

MARGINS OF MEMORY



*Anti-Semitism and the destruction
of the Jewish community
in Prekmurje*

OTO LUTHAR





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“It made you want to cry your *heart out*...”¹

1 From the account of Liza Berger, one of the few internees who survived Auschwitz-Birkenau extermination camp. Mrs. Berger was born in Murska Sobota and was deported with her parents in early spring 1944. That April morning, on her way to the Murska Sobota synagogue, where the local gendarmerie and German soldiers had rounded up the majority of the Jewish population from the city and its surroundings, she noticed that many of her fellow citizens rushing to work were crying at the sight of them. She never forgot that scene and vividly remembered it some fifty years later when interviewed by a member of the Shoah Foundation. Here we would like to thank our colleagues Albert Lichtblau and Karl Rothauer, who helped us access thirteen interviews with Prekmurje Jews, Holocaust survivors. Similar gratitude also goes to late anthropologist and ethnologist Borut Brumen, whose monograph, *Na robu zgodovine in spomina. Urbana kultura Murske Sobote med letoma 1919 in 1941* [On the margins of memory. Urban culture in Murska Sobota between 1919 and 1941], (Pomurska založba, Murska Sobota, 1995), is in my opinion the best scholarly account so far of Prekmurje. In one of the chapters he also wrote about the Jews of Murska Sobota, and it is to him that I dedicate my discussion.

Introduction

This book was written within the framework of an international project titled “Neglected Holocaust: Remembering the deportation of the Jews in Prekmurje, Slovenia” (2010–2012). Initially, it was conceived as additional material for history teachers, a companion to the textbook *The Land of Shadows. The Memory of the Expulsion and Disappearance of the Jewish Community in Prekmurje*, intended for primary and secondary school pupils. The text ultimately grew into a book, but the aim remained the same: to offer a clear and comprehensive presentation of one of the most horrific and heartrending episodes of contemporary world and Slovenian history.

Apart from presenting the reasons and identifying the perpetrators of the largest genocide in the history of mankind, I intend to draw attention to its resonances with militant anti-Semitism outside Germany – not least because the first Jewish victims ended up in the Ustaše concentration camp Jasenovac, not in Nazi Auschwitz. Whenever we talk about the Holocaust, we must consider not only the key players in the “final solution to the Jewish question,” but also their collaborators in the occupied territories across Europe.

Accordingly, this text is divided into two parts: a description of the preparations and implementation of the “greatest organised crime in the history of civilisation”² and a presentation

2 Milinko Radević, “Predgovor,” in: Aleksandar Gaon (ed.), *Mi smo preživeli, Jevreji o Holokaustu*, Jevrejski istorijski muzej Zaveza jevrejskih opština, Belgrade, 2005, p. 12.

of the sites where this crime was committed on Slovenian soil. In the first part, I shed light on circumstances that started the Holocaust and genocide against the Slavic nations during World War II in the first place or, to put it in other words, I try to explain why and how two marginal extremist groups promoting Fascist and Nazi ideas gave rise to two totalitarian empires that led to the greatest catastrophe in human history.

In the second part, I turn to the developments in Slovenian territory or, more precisely, in Prekmurje, where three well-organised Jewish communities existed and greatly contributed to the region's prosperity until 1944. In this way, I wish to present an abstract and hardly conceivable chapter of the World War II through concrete destinies of the expelled and the accounts of those who never returned. The genocide of the Jewish people in Europe also took place in the Slovenian territory, though limited in scope there and perhaps even negligible according to some. Acquaintances, friends and neighbours of our grandparents disappeared overnight from neighbourhoods, towns and villages. Prekmurje, still the most underdeveloped and most frequently overlooked region in Slovenia, was thus forever robbed of the architects of its modernisation.

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Formally, this text is a result of two Slovenian projects, “(Re)construction of the memory of turning points in Slovenian history of the 20th century” (2010–2013) and “Slovenian Jews in Štajerska and Pomurje: survival, memory and revitalisation” (2009–2011) as well as of the aforementioned international project. But in terms of its contents, it is, of course, an expression

of the invaluable support as well as the infinite patience of Martin Pogačar, Boris Hajdinjak, Ana Hofman, Tanja Petrović, Heidemarie Uhl, Éva Kovacs, Ivo Goldstein, Goran Hutinec, Eleonore Eppel Lappin, Alfred Lichtblau, Irena Šumi, Marjan Toš and Breda Luthar.

I.

The prehistory and ideological origins of anti-Semitism, Fascism and Nazism

Nazism was not born on the eve of World War II, just as Adolf Hitler³ and Benito Mussolini⁴ were not the only advocates of anti-Judaism. Quite the contrary, both drew on various views of individual authors from the end of the 19th and the early 20th century. But this certainly does not change the fact that by translating extremist Social Darwinist ideas into practice they led mankind to the greatest disaster in its history.

3 Adolf Hitler, German Chancellor, Nazi leader (Führer) and war criminal, who in 1933–1945 enabled the extermination of more than a half of the European Jews. According to the Nazi statistics of 1942, some eleven million Jews lived in Europe at the beginning of the systematic destruction of Jewish communities (1935). The end of the war was seen by a little more than one half of them, the rest were destined to disappear. Opinions as to the beginning of the systematic persecution of Jews vary. Some place it in the year of Hitler's rise to power (1933), whereas others, including the authors of this book, recognise the turning point in the passing of racial laws at Nuremberg (see the glossary at the end of the book).

4 Benito Mussolini, Italian Fascist leader (Duce). Like Hitler, this second-worst war criminal of World War II aspired to expand the living space for the select races and peoples, thus bringing destruction on every single occupant of that territory. Prior to Italy's adoption of German racial laws, the top position on its list of inferior peoples was assigned to the Slavs, especially Slovenes and Croats, as well as the peoples of northern and northeastern Africa, most notably Tunisia, Ethiopia and Somalia.

Hitler, the ultimate bearer of responsibility for the catastrophe in the mid-20th century, drew inspiration from authors of the late 19th and early 20th century who believed that personal dictatorship was the most effective means of attaining political objectives or who extolled the significance and power of select individuals and superior peoples. Hitler was particularly impressed by theories that justified the differentiation between races and peoples by drawing on the views of modern European chauvinists and racists, as well as on research of German naturalists, medical scientists and anthropologists specialising in so-called racial hygiene.⁵

In light of the above, it is obvious that both modern racism and radical anti-Semitism were the negative consequences of the development of the natural and social sciences of the 19th century; or, more accurately, both forms of racial differentiation were the result of an uncritical transposition of the theory of the evolution of species into evolutionary social theory. In this case, Darwin's findings regarding the ability of the fittest and most adaptable species to survive no longer concerned only individuals but began to tailor the fate of entire groups. Since this shift occurred in a century marked by the formation of nation states, these groups were no longer

5 Special note ought to be made of the research conducted by the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute in Berlin and its Department of Anthropology, Human Heredity and Eugenics. Erwin Bauer, Eugen Fischer, Fritz Lenz and Otmar von Verschuer were among the leading researchers of the research centre. The first three gained fame in 1923 with the work *Outline of human genetics and racial hygiene* (*Grundriss der menschlichen Erblichkeitslehre und Rassenhygiene*, J. F. Lehmann, Munich, 1921). The last one became known for his research on twins and as a mentor to the notorious Josef Mengele.

groups of people settling a common territory but groups bound together by their common origin or, as anti-Semites would say, defined by the same blood. Modern anti-Semitism was therefore a fusion of racial theory and traditional hatred of Jews. In the early 20th century, traditional anti-Semitism with its primitive stereotypes caricaturing Jews as having hooked noses or accusing them of malicious infanticides evolved into modern nationalist anti-Semitism based not only on the tradition of Christian anti-Judaism but also on the findings of “racial science.”

Nazi anti-Semitism found its expression not so much in illustrations of ritual killings as it did in posters warning against race mixing and occasional illustrations in the form of archaic comic books narrowing down the issue of racial hygiene to the question of pure blood. The demonisation of Jews further intensified during and especially after World War I. When Germany faced a severe post-war economic and social crisis, Jews became a scapegoat for all its problems: the war, the defeat, general shortage and the degradation of traditional values. The usual list of the wrongs committed against purity of blood was extended by the warning against Jewish-Bolshevik revolutionaries and the universal call to oppose Jewish politicians.

Before we take a closer look at some of the preconditions for the growth of Nazi anti-Semitism, we first need to understand the circumstances that enabled these ideas to take root in the first place. Special mention should be made of the following three processes and events:

1. Anti-Jewish tradition;
2. Modernisation;
3. World War I and its aftermath.

Even though all three of these phenomena involve extremely complex development processes, our primary interest shall be in their political aspect. Or, to put it more accurately, with regard to the *second* phenomenon, we shall mainly concern ourselves with the consequences of the last stage of European internal and external colonisation. How were developments in Europe affected by the economy, which from the mid-19th century onwards was increasingly fuelled by profit (or revenue, as the term is currently used) from outside Europe (the United Kingdom in India, the Netherlands, Belgium and France in Africa and parts of Asia)? How was such a division of the world perceived by two states that came into existence only in the second half of the 19th century? Here, the primary reference is to Germany, which won the Franco-Prussian war just prior to its unification in 1871, thus demonstrating the ability to pursue its economic and political, i.e. territorial, interests. Its expansionism was partly also the result of developing capitalism, whose interests had by the end of the 19th century reached beyond all national frameworks. On the other hand, both old and new states masked their respective colonial interests – whether in Europe or anywhere else in the world – as so-called national interests. This is why it should also be noted that distinctly liberal national movements came under the control of conservative powers. In the course of swift changes brought about by modernisation, so-called collective interests prevailed over the rights of the individual citizen, just as “hysterical nationalist movements and hostility towards foreigners” prevailed over the liberal emancipation of a nation.

When we also add the theory or concept of the “balance of powers” reiterated in 1908 by the British diplomat Sir Eyre Crowe, the picture becomes even clearer.⁶

Therefore, any explanation that seeks the causes of World War I in Gavrilo Princip’s assassination of Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, or in Serbian expansionism, which interfered with the Austro-Hungarian interests, cannot hold up to serious criticism. True reasons should be sought in the consolidation of German and Austro-Hungarian economic and political influence in Southeastern Europe, where the spheres of interest were still not clearly defined. In other words, it was a question of political control and economic expansionism over a region in which the distribution of powers was still not “balanced.” Let us only recall the German modernist colonialist vocabulary, which draws on concepts such as “racial core,” “new relations between the nations in Southeastern Europe,” and the realisation of the German “concept of Central Europe,” which in the period between the two world wars could also be understood as “control over Central and Southeastern Europe.” In this context, one could even witness the “death of the Balkans” later in 1940 and the “birth of Southeastern Europe” or

6 The British diplomat Sir Eyre Crowe, who at the beginning of the 20th century put a unique brand on the British perception of Germany, borrowed the term “balance of powers” from the physicist Isaac Newton. Thanks to Crowe, the concept of a “balance of powers,” which since Newton has represented an action of natural powers, crucially characterised the Western political vocabulary already before World War II, whereas during the Cold War, it appeared at every step. In one of his diplomatic reports or memoranda, Crowe described Germany as a professional blackmailer, which was a rather harsh or unusually blunt judgment for the proverbially reserved British diplomacy.

a “new balance of powers in the South East.” One hundred years later, the reasons for this are as clear as day. German expansionists of the late 19th and early 20th century saw the “southeastern part” of Europe as open to a “general partition”⁷ that was to warrant security in the entire region. The latter could, of course, only be guaranteed by Germany, which identified Southeastern Europe as its potential reservoir for the production of food and raw materials, as well as a communications crossroad between the Transdanubian basin and the Adriatic as well as between Southeastern Europe and the Black Sea and Ukraine’s coast.⁸

Viewed through this lens, World War I was more than a typical imperialist war or a war for the consolidation of political and economic influence on the one hand and the pursuit of colonial interests on the other. Therefore, it is little wonder that Nazism, whose core was largely composed of disillusioned former soldiers, targeted the old imperialist elites and their institutionalised structure, i.e. their machinery of power, influence and hegemony.⁹ Germany, which suffered a great defeat in the war and emerged from it as the sole culprit (Austria-Hungary

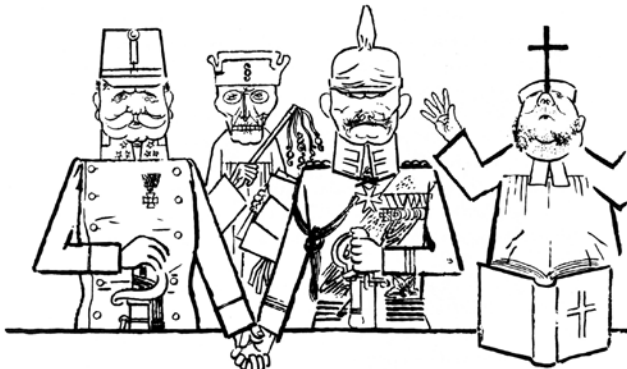
7 Jovan O. Despotović, “Nemačka i Balkan” (Milan Ristović, *Njemački novi poredak i Jugoistočna Evropa 1940/41–1944/45*, VINC, Beograd, 1991), a review in *Vojno delo* nos. 1–2, Belgrade 1992, p. 214.

8 *Ibid.*

9 Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes. The short 20th century 1914 –1991*, Abacus, London, 1995, pp. 120–121. Hobsbawm also points to the important role of the so-called “front soldiers” (*Frontsoldaten*) who composed most of the first extreme nationalist storm sections, alongside freelance army gunmen who murdered the German Communist leaders Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg in early 1919 (p. 68), and later formed the backbone of the German *Freikorps*.

had by then disintegrated, whereas Turkey had been a relatively marginal player), found itself in the direst of situations. The general shortage led to a sharp decline in the general standard of living, and every attempt at economic recovery was thwarted by the obligation to pay war reparations to the Allies.

World War I disenchanted many people with the world and created distrust of former institutions, value systems and religions.



German Kaiser, Army, Law and Church in the eyes of Georg Grosz. From Uwe M. Schneede, *George Grosz, Der Künstler in seiner Gesellschaft*, M. DuMont Schauberg, Cologne, 1975.

People, especially soldiers on the battlefield, began to wonder where God was when in a single day some sections of battlefields took the lives of tens of thousands of their fellow combatants for absolutely no good reason. All of the above, and a number of other factors, shaped a political environment in which liberal, democratic and emancipatory forces had the least chance. Or, to put it in other words, it created an ideal climate for anyone calling for order, discipline, self-denial and a final settling of scores with everyone responsible for the current

situation. The list of culprits drawn up by the NSDAP (*Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei* – National Socialist German Workers’ Party) was a long one and included capitalists and politicians, on the one hand, and Jews and aliens, on the other. In light of this, it is little wonder that the government and parliament of the Weimar Republic, as Germany was called immediately after the war, appeared so feeble and powerless.

Daily life in that period was vividly portrayed by the images (paintings, drawings and graphics) of German expressionists such as Otto Dix, Max Beckmann, Ludwig Meidner, Christian Schad, George Grosz etc. Here we shall focus on the works of the first and the last artist mentioned, so as to demonstrate in the easiest way possible the horrors of the positional warfare of World War I, as well as the disenchantment in the world, which was certainly the most important consequence of the senseless four-year carnage.



War profiteers. From Schneede, *George Grosz, Der Künstler in seiner Gesellschaft*.

These artists were socially engaged and believed that art should not only serve the “pleasure of individuals,” but “should become one with the people.”¹⁰ Therefore, it comes as no surprise that at the advent of Nazism some of them withdrew abroad or into so-called internal exile. In the early 1930s, Grosz migrated to the US, Dix lost his job at the university; and the rest were marginalised in other ways, also by having most of their works destroyed. Grosz later wrote in desperation that when Hitler came, he felt like a boxer who had lost a fight and that all their efforts had been in vain.¹¹ The Nazis’ attitude toward or, rather, their distrust of modern art as represented by Grosz’s and Dix’s works, bears further witness to the undemocratic character of Nazism, which was completely devoid of self-reflection, let alone self-irony. According to Yehuda Bauer, one of the most prominent researchers of the history and culture of the Holocaust, this particular aspect of Nazi thought deserves special attention, since only in this way is it possible to grasp the unusual, if not inappropriate use of general concepts. He takes as an example Himmler’s famous speech to SS troops in Poznań in 1943, describing those who were the most effective in murdering Jews as “decent” (*anständig*).¹²

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However, before we turn to the discussion about the origins of modern anti-Semitism, it is important to highlight the difference between classical Christian anti-Semitism

and its modern Neo-Darwinist or quasi-scientific derivative. As Yehuda Bauer maintains, the Christian doctrine has always identified Jews as evil and, as such, as a manifestation of God’s wrath.

Over time, these symbols materialised to the extent that a “Jew was no longer only a symbol of Antichrist but the actual Antichrist or the incarnation of the Devil.”¹³ In the opinion of the first generation that conducted systematic research into the origins of anti-Semitism (Yehuda Bauer, Uriel Tal, Shmuel Ettinger, Saul Friedländer and others), hatred of Jews is not so much about actual antagonism to the Jewish faith and lifestyle as it is about a “permanent confrontation with the phenomenon of Jewry.” Last but not least, the same holds true of modern anti-Semitism in places where Jews no longer live and where practically no Jews have lived or where their presence has never been of any significance. In this connection, Bauer refers to cases from early modern England, post-war Poland and Idi Amin’s Uganda, which imported anti-Semitism along with the saw, the nuclear bomb, the cinema and plastic.¹⁴ To this list, we may also add the case of Austria as well as Slovenia, where the SJM (Slovenian Public Opinion) opinion polls reveal a high level of anti-Semitism despite the absence of Jews.

