

THE ALBANIAN ETHNOTYPE AND THE SAVING OF THE JEWS DURING WAR

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The Albanians protected the Jews like no where in the world. But Albania was not the only country where Jews were not affected. "Final Solution" - of the total destruction of the Jews, it is not proven to have caused victims also in Denmark, Finland, Portugal, Spain and Turkey. But there is a big distinction from these countries and Albania as regarding to the non reports of the Jews. Spain, Portugal and Turkey were not involved in the war, they were officially neutral. The laws of war, including anti-Jewish laws that were designed by the nazi fascist countries, didn't have operational effect in these countries. Albania, unlike many of these countries, invaded for more than five years, listed in the world alliance against fascism, was recognized as such in the "Peace Conference" in Paris in 1946, where it was declared "ally", so was not protected by any special status, as regards to the problem of the Jews. On the contrary, the countries who politically and military controlled Albania during fascism and then the Nazis, attempted all the time to impose their agenda, including the doctrine of the "Final Solution". But they did not succeed. This failure of the nazi fascist doctrine in Albania is often explained in an almost canonic way by the "Code of Honor", and the "guest status". In fact, such an explanation is not sufficient. In the years of war Albania had a government and was not ruled by the Canon.

When it comes to the saving of the Jews, to be realistic, we should divide them into two groups: the resident Jews, citizens of a country and the exiled Jews, the non-residents. Almost all European countries have made the effort to save "their Jews". For example, it is known, Denmark's dignified attitude towards "their Jews." While in Albania, the issue is not about "her Jews." Above all, Albania refused quotas and no quotas realisation was ever reported. According to the first census of population (1929-1930) in Albania lived no more than 200 Jews, Albanian citizens with permanent residence.

Rescued Jews in Albania, means saved Jews from Montenegro, Croatia, Serbia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Bulgaria and some other countries. Talking about the number of Jews rescued in Albania there is a discrepancy in numbers and especially in time. Sometime this number is reported to be 200, sometimes 800, sometimes 1000 and even 1800. Disagreements about the number of Jews who came and were rescued in Albania come from the fact that there is always an arising of new data. Meanwhile, a detailed study of documents in the Albanian Archives shows a list of names with full details of Jews who entered and were rescued in Albania during World War II. There were 2265 Jewish names on that list. This is the longest list so far. The list is located at the "Holocaust Memorial Museum" in Washington D.C since the summer of 2005 and serves as a guiding document for further researches.

Even in the statistics of the “Yad Vashem” , it is confirmed that there were more than 2000 Jews saved from the Albanians. However, this number should be higher. This is based on two fundamental reasons: first, because the research of documents about the Jews, like any other research, although now in a satisfactory scale, can not be considered completed and, secondly, because all the lists drawn up and published so far for the Jews who refuge in Albania are only the names of those Jews who have entered stating their race and ethnicity, but some other Jewish groups, have hidden their identity and where presented Christians or Muslims. A considerable number of Jews, not only were dressed as Albanians with their ethnographic clothes but as well they had Albanian ID’s and passports and introduced themselves as Albanians and sometimes even as Turkish or any other nationalities. For this there is no list, no statistics, except some indirect data.

Even in the Albanian press there has been so much controversy about the thesis that there were hidden Jews in Albania during World War II. In fact, this is not a thesis, in terms of a research instrument. That in Albania there has been adapted Jewish this is wellknown. Before neglecting documents and especially avoiding the analysis of the Jewish presence of in Albania, researchers need to answer this question: Where did the Jewish communities of Vlora (Avilona, pronounced by the Yiddish language), Elbasan, Gjirokastra, Korca, Shkodra and some other well-known cities wellknown since in the Early Middle Ages, go?

In his study "The Jewish Community of South: Valona-Avilona" the Jewish historian Mordechai Arbel, published in "Los maestro", nr.50, 2003, explicitly says: "The Jewish community of Valona is one of the most ancient in Europe" that, according to the data of itself Albanian historiography", in 1520 there were in Valona 945 families in which 528 were Jewish, in other words, 3600 Jews in a population of less than 5000". This report made the researcher Bogumil Hrabak considering the city of Vlora “preponderantly a Jewish town” . It’s true that the Jewish population has moved continuously, there were migrations. But also it is known the fact that a considerable part of them converted into Muslims or Catholics. In the South Albania, in the Muslims population, it can be found typical Jewish names like “Kofina” or “Avrami” exactly where can be found also Jewish toponyms as “Plateau of Galilea” or “The Jewish Tomb” . Cities like Elbasan and Vlora has had synagogues, and Vlora’s synagogue for example, was used by the Italian army as an army depo during First World War; testifies that these cities had a stable Jewish community. Often it is mentioned as an act of tolerance or as an ecumenism the Latin, Greek and Slavic writings at the gate of the St. John Vladimir monastery. But nobody ever questioned that in this monastery from the Middle Ages till now there is the Star of David. Altogether, Albanian and others agree that Sabbatai Zevi, the leader of the Jewish “Messianic Movement” during 17th century passed his last decades of his life in Albania or that he had simple temples in Vlora, Ulqin, Berat and he even founded a sect combining the Hebrew-Muslim belief into what is called “d nme” .

