, Savez jevrejskih opština Jugoslavije, Beograd, 2001; *Mi smo preživeli...3. Jevreji o Holokaustu*, Jevrejski istorijski muzej, Savez jevrejskih opština Srbije i Crne Gore, Beograd, 2005; *Mi smo preživeli...4. Jevreji o Holokaustu*, Jevrejski istorijski muzej, Savez jevrejskih opština Srbije, Beograd, 2007; *Mi smo preživeli... 5. Jevreji o Holokaustu*, Jevrejski istorijski muzej, Savez jevrejskih opština Srbije, Beograd, 2009.

they were going to forced labor. When the van was filled and sealed, one of the drivers would release gas from the exhaust, which very quickly suffocated everyone who was in that part of the sealed van. The van went over the bridge on the Sava River through the city and reached the shooting range in Jajinci, where the dead were unloaded in front of a mass grave dug in advance. Several Roma threw the dead bodies into the mass grave, and then were shot themselves so that they would not be witnesses of the mass murder. The gas van started operating in February 1942 and operated until May 1942. In this way, from December 1941 to May 1942, about 7,500 Jews were killed from the Sajmište camp, including women, the elderly, and children. Colonel Emanuel Schäfer boasted of his success: “Belgrade is the only great European city that got rid of Jews” and they declared that territory a “Judenfrei” (Brauning 1992: 419–426; Beata 2012: 65–82). Colonel Schäfer stated in a report sent to Berlin that Serbia had been cleansed of Jews (Beata 2012: 74–75) .

The main creator of the Holocaust was the SS and Gestapo general, practically the most powerful man in Nazi Germany, Heinrich Himmler (1900–1945). The main executor, coordinator, and the person in charge of the physical extermination of Jews in all occupied territories was the Austrian German SS lieutenant colonel Adolf Eichmann (1906–1962).<sup>5</sup>

Apart from the Special Police, the Nazi occupier formed a special police detachment composed exclusively of local German Volksdeutscher, to arrest Jews. In addition, there were the so-called Einsatztruppe that carried out shootings, destruction of immovable and looting of movable Jewish property. The Gestapo (Geheime Staatspolizei) as well as the Military Intelligence Service, which included the secret military police (Geheime Feldpolizei), were also involved in the persecution and execution of Jews (Romano 1980: 58–63; Božović 2012: 105–138).

#### 4. Conclusion

The German occupier, with the cooperation and help of the Quisling Special Police, gendarmerie, members of Ljotić’s “ZBOR” and other state and military bodies of Nedić’s Serbia, fully implemented their criminal plan of the Holocaust in a very short time from July 1941 to May 1942. They practically carried out the physical destruction of Jews in Serbia, including Banat, and looted Jewish movable and immovable property. The physical extermination of Jews began on July 4, 1941, when “13 communist officials and Jews were shot for preparing the assassination of the Military Commander of Serbia”. In addition to this public shooting, by the end of 1941, there were a dozen other public individual and group executions of Jews, which was an introduction to their complete physical extermination on the territory of Serbia, including the territory of Banat and Sandžak (Romano 1980: 68–70).

It raises the question as to why the German occupier was in such a hurry to carry out the physical extermination of Jews in Serbia. First, in July 1941, a popular partisan uprising against the German occupier broke out in Serbia, and in a short time, the partisans defeated the German army and liberated a relatively large territory in Serbia. The German occupier assessed that the majority of able-bodied Jews could join the partisans, which would strengthen and popularize the partisan detachments. Because, according to the German rationale, the Jews knew what awaited them: concentration

5 Adolf Eichmann was sentenced in Israel for crimes against Jews and crimes against humanity to death by hanging, which was executed on June 1, 1962. (Herbert Grün, *Proces u Jeruzalemu 1961*, Naprijed, Zagreb, 1962)



camps and extermination. That is why the German occupiers decided to complete the “final solution to the Jewish question” as soon as possible, meaning a quick physical liquidation. Unfortunately, they succeeded in this. Out of 12,500 Jews who lived in Serbia until 1941, including Banat, they killed at least 11,000, or almost 90% in various ways.

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## GENOCID NAD JEVREJIMA U SRBIJI 1941–1945. GODINE

### Sažetak

Nacistička Nemačka je izvršila agresiju na Kraljevinu Jugoslaviju 6. aprila 1941. godine, a zatim i okupaciju, a imala je u svom osvajačkom planu fizičko uništenje srpskog i jevrejskog naroda. Navedeni plan uništenja srpskog i jevrejskog naroda nemački okupator je počeo da izvršava odmah od prvih dana okupacije. U predratnoj Srbiji, Jevreji su u najvećem broju živeli u Beogradu, a zatim u Novom Sadu, Subotici, Velikom Bečkereku, Pančevu, Senti, Vršcu, Somboru, Kikindi, Zemunu, Nišu, Šabcu, Pirotu, Prištini, Kosovskoj Mitrovici, kao i u manjem broju i u drugim gradovima u Srbiji. U predratnoj Srbiji živelo je 16.000 srpskih Jevreja. Najviše Jevreja je živelo u Beogradu, oko 12.000, dok su ostali živeli u navedenim gradovima i naseljenim mestima. U toku Drugog svetskog rata stradalo je oko 14.500 srpskih Jevreja ili 90% od ukupnog broja koji je živelo na teritoriji tadašnje Srbije. Beogradski Jevreji su stradali takođe više od 90% od ukupnog broja. Preživelo je ukupno svega 1.115 beogradskih Jevreja. Navedeni broj preživelih Jevreja uspeo je da se sakrije po drugim mestima i selima u unutrašnjosti Srbije, dok se manji broj priključio partizanskim odredima. Uništenje Jevreja od strane nemačkog okupatora bilo je u sklopu „konačnog rešenja jevrejskog pitanja” koje je sprovedeno u čitavoj okupiranoj Evropi. Po ubijanju Jevreja muškog odraslog stanovništva, ubijane su i žene i deca u logoru na Sajmištu, a ubijani su i gasom u kamionu dušegupki koji je za to specijalno

napravljen i dovezen iz Nemačke. Streljanja Jevreja su vršili Gestapo, jedinice SS, kao i jedinice nemačke vojske Vermaht. U uništenju srpskih Jevreja učestvovali su pripadnici srpske specijalne policije kao i oružanih odreda „Vlade narodnog spasa”, pre svega u racijama i hapšenjima. Zatim su uhapšene Jevreje predavali nemačkim vlastima koje su ih na razne načine ubijali. Srpska specijalna policija je formirala i poseban 7. odsek zadužen za Jevreje i Rome. Nemačke okupacione vlasti nisu imale potpune spiskove Jevreja u Srbiji koje bi trebalo uhapsiti. Tu su im pomogli srpska specijalna policija i oružane Nedićeve snage. Mnogi srpski Jevreji su decenijama ranije promenili svoja imena i prezimena u srpska. Međutim, to je znala specijalna policija koja je ta imena dostavljala nemačkom okupatoru i iste hapsila i kasnije ubijala na Sajmištu i Jajincima.

*Cljučne reči:* Srbija, Jevreji, Drugi svetski rat, genocid, holokaust, Nedićeva specijalna policija, Topovske šupe, Banjica, Sajmište, Jajinci

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