In the Slovenian territory, Jews first assumed the role of villains as early as the end of the 13th century. According to

10 Schneede, *George Grosz, Der Künstler in seiner Gesellschaft*, p. 80.

11 *Ibid.*, p. 188.

12 Yehuda Bauer, *Trends in Holocaust Research*, Yad Vashem, Jerusalem, 1977, p. 20.

13 *Ibid.*, p. 21.

14 *Ibid.*, p. 18.

the writings of Janez Vajkard Valvasor, one group of Jews in Ljubljana was accused of kidnapping in 1290 and another of raping little Christian girls some hundred years later (1408). The charges had tragic consequences. The former incident triggered violent riots killing “many Jews” and the latter led to the killing of three members of the Ljubljana Jewish community. As in many cases across Central and Western Europe, Carniolan Jews were also accused of poisoning wells, which was the most frequent charge fuelling animosity towards Jewish families, apart from sacrificing Christian children and extortion.¹⁵ According to Boris Hajdinjak, the foremost authority on Jewish history in the territory of present-day Slovenia, this appears to have been an aspect of the persecution of Jews just before the end of the 14th century.¹⁶

15 Janez Peršič, *Judje in kreditno poslovanje v srednjeveškem Piranu*, Department of History, Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana, Ljubljana, 1999, p. 131.

16 In his article, “Jews in medieval Ptuj,” which will probably not have been published by the time this book is released, Hajdinjak states that the most likely instigator of the persecution was the “town lord of Ptuj, Archbishop of Salzburg, Eberhard III [...] von Neuhaus.” During his research on the conditions in Ptuj towards the end of the Middle Ages, Hajdinjak concludes that in the last decade of the 14th century the Jews of Ptuj were first confined and then forced into exile, “with their possessions confiscated to the archbishop’s benefit.” Particularly striking, according to Hajdinjak, is that the document in regard to confiscated property has been “preserved both in German and Hebrew version.” It contains, among other things, the exiles’ “announcement” “that they will not seek vengeance” or claim damage compensation for their confinement and confiscated property. I owe special gratitude to my colleague Hajdinjak for permission to publish parts of his forthcoming article.

The history of the concept

Before we turn to the concluding stage of the process, which had been taking place for at least seven hundred years, let us first take a look at some authors who had the most significant influence on the leading Nazi figures and those most responsible for the Jewish tragedy. Hitler, for instance, was by far most inspired by the writings of Alfred Rosenberg, especially his delusions about the “myth of blood.” In his extremely bizarre and muddled book titled *The Myth of the 20th Century (Der Mythos des XX. Jahrhunderts)*,¹⁷ the author extolls Germany as the vanguard of European civilisation and devises a theory of the charismatic leader and the purity of the so-called Aryan race.

“Today a new faith is awakening,” Rosenberg states, “the myth of blood; the faith that the divine essence of mankind is to be defended through blood. [...] But today an entire generation is beginning to have a presentiment that values are only created and preserved where the law of blood still determines

17 The book largely draws on the work *Die Grundlagen des XIX. Jahrhunderts (The Foundations of the 19th Century)* (Verlagsanstalt F. Bruckmann A.-G., Munich, 1912) by Houston S. Chamberlain, the foremost ideologue of fanatical racism, which is the central and most characteristic aspect of Nazism. Much as Fascism built on authoritarian and anti-parliamentarian views formulated during the decades after the unification of Italy chiefly on the basis of nationalists’ writings of the late 19th century, Nazism found its underpinnings in the authoritarian and racist tradition of worldviews embodied in Chamberlain’s book or individual chapters of Oswald Spengler’s famous work *Untergang des Abendlandes* (Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, Arthur Helps and Helmut Werner (eds.), trans. Charles F. Atkinson, Preface H. Stuart Hughes, Oxford UP, New York, 1991).

the ideas and actions of men, whether consciously or unconsciously.” While in Fascism, the glorification of elites gives prominence to the leader and hierarchy, its Nazi counterpart refers to national and racial communities in relation to other peoples, i.e. German natural superiority and the supreme calling of the German people to dominate the world. Therefore, their outlooks on the relationship between the state and the people make Nazism and Fascism slightly different from one another. “The National Socialist state is only a means. The fundamental reality is the People or *Volk*. The German people is not only a community of the living Germans but a historical and biological reality; it embodies the German race as well as the history of Germany. The National Socialist state therefore constitutes only one moment in German destiny.”¹⁸

As evident from the above, the racial myth in Nazism entails a completely different classification and emphasis. While Italian Fascism also builds on nationalism, it uses the term race (*razza*) far less frequently than the term lineage (*stirpe*), which is closely associated with the “imperial mission of Italian and Catholic Romanhood.” As late as in his *Talks (Colloqui)* with Emil Ludwig in 1932, Mussolini would disagree with Hitler, arguing that “national pride has no need of the delirium of race,” that “there is no anti-Semitism in Italy,” that “Jews have always conducted themselves well as [Italian] citizens, and as soldiers they fought bravely.” He dismissed Nazi anti-Semitism with a jocular remark that

whenever there “is something wrong with the Germans, the Jews receive the blame for it.”¹⁹ However, his wittiness apparently faded a few years later when Fascism, too, embarked on the path of anti-Semitism and embraced the essential commandments of the Nuremberg racial laws.

From this vantage point, Nazism, utterly incapable of self-reflection, was the genuine embodiment of the Nazis’ staunch anti-Semitism and fastidious hierarchy of races with the pure Nordic Aryan German race at the zenith. The doctrine of the superiority of the German race was directed not only against the Jews, who in the 1930s began to face ever-fiercer persecution, but also against other peoples, among which the Russians and Poles bore the main brunt of Nazi hatred and contempt.

At this point, it seems appropriate to recall the position in which the Slovenes found themselves in this hierarchy. According to the so-called Main Welfare Office for Ethnic Germans (*Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle* or shorter VoMi), successor to the Race and Settlement Main Office (*Rasse- und Siedlungshauptamt*), which had been responsible for racial and settlement planning ever since 1931, the Slovenes appeared to have outranked the Poles, Russians and Jews. However, the number of people in Slovenian Styria and Upper Carniola deemed suitable for Germanisation or, to put it in more scholarly terms, re-absorbable into the German race (*Wiedereindeutschungsfähig*), was rather low. Even though

18 Here quoted from Paolo Alatri, *Oris zgodovine moderne politične misli (Lineamenti di storia del pensiero politico moderno)*, Delavska enotnost, Ljubljana, 1980, p. 345.

19 Emil Ludwig, *Colloqui con Mussolini*, A. Mondadori, Milano, 1932.

their initially negligible number was raised to approximately 50,000 by the end of the war, they did not inspire much trust and deference from the Nazis. Quite the contrary, given their Slavic origin and the fact that partisan resistance had already formed three months after the occupation, VoMi officials treated them as potential supporters of the local resistance movement, especially in instances of planned resettlements to various locations in western Poland. This is also why the VoMi sent to the region around Lodz and Lublin no more than two Slovenes for every ten Germans.²⁰ If we also add the 220,000 to 260,000 persons that were found utterly unfit for Germanisation and set for deportation to the Old Reich, Serbia and Croatia, we may conclude that the so-called Reichsminister Heinrich Himmler slated no less than one-quarter of the entire Slovenian people for expulsion.

Everyone else was deemed suitable to undergo Germanisation at home. The first stage of the process included the ban on the use of Slovene, which is also evident from the Maribor decree of early April 1941 requiring all shop and bar owners to replace Slovene signs with German ones. The decree was signed by the chief of the city police, Polizeibevollmächtigter Dr. Pfrimmer. The Nazi authorities, however, practiced methods similar to those in occupied Poland. This included a combination of the expropriation and expulsion of local population and its eventual physical de-

struction, on the one hand, and the immigration of Germans or other nations envisaged for Germanisation, on the other. Physical destruction became an issue of particular importance after the formation of the resistance movement and the first partisan units. Partisans' wives were usually deported to concentration camps and their children sent to foster homes or institutions where they would be brought up as proper Germans (*“zum ‘Deutschthum’ erzogen”*). According to Klaus Thörner, a German specialist in Nazi occupation regimes, 600 children were deported to the Old Reich before 1943. About half ended up in German foster homes.²¹ The total number of victims in the Slovenian child population was significantly higher. Ivica Žnidaršič, President of Slovenian Exiles Association, claims that among 67,000 Slovenian exiles at least 20,000 were children. Slovakian colleagues state similar numbers (15,000), while the number of Czech child victims was considerably higher. The highest toll, however, was paid by Polish children, with some 600,000 exiles.²²

21 Ibid., p. 16.

22 Janoš Zore, “Med žrtvami holokavsta tudi 20.000 slovenskih otrok,” *Delo*, 28 January 2011, p. 12. The author mistakenly includes non-Jewish victims of the Holocaust, perpetuating thus a common mistake in interpreting World War II in Slovenia. Recently, politicians and journalists tend to include domestic victims among the Holocaust victims. Such symbolic “unification” with the Jews – “Za nacizem smo bili vsi Judje” (We were all Jews for the Nazis); “Holokavst ... ni bil vršen samo nad Judi, ampak tudi nad nami” (The Holocaust ... was perpetrated not only against the Jews, but also against us.); “Tudi Slovence so obravnavali enako kot Jude” (The Slovenes were treated like the Jews) – not only creates confusion among the young learning about these topics, but is also often abused as a tool of discreditation in local politics. Vanja Alič’s article is one of the best examples of such confusions and abuses: “Za nacizem smo bili vsi Judje,” *Dnevnik*, 31 January 2011.

20 Klaus Thörner, “Der ganze Suedost ist unser Hinterland – die geschichtlichen Hintergründe der Germanisierungspolitik in Slowenien,” in: *Neuengammer Studienhefte, KZ-Gedenkstätte Neuengamme, Hamburg*, 2010, p. 15.

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The figures above clearly reveal a strain of fanaticism whose economic,²³ social and political roots reach back to the mid-19th century and whose tenets were expounded in Hitler's programme *Mein Kampf*. Here, reference is made first and foremost to Hitler's adoption of the concept and ideology of the ethnic state (*Volksstaat*), which is obligated "to promote the victory of the better and stronger and demand the subordination of the inferior and weaker in accordance with the eternal will that dominates the universe." Hitler's völkischer state, therefore, "favours the fundamentally aristocratic concept of nature and believes in the validity of this law down to the last individual." It sees not only "the different values of races, but also the different values of individual man." From the masses it elevates the importance of an individual and thus has an organising effect in contrast to the "disorganising effect of Marxism." It believes in the necessity of "idealising the fundamental premise of mankind. But it cannot grant the right of existence to an

23 Special mention ought to be made of the Southeastern European Memorandum (*Südoesteuropa-Memorandum*), drawn up in 1932 by the specialist service of the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in collaboration with a group of German economists. The memorandum, as already mentioned, portrays Southeastern Europe as a reservoir of labour force and inexpensive raw materials (primarily monocultures such as soy) for Germany and Italy. Apart from selected German economists, the memorandum also relied on the expertise from experts of IG-Farben, a consortium of chemical companies including BASF, Bayer, Höchst etc. In the opinion of the latter, it was necessary to undertake a complete agricultural reconstruction in Yugoslavia, Romania and Bulgaria and turn small family farms into large estates, which would ultimately result in "3.5 million hungry mouths too many." *Ibid*, p. 12.

ethical idea if this idea represents a danger to the racial life of the bearers of higher ethics: for in a hybridised and negrified world all conceptions of the humanly beautiful and sublime, as well as all hopes of an idealised future of humanity, would be lost forever."²⁴

The two targets of Hitler's deepest contempt were Marxism and Jewish capitalism or, rather, Jewish international demo-plutocracy, which, in Hitler's belief, sought to destroy Germany. For this reason, he also found it of utmost importance that Germany should gather up all Germans who remained outside its borders pursuant to post-World War I peace treaties and then launch its expansionist campaign against the inferior Slavic peoples. In Hitler's belief, the primary mission of the Third Reich was to subject these peoples to slavery or even physical extermination and on their debris establish the awe-inspiring new "world order." Hitler and his adherents maintained that the German people had the right to turn the subjugated peoples into a reservoir of their economic and human resources for the restoration of German glory and greatness. Although the Nazi doctrine of "living space" (*Lebensraum*) was quite close to the Fascist thesis of a "proletarian nation" that should win "its own place under the sun," it was much more fatefully entrenched in racism, the myth of race and blood. What is more, Nazi expansionism and pan-Germanism drew not only on economic elucidations but also on peculiar interpretations of natural law and fantasies imbued with mysticism. In the latter re-

24 Here quoted from Alatri, *Oris zgodovine*, p. 346.

gard, the Nazis saw the war also as an opportunity for the realisation of their territorial and political aims, as well as the enslavement or even extermination of inferior peoples.

Nazism was, moreover, the embodiment of blind and fanatical devotion to the cult of the leader. The so-called leader principle (*Führerprinzip*) was officially embraced as a basis of the entire hierarchical pyramid composed of the nation and the Nazi state. In this context, the Führer assumes the attributes of a semi-divine personality possessing prophetic abilities. The worship of Hitler as an infallible leader of iron will and infinite intuition eclipsed even the Fascist saying, “Duce is always right,” further attesting to a complete lack of detached self-reflection, not to mention self-irony.

In this connection, a special chapter focuses on the relationship towards the youth, which was to serve as a guarantee for the establishment of a new world order, iron discipline and ethics of violence, as well as to exemplify the prowess of the master race. Hitler insisted that “everything weak must be chiselled away.

“In my Ordensburgen a new type of youth will grow up who will shock the world. I want a domineering, fearless and cruel youth capable of performing the grandest of actions. The free, magnificent beast of prey must once again flash from their eyes. I want my young people to be strong and beautiful. I shall have them trained in all forms of physical exercise. I want an athletic youth. This is the first and most important thing. That is how I will eradicate thousands of years of human domestication. Thus I will see before me the noble and raw material of nature to create new things. I will

have no intellectual education. Knowledge spoils young people. I prefer to let them learn only what they pick up by following their play instinct. But they must learn to dominate.”²⁵

These ideas materialised in horrific SS battalions, brutal executors of all destructive operations. Slightly different prospects were in store for some special formations, e.g. SA (Storm Sections) under the command of Ernst Röhm, which were connected with the radical anti-capitalist wing of Nazism led by Gregor Strasser. This wing met with the same destiny as the pro-socialist wing of Fascism in Italy, which still exhibited some popular tendencies from the revolutionary syndicalism or the remnants of egalitarian and liberally oriented beliefs. By ordering the execution of Röhm and his men in the “Night of the Long Knives,” Hitler made his first determined step on the path that would allow no compromise with who opposed him.

With the war approaching, the economy of private capitalist monopolies was exclusively geared to war preparations both in Fascist Italy, which gradually introduced the policy of autarchy, i.e. complete economic independence, and even more so in Germany, which took this process to the extreme. A new form of state-planned economy emerged, characterised by “harmonised development” between the state itself and private industry, giving absolute priority to major monopolist concentrations and the semi-militarisation of work. As was the case with Fascist corporations in

25 Ibid., p. 347.

Italy, the Reich Chamber of Commerce and its provincial divisions formulated the basic directions for the management of the German economy following the dictates of big capital, albeit under the supervision of the Nazi hierarchy, which steered production towards the consolidation of national military power for the purposes of war preparations.

The working class was thus stripped of every means of struggle and left at the mercy of employers. Although blue- and white-collar workers had their “representative councils,” the latter were appointed by the Work Front (*Arbeitsfront*), an affiliated organisation of the Nazi Party. On the other hand, the situation of German workers was still incomparably better than that of workers in the occupied territories, who had fallen into genuine slavery and were killed even for the most minor of indiscretions or due to the turning of tides of war. However, the very flames of war ignited by the Nazis also shattered the delirious dreams of Hitler, his associates and followers.

**

And how were the theories listed and briefly described above incorporated into National Socialist or Nazi policies? Since this discussion deals with a phenomenon that reached its concluding stage in Germany or on the initiative of the German Nazis, our primary attention will be on Germany. However, before we turn to the social and economic conditions in this country, a few words ought to be said about the term national socialism. As stated by Eric Hobsbawm, the Fascist movement in Germany indeed “had the elements of revolutionary movements, inasmuch as they contained peo-

ple who wanted a fundamental transformation of society, often with a notably anti-capitalist and anti-oligarchic edge. However, the horse of revolutionary fascism failed either to start or to run. Hitler rapidly eliminated those who took the ‘socialist’ component in the name of the Nationalist Socialist German Workers’ Party seriously – as he certainly did not.”²⁶

Who was captivated by Nazism and how and why?

In the opinion of the aforementioned author, one of the greatest historians of the 20th century, both Nazism and Fascism fed on the indignation of ordinary men in society caught between big capital on the one hand and the mass workers’ movement on the other. The Nazi rhetoric and propaganda in general especially appealed to those who felt robbed of appropriate social status in society. This self-perception and the resulting frustration found their characteristic expression in anti-Semitism, which became the vehicle of new political movements that, fuelled by the hatred of the Jews, emerged in several states during the last quarter of the 19th century. Owing to their omnipresence, the Jews easily symbolised everything that aroused the deepest hatred, including the ideas of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution, which had emancipated the Jews and placed them in the foreground,

26 Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes*, p. 121.

where they could serve as symbols of the hated capitalist/financier; the revolutionary agitator; the disintegrating influence of “rootless intellectuals” and the new mass media; competition (how could it be anything but “distorted”) securing them a disproportionate share of posts in learned professions; and the alien and outsider in general. Not to mention the universal belief that the Jews murdered Jesus Christ.

As already established above, animosity towards Jews pervaded the entire Western world, and their position in the 19th century society was indeed quite ambiguous. Nevertheless, the fact that strikers – including members of non-racist workers’ movements – were capable of attacking Jewish shop owners and regarding their employers more as Jews than as capitalists, should not lead us to automatically deem them proto-National Socialists. If it were that simple, then we should also consider anti-Semites the members of the Bloomsbury group,²⁷ which set an example of Edwardian liberalism in Great Britain.