To talk about the Jewish identity adaptation in the demographic environment of Albania it’s not so easy. This historical aspect facilitates the understanding of Jewish identity coverage during Second World War. How can be named the entry into a country with a false passport where everything is incompatible with the basic data of its wearer? The existence of a printing shop in Tirana, which produced false passports for Jews registering their names, religion and nationality as Albanians, the Italian Embassy in Albania has informed the *Farnesina* since in 1939, even in a second notice also it is stated the printing shop holder’s name. In the years 1942-1943 the Italian

authorities notified their superior authorities that a similar printing shop was set up in the city of Tetovo, where Jews from Skopje and Bulgaria were printing passports to enter in Albania. Coverage of Jewish identity has been made by local administration institutions. There are Jews who entered in Albania with hidden identity helped from the Mayor of Gjakova and so did other Mayors. There are Jews who hidened their identities after entering in Albania, for example, during their stay at the Kavaja camp, the Mayor there with his authority baptized the Jews from being called Solomon Saltiel into Sali, and David to Daut and so on. And precisely those who have entered with Albanian passports are not recognized or are not registered as survived by Albanians. In the correspondece between the Ministry of Free Lands (as Kosovo and Western Macedonia was called at that time) and the Council of Ministers often it is talked openly that one of the most viable ways of facilitating the evacuation of Jewish people concentrated there from various Balkan countries and lead to their withdrawal "inside of the Albanian state" is to give them unregistered Albanians passports.

This is the covering of the Jewish identity in Albania: false passports, passports issued by employees who did not had the legal power to do that, but also from ordinary beneficiary because of hard times, that perhaps had turned thier printing shops a way of profit. From the documents it appears that there have been occasions when the police has noticed the hidden identity and precisely during the investigation are mentioned even the names of those individuals who had provided them with false passports or identity cards (the case of the shop in Tetovo).

Religious Conversions of Jews to escape danger of extermination during World War II have been a European phenomenon. The only difference is that, for example, in Italy, to allow the evangelization of a Jew required to pass a required test time, the catechism, canonisation; the consent of a high-ranking cleric was needed, while in Albania this "evangelism" and "Islamisation" are made with exceptional ease, not only from the shrines, not only by the clergy, but by non clerical authorities. Above everything is the fact that this evangelism was done without catechism. Only Father Shtjef n Kurti, during the years 1943-44, has evangelized Jews: Venko Verab (Skopje), Abram Friz, Armando Alfandari of Rachel Alfandari (without country of origin); Olga Nikolic and her two daughters (Kotor) and "five Jews from Father Pjet r Meshkalla". Very surprised he himselfes writes saying that "these people are supposedly prepared in Christianity."

What some scholars are questionig is that how can a Jew accept to convert, knowing that Judaism is a nationality and at the same time religion (the only case in the World). In these cases, these conversions are not a way to express an internally rejection of Judaism, but simply an ordinary political pragmatism, which gave to these unfortunate people the opportunity to survive, accepting to violate formally recognizing the identity of its own.

More or less this has happened to the Albanians themselves, at the beginning of Ottoman Empire invasion. We can recall that our own National Hero, Gjergj Kastrioti, Prince of Arbs was Islamised in the courtyard of the Sultan (and certainly did the best possible) by remaining, however, the defender of European Christianity.

These things can be understood very well by deviding the essence from the form. It takes a fundamental importance that in the Resolution adopted by the American Congress to reevaluate the attitude of the Albanian people against Jews during World War II (2005), it is exactly stated that this recognition was directed to the Albanians taking into consideration the fact that "many Jews could hide their identity through passports with false Albanian names released from the national

Albanian institutions, or through the change of religion with the help of Christian and Islamic shrines. "

On the contrary to what people thought, historical and cultural ties between Albanians and Jews exist from Antiquity. Facts about this relationship are stored in archeology, ethnology, in religion and rites, in chronicles and history, and above all in the archives. Four are the major arrivals of Jews in Albania and the fourth of them are known as danger periods of their collective existence: 1.The first centuries AD, when the Jews were taken as slaves in the former Roman Empire (the romaniote Jews); 2.In the period of West Incuisition, especially the Spanish, in the late Middle Ages in the years 1492 and 1497 (safardic Jews); 3.In the period of mass prosecution from the former Ottoman Empire after the failure of the uprising, led by "mystical Messiah" Sabbatai Zevi; 4.In the period of the Nazi doctrine of "Final Solution"- the ashkenaz Jews (Germanic).

As noted, the Jew arrivals in Albania are always associated with the emergence of a risk of mass extinction. Periodic repetition in four different times of this phenomenon expresses more than a common historical tie between the two peoples and two cultures. One of the explanations given by historians for the salvation of Jews in Albania is that "they were a small group and did not represent nor competitive factors, or risk to the natives," so that ' s why Albanians held a soft and friendly attitude towards the Jews. In Albania came and were saved approximately 3000 Jews probably because that is how many could come, but the most important is that they all survived.

The more we lighten the issue of the Albanian Jews, the more it seems that this increases questions. One of these and the most important is that at what extent was the so called "SS division Skanderbeg" - the Albanian volunteers mobilized in the Nazi army, involved to deport the Jews from Kosovo to the concentration camp at Bergen Belsen and their elimination.

Regarding this issue the first publications has come mainly after 1990. For the first time the "Skanderbeg" Division is mentioned as a military force that has deported the Jews of Serbia settled in Pristina in memorires of H. Neubacher and later in the testimony of two Serbian scholars, published in the last two decades. In these memories it is said that this division of Albanian collaborationist brought in Bergen Belsen approximately 500 Jews, who are considered missing but in fact, it was not about accompanying the Jews in the notorious camp, but for a touch up in prison to Belgrade.This story came in leaning stubbornly, in encyclopedias, in publications, as they now say officially that the attitude of the people of Kosovo toward the Jews was entirely different from that of the Albanians.

Kosovo Albanians and Albanians from Albania, if you would had been different at this point it means that there are ethnotypes differences between them: the first ones collaborated with a collective crime and the second ones not. The research of documents in the Kosovo archives has not given yet any results. Perhaps these documents concerning the attitude towards the Jews are in the archives of Belgrade. In his book, Mirteza Studenica, the president of the Jewish community of Kosovo, this episode is mentioned, but the number of Jews deported to the Bergen Belsen, according to him, is somewhere between 10-15 people. Berndt Fischer, in his studies concluded that the number of Jews sent from Kosovo to mass extermination camps in Germany has been about 500, "but at least 40% of them managed to survive." This number comply with the data contained in several documents that were donated to the Albanian archives by Dr. Radu Ioanid during the visit of the Holocaust Memorial Museum delegation in Tirana.

These documents indicate that the "SS Division "Skanderbeg" was charged to bring in Belgrade prison 246 arrested, "Bolsheviks, communist rebels, political enemies and Jews". By this we understand that is not about the 500 Jews handed by Albanians, nor for 246 (nearly as Berndt Fischer talks about), because most part of this group were not Jews, but communists, partisans and rebellions. The deported lists show that the number of Jews sheltered in Kosovo that ended in Bergen Belsen was much less.

In these lists the "SS Division "Skanderbeg" is not the executor of the arrested but only the companions. But more important is those lists, in a special column, is written name by name the reason why the person is being sent to extermination camps and only 18 of them are deported and have aside the note "Jews". All others are Albanians, Montenegrins and Serbs who fought armed the Nazi army.

These documents are gradually leading to a full solution to the fictitious problem of the "relative involvement of the Kosovo Albanians" in the extermination of Jews. Historians for these documents must say their par.

Many can find it excessive to insist on the positive role of Albanian government authorities during War to save Jews. But the fact is that the people helped the Jews and gave them food, work and shelter. The people did not have lists. The government authorities had the lists but they didn't give them. There were functionaries of the government that not only have not submitted lists of Jews, not only have reported that under their jurisdiction there is not any Jew, but they even demanded of the Nazi command to release those Jews that they had captured during migration from the depths of the Balkans to Albania and exactly in Kruja, Hurshit, Mullet, Kor a, Preza and oba.

It is not that in Albania efforts were not made to involve the Jews in the antifascist war. There is a Circular of the communist movement (the Berat Circular for example) attempted to create this union. There are also policie reports on suspicion of Jews collaborating with the communist. But the Jews came to Albania to get salvation not to be implemented in any mission. With some minor exceptions, like that of the martyr Dario Ardit, there wasn't a large number of Jews who joined the antifascist movement. It seems contradictory that the special connection of the Jewish question by factors operating in Albania. Perhaps this specific saved them. According to sources, the Jewish case was above political issues.

Jews in Albania were not rescued by nationalism, communism, or any other political factor, but the power of ethnotype, in the essence of which is the protection of others in danger. This is a feature that Albanians have repeated often in dealing with "others".

**All the reference on the accurate data is based on the book "Jews in Albania" by Shaban Sinani.*