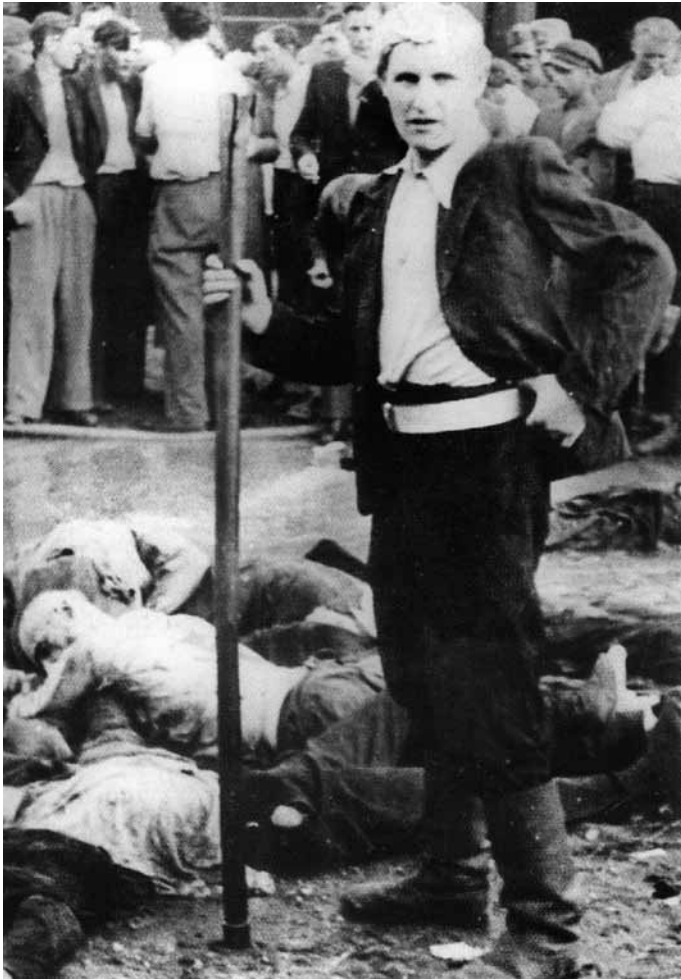
A somewhat different form of anti-Semitism was characteristic of peasants in Central Eastern Europe, where, according to Hobsbawm, for various practical reasons the Jew was the link between the survival of the villagers and the non-rural economy on which they depended. This form of animosity towards the Jews was certainly much deeper and more explosive, and it became even more evident after the Slavic, Hungarian and Romanian rural societies began to confront the completely incompre-

27 A group of artists and intellectuals who in the first half of the 20th century set many trends in British art and intellectual life. Among the ten or dozen outstanding individuals forming this group are the writer Virginia Woolf and economist J. Maynard Keynes.

hensible consequences of modernisation. Given that stories of Jews sacrificing Christian children still circulated among these peasants, it is little wonder that occasional social unrest usually degenerated into anti-Jewish pogroms. Of all forms of anti-Jewish sentiment, this is the one in which we should look for a direct connection between the original roots of anti-Semitism and extermination of Jews in World War II. The roots of anti-Semitism clearly laid the foundations of Eastern European Fascist movements that garnered mass support – especially the Romanian Iron Guards and the Hungarian Arrow Cross movement. This connection was certainly much more evident in the former territories of the Habsburg Monarchy and the Russian Empire than in the German Reich. In Germany, where after 1871 the Jews could even run for certain public offices, so-called social anti-Semitism was slightly more concealed, but that does not mean that it was not there. One attestation to this fact is the story of German painter Charlotte Salomon (1917–1943), whose works demonstrate the reach of the dogged anti-Semitism of German associations, clubs, commissions and juries.

This is also why we cannot concur with Eric Hobsbawm when he says that in Berlin anti-Semitism spread with orders from the top. However, it is true that until 1938 modern Germany knew no events even remotely comparable with the pogrom in Kishinev in 1903 or the mass killings of Jews during the Russian Revolution of 1905, not to mention the brutal murder of 3,800 Jews who were slaughtered by Lithuanians immediately after the arrival of the Germans.²⁸

28 Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes*, p. 114.



Lithuanians participating in the Vilnius massacre, 1941. From Botsch et al. 2008, p. 69.

The latter event provides a great prelude to the description of the basic topography of the systematic genocide as well as the most illustrative introduction to the chronology of Nazi anti-Semitism. Apart from that, it also offers a sound starting point for a reflection on the Holocaust committed by anti-Semites outside Germany. The closest to the Slovenian territory was the devastating anti-Semitic violence committed by the Croatian Ustaše in the concentration camp Jasenovac. As for individual criminals of Slovenian descent, certainly no one can match Odilo Globocnik (1904–1945), Chief of SS and Police in the Lublin district, responsible for the organisation and implementation of “Operation Reinhard.”²⁹

However, this and the role of anonymous anti-Semites will be discussed later on. For now, our attention lies squarely on the German case, which, after all, set in motion the train of all subsequent events.

²⁹ Operation Reinhard, which aimed to exterminate the Jews in the Lublin district of Poland, lasted from March 1942 to November 1943. The brutality with which Odilo Globocnik undertook this criminal enterprise surprised even Joseph Goebbels, Nazi Minister of Propaganda. On the evening of 27 March, the latter wrote in his diary: “*The General Government in Lublin has begun deporting Jews to the east. The methods they used were rather barbaric and indescribable in their particulars; therefore, there were not many Jews left.*” The Belzec, Sobibor and Treblinka concentration camps, in which the majority of the deported Jewish families were taken, were wiped off the face of the earth by the end of 1943. One of the rare preserved pieces of evidence regarding this crime is the “revenue account” drawn up by Odilo Globocnik at the behest of Heinrich Himmler. The total revenue (in foreign currencies, German currency, gold and other valuables) amounted to a little more than 100 million Reichmarks... Here taken from Gideon Botsch, Florian Dierl, Elke Gryglewski, Marcus Gryklewski, Peter Klein, Thomas Rink, Christa Schikorra, *Die Wannsee-Konferenz und der Völkermord an den europäischen Juden. Katalog der ständigen Ausstellung*, Haus der Wannsee-Konferenz, Berlin 2008, p. 152.

Germany: from frustration to destructive hatred

As regards the basic anatomy of German anti-Semitism, it is already astonishing to learn that no fewer than 500,000 Jews lived in German provinces immediately after unification and 600,000 in 1914, making up only 1% of the entire population of Germany. Nearly two-thirds of German Jews lived in major cities and every fourth lived in Berlin. They had a prominent position in economic life, with 30 of the 100 wealthiest Prussians being Jews; they constituted 5% of the population of Berlin but contributed more than one-third of the city's income tax revenue. These successes were the fruit of their learnedness – 8% of all Prussian secondary school pupils and students were Jews – as well as their drive for accomplishment and advancement. Nevertheless, German Jews were not treated like other German citizens. They had no access to high state administration positions and officer ranks, they hardly stood out as teachers in people's schools or gymnasiums, and very few worked as university teachers. None of this was based on any legal grounds, but rather on covert discrimination exercised by the non-Jewish majority.

Let us take a look at how the German-Jewish writer Jakob Wassermann (1873–1934) remembered this:

“As a soldier I invested all my energy in performing my duty, which sometimes required not a little bit of self-sacrifice. And yet, I always failed to win the recognition of my superiors and soon realised that no matter how exemplary my conduct might be, I would never attain this goal; they would always hold some-

thing against me. That became evident from the contemptuous posture of the officers, from their overt tendency to take a satisfactory achievement for granted and scoff at anything less. Socialising was out of the question, they could care less about human qualities; humour or even the smallest originality of expression immediately raised suspicion, venturing past certain boundaries was inconceivable – all that simply because of the word Jew stamped in the citizenship card under religion. [...]

But what I found even more obvious and far more painful was the [...] behaviour of my fellow soldiers. For the first time I sensed that blunt, rigid, almost stupefied hatred in the national body going far beyond the meaning of the word anti-Semitism, which fails to describe its manner, source, depth and objective. That hatred was underscored by superstition and voluntary blindness, the fear of demons and parochial stubbornness, the wrath of the underprivileged and betrayed, ignorance, lies and unscrupulousness, as well as by rationalised defence, bestial malice and religious fanaticism. [...] Moreover, the Catholic population of Lower Franconia supposedly faced the main brunt of the unfortunate onslaught of half-ghettoised, gouging and omnipresent Jewish shopkeepers, peddlers, antiquarians, cattle tradesmen and pedlars. They were exposed to constant incitement [...], the memory of stories about poisoned wells and Pesach slaughters, episcopal blood edicts, as well as murderous and triumphant persecution of Jews was still very much alive.”³⁰

30 Jakob Wassermann, *Mein Weg als Deutscher und Jude [My Path as a German and a Jew]*, S. Fischer Verlag, Berlin 1921, p. 38 ff.

Apart from latent anti-Semitism, there were also cases of overt, public anti-Semitism, which found its way into all spheres of life: academic scientific discussions; journalism; partisan politics, which incited hatred towards aliens and a sentiment of social jealousy and which stigmatised Jews as a scapegoat for all problems that arose from economic and social modernisation. Anti-Semitic propaganda appealed especially to groups of conservative and nationalist, peasant and petit bourgeois provenance.

The first, the conservative group, found its exemplary representative in the nationalist historian, Heinrich von Treitschke (1834–1896), who in 1880 insisted that the Germans should demand of their “Israelite fellow citizens”:

“to become German and, plainly and simply, feel German – regardless of their religion and their ancient sacred memories, which we all respect; for we do not want an age of German-Jewish mixed culture to follow millennia of German civilised life. It would be sinful to forget that a great many Jews, baptized and unbaptized, [...] were German men in the best sense, men in whom we honour the noble and good traits of the German spirit. But it is equally undeniable that numerous and mighty circles among our Jews simply lack the goodwill to become thoroughly German. [...] Nevertheless, I believe that many of my Jewish friends will concede, though with deep regret, that I am right when I assert that in recent times a dangerous spirit of arrogance has arisen in Jewish circles. The influence of Jewry on our national life, which created much good in earlier times, nowadays shows itself in many harmful ways. [...] Overlooking all these circumstanc-

es – and how many others could be added! – this noisy agitation of the moment, though brutal and hateful, is nonetheless a natural reaction of Germanic racial feeling against an alien element that has assumed all too large a space in our life. [...] Among the circles of highly educated men who reject any idea of church intolerance or national arrogance there rings with one voice: the Jews are our misfortune!”³¹

The same year Treitschke received a reply from his fellow, liberal historian Theodor Mommsen (1817–1903), who observed that:

“Masses [...] were swallowed by a storm of madness with Mr von Treitschke as its true prophet. What does it mean to demand of our Israelite fellow citizens to become Germans? They already are so, as much as he and I. Perhaps he is more virtuous than they are; but are the Germans truly nothing but virtuous? Who gives us the right to expel from the German midst any category of our citizens for the defects we generally attribute to it, albeit rightfully so? No matter how serious the defects we may find in our fellow citizens, no matter how harshly we oppose extenuating them, we will, at best, arrive at the same logical and practical conclusion that Jews should be declared Germans, who were marked twice by original sin. [...] With the war on the Jews, our nation, which has just been unified, enters upon a dangerous path. Our tribes are very unequal among themselves. None of them lacks their specific

31 Heinrich von Treitschke, *Ein Wort über unser Judentum* [A word concerning our Jewry], Berlin, 1880, p. 3.

defects, and our mutual love is not so old that it could not possibly die. Today this holds true of the Jews, [...] tomorrow it may well be shown that, strictly speaking, no Berliner is any better than a Semite. Before long the Pomeranian will raise the demand that the statistics should also include incitement and try to demonstrate with numbers that the percentage in the western provinces is doubled.”³²

Almost concurrently with Wassermann’s critical reflection of German society, a programme was formulated within the NSDAP (1920) that, among other things, stipulated that “[o]nly German nationals can be citizens of Germany. Only persons of German blood, regardless of Christian confession, can be German nationals. Hence, no Jew can be a German national.” The Jews were meticulously and consistently described as enemies in speeches, schools, posters, party gazettes and books. Although the NSDAP storm troopers had already attacked and persecuted individuals before the Nazi seizure of power in 1933, the first formal measures against citizens of Jewish descent were introduced two months afterwards. The NSDAP made a brazen call, without any objection from the government, for a boycott of Jewish-owned shops. They made posters and flyers stating: “No German shall any longer buy from a Jew,” and set up “action committees.” At mass meetings, representatives of action committees raised the demand to introduce a quota limiting the

32 Theodor Mommsen, *Auch ein Wort über unser Judentum* [Another word concerning our Jewry], Berlin 1880, p. 11.

number of Jews allowed to engage in the medical and legal professions, as well as to attend German high schools and universities, in accordance with their proportion in the German population.

On 7 April 1933, the “Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service” was issued, the third paragraph of which stipulated that officials of “non-Aryan” descent must be retired. Later numerous other laws were changed to include “Aryan provisions.” The term “non-Aryan” defined anyone “descended from non-Aryan, especially Jewish parents or grandparents.” Unlike in later provisions of the Nuremberg laws, it sufficed that “one of the parents or grandparents is classified as non-Aryan.” Any of these officials who had been in public service for less than ten years – i.e. most representatives of the younger generation – were stripped of their pension benefits and hence their later livelihood. Initially, the above provisions did not apply to those who had held public office since 1 August 1914, had personally served at the front in World War I (1914–1918) or had fathers or sons killed in that war. In 1935, however, these exemptions were abolished.

Soon afterwards, a series of further measures were introduced in rapid succession to legalise the discrimination and humiliation of the Jews. These included the “Law against the Overcrowding of German Schools and Universities” of 25 April 1933 drastically limiting the number of non-Aryans permitted to attend such institutions, the mass book burning in May 1933, the Editorial Law of 4 October 1933, and the demand for a certificate of descent for a number of professions and activities. This meant that every person seeking

employment and every candidate for examination was required to submit an “Aryan certificate” demonstrating that he was a member of the Aryan race. The certificate was gradually introduced for all liberal and academic professions.

15 September 1935 saw the introduction of the Nuremberg Laws on citizenship and race. The Reich Citizenship Law classified Jews as second-class citizens and the Blood Protection Law prohibited marriages and extramarital sexual intercourse between “Jews and subjects of the state of Germany or related blood.”

“The First Implementation Decree to the Reich Citizenship Law” of 14 November 1935 introduced the definition of a Jew and “half-Jew.” In accordance with the decree, the Jews were not bearers of full political rights, they could not exercise the right to vote, nor did they have the right to hold public office.

Thirteen implementation decrees to the Reich Citizenship Law were issued by 1 July 1943. Before the beginning of World War II in 1939, the Nazi regime issued altogether 250 laws, decrees, ordinances, provisions and regulations depriving the Jews of their freedom and livelihood. The Second Implementation Decree to the Reich Citizenship Law of 21 December 1935 prohibited Jewish physicians from occupying leading positions in hospitals or serving the welfare system (*Vertrauensarzt*). No later than April 1933, a decree was passed excluding non-Aryan physicians from health insurance schemes, followed by further rules that deprived them of the possibility to engage in all kinds of professions.

When Germany hosted the Eleventh Olympic Games in 1936, the whole world could closely follow the developments in the Third Reich. In those days, the National Socialists were still concerned about their international reputation. Therefore, many repressive measures, including against Jewish athletes, were temporarily put on hold and fewer decrees were issued than usual. But that did little to improve the situation of the Jews.

In 1938, new decrees followed one after another. On 26 April, the Jews were required to register property of more than 5000 Reich Marks. On 14 June, a decree was passed requiring Jewish craft shops and factories to be registered and classified as Jewish enterprises. The German population was called upon time and time again not to buy from or work at Jewish companies.

Similar legislative acts were passed in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, just nine months before the German attack and occupation. They also evoked reaction in the Slovenian newspaper *Jutro*, which reported on the adoption of two regulations concerning the exclusion of the Jews from certain sectors of the economy and from enrolment in institutions of higher technical and secondary education. The “elimination [...] of visible and invisible forces” posing an obstacle the “positive norms of today’s cultural aspirations” was also high on the agenda of the leading Slovenian politician at the time, and in 1940 the Yugoslav Minister of Culture, Anton Korošec, addressed the issue with “convenient pedagogical methods” and “without a moment’s hesitation, second thought and fuss.” In his opinion, “everything [...]

must be set with clarity, precision and purpose. Secular and cultural workers must display courage and vigour. Only in this way can the moral and cultural revival be effected.”³³

On 25 July 1938, Jewish physicians were ordered to classify themselves as “nursing attendants” if they wanted to pursue their medical practice, and were thenceforth only permitted to treat Jewish patients. Similar orders applied to many other aspects of Jewish everyday life.

On 17 August 1938, all Jewish men and women were ordered to add the names Israel and Sarah to their personal names in identification papers. On 27 September 1938, Jewish attorneys were classified as “Jewish consultants” and were granted only the right to represent Jews.

On 9 November, during the notorious Night of Broken Glass (*Kristallnacht*), Jewish synagogues, apartments and factories were destroyed, with more than 20,000 Jews arrested and sent to concentration camps. The pogrom was followed by a series of Aryanisation measures ultimately eliminating the Jews from economic life. With their factories, land and property being expropriated, the Jews were ultimately deprived of their livelihoods.

The personal and social life of the Jews suffered enormously as well. From 12 November 1938 on, they were prohibited from going to the theatre, the cinema, concerts or other forms of public entertainment. From 28 November 1938 on, they were prohibited from “entering certain districts” or moving freely in public at certain hours.

33 *Jutra*, 1 July 1940, p. 1.

On 6 December 1938, the Berlin authorities “proclaimed a ban on the Jews” forbidding them, among other things, to enter museums or use recreational grounds, railway, public bathhouses or swimming pools.

From 3 December 1938 on, Jews were prohibited from owning a driver’s licence and stripped of the right to drive automobiles and, from 8 December on, they were banned from universities. Pursuant to the Law on Tenancies with Jews of 30 April 1939, they could be forcefully moved to so-called Jewish houses reserved for them. From 1 September 1939 on, at the outbreak of the war, the Jews were prohibited from leaving their homes after 9 p.m. in summer and after 8 p.m. in winter.

On 23 September 1939, the Jews were ordered to hand over their radio sets.

Harassment and threats intensified also with the aim to force the Jews to abandon their property and leave Germany. Many, especially the poor who could not afford to cross the Atlantic, fled to neighbouring European countries, if they were granted permission to enter. But not all countries were willing to shoulder the burden of providing social services to destitute immigrants. Therefore, their only hope lay in the efforts of individuals and numerous organisations at home and abroad. After the outbreak of World War II and Germany’s swift invasion of Poland, Denmark, Norway, the Netherlands, Belgium and northern France, the expelled Jews were soon recaptured by the National Socialists.

On 23 November 1939, the Jews in occupied Poland and, on 1 September 1941, the Jews in the German Reich were ordered to wear a yellow Jewish star with the inscription

“Jew,” stigmatising them like lepers in the Middle Ages. In 1942, the Nazi regime passed parallel decrees for countries under German occupation. Among the first to follow the German practice were the Ustaše, who already enforced the wearing of the Jewish symbol (two pieces of yellow cloth with a big letter “Z”) in May 1941.

On 23 October 1941, the Jews were prohibited from emigrating.

In Eastern European areas occupied by the German forces, one part of the local Jewish population was driven into ghettos and the other part was captured by special task forces of the Security Police and SD (*Einsatzgruppen der Sicherheitspolizei und das SD*, in short *Einsatzgruppen*) that followed in the wake of the German army to begin their physical extermination – murder.

- 14 October 1941 marked the beginning of the deportation of the Jews from the Old Reich.

- On 20 January 1942, the notorious Wannsee Conference was convened to plan the coordination of all authorities responsible for the “final solution to the Jewish question” – the envisioned deliberate murder of all European Jews. Soon afterwards the Jews were massively transported to extermination camps in Poland.

- Then, on 1 July 1943, the “Thirteenth Implementation Decree to the Reich Citizenship Law” was issued. It was particularly cynical in its second article. After the Jews had been stripped of every right for years and left at the mercy of despotic officials and the police, while many others had already died in extermination camps, the article

stipulated that Jewish “property will go to the Reich.” By then, however, no less than one-third of all its victims, i.e. two million Jews, had already been murdered.

Jews and Slovenes

“Tell me [...] where are we going?”

“Very far away. To another country.”

“What do they call it?”

“Concentration camp.”

...

“... Why are we wearing stars?”

“We’re Jews.”

“What is that?”

“I don’t know.”³⁴

34 Miriam Steiner, *Vojak z zlatimi gumbi*, Mladinska knjiga, Ljubljana 1964, p. 33.

II.

Did the Jews in the Slovenian territory share a fate similar to that of the Jews in Germany and Eastern Europe?

To provide a credible answer to this question, we must first make a short presentation of their living space, their activities and the reasons for their destruction.

Settlement

The first Jewish settlers were documented in the territory of present-day Slovenia at the end of the first millennium, and the first Jewish communities emerged in the 12th century, when major towns and market towns gradually spread into urban settlements. According to Jože Mlinarič, the older of the two contemporary Slovenian authorities on medieval Jewish history, most Jewish families came to Carniola and neighbouring provinces from Carinthia and had in turn come to Carinthia from the Rhineland.³⁵ They settled mainly in Trieste, Gorizia, Ljubljana, Maribor and Ptuj. The first records of the settlement of Jewish families make mention of Ljubljana and its synagogue dating to the early 13th century. Documents referring to the first permanent

35 Jože Mlinarič, “Judje na slovenskem Štajerskem do njihove prisilne izselitve v letu 1496,” in: *Judovski zbornik, ČZN*, 1–2, Maribor, 2000, p. 50.

settlements in Maribor and Ptuj date to between 1274 and 1296.³⁶ According to Hajdinjak's data, Jews were "first documented in Ptuj already in 1286, when a Jew Jakob and his wife Gnana purchased a house from the town judge Nikolaj I. Weckel. [...] Judging from the names of witnesses"³⁷ listed in the document (Hekel, Altman, etc.), the first Jews came to Ptuj from the German area. The first mention of Jews in Celje and Slovenj Gradec dates to the first half of the 14th century, and the first mention of Jews in Slovenska Bistrica follows a few decades later. Jewish settlers earned their livelihood primarily with trade in wine, wood, horses etc., with a network of partners throughout most of the Balkans, in the central Austrian provinces, as well as in Hungary and northern Italy. The Jews from Maribor and Ljubljana established an especially lucrative trade with Venice, from whence they imported various kinds of commodities, silk, spices, precious stones and gold. Apart from merchants, sources also mention seal makers, goldsmiths, medicine men and landowners.³⁸

The largest and most influential medieval Jewish community in the Slovenian territory developed in Maribor, which is confirmed by a fairly large number of documents kept in the Regional Archives Maribor. These materials

36 Ibid.

37 Boris Hajdinjak, "Judje srednjeveškega Ptuja," in: Irena Šumi and Hannah Starman (eds.), *Slovenski Judje, Zgodovina in holokavst*, Center judovske kulturne dediščine Sinagoga Maribor, Maribor, 2012.

38 Peršič, *Židje in kreditno poslovanje*, p. 31.

contain the first mention of the Maribor synagogue, which dated back to 1429. Although the Jewish community in Maribor was of a later origin than that in Ptuj, the memory of it is much stronger, mostly owing to a long line of generations of the Morpurgo family, whose members even had ties with Florentine bankers. Klemen Jelinčič Boeta even believes that the community, which emerged in the first half of the 13th century and 250 years later consisted of at least forty families making up about 200 people, was one of the most influential – if not the most influential – communities in the entire area between Venice, Salzburg and Prague. Moreover, "Maribor rabbis and their rabbinical court" are said to have been "superior" to those in "Salzburg and Graz."³⁹ This is probably a slight exaggeration, also according to Hajdinjak, who maintains that Jelinčič might have been misled into making the above assertion by the period of Rabbi Israel Isserlein or Israel bar Petachia, a man of tremendous significance and informally the supreme rabbi of the Inner Austrian lands.

Monetary transactions also brought Jews to Carniola and Gorizia, where they came at the invitation of Henry of Carinthia, Duke of Carniola. Despite their bustling trade activities and extensive connections, medieval Jewish quarters left only a faint imprint on Slovenian towns, which was due to a relatively small number of Jewish families and their dispersed settlement pattern. In other words, the Jews

39 Klemen Jelinčič Boeta, "Judje v Mariboru," *Življenje na dotik*, free bulletin of the Public Institute Maribor 2012 European Capital of Culture, Maribor 2012, vol. 1, no. 3, p. 10.

in Slovenian towns were not confined to a certain quarter from which a ghetto would later emerge, but to individual buildings and streets that subsequently obtained the name “Jewish” street, alley, road, etc. In any case, every such designation required special permission, very similar to that signed by Emperor Leopold I some 300 years later to protect the Jewish inhabitants of Trieste.

The constantly strained relations between the native population and the Jews underwent considerable change in the second half of the 15th century, when the Inner Austrian provincial estates demanded that Emperor Frederick III expel the Jews from Carinthia and Styria in exchange for monetary compensation. Frederick’s son and heir to the throne, Maximilian I, finally yielded to pressure and issued the edict of 18 March 1496, which not only held the Jews accountable for the eruption, spread and consequences of contagious diseases, but also accused them of so-called host desecration, the killing of Christian children and the poisoning of wells.⁴⁰ The representatives of the Carniolan provincial estates did not endorse the initiative of the Carinthians and Styrians, but that did not prevent the expulsion of the Jews from Carniola two decades later.⁴¹

40 Elizabeth Arlt, Brako Lenart, *Vergangen und vergessen/Preteklo in pozabljeno. Jüdische Kultur in Slowenien: Judovska kultura v Sloveniji*, Pavelhaus/Pavlova hiša, Laafeld/Potrna, 2010, p. 56.

41 As an interesting detail, let me add that “it was determined after lengthy negotiations [...] despite the demands of the estates, which hoped for a cancellation of debt, that Jewish property would not be confiscated, but that [the Jews, author’s addition] would be able to sell their [real] property.” See Jelinčič Boeta, “Judje v Mariboru,” p. 10.

Notwithstanding Maximilian’s plans to resettle them in the territory of present-day Burgenland, the expelled Jews migrated to Gorizia and Adriatic towns, and some settled in Hungarian and Czech provinces, as well as a few Polish towns. Due to their typical family name, it was the easiest to follow the migrations of the Morpurgos from Maribor, who found their new homes in Gorizia, Split, Venice and other minor Venetian and Friulian towns. The reason they moved to these communities is probably the relative tolerance towards the Jews in small Italian city-states under Venetian patronage, owing to which the Jews, who first appeared in Trieste, Tržič, Cormòns, Koper and Piran in the 14th century, were joined two centuries later by Jews from Carinthia, Carniola and Styria.

Renewed settlement and the emergence of the Jewish community in Prekmurje

After these pivotal events, which had pushed the Jews to the margins of the Slovenian provinces, conditions remained more or less unchanged until the second half of the 18th century, when Jewish families started returning to the central Slovenian provinces, also settling the territory of the present-day Prekmurje. Most of those who decided to settle in the northeastern part of present-day Slovenia came

from Hungary and Burgenland. The first fourteen Jewish settlers in Lendava were documented in 1778. After that, a large number of Jewish families settled in Beltinci and Murska Sobota, mainly in the middle and second half of the 19th century. The settlement process has so far been most accurately reconstructed by Marjan Toš in his PhD dissertation published in early 2012 in book form under the title *Zgodovinski spomin na prekmurske Jude* [*Historical Memory of Jews in Prekmurje*].⁴²

According to Toš, a group of ten or twelve families that lived in the territory of present-day Prekmurje in the last quarter of the 18th century was expanded by an additional forty families some thirty years later. The census of 1831 thus mentions no fewer than 207 Jews. The majority, ninety-eight, lived in Murska Sobota. Twenty years later, their number had almost doubled (383) and the distribution of settlers remained more or less unchanged; the greatest number of Jews (about 180) lived in Murska Sobota, a slightly lower number (about 120) in Lendava, and the remainder in Beltinci and other major villages. At around that time, the Jewish community in Beltinci built its own synagogue.

Most Jews engaged in trade, and many of them owned butcher shops and taverns. Moreover, according to Borut Brumen, the old guild corporatism, which impeded the development of modern trade in the province until the mid-19th century, received a “deadly blow” [...] precisely by the

42 Marjan Toš, *Zgodovinski spomin na prekmurske Jude*, Založba ZRC, Ljubljana, 2012.

Jewish settlers and their shops which also (re)sold goods manufactured by artisans from Murska Sobota.”⁴³ The wholesale store Asher, one of the first true harbingers of this process, was “followed by numerous others,” and a good thirty years later Murska Sobota counted sixteen stores, “all but one in the hands of the Jews.”⁴⁴ In short, as established middlemen, Jews purchased honey, hides, cattle, feathers and linen cloth etc. in villages and sold them to wholesalers in major urban centres. As importers, Jews also exerted significant influence on the development of the local market.

43 Brumen, *Na robu zgodovine in spomina*, p. 86. Brumen's book offers by far the best depiction of the economic and cultural conditions in interwar Prekmurje, with an emphasis on Murska Sobota. In addition to data from the Regional Archives Maribor, materials from the Regional Archives Murska Sobota and various legacy collections from the National University Library in Ljubljana, the author also relies on all relevant literature on urban ethnology. Moreover, he draws his conclusions from the works of Jürgen Habermas, Henri Lefebvre, Marcel Mauss, Günter Wiegelmann, Clifford Geertz, Jack Goody, Fernand Braudel and many other philosophers, anthropologists and historians who, in one way or another, dealt with urbanisation of Europe.

Given the above, Brumen's discussion still offers the best insight into the beginning of the process of a multicultural society changing into a modern national community. Namely, the process begun by the Hungarians with accentuated Hungarisation at the turn of the centuries was imitated by the Yugoslav authorities. Already in spring 1920, Murska Sobota witnessed the establishment of the Yugoslav Literary Society and the National Reading Society. For a city that was home to as many as three reading rooms with mainly Hungarian literature and a fairly influential newspaper in Hungarian, that was a pivotal moment. For more on this, see in particular the following two chapters in Brumen's book: “Papinci, luterani in židovje – Prekmurci, Slovenci in Vogri,” and “Med fabrikanti in želarji; na sprehajališču in kavarni.”

44 Ibid. On the basis of the materials collected by Brumen, one can truly visualise a majority of these stores. As Brumen himself says, the offer was “usually modest,” as the entire store on average held “50 to 100 kg of salt in blocks, a barrel of petroleum, a barrel of vinegar, matches, tobacco, soap and alcoholic beverages.”

As Brumen suggests, on the basis of their network, about 130 “registered tradesmen” lived in Murska Sobota alone.⁴⁵

Although the Josephine Reforms (1781–1789) granted them the right to lease, work and even own land, the Jews have remained etched in the memory of the province as shop owners, shoemakers and other craftsmen, construction workers, transporters, pharmacists and later also as hoteliers, factory owners and bankers. Marjan Toš, for instance, identified no fewer than four Jews among the influential officers of the Savings Bank of Dolnja Lendava: the doctor Mor Kiraly, the wholesaler Lazar Pollak, the lawyer Adolf Wollak and the bookkeeper Emil Pollak.⁴⁶

Jews in the Lendava area also owned two regional mills and two brickworks. The mill and brickworks in the city itself were in the hands of the Eppinger family, and the other two facilities in the nearby Dolga vas were owned by Jozsef Schwarz. Bojan Zadavec, who tells the story of the Schwarz family in greater detail through the narrative about his son Tamas Berthold Schwarz, renamed Yoel Shachar, has established that Schwarz’s mill employed “five millers.” Yoel also remembers that they were “never in want of anything” and how their family made “regular trips to Opatija and Crikvenica at the seaside.”⁴⁷ All of this left their non-Jewish neighbours with an impression that every Jew, without exception,

45 Ibid.

46 Toš, *Zgodovinski spomin*, p. 30.

47 Bojan Zadavec. “Vsak konec je nov začetek, četudi izgubiš vse.” *Ona*, vol. 14, no. 5, Delo revije, Ljubljana, 31 January 2012, p. 24.

was rich. Just as Roma were regarded as idle, Jews were accused of being wealthy.⁴⁸ The assertion that all Jews in Prekmurje were well-off is, of course, an exaggeration, but it is certainly not an exaggeration to say that the development of printing activity in the province was largely to their credit.⁴⁹ Similar holds true for the paper industry, which evolved in parallel with printing and reached its peak on the eve of World War I, when it was taken over by Ernest Balkany and his son Izidor Hahn, “who [...] with time also obtained a bookbinding shop in Murska Sobota [...]”⁵⁰

The growth and thriving of the Jewish communities in Prekmurje was also evident from the establishment of a Jewish school and the construction of a new synagogue in Lendava. The register of births, marriages and deaths was moved there in the 1860s, but was destroyed in 1944, together with the entire community. Similar developments took place in Murska Sobota, which obtained its first synagogue only forty years later (1908). During roughly the same period, the Jewish

48 Karel Gergar, the son of one of our rare male respondents, Janez Gergar, who was interviewed by Klaudija Sedar in 2011, repeats several times in his narrative that “*gypsies were [...] do-nothings [...] and Jews were rich.*”

49 As already established by Franc Kuzmič, the foremost authority in the last two decades on regional economic history, the first printer in Murska Sobota was M. Grünbaum, who immigrated there from Keszthely in Hungary and at the end of 1884 began publishing the newspaper *Muraszombat es Videke*. See Franc Kuzmič, *Podjetnost prekmurskih Židov*, in: *Znamenje. Revija za teološka, družbena in kulturna vprašanja*, vol. 19, no. 2, 1989, pp. 172–178; see also a chapter contributed by the same author to the catalogue *Stalna razstava [Permanent exhibition]* of the Murska Sobota Regional Museum, “*Židje v Prekmurju*,” Catalogue of the permanent exhibition, Murska Sobota Regional Museum, Murska Sobota, 1997, pp. 187–194.

50 Franc Kuzmič, “*Židje v Prekmurju*,” p. 187.

school in Lendava underwent renovation and soon afterwards obtained a new headmistress, Hermina Brünner, who remained in that position until the school closed down in 1921.

The latter detail pointedly suggests that the greatest prosperity of the Jewish community was followed by an unusually rapid decline. Andrej Pančur offers the most convincing explanation for this process in his book *Judovska skupnost v Sloveniji na predvečer holokavsta* [*The Jewish community in Slovenia on the eve of the Holocaust*]. In his opinion, the decline in the Jewish population in Prekmurje was “in complete correspondence with the developments throughout Hungary,” with “migrations from villages and towns into major urban centres. Towns mostly attracted immigrants from the immediate surroundings and cities from the entire country and even abroad. In this respect, the number of Jews increased at a particularly high rate in Budapest,” where “almost one quarter of all Hungarian Jews lived [...] before World War I.”⁵¹

Over the course of a little more than fifty years, Lendava simultaneously witnessed the greatest prosperity and the decline of the Jewish community. The latter already became inevitable in the period between the two world wars, owing partly to the new post-World War I political order, partly to the economic crisis and partly also to growing anti-Semitism. After the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes annexed Prekmurje, the Jews, who were mainly of Hungarian descent, shared the same

51 Andrej Pančur, *Judovska skupnost v Sloveniji na predvečer holokavsta*, Historical Society of Celje, Celje 2011, p. 24.

fear as their Hungarian fellow citizens, with the difference that, as wealthy members of a community that found itself in the middle of national emancipation, they were also confronted with traditional anti-Semitism portraying them above all as foreign exploiters. Nonetheless, with their activities, the Jews not only set the economic pace of the province, but also left a definitive mark on its cultural and social life.

Among the most notable agents of economic and cultural development, mention should once again be made of printers, especially the publishers of the local newspaper *Muraszombat és Vidéke*, the owners of the local Savings Bank of Dolnja Lendava and the founders of the oldest modern industrial facility in the province, the knitted wear and umbrella factory. This establishment, which evolved from a sewing factory to a successful enterprise at the very beginning of the 20th century, left an imprint on Lendava that would not fade until the end of the socialist era.

Something similar may be said about Murska Sobota and its food processing industry, pioneered by the Arvay, Berger, Fürst, Weiss and Koblencer families. The vast majority of butcher shops, livestock trades and catering businesses, which also provided their merchandise and services to partners in Radgona and other places in Austria, were either in their hands or under their influence. According to Franc Kuzmič and Marjan Toš, Koblencer's sales network reached as far as Switzerland and Italy.⁵²

52 Kuzmič, *Podjetnost prekmurskih Židov*, p. 176.

In light of this, it is no surprise that some contemporaries labelled Murska Sobota the “Jewish nest” or the beginning of “Jewish dominion.” The latter presumably reached as far as Budapest, nicknamed “Judapest” by the most fervent anti-Semites.⁵³ Although anti-Semitism intensified soon after the annexation of Prekmurje to the Kingdom of SHS, it was not the sole cause of the first major wave of emigration. The first to leave Prekmurje were families that had stronger kinship and economic ties with Hungary.

The incorporation of Prekmurje in Yugoslavia had both positive and negative implications for the Prekmurje Jews. On the one hand, manufacturing factories and workshops based in Lendava and Murska Sobota evolved into the first veritable industrial plants and, on the other, their traditional ties with Hungarian partners were broken. As already established by Borut Brumen, one of the best Slovenian ethnologists, the prohibition of free movement and rigid rules on trade issued by the new provincial administration severed “all economic and trade ties with Hungary.”⁵⁴ Further disquietude was caused by the proclaimed abolition of Hungarian legislation, which recognised seven other religions alongside Roman Catholicism. The Evangelicals and Jews were especially distrustful, for fear that the Kingdom of SHS would impose the “former Austrian law and thus

53 Toš, *Zgodovinski spomin*, p. 51.

54 Brumen, *Na robu zgodovine in spomina*, p. 62. Reference is made to the “Rules regarding trade in goods in the border areas” No. 5184/20, issued in Murska Sobota on 8 July 1920. The document limits or, rather, prohibits trade in a vast majority of crops and species of livestock, except horses.

legitimise the disadvantaged formal legal position of non-Catholic religious communities.”⁵⁵ Regardless of the reasons for emigration, its final result for the Jewish community was anything but encouraging. In a little more than ten years, a good third of its members left the province in fear of reforms, restriction of trade relations and local anti-Semitism.⁵⁶ In the 1920s and 1930s, the Jews in Prekmurje were, more than ever before, regarded as religious “renegades,” and, due to their presence, Murska Sobota was often portrayed as “filthy [...] as any Jewish city.”⁵⁷ Local anti-Semitism reached one of its peaks by recapping the news from Hungarian and Austrian newspapers that denounced the Jews as instigators of Bolshevism. In early 1935, this assertion also found its place in the title of some article in the Murska Sobota newspaper *Novine*.⁵⁸

The ensuing changes affected not only the economic but also cultural life of both cities and villages that had a Jewish population. The decline in the Jewish community set in motion a series of consequences that affected its daily life. Murska Sobota, for instance, even found itself without

55 Ibid.

56 According to the census conducted by the Union of Rabbis in Yugoslavia, there were fewer than 2,000 Jews (1,959, to be precise) left in the entire Slovenian territory and Medijmurje in 1921, whereas the number contained in the statistics of the national census is half that, i.e. 946. See Jaša Romano, *Jevreji Jugoslavije 1941–1945. Žrtve genocida i učesnici narodnooslobodilačkog rata*. Union of Jewish Communities of Yugoslavia, Belgrade.

57 Anton Trstenjak, *Slovenci na Ogrskem*, (manuscript), old fond 193, National University Library in Ljubljana, Manuscript Department, 1909.

58 *Novine*, XXII/1935, no. 5, Murska Sobota, 3 February 1935, p. 4.

a rabbi. After Rabbi Henrik Kiss left the city in 1921, rabbis from Lendava and Čakovec handled the urgent affairs of the community until the arrival of Rabbi Lazar Roth five years later. A small but telling indicator of trouble was also the divided opinion regarding the new rabbi. Even after the war, some of his pupils would, most likely under the influence of their parents, remember him as a drunk who taught them nothing,⁵⁹ while others, especially non-Jews, would regard him as a highly educated and amicable conversationalist.⁶⁰

Five years later, in the early 1930s, the situation turned from bad to worse. This was largely due to the developments in Germany, from whence news was spreading of the expropriation and persecution of the Jews. But the main reason for alarm was to be found in the changing political climate in Yugoslavia. Here, reference is made, in particular, to the changes that followed the death of King Alexander, who figured as the patron of the Jews in Yugoslavia, and to specific legislation that, just like in Germany, hindered the daily life of the Jews. The most fervent advocate of anti-Semitic “regulations” was none other than the Slovenian member of the Yugoslav government and the

leader of the Slovenian People’s Party, Anton Korošec.⁶¹ The reaction to his endeavours as Minister of Education was also described in the central Slovenian newspaper of the time, *Jutro*, which reported on the passage of two regulations on which, at some point, Korošec even made conditional his further participation in the government. These were the regulation on the exclusion of the Jews from certain sectors of economy and the regulation on the enrolment of the Jews in institutions of higher technical and secondary education.

Some of those who could not or would not emigrate in the face of this pressure felt compelled by the new circumstances to convert to Christianity. During this process, which was especially characteristic of the years just before the war, a slightly higher number of converts opted for Protestantism and a slightly lower for Roman Catholicism. In some cases, parents baptised only their children, while in others, whole families converted and then changed their names accordingly.

The consequences were more than noticeable. Lendava, where there were still 259 members of the Jewish community in 1931, counted no more than 143 Jews at the onset of

59 “Rabbi was a drunk, he taught us nothing, absolutely nothing; he’d give us straight As, but he taught us nothing.” From the narrative account of Šarika Horvat, Shoah Foundation.

60 The Auxiliary Bishop of Maribor, Jožef Smej, remembers him as a remarkable man “with a beautiful black beard,” who would “strike a conversation with us ... secondary-school pupils, despite his high education [...]”. From the narrative account of Auxiliary Bishop Jožef Smej.

61 In regard to Korošec’s role in passing the anti-Semitic legislation, consideration should be given to the work of Ervin Dolenc, especially his article “Zmaga ali poraz?: marginalije h Koroščevi antisemitski uredbi leta 1940” in Dušan Nečak (ed.), *Stiploškov zbornik*, *Historia: znanstvena zbirka Oddelka za zgodovino Filozofske fakultete v Ljubljani* 10, Department of History, Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana, Ljubljana, 2005, pp. 199–210. According to Hajdinjak, the article above shows that Korošec was an explicitly pragmatic anti-Semite.

World War II.⁶² A similar ratio is revealed by two censuses conducted in Murska Sobota. For the Jews, who had otherwise grown accustomed to occasional expressions of animosity, restrictions and offences, the pressure simply became too much to bear. A new version of anti-Semitism was imported from Germany and German-annexed Austria and which was inflamed mainly by articles in newspapers and magazines, as already pointed out by Darja Kerec, whose contribution *Judje v Murski Soboti v letih 1934–1954* [*Jews in Murska Sobota during 1934–1954*] also offers some of the most typical passages. Let us take a look at one of them:

“A special chapter should be devoted to the Jewish problem in Prekmurje. It would be natural for the Jews not to address the problems of the nations in which they live by adopting a hostile attitude towards them, and Jewry in other nations, indeed, adapts to the tendencies of the dominant nation. Only here in Prekmurje has this rule completely failed in its mission. If a traveller in Prekmurje happens to hear Hungarian spoken loudly and forcefully, he might assume he had stumbled upon people of Mongolian blood, but when they take a closer look at the physiognomy of the subjects under question, they will notice that most of them are of Semitic blood. This is how the Jews have the gumption to present themselves, feigning their loyalty everywhere. And whoever

knows anything about their character comes to the realisation that the Jews shall under no condition recognise the Slovenes and Yugoslavs as the master nation and that they themselves form a network in Prekmurje that tries to hold the idea of returning from an Asian to a non-Asian country.”⁶³

Many newspapers in this part of the Drava Banovina province offered similar expressions of intolerance and more or less overt hatred. On the other hand, some papers, like the aforementioned Catholic *Novine*, showed very little original anti-Semitism. What the reader can find is espoused stereotypes describing “Jews” as a “misfortune for our [Slovenian] landscape,” “Jews” as “swindlers” and “traitors to Christ,” and one can also come across reports about a “trade struggle against the Jews” in which “all non-Jews will ordinarily be conquered.”⁶⁴ Imitators of such rhetoric would also often find inspiration in central Slovenian newspapers, most notably *Slovenec* and the aforementioned *Jutro*. The former even informed a “certain part of Murska Sobota’s citizens” that their “path from Yugoslavia [...] was clear” and that “commodities of this sort are exported” from Slovenia “without compensation.”⁶⁵

The consequences of the changed attitude affected everyone, both esteemed and ordinary members of the community

62 In his book, *Koncentracioni logor Jasenovac 1941–1945. Dokumenta III* (Narodna knjiga Beograd – Spomen područje Jasenovac, 1987), Miletič refers to the Union of Jewish Communities and makes mention of 134 Jews in Dolnja Lendava and 711 in Murska Sobota. See: Miletič, *Mi smo preživjeli, Jevreji o Holokaustu*, Jewish Historical Museum of the Union of Jewish Communities, Belgrade 2005, p. 497.

63 Darja Kerec, “Judje v Murski Soboti v letih 1934–1954” in *ČZN*, vol. 71, no. 4, Maribor 2000, p. 595.

64 Ibid.

65 *Slovenec*, vol. XLVII, no. 234, Ljubljana, 11 October 1919, p. 4.

alike, but left a special mark on those who were children at the time. They failed to comprehend the sudden terminations of friendships, in part because their parents did not want to burden them with anticipated troubles. This is one of the reasons why most accounts of survivors who were a little older than ten just before the war are fairly emotional when reliving the shock of losing their friends. Šarika Horvat, who shared the feelings she had during these moments with the famous Shoah Foundation, recounts how “*everything was already shattered*” when Korošec “*was in the government.*” However, most other interviewees, including our key respondent Erika Fürst, link this moment with the war or, more accurately, “*autumn 1943,*”⁶⁶ when the Jews in Prekmurje were forced to “*wear the Star of David,*” i.e. the days of overt persecution. Just before the war, the most self-interested and politically ambitious individuals, in particular, broke their ties with Jews, pushing the Jewish community into further isolation.

As may be gathered from their accounts, the Jews in Prekmurje created a parallel social life. For the wealthier, this meant playing tennis at the Lendava tennis court and going to concerts given by the local quartet.⁶⁷

But the majority that lived a seemingly uneventful life in the “old rut”⁶⁸ experienced the most dramatic changes. Lurk-

ing below the surface of their daily routine – “a glass of wine in Dobray,” “sipping coffee in Sočič’s Grand or Faflek’s Central Coffee House,”⁶⁹ shopping at Ebenšpanger’s, Kohn’s, Preuss’ etc. – and a seemingly privileged lifestyle was their increasingly unenviable social position.

The latter came to its fullest expression after Germany’s attack and occupation. The occasionally suppressed intolerance, grudges and frustrations among the majority population burst out into the open practically overnight, most frequently in the looting and destroying of Jewish shops and taverns.

In light of this, the apparent peace that prevailed after Germany ceded Prekmurje to the Hungarian occupation authorities may be seen above all as a lull before the storm. One week after the first plunderers grabbed the bulk of all valuables (“*they came with a gun [...] made [my father] give them his car and the keys to his printer’s shop*”) “and the villagers looted shops,”⁷⁰ the Hungarian authorities restored “life to a relative normality,” but that did not deter the local Kulturbund from occasional pillaging Jewish property even before the internment in 1944.

Children welcomed this apparent normalisation of life with relief, being able to return to school and spend time with their peers, whereas grown-ups perceived it as the beginning of their end, with the first wave of expropriations, restrictions on activities and personal freedom and prohibition of mixed

66 Which is inaccurate. Jews in Hungary were required to wear the “Star of David” only from 5 April 1944 on. Narrative account of Erika Fürst, interviewed by Oto Luthar in June 2010.

67 Toš, *Zgodovinski spomin*, p 63. In this famous Lendava quartet, Ludvik Blau and Laci Freyer played violins, Feri Stern played cello and Juliska Stern accompanied the string trio on the piano.

68 *Ibid.*, p. 64.

69 *Ibid.*

70 A transcript of the narrative account of Erika Fürst. The interview was conducted by Oto Luthar in June 2010.

marriages. But that was far too little to satisfy the Germans, who, already in spring 1942, would demand that the Hungarians imprison all Jews from Hungary and the provinces under Hungarian occupation. Therefore, in the middle of the same year the Hungarian army inaugurated change by reassigning all soldiers of Jewish descent to auxiliary work units, and in September a decree was passed on the acquisition of Jewish land. As Metka Fujs established, priority in acquiring Jewish land confiscated in November was granted to high-ranking officers of the Hungarian army, the war-disabled, war widows and orphans and decorated soldiers who possessed less than five acres of land.⁷¹ Roughly the same period witnessed an increased mobilisation of Jewish men into new work battalions, while their families at home were obliged to wear special badges in public.

Judging from our respondents' narrative accounts, some fragments of news about concentration camps had by then also reached Prekmurje, but parents kept such news to themselves. Erika Fürst, for instance, remembers that "*for the entire duration of the war [...] [she], as a child never heard of Auschwitz or of any concentration camp [for that matter]. [...] [She] knew nothing about Auschwitz, about concentration camps, until they drove [them] away.*"⁷² Similar recollections were expressed by Erika's namesake, Elizabeta Fürst from Lendava, who told Jutka Rudaš for the aforementioned magazine *Življenje na do-*

tik that she "*had no idea where [...] [they] were being taken,*" not even while on the train.⁷³ Just how hard some Jewish parents tried to keep their children from knowing what was in store for them is also shown by the fact that she didn't encounter overt anti-Semitism from her immediate surroundings until the end of 1943. In other words, only during the last winter before the deportation did she notice that her father was being shunned even by his old acquaintances and that she was losing her friends. Bearing in mind that the Jews in Lendava were ordered to wear the yellow star no sooner than spring 1944, this is to some extent even understandable. On the other hand, fathers in particular went to great lengths to prepare themselves for the worst. In this case, too, Erika Fürst offers the most illustrative account of how, just a few weeks before the internment, her parents showed her and her sister a hiding place for a few pieces of family jewellery and a certificate of her father's education.

*"The woodshed was stacked with wood, there was a big hive in one corner [...]. Underneath it my father dug a hole... and told us there were some very important things [in it], and if anything should happen to him, or if someone, anyone of us should return, it would do for a start. Back then I didn't know what it was and what was in it. After the war my mother told us it was a large storage jar. In the jar was a box and in the box were my father's business licence and some jewellery, a few pieces of jewellery..."*⁷⁴

71 Metka Fujs, "Odnos madžarske države do židovskega prebivalstva v drugi svetovni vojni," in: *Kronika Pomurja* 7, Murska Sobota, 1998, pp. 25–29, p. 26.

72 From the narrative account of Erika Fürst.

73 Jutka Rudaš, "Elizabeta Fürst. Usodni dogodki in življenjske izkušnje, ki dajo misliti" in: *Življenje na dotik*, p. 12.

74 From the narrative of Erika Fürst.

The account above reveals a presentiment of events that followed and eloquently describes the atmosphere of anxious apprehension, created by a mixture of fear and hope. On the one hand, the Prekmurje Jews, just like their counterparts in Medjimurje in Croatia, hoped for a miraculous defeat of the German-Hungarian enemy, while, on the other, they were haunted by the premonition of the fate that befell their relatives and acquaintances in other parts of Europe. They were familiar with the fate of their relatives in Croatia and Serbia. Namely, already before the war, a considerable number of Jews from Prekmurje moved to Zagreb, Karlovac and other places in Croatia that became part of the Ustaše-ruled Independent State of Croatia after the occupation, and a few moved to the Yugoslav capital. The Jews in Croatia found themselves under attack first, no later than fourteen days after the capitulation of the Yugoslav army.

In other respects, too, the difference between Zagreb or, rather, the Independent State of Croatia and other parts of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia was enormous. Much about this was written by Josef (Joško) Indig, who, with the assistance of the Zagreb Jewish community, the Slovenian Red Cross and the Italian organisation DELASEM,⁷⁵ managed to rescue some sixty children whose parents were sending them from Germany, Poland and Austria to Palestine through Yugoslavia. Zagreb, where they were stuck due to the occupation of Yugoslavia, turned into a site of arrests and killings in

75 Abbreviation for *Delegazione per l'assistenza agli emigranti*.

a matter of a few weeks, whereas in Ljubljana, where they sought shelter on their way to Italy, people could still “read newspapers from neutral countries [...] and listen to foreign radio stations.”⁷⁶ Indig, who visited Ljubljana on several occasions during his preparations for the journey, recounted that, notwithstanding the arrests of the “enemies of the regime,” life in the biggest Slovenian city “was still pleasant, with opera, cinema and Swiss newspapers.”⁷⁷ Most of all, it was in stark contrast with the atmosphere of “murder and sadism” in Zagreb, which was plastered with announcements of executions of “Jews and communists” accompanied by anti-Semitic messages.⁷⁸

This particular period and the first victims of the Ustaše regime were meticulously described by Antun Miletić, the author of a comprehensive documentation on the concentration camp in Jasenovac. According to his estimates, the first transport from Zagreb carried about 300 people, predominantly Serbs and Jews. By summer 1941 most transports had ended up in or around Jasenovac.

76 Josef Indig, *Joškos Kinder. Flucht und Alija durch Europa, 1940–1943. Josef Indigs Bericht*, Verlag das Arsenal, Berlin 2006, p. 59. Indig's book is of interest to us also because it documents, in its entirety, the fate of “children from Vila Ema” or, in other words, children from Lesno brdo nad Horjulom. For nearly one year, the mansion situated between Drenov Grič and the Horjul Valley housed eighty children whom Indig took to neutral Switzerland via Ljubljana, Zagreb and the Italian town of Nonantola, including sixteen Jewish girls from Berlin, Leipzig, Hamburg and Vienna whom the Maribor “Kommissar” Uroš Žun had rescued at the Šentilj border in January 1941. Some three decades after the war, Žun was among the first Slovenians to become one of the Righteous among the Nations.

77 Ibid., p. 106.

78 Ibid., p. 59 and 61.

Even before the concentration camp in Lonjsko polje was officially opened, it received at least two Jews from Murska Sobota, Franjo Trautman and Izak Roman, on 3 July 1941. On 10 September and 27 October of the same year, they were joined by Božo Schulhof and Pepo Moric.⁷⁹ If the Ustaše had not destroyed the concentration camp documentation on at least two occasions, we would have surely found a number of names of other Jews from Prekmurje. A similar answer could be given to the question as to how much the Prekmurje Jews knew about their relatives being massacred in this concentration camp. All respondents but one maintain that as children they knew nothing or very little about the fate of Jews outside Prekmurje. Lili Hajmer Kožič is one of the rare people who can remember “*waiting [...] every day for things to get worse and worse and worse*” and hearing bits and pieces about the events that were unfolding across Europe through the only radio receiver that had not been taken away from them.⁸⁰ Lili also recalls her father and uncle having to report every morning to the “*gendarmerie and swear to them that his whole family was still in the house,*”⁸¹ and Tamas B. Schwarz alias Yoel Shachar is convinced that his “*parents were informed [...] that the gendarmerie was coming for us [...].*”⁸²

79 Antun Miletić, *Koncentracijski logor Jasenovac 1941–1945. Dokumenta III*, Narodna knjiga Beograd – Spomen područje Jasenovac, 1987, pp. 91–92.

80 “*We knew, we were hiding a small radio, they could take one radio, they took two radios, but we would listen to the radio in hiding, in Hungary, in Germany [...].*” From the narrative account of Lili Hajmer Kožič; her account is kept by the Shoah Foundation.

81 Ibid.

82 Zdravec, “*Vsak konec je nov začetek,*” p. 24.

This is also why the parents of our respondents ventured into fairly unusual agreements with their neighbours and non-Jewish acquaintances. A tavern owner Voglar from Bogojina, for instance, made a notarial transfer of “*his entire property, a tavern and a hefty chunk of land, an estate, if you will*” to his neighbour, father of the aforementioned Jožef Smej, who was later to become Auxiliary Bishop of the Maribor Diocese. The two signatories also made a “*tac-it agreement,*” in accordance with which, “*if they return, the family was to be given back the entire property, and if not, the property is to remain in his hands.*”⁸³

Smej, then already a student of theology in Szombathely, remembers his school friend of Jewish descent being excluded from the study of theology around that time. “*Nazis came and drove him away. They said he was no longer allowed to study here. They took him away and gave him [...] a yellow star, they ordered him to wear a five-pointed [sic!] yellow star.*” All the rest had to prove that they “*had not had any Jewish ancestors [...] for the past five generations.*”⁸⁴ After the putsch in Budapest and the establishment of the Hungarian marionette regime, the situation grew even worse. Smej mentions that the local bishop even forbade them to “*walk [...] around the town.*” From this it can be gathered that deportations started immediately after the change in regime or right after the adoption of rules specifying all restrictions and prohibitions.

83 A transcript of the narrative account of Jožef Smej; the interview was conducted by Oto Luthar in autumn 2010.

84 Ibid.

Thus, from the beginning of spring onwards, the Jews were prohibited from practically anything, from employing non-Jewish workers to holding public office, and denied membership in journalists' and actors' associations. Moreover, on 21 April a special decree was issued in the Official Journal on the confiscation of Jewish property, in compliance with which the Jews were obliged to register their entire property,

“with the exception of residential goods and objects intended for personal use and whose value does not exceed 10,000 pengö. This decree shall annul every official legally valid document with which a Jew might intend to transfer their property to other persons after 22 March 1944; the aforementioned property shall become subject to this law. By way of exception, the law shall not apply to property whose value does not exceed the rough average estimate of 10,000 pengö. Compulsory registration shall also apply to Jewish property placed in the care and charge of Christians. Jewish bank accounts and their claims have been confiscated as well. From the confiscated monetary assets, Jews are allowed to use 1,000 pengö monthly. Jews are not allowed to sell goods that are subject to compulsory registration.”⁸⁵

Then came the restriction of movement and total social isolation of the Jews. The prohibition “to use public swimming baths, visit public events, cinemas, football matches and entertainment parks...”⁸⁶ was followed by the decree

85 Toš, *Zgodovinski spomin*, p. 72.

86 Ibid.

restricting access to markets and the prohibition of movement between 7 p.m. and 7 a.m.

Among the most horrid moments of these preparations for the final destruction were most certainly newspaper articles that could be read as harbingers of events to follow. Here, reference is primarily to *Muraszombat es Videke*, which, in an article issued in April 1944 under the sinister title *Major Cleansing*,⁸⁷ announced not only the “cleansing of the Jews but also communists and other suspects.”⁸⁸

Even more striking is the determined consistency of Nazi leaders in the execution of the so-called *final solution*. To put it more precisely, neither the losses on all fronts nor the anticipated invasion by Allied forces in France or Belgium had in any way slowed down the arrests, confiscations of property and internments in concentration camps. Quite to the contrary, they spurred the systematic destruction of Jews in the death factories to untold proportions. The master propagandist of the German Reich, Joseph Göbbels, ascribed this, among other things, to Hitler's rage over the state of affairs in the battlefield, as well as to the Allies' increasingly frequent bombing campaigns against German cities. “The Führer's hatred of the Jews only grew stronger. The Jews had to be punished for their crimes

87 Darja Kerec, “Judge v Murski Soboti ...,” p. 607. A little less than one month later, the same newspaper reported on the inventorying of Jewish property in Prekmurje and on cattle sales in Murska Sobota. Darja Kerec also mentions the news of the internment of a 21-year-old Christian girl whom the authorities drove to the concentration camp, because “she was walking around the city with a Jewish friend under her arm.” Ibid.

88 Toš, *Zgodovinski spomin*, p. 73.

against the European nations and the entire cultural world. Wherever we lay our hands on them, they must not escape our revenge,” Göbbels confided in his diary⁸⁹ in spring 1944 – the very same diary in which we may also find the unambiguous assertion that “the destruction of German cities is the work of the Jew.” A similar opinion was held by the Reichsführer-SS, Heinrich Himmler, who told the organisers of the genocide that the extermination of the Jews was a prerequisite for the safety of and a bright future for the German people. Being one of Hitler’s closest associates, Himmler fully identified himself with the Führer’s belief that the Jews were a foreign body in the German national community. Or, as Hitler himself had stated: “By removing the Jew, I have abolished in Germany the possibility to build up a revolutionary core or nucleus.” He pre-empted any criticism that he could have achieved this by using other, less brutal means, with his typical outburst that it was a struggle between life and death. “If our enemies are victorious in this struggle, the German people will be extirpated [...] [and] the Bolsheviks will butcher millions upon millions of our intellectuals. Those who escape the bullet in the back of the neck will be deported. The children of the upper classes will be taken away and got rid of. This entire bestiality was organised by Jews.”⁹⁰

89 Joseph Göbbels, *Die Tagebücher von Joseph Göbbels*, Elke Fröhlich (ed.), part II, vol. 12, Munich, p. 202, here quoted from Saul Friedländer, *The Years of Extermination. Nazi Germany and the Jews, 1939–1945*, Harper Collins, New York, 2007, p. 604.

90 Friedländer, *The Year of Extermination*, p. 605.

In short, the greater the number of reports on air raid victims, the more atrocious were the accusations directed at the Jews, who were to be exterminated at Hitler’s orders as if in retaliation for the Jews’ alleged attempts to exterminate the Germans. Here, we are particularly interested in how the Führer’s rage affected the destiny of the Jews in Prekmurje, who, just like the Jews in Hungary, were anxious to know what the war had in store for them. And their fears proved to be more than founded: already in spring 1943, less than one year before the occupation of Hungary, Hitler confided in his Slovak ally Jozef Tiso that he was astonished by the level of “Judaisation of Hungary.” Three days before the first transports of Hungarian Jews to Auschwitz, Hitler and Tiso had a very similar conversation, after which Tiso concluded in his notes that the Germans were very lucky to have a leader of Austrian descent and hence a great authority on the Jews.⁹¹ The Romanian dictator Antonescu, another one of Hitler’s most frequent and popular guests in Berlin, held a similar opinion. According to research by Saul Friedländer, a leading authority on the Holocaust alongside Raul Hilberg, both Antonescu and Hitler repeatedly expressed the belief that the Jewish influence on politics in Budapest had disastrous consequences and concurred that it had to be curtailed or that the Jews in Hungary were to be done away with, like the Jews elsewhere in Europe. At his last meeting with Antonescu before Eichmann’s campaign in Budapest, Hitler ensured him that the plans to do so were already in place.

91 *Ibid.*, p. 606.

Hungarian Jews – and with them the Jews in Prekmurje – found that out at their cost only one month after this conversation took place. Despite their silent hopes for a miracle,⁹² they and other inhabitants of Lendava, Murska Sobota and the surrounding villages realised in early spring 1944 that they were going to share the fate of their relatives and acquaintances in other parts of occupied Europe. At the end of March that same year, “an envoy of the Hungarian government appeared in Lendava and issued a decree to collect the Jews.”⁹³ The ensuing arrests took place for the better part of April, and the procedure was more or less the same everywhere. Whole families were gathered up at the synagogues or other public spaces in the early morning hours and then taken by carts, trucks and trains to Čakovec.

Both our respondents and the respondents of the Shoah Foundation remember that April morning when they “knocked on [their] door at 5 a.m., woke [them] up and [...] told [them] they had thirty minutes”⁹⁴ to pack for the road. Yoel Shacher, for instance, recounts that by the time the gendarmerie arrived, his family was “already fully clothed.”⁹⁵ Since the Fürst family went through a real drama before leaving their

home, we shall begin the reconstruction of the events that unfolded in those April mornings with Erika Fürst’s account:

“[M]y father was ordered to hand over all his securities, gold, money, anything of any value. I had a necklace with a Star of David, and they tore it off of my neck. My sister had a Moses with the Ten Commandments. It hurt to see them take that away from us. Then, after they took everything, my father called us into the living room. He asked us to come to the living room. When all four of us gathered there, he opened a drawer, the one in his desk. From that drawer he took a little bag and looked at us, with tears in his eyes, and put the little bag back in the drawer, locked it and out we went. After the war my mother told us that the little bag contained arsenic to poison us. I know, it’s as if he had known what was coming. Then, my mother and our maid were doing the laundry, the white linen was left to soak, and my mother asked the gendarmes if they would let us – because we had poor neighbours – if they would allow us to take the linen there, because it’s no good if you let it soak for too long, and then the gendarmes sent a word to this family... My sister and I wanted to say goodbye to our best friend and the gendarmes gave us permission. They were our next-door neighbours. We went there and took our memory books with us, so she would put them away, and we said our goodbyes. Her father [...] had already been imprisoned [...] and [...] he took it the hardest. He put his arms around us, with tears running down his face, and said: ‘Poor children, I’m afraid I know what waits for you there.’ Well, a few moments later we were back home. My mother was out of her wits and completely unable to pack her things, so my sister and I packed her suitcase and then, each one of us

92 Mirjana Gašpar and Beata Lazar. *Židje v Lendavi*. Lindplast Pince, Lendava, 1997, p. 84. The decision that sealed the destiny of the Jews of Prekmurje and Medjimurje was passed on 19 April. The Hungarian districts bordering the areas controlled by the Yugoslav partisans were labelled “areas of hostilities,” from whence Jews needed to be transferred to areas controlled by the German forces.

93 Toš, *Zgodovinski spomin*, p. 73.

94 From the narrative account of Erika Fürst.

95 Zadavec, “Vsak konec je nov začetek,” p. 24.

was allowed to carry twenty kilos, and one of the gendarmes hinted to my mother to take food with her, as much food as possible. When we were done packing, we had to foot it to the synagogue, where we were taken over by the SS units.”⁹⁶

If the Fürsts’ soaking linen clearly shows that despite the aforementioned announcements not even the parents could realise that their departure was so imminent, Šarika Horvat’s testimony was just the opposite. “I just knew they came for us,” she was certain in the introductory part of the interview conducted by the associate of the Shoah Foundation. Moreover, she was convinced that they “could have run [away],” but her dad, who was an “awfully big optimist,” couldn’t bring himself to do it. Šarika also differs from the majority of other respondents in her assessment of the neighbours. If Smej and others provide more assurances that the non-Jews in Prekmurje had “no prejudice whatsoever,” that they “loved”⁹⁷ the Jews, and that the “excellent merchandise” in Jewish stores “was no more expensive than anywhere else,”⁹⁸ Šarika gives just the opposite interpretation. Even half a century later, she can still remember the anti-Semitic attitude of some professors, due to which her parents would warn her that she must not

“stand out” in any way.⁹⁹ Something similar holds for the general perception among non-Jews, who respected the intelligence and sophistication¹⁰⁰ of the Jews, but nonetheless often perceived them as stingy, unapproachable and sometimes even dangerous. In interviews, our respondents often made observations about their precision, which in fact stands for their “stinginess.”¹⁰¹ Something similar is true of the stereotype about the Jews as murderers of Christian children, the adapted version of which had survived in Prekmurje until the mid-20th century. Generations born in the 1920s and 1930s still remember their parents telling them to be good, otherwise the Jews would come, take them away and boil them “into soap.”¹⁰²

96 From the narrative account of Erika Fürst.

97 From the narrative account of Elizabeta Šejk from Hodoš. The interview was conducted by Klaudija Sedar in August 2010.

98 From the narrative account of Jožef Smej.

99 In her interview with the Shoah Foundation, she remembered her parents having constantly warned her “to fit in” and thus make sure not to stand out in any way.

100 All accounts provide a wealth of information regarding the entrepreneurial abilities and riches of the Jews, but some remember them as progressive and sophisticated: “They were awfully intelligent, always ahead of the times and the like.” From the narrative account of Jolanka Smodiš from Gornji Petrovci. The interview was conducted by Klaudija Sedar in September 2010.

101 Anton Vratuša, one of the three male respondents, remembers a Jewish merchant (“the Koblencar Jew”), who presumably “measured that yeast for me down to the last gram. Whereas the other one [the non-Jewish merchant], he was never that fussy, sometimes it was a bit more, sometimes a bit less... I never thought about it, but it did stick with me.”

102 Anton Vratuša does not remember who and when told him that; “it was probably on one of those evenings when the whole village would engage in shelling pumpkin seeds, feather sorting and the like, that people would tell such stories,” but he remembers all too well how his “grandmother” used to “say if you won’t behave, the Jews will turn you into soap.”

Deportation

Nevertheless, on those April mornings Jewish families also attracted much sympathy and support. Lili Hajmer Kožič, for instance, describes how the neighbours, most specifically Josip Benko, the owner of a slaughterhouse and a chain of butcheries, brought them “*food, meat [and] milk*”¹⁰³ and how her family also received money. Her father, himself the owner of a general store, would often sell construction materials on credit, which some of his debtors did not forget. Liza Berger, who first encountered anti-Semitism already during her studies in Vienna, remembers how she watched the inhabitants of Murska Sobota stop by the side of the road on their way to work and cry: “[T]hey came out ... and cried. I saw people crying. It was a sight that made you cry. People carrying bags on their backs, just like in the stories about the Jews.”¹⁰⁴

And just like in the old stories about the Jews who fled their persecutors with bags on their shoulders, their situation in the real drama worsened with every subsequent scene. Erika Fürst remembers realising just how serious the situation

was when they saw the Germans at the synagogue: “As soon as we saw the Germans [...] with their shepherds, naturally, [...] we knew they were [...] more bloodthirsty than the Hungarians [...]. The Hungarians were still somewhat more considerate.”¹⁰⁵

However, it was not only the dogs and the ruthlessness of the Germans that frightened her, but the entire process. After being herded up at the synagogue, they had to wait there for the others to be driven from the nearby villages. In the meantime, German soldiers called their names out loud, repeatedly checking their presence, until “300 or almost 400 people”¹⁰⁶ had been gathered by the evening, “packed like herrings”¹⁰⁷ in the synagogue.

“Well, then we were taken to Čakovec, some of us by carts and others by train. In Čakovec they locked us in a school building. We slept on the floor. We were held there for two days, as long as it took to examine each and every one of us. There was a small room in which two German officers were sitting, and they called each one of us by name and asked us whether we had any money or jewellery left. I was shaking with fear, I was only thirteen and alone with those aggressive officers [who were looking] very hostile. They had a dog; they searched me from head to toe to see if I was still hiding something. [...] This is how they checked each one of us. There was one man, Mr. Hiršo Karman from Murska Sobota, he happened to lose

103 From the narrative account of Lili Hajmer Kožič, Shoah Foundation.

104 From the narrative account of Liza Berger, Shoah Foundation. Erika Fürst talks about a similar expression of sympathy that also proved crucial for their survival, when she mentions the assistance her family received from the local factory owner: “*But I also have to say that in the meantime Mr. Benko, Josip Benko, the factory owner, sent to his acquaintances, including my father, who did transports for him on several occasions [...] a large parcel of food, such as smoked ham, smoked meat, salami. It was a large parcel, so much so that my father barely lifted it. And this parcel saved our lives [...] because we were given no food whatsoever until Auschwitz.*”

105 From the narrative account of Erika Fürst.

106 Ibid.

107 From the narrative account of Šarika Horvat, Shoah Foundation. A similar account was given by Liza Berger, who recalls the synagogue being “*packed full [...] it was horrible [...].*” From the narrative account of Liza Berger, Shoah Foundation.

*a gold crown from his tooth. Where this happened I don't know, he just put [...] that crown in his pocket and forgot about it. When he came before the Germans, they beat him up so badly that he came out all swollen up and beaten. Because they thought he was trying to hide it. Well, we were there for two days. [...] After two days they loaded us on cattle trains and drove us to Nagykanizsa.*¹⁰⁸

A similar account is given by Yoel Shachar, who was taken to the Lendava Synagogue with his mother Rozalija, sister Vera and father Josip, then

*“driven to Čakovec and from there the next day to Nagykanizsa, where we were put up in a school and distributed into classrooms. Soon [afterwards] the Germans gathered up men fit for work, including my father Josip Schwarz, and sent them to a labour camp; there they were divided into labour battalions. I stayed with mother Rozalija, sister Vera and grandmother Roszi Wortmann, and other Lendava Jews in Nagykanizsa. I think it was 17 May 1944 when they boarded us onto cattle cars and took us to Birkenau.”*¹⁰⁹

Although the sources differ on the number of the first deportees, we may say with certainty that not quite 300 Jews¹¹⁰ were deported from Lendava, Beltinci, Murska Sobotna and the surrounding villages. This was the first wave of

108 From the narrative account of Erika Fürst.

109 Zdravec, »Vsak konec je nov začetek«, p. 24.

110 According to Hajdinjak, who cites Nemeth–Pasky, altogether 672 people were ultimately deported from Prekmurje and Medjimurje.

deportations “to spare Jews who had previously converted to Christianity and Jews who had rendered special services to Hungary.”¹¹¹

The first group of deportees was followed by a second one in the early days of May, a third one on 20 October 1944 and in November the last and the smallest group was arrested, after having escaped the previous deportations owing to “services to the Hungarian nation.” The course of the first two expulsions was more or less identical: early morning arrests were followed by rounding up, identity verification and transport to Croatia or Hungary,¹¹² from whence the deportees were driven to Auschwitz in two transports (the first one on 28 April 1944 and the second one on 18 May 1944). Since the April transport was the largest and several persons from the May deportation caught up with a part of the April group in the transit collection centre in Hungary, our reconstruction of the events focuses more thoroughly on the first group, which also included our most informative respondents, the two teenage girls Šarika Horvat and Erika Fürst, and the former chemistry student in Vienna, Liza Berger.

However, it should be stressed at the very beginning that all deportations from Prekmurje took place “under the supervision of the gendarmerie or the central Hungarian

111 Toš, *Zgodovinski spomin*, p. 73. See also Franc Kuzmič, *Posebnosti židovske populacije v panonskem prostoru glede izseljenstva in sezonstva*, in: *Zbornik Sezonsko in izseljenstvo*, Založba ZRC, Ljubljana, 2003, p. 138.

112 Some respondents also mention Hodoš as the collection area on route to Nagykanizsa: “Then they were taken to the train station in Hodoš, and with a train to Auschwitz.” From the narrative account of Jolanka Smodiš.

police,”¹¹³ while the Germans assumed control over inspections and the theft of personal property. Therefore, the case of Prekmurje, too, reveals the general division of labour, according to which the idea and organisation of the genocide in Hungary was in the domain of the German SS and Wehrmacht units, whereas the work in the field, including occasional killings, was carried out by Hungarian gendarmes and fascists. Within the framework of the former, Slovenian gendarmes in Hungarian uniform are known to have participated at least in arrests made in the villages and towns around Prekmurje. Many of them were members of the local Kulturbund, who were the most efficient in looting Jewish property. Most of those operating in Murska Sobota came from Turpolje, a suburban district on the western fringes of the city.

On the other hand, there is no evidence that Slovenes participated in the killings in major Hungarian cities. In short, Slovenian participation in the deportation of the Jews in the service of the two occupying forces ended with the presentation of deportees in Čakovec, whereas the scope of their responsibility for the destruction and pillaging of the property of deported Jews will most likely never be fully determined. This is because the ever-dwindling numbers of witnesses confine their accounts to extremely generalised stories of looting and only seldom provide clear depictions of

the events. Only two of our respondents spoke directly about the pillaging of Jewish property. More than six decades afterwards, the former neighbour of the Hahn family from Murska Sobota is still visibly upset when describing how the “Nyilas” and “Kulturbund” people “emptied” the Hahn’s house and printer’s shop “of everything whatsoever,” including furniture,¹¹⁴ while her peer from Poznanovci still remembers the general pillaging of merchandise in Kovačevci.¹¹⁵

While the members of the Nyilas and the Kulturbund were pillaging through Jewish homes, stores and workshops despite the announced acquisition of Jewish property, Prekmurje Jews were being transferred from Čakovec to the collection camp in western Hungary:

“As I said, after two days they boarded us on cattle trains and took us to Nagykanizsa. To an agricultural college in Nagykanizsa. The school was stripped down to a skeleton, with no benches in the classrooms, where we slept on the floor. [...] The next morning they gathered up all younger men and younger women in the courtyard. They all had to report to the courtyard. Unfortunately, that group also included my father. They made a list of their names, sent them back to take their things, lined them up and took them to the railway station. That was [...] the last time I saw my father. Everyone was crying. [...] We were locked in classrooms, watching out the window and [...]

113 Pursuant to the order issued by the Hungarian Minister of Interior, all actions of the Hungarian gendarmerie were formally coordinated by Oberstleutnant László Ferenci. See Ota Kraus, Erich Kulka, *Die Todesfabrik*, Kongress-Verlag, Berlin, 1958, p. 167.

114 From the narrative account of Julijana Zrim, Murska Sobota. The interview was conducted by Ivanka Huber.

115 “People took whatever they could lay their hands on,” recounts Francka Coer from Poznanovci. This interview was conducted by Ivanka Huber, as well.

waved. I'll never forget that [...] sad look on my father's face. They were taken to the railway station and to Auschwitz."¹¹⁶

According to Liza Berger, Erika's father was among the rare elderly people in the first transport of the Prekmurje Jews from Nagykanizsa to Auschwitz. She recounts that they were "mainly calling out" "young people," saying "they are going to give us work, while our families shall remain in Hungary."¹¹⁷ Similar testimony is provided by Šarika Horvat, who recalls that the first transport, which was supposed to start one month before the others, carried mostly "men [and] childless women."¹¹⁸ The accounts of both are also supported by the data collected by Hajdinjak. From Nagykanizsa, where altogether 2,675 Jews were gathered up, they first sent to Auschwitz men and women fit for work. At the Budapest Eastern Railway Station, the transport from Nagykanizsa was expanded to include another 1,000 Jews from the internment camp Kistarcsa near Budapest. This group was composed mostly of people arrested during raids carried out across the Hungarian capital in the second half of March.

Liza Berger, visibly upset by her conduct at the time, also remembers believing precisely that, just like many of her co-passengers in that transport. Moreover, when one of the less-gullible women began screaming that they were all going to be killed on route, she laughed at the frightened co-passenger:

116 From the narrative account of Erika Fürst.

117 From the narrative account of Liza Berger.

118 From the narrative account of Šarika Horvat.

"I laughed [...] that's impossible [...] there's no such thing. Then they let us say goodbye to our parents [and] I said: "Stay calm" [...] I promise you, I'll come back [...] and I did come back, but they were not [...] they didn't wait for me."¹¹⁹

Those who stayed shared the fate of the rest of the Fürst family. Let us take a look at how Erika remembers those three weeks:

"We had nothing but water, so we ate the meat Mr. Benko had sent us. And my mother had one loaf of bread, the other one she gave to my father. This is what we ate for three weeks. We were allowed to move about the courtyard and were guarded by Hungarian gendarmes for three weeks until the Germans took over again and drove us to the train station, to the cattle cars."¹²⁰

Šarika Horvat remembers seeing loaves of old bread sitting in the train cars¹²¹ that further aggravated the thirst of the crammed passengers during the next four or five days' journey. Each and every one of them remembers at least three things: lack of space, shortage of water and appalling hygienic conditions, with no restrooms, only improvised sanitary facilities in the train cars.¹²²

119 From the interview with Liza Berger.

120 From the narrative account of Erika Fürst.

121 From the narrative account of Šarika Horvat.

122 "[...] there were no toilets; in short, we did everything in one corner." A transcript of the narrative account of Erika Fürst.

“We were hungry and thirsty, more than anything we were thirsty and frightened,” Erika recalls and her testimony is also confirmed by Marija Dajč Ebenšpanger, who specifically remembers the shortage of water (*“[...] there was no water, not even a drop [...]”*),¹²³ while Šarika Horvat will never forget her brother’s toothache and the slow crawling of the train. The endless composition of cattle cars, each carrying eighty to ninety persons, moved when they would not interfere with transports from the battlefield. The latter had the right of way at any point along the line, which protracted their journey even further. *“At one point we were moving, [and] stood still [at another],”* Šarika Horvat recounts, while Liza Berger remembers the train car being *“full [...], but not so much that it made it impossible to move.”* For this young woman from Murska Sobota, the transport was especially important, as it was here that she met her future friend and rescuer:

*“And there I met this lady, a little older than myself, with whom we are still friends today, and who was with me everywhere I went. She helped me a great deal [...], maybe I helped her, too. She now lives in America.”*¹²⁴

Auschwitz...

Then followed the shock of arrival at the concentration camp. The first contact with the guards and prisoners responsible for maintaining order struck the newcomers so profoundly that they all describe it in detail, at length and with a great deal of emotion. Quite often, one can also find these descriptions in literature, including the works of the Nobel Prize winner Imre Kertész and the famous Roman-born, Jewish-American writer Elie Wiesel. But before we become better acquainted with the concentration camp ourselves, let us first take a look at what Ota Kraus and Erich Kulka, two of the most reliable witnesses to the conditions in Auschwitz, wrote about the preparations for the “Hungarian transport.” In their unfortunately forgotten or overlooked book, *Die Todesfabrik*, published a good decade after the war, first in Czech and then in German translation, they provide a detailed description of “ambitious preparations for the Jewish transports from Hungary. The crematoria were carefully restored, ovens re-lined with fireclay and hearths reinforced with iron grids.”¹²⁵ In addition, the ovens around the crematoria were enclosed by corridors of wire fences, covered by blankets in places to shield the interior from the gazes of passers-by. “Huge pits were dug behind the crematoria” and a new rail link was finished to connect Crematoria I and II at Birkenau with the station at Auschwitz. What is more, “be-

123 From the narrative account of Marija Dajč Ebenšpanger, Shoah Foundation.

124 From the narrative account of Liza Berger.

125 Kraus and Kulka, *Die Todesfabrik*, Kongress-Verlag, Berlin 1958, p. 161.

tween the BI and BII sections, a completely new four-track landing ramp was constructed,¹²⁶ and the commander of the concentration camp also ordered the extension of an area of the camp where the arrivals' belongings were sorted – an area evocatively called “Canada.”

They also recall that the first transports arrived from the regions of Carpatho-Ukraine and Transylvania, but what they remembered most was that the train cars from the east and southeast of Hungary carried a large number of bodies of passengers “who’d died of thirst.” They recount with horror a scene in which the Germans shot dead the whole car of passengers mad with thirst: “*On one occasion they opened the door of a train car and women, half mad with thirst, jumped out and began climbing the firefighters’ water reservoirs, flatly ignoring the SS commands to stop and their blows [and] the SS shot them all.*”¹²⁷

Erika Fürst describes her arrival in the concentration camp as a “*great ordeal*”:

“They opened the train cars; the German soldiers were shouting at us ‘alle raus,’ everybody out. We were not allowed to take anything; women not even a toiletries case, nothing whatsoever. But there was word going around that we would be left only with what we were wearing. So we put on some underwear, a blouse dress, a skirt over that, then a winter coat, and over that a trench coat. So my sister and I looked older, stronger, and so we jumped

*out of the train car. There we were lined up by the soldiers constantly shouting at us: ‘faster, faster,’ and then we walked along the railway line until we reached a certain point [...].”*¹²⁸

The arrival in the concentration camp was a similar experience for Šarika Horvat and Tamas B. Schwarz. They will never forget the SS officers shouting, “*Aussteigen! Schnell, schnell!*”¹²⁹ and Šarika also remembers “*having to leave the luggage in the train car.*” She also had a feeling as though someone had died during the transport.¹³⁰

Liza Berger experienced the arrival a bit differently. She remembers the Germans and how they made them leave all their belongings in the train cars, saying “*you’ll get everything in the camp [...] not just suitcases.*” At the same time she stresses that they greeted them “*very, very nicely,*” saying “*Welcome, you’re going to the camp, you’re going to work.*”

On the other hand, she also remembers her encounter with the infamous Dr. Mengele or, rather, “*the point*” mentioned by Fürst above. “*The point where he stood and sorted [them]*”:

“Elderly people, children and young mothers went to the right [...] the few of us fit to work went to the left. When we came up to Mengerle [sic] – because my sister and I were wearing identical clothes and we were of approximately the same height, even though my sister was two years older than me – he asked my mother if we were twins. My mother said no, we

126 Ibid.

127 Ibid, p. 162.

128 From the narrative account of Erika Fürst.

129 Zdravec. “Vsak konec je nov začetek,” p. 25.

130 “*I think there was a dead man in the car.*” From the narrative account of Šarika Horvat.

weren't. 'How old are they?' She said seventeen and fifteen, and added in German she said: 'We want to work.' Then he smiled like a weasel and said, "Left."

That's how we stayed alive, rather than being sent straight to the crematorium. Only thirty-four women survived from the entire transport. I know that because we were lined up by five in six rows, and because there were only four in the last one, instead of five."¹³¹

Something similar may be gathered from the account of Marija Dajč Ebenšpanger, who recalls "Mengele's [...] ordering them who was to go where" and that "older people didn't go with us, older people went straight to the crematorium."¹³²

An almost identical account is given by Liza Berger, who believes that Mengele intentionally saved her life and the life of her new friend Greta Weiss by suggesting that they should walk, while the older and disabled were boarded on trucks that drove straight to the gas chambers.

As Šarika Horvat recounts, "Mengerle" also appeared to be a very nice man. Moreover, she remembers him as a "tall" man "standing and watching" and even "looking good" while doing it¹³³ ... and he continued doing so when the agents came to recruit a fresh female labour force for German factories. Tamas B. Schwarz remembers how a Polish prisoner suggested to his mother that her son pose as a sixteen-year-old:

"We were mixed with Polish prisoners and one of them said to my mother to send me forward. When they asked me how old I was, I should answer: sixteen years. Then I came face to face with Mengele. He asked me: 'Wie alt bist du?' I replied: 'Sechzehn Jahre.' Mengele then directed me to the working group. When I looked back I saw my mother, she was thirty-two and could also have been sent into the working group, but she refused to be separated from my little sister Vera who was five and a half. She knew they would both die. And they were indeed both killed, just like my fifty-nine-year-old grandmother."¹³⁴

In the light of frequent warnings we have received from our colleagues who deal with the destruction of Jewish communities in this part of Europe, we have undertaken the analysis of encounters with Mengele with special care. Namely, authorities on this subject note that many prisoners have conceived of this encounter in their mind's eye on the basis of the accounts of their fellow sufferers.¹³⁵ However, this can by no means be said for our respondents, even though Liza Berger, when explicitly asked how she knew it was Mengele, frankly replies that "everyone knew that" and "everyone knows that."¹³⁶ That the great majority of women were indeed examined by Mengele himself is further con-

131 Ibid.

132 From the narrative account of Marija Dajč Ebenšpanger.

133 From the narrative account of Šarika Horvat.

134 Zdravec, "Vsak konec je nov začetek," p. 25.

135 Especially Ivo Goldstein, undisputedly the leading authority on questions of the Holocaust in the territory of the former Yugoslavia alongside his father Slavko Goldstein. Boris Hajdinjak, however, states that such encounters with Mengele were a component part of at least 350 verified protocols, which also lends credibility to the accounts of our respondents.

136 From the narrative account of Liza Berger.

firmed by Ota Kraus and Erich Kulka, who also mention Dr. König, who primarily assisted Mengele in seeking new “healing methods” (*Heilmethoden*). For example: “women complaining of headaches were first forced to spend the whole day in the scorching sun and in the evening sent for special treatment (*Sonderbehandlung*) – the crematorium. From young and healthy women they [first] collected blood for the soldiers of the German army.”¹³⁷

Those who survived the selection process were taken to the concentration camp. Under the command of an

*“SS woman we [...] marched [...] in fives for a few kilometres.”*¹³⁸ *“The SS woman [...] said she was taking us for a stroll [...] past the crematorium, where they were just burning our family members. My grandmother, cousin, aunt and other relatives. Women asked the SS woman: ‘Why is there so much smoke coming from this chimney?’ and she said: ‘This is where they bake your bread.’”*¹³⁹

Then followed the standard hygiene procedure:

“We were taken to a building where we had to strip naked, have our hair cut and leave our shoes and all our clothes on a pile. My mother kept a family photo and an SS woman pulled it out of her hands, saying: ‘What’s this, you won’t be needing this,’ and tore it up before our eyes. We went to the showers. The water was lukewarm, it wasn’t cold, but they’d already

*cut our hair, we were shaved bald, and we came out on the other side and, of course, we had no towels, nothing to dry ourselves with. We were given dresses, grey dresses, no socks, no underwear, only dresses and shoes. My sister and I had rather small feet, so the SS woman allowed us to take our own shoes. Mother was given a different pair: some were given wooden shoes.”*¹⁴⁰

But as it happened, some female prisoners refused to wear prison uniforms, which made them subject to additional torture. Kraus and Kulka, for instance, remember a group of 128 Yugoslav partisan women that arrived in Auschwitz in the summer that same year and swapped their uniforms for prison uniforms only when they were forced to do so by starving – starving and hard labour, due to which only twelve would ultimately come out alive.¹⁴¹

Shivering with cold, dressed in “some rags” and “shaved to zero,”¹⁴² women from Murska Sobota and Lendava realised after a few days that it would be difficult to survive in the new environment. In addition to the initial systematic dehumanisation, which found its ultimate form in the tattoo of the prisoner’s camp number, they were treated to new unpleasant surprises every single day. Liza Berger still clearly

137 Kraus and Kulka, *Die Todesfabrik*, p. 163.

138 From the narrative account of Liza Berger.

139 From the narrative account of Erika Fürst.

140 Ibid.

141 Kraus and Kulka, *Die Todesfabrik*, p. 79.

142 From the narrative account of Šarika Horvat. However, Marija Dajč Ebešpanger remembers how they deliberately did a terrible job of cutting their hair so as to make them “look like true scum.” From the narrative account of Marija Dajč Ebenšpanger.

remembers how her older fellow prisoners stole her shoes even before she could get used to them. Immediately after she first went to the toilet, “*it was some shack with benches,*”¹⁴³ she was left without her shoes and her own comb, which she had managed to hide before taking a shower. But the greatest shock for all prisoners came with the realisation that the crematoria were not bakeries but incinerators for the bodies of their family members. “*I didn’t know then*” that “*my brother [...] went to the crematorium with my mother [...]*,” Šarika Horvat recounts and adds how devastated she was when she found out why “*there was constant fire*”¹⁴⁴ in the crematoria in the days when they arrived.

The majority of passengers of the fourteen May transports ended up in the crematoria, most of them in less than twenty-four hours.¹⁴⁵ Kraus and Kulka particularly remember a group largely composed of former Jewish-Hungarian soldiers of the Hungarian army, also because they were addressed as such by the SS officer. He turned to the wary and rather unquiet crowd with roughly the following words:

“I turn to you as members of an ally nation fighting shoulder to shoulder with ours. I know it is difficult for you to have found yourselves in a labour camp, but the front is

being fought here, too, therefore you are needed here as our allies, as well. And you shall be treated accordingly. Since tens of thousands have come from your country to work here, we cannot guarantee each and every one of you a separate bath and disinfection under war conditions. Therefore, you must all make a minimum sacrifice and make do with group bath and disinfection. I’m counting on your understanding and discipline... I’m asking everyone who understands German to translate what I’ve just said.’ Upon which one of Hungarian officers stepped up, asking his compatriots to show that they were ‘not only able to fight courageously, but also willing to adapt to any situation without hesitation. I ask for a complete silence and that you do your best in the disinfection room to squeeze everyone in.’”

In the words of an eyewitness, Filip Müller, a fireman at the crematorium, who reported the incident to the authors of *Todesfabrik*, that same evening some soldiers greeted their officer’s speech with an ovation... and several minutes later met their end as the “most disciplined corpses.”¹⁴⁶

According to Kraus and Kulka, this happened at the very peak of the “sad activities at Birkenau,” which in July 1944 counted a record number of 105,700 prisoners. The majority of them, just over 60,000, were in Camp BII (Birkenau II), and the lowest number, 10,000, in BIII.

In addition to a rough numerical estimate and description of several horrors, the listed data also offer the best ba-

143 From the narrative account of Liza Berger.

144 From the narrative account of Šarika Horvat.

145 Kraus and Kulka, *Die Todesfabrik*, p. 165. Hajdinjak established that the majority of passengers of the fourteen May transports were cremated, including the bulk of the Nagyanizsa transport. Many did not survive the first twenty-four hours in the camp. See Boris Hajdinjak, “Mengelejeve žrtve; Kohnsteini in Singerji iz Maribora, mariborske žrtve holokavsta,” *Večer*, 14 April 2010.

146 Kraus and Kulka, *Die Todesfabrik*, pp. 164–165.

sis to describe the concentration camp, which, although comprising a conglomerate of camps, remains largely known under a single name – Auschwitz. The reason for this is simple. Even the Germans themselves made the most frequent use of the name “*Der Auschwitzkonzern*”¹⁴⁷ or Auschwitz for short. To ease understanding of the structure, we shall use the archival materials, as well as subsequent interpretations, primarily graphic illustrations made on the basis of the accounts given by the survivors.

When we talk about the Auschwitz, Birkenau or Rajsko camp, we are, in fact, referring to a system of thirty-nine concentration camps that were divided into three main groups:

- **Auschwitz I**: was the original and main camp with the “central” command, the headquarters of the camp Gestapo and the administration of military industry linked to the camp workforce.

- **Auschwitz II**: was officially called Birkenau. Its main goal was the mass killing of people, primarily Jews, Roma, members of resistance movements from all over Europe, Russian prisoners of war, homosexuals, German political prisoners etc. The Birkenau complex also comprised the Budy camp, a chicken farm, the Rajsko nursery gardens and chemical laboratories.

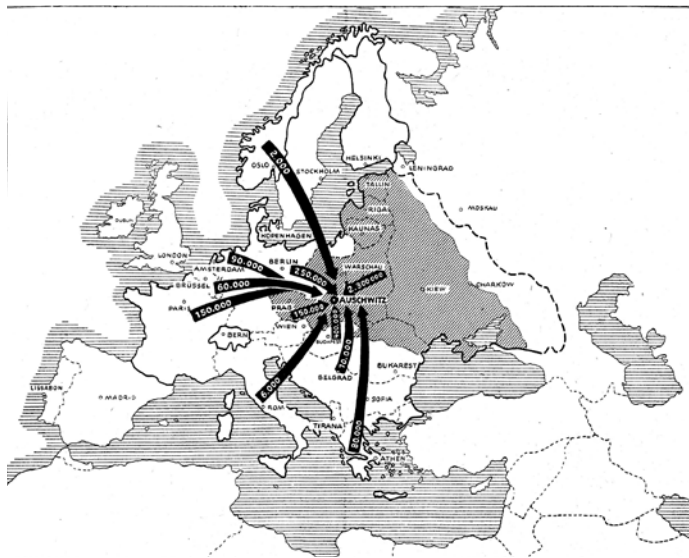
- **Auschwitz III**: or Buna was a concentration camp that served various wartime and, to a lesser extent, peacetime industries. Its main activity was the production of synthetic

rubber at Monowitz. This complex also comprised smaller units inhabited by forced labourers and miners working in the mines at Fürstengrube, Chorzów (Germ.: Königshütte), Jawiszowice, Jaworzno, Bobrek and Janina, the cement works at Golezów and some minor plants. The beginnings of the camp date back to spring 1940, when the first group of to-be “capos” and heads of the barracks were relocated from Sachsenhausen. At the end of June they were joined by the first transport of Polish political prisoners.

This was the world into which Jews from Hungary first entered in May 1944. Among Kraus and Kulka’s estimates, two numbers are frequently found: 400,000 and also “450,000 Hungarian citizens of Jewish descent.”¹⁴⁸ The authors do not forget to mention that this number included a significant share of Slovaks and Jews from Carpatho-Ukraine, a mass of people in which they understandably failed to detect a relatively small group of Jews from Prekmurje.

¹⁴⁸ “450,000 ungarische Staatsbürger jüdischer Herkunft”; Kraus and Kulka, *Die Todesfabrik*, p. 168. Hajdinjak, on the other hand, swears by the number 430,000, including some 12,000 Jews from the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, “hence from Prekmurje and Medjimurje, and the Yugoslav part of Baranja and Bačka.” All 430,000 were stuffed into 147 train compositions, most of which reached Auschwitz before 22 July 1944. Around 75 per cent of the people caught in the so-called *Ungarnaktion* soon afterwards disappeared in gas chambers. From Boris Hajdinjak’s handwritten notes.

¹⁴⁷ This is one of the reasons that scholars have recently endeavoured to use the term *concentration centre* rather than concentration camp.



Map shows the deportations of the Jews from European countries to Auschwitz. From Kraus and Kulka, *Die Todesfabrik*, p. 200.

But they do remember with utmost clarity how, owing to the large amount of belongings seized on the arrival of Hungarian transports, the camp command increased the number of those who worked in areas where the seized personal belongings of deportees were collected, the system of six barracks with the aforementioned name “Canada,” in which prisoners, the so-called Canadians, sorted the confiscated property. For almost all of its four-year existence, the concentration camp produced mounds of suitcases and travel bags, prosthetics, blankets, clothes and underwear, medications. Gold, money, alcohol and other useful objects or luxury goods often ended up in the pock-

ets of German guards¹⁴⁹ and some of the objects (personal documents, compasses, medications, etc.) came into the hands of the camp-wide resistance organisation that would attempt occasional escapes. Work in the storage area had a special advantage, as the “Canadians” were, despite strict supervision, now and again able to smuggle out a few items of property, which they would then use to buy food and other services; but on the other hand, this practice was also extremely risky. According to Kraus and Kulka, most Canadians were captured sooner or later and sent to the crematoria. There they met all those whose property they had tried to acquire for one reason or another.¹⁵⁰ In light of this and especially considering that the greater part of the transports that interests us the most ended up in the crematoria, the latter deserve our special attention.

Crematoria are one of the central symbols of the mass murder of those Germany considered its enemies and of the systematic annihilation of entire nations, first and foremost the Jewish one. When we speak of crematoria, we also have in mind their accompanying parts, most often gas chambers with ante-

149 Nevertheless, by far the largest amount of gold, especially gold teeth, ended up in the central bank of the German Reich, which is also evident from the note sent by SS Brigadeführer, General Major Frank, to Himmler in 1942. Here quoted from Maria Angels Anglada’s novel, *The Auschwitz Violin*, pp. 85–86.

150 Erika, too, remembers Canada and the people working there. She recounts that “in Canada [...] they sorted things we brought with us. And they would also find food hidden among the belongings. They would take underwear, even though they ended up [...] in the sauna for it [...]. We thought [...] that [...] they were the privileged ones, that they were better off. There was no envy, but we knew they were better off. What happened to those, if all of them ... I’m not sure, maybe they were liquidated then.” From the narrative account of Erika Fürst.

rooms where the deportees took off their clothes believing that they were going to the showers. The appropriate signs on the walls made the deception even more convincing. There were multilingual signs everywhere stating “Disinfection,” “Bathroom,” “Keep the room clean and orderly” and “Maintain silence” etc.¹⁵¹ Here, reference is made above all to the new generation of crematoria of 1943. Before that, the central part of the “Death Factory” was much more primitive. In spring 1942, when crematoria were still a constituent part of the Auschwitz I complex, the signs were not there and the crematoria’s capacity was incomparably lower. Rudolf Höss, one of the war criminals to be convicted at the Krakow trial, explained that the first gasings (Zyklon B) were simply carried out in a section of one of the camp blocks (Block 11), with Russian POWs and Jews from Žilina being among the first victims.¹⁵² Conditions underwent a drastic change after Himmler’s visit, during which a decision was made to expand the gas chambers and crematoria. One year later the decision was implemented, and Birkenau became the centre for killing and cremation. Where once stood the farmhouses of Brzezinka, or Birkenau in German, and in two of them the first primitive crematorium, modern and carefully designed machinery grew with enormous space for the “wardrobe,” gas chambers and crematoria. Before, the victims had had to walk almost half a kilometre from the undressing room to the “showers” or, rather, gas chambers, but now everything

151 Kraus and Kulka, *Die Todesfabrik*, p. 111, 112, 115.

152 The very first experiments with Zyklon B are said to have been carried out already in August or September 1941 on a “test group” consisting of Russian war prisoners and patients.

was combined into a single system. The works begun in autumn 1942 were completed in summer 1943, with the construction of four crematoria at Birkenau replacing the old crematorium at Auschwitz, which would thenceforth serve for ash storage. Instead of four old ovens, the basement of the new machinery had no fewer than twenty-three. The biggest crematoria (I and II) had the capacity to burn 2,000 corpses in one “shift.” This was precisely the number of people that could be packed into the new gas chambers.

By also adding the aforementioned landing ramps, which were completed just before the arrival of the Hungarian transports, and the road that led truckloads of exhausted passengers straight to the gates of the crematoria, we gradually obtain a complete picture of the entire system of the mass murder of people and the cremation of their corpses.

Given the new capacity, smaller groups of prisoners were often simply shot.

And no one could perform this task as efficiently as the SS officer Moll, one of the five commanders of the crematoria who preferred to kill people with his gun or order his soldiers to line up the prisoners one behind the other to kill four or five with a single bullet and thus save ammunition.¹⁵³

153 *Ibid.*, p. 120. Moll, who in summer 1944 replaced the organisationally less competent (p. 133) commander Forst, further perfected the process of killing and cremating prisoners. On his order, they dug new pits for burning corpses behind the crematoria, and in the days when the crematoria operated at full capacity, he would even offer his assistance in burning the dead. Or, as Filip Müller, a camp prisoner who worked in the crematoria the longest (p. 130), states: “When the workload was the highest, [Moll] would personally assist in throwing the corpses [into the crematorium ovens]: he would roll up his sleeves and work for two [...]” p. 133.

Apart from the sadism with which Moll treated the prisoners, his conduct also reveals that some camp administrators genuinely considered every single prisoner to be “public enemy number one.”¹⁵⁴

At the time when the Death Factory was operating at full capacity, the camp administration could probably not wish for a better commander of the crematoria. And given his zeal, it is not hard to imagine that someone from Prekmurje, too, might have met him on their final journey. Some of these perhaps even had the chance to witness Moll’s special hobby. As Müller recounts, this one-of-a-kind executioner took exquisite pleasure in killing children. Quite often he would trick them away from their mothers with a chocolate bar or some other excuse and threw them into a pit into the bubbling fat of the corpses.¹⁵⁵

*

Those who survived the first selection, including young men and childless women, were distributed among various concentration camps or, rather, sent to work to other camps closer to Germany. The same fate soon befell our Šarika Horvat, after she survived the first days in Auschwitz with the help of her cousin Judita Kreft. Judita arrived in the camp with the first transport and was very lucky to get work in the kitchen and the food distribution area. Therefore, she would

154 The first of the ten commandments of the commanders of various units stated: “Jeder Häftling ist ein Staatsfeind Nummer 1,” see Kraus and Kulka, *Die Todesfabrik*, p. 182.

155 *Ibid.*, p. 134.

often bring leftovers to Šarika in the evenings and warn her from the very beginning against drinking water. Unboiled water was contaminated and the water from open reservoirs was the most likely source of infection.

Gathering from Erika Fürst’s account, a majority ended up in Birkenau, which not only had the largest number of crematoria but also hosted the largest number of female prisoners in the entire colony of camps. “*They took us [...] to women’s camp A,*” she recounts, saying that “*here we had the first foresight and premonition of what was waiting [for us].*” They were “*hungry, thirsty, terrified [...] in short, we suffered terribly. I [...] was constantly hungry, my stomach was constantly aching, [...] thirsty [...].*”¹⁵⁶ Liza Berger, too, remembers being given scraps of food, a piece of bread and “*a tin plate of some kind of soup,*” and adds that the bunks in her barracks looked like “*racks.*”¹⁵⁷

Just as a majority of others, both Erika and Liza also remember the roll calls or “*appels*”¹⁵⁸ that would go on forever, the beatings and hard labour. Šarika Horvat recounts that “*old prisoners took a lot more beating than children.*”¹⁵⁹ She

156 From the narrative account of Erika Fürst.

157 From the narrative account of Liza Berger.

158 Standing for long hours, day after day, they could read the enormous posters with instructions for survival stating: “There is only one road to freedom and its milestones are Obedience, Diligence, Honesty, Order, Cleanliness, Temperance, Truth, Sacrifice and Love of One’s Country.” (*Es gibt nur eine Weg zur Freiheit! Seine Meilensteine heißen: Gehorsam, Fleiß, Ehrlichkeit, Ordnung, Sauberkeit, Nüchternheit, Wahrhaftigkeit, Opfersinn und Liebe zum Vaterland!*) See Kraus and Kulka, *Die Todesfabrik*, p. 33.

159 From the narrative account of Šarika Horvat.

also recalls the roll calls (“*they counted us constantly*”) and the poor toilets. Both Šarika and Erika had the most difficulty adjusting to the fact that they “*could not [...] go to the toilet when [...] [they] needed to, but only when [...] [they] were allowed to.*”¹⁶⁰ And even then, “*there was one SS man already making his rounds if you happened to be squatting for extra five minutes.*”¹⁶¹ On top of it all, they shivered with cold in the beginning, “*because it was still freezing there, even in May.*”¹⁶² They were also cold at night. “*It was terribly cold,*” Šarika says. And Erika also cannot forget the bedbugs, which would also ruin their sleep at night. “*In the morning we all had our faces stained with blood. [...] After they moved us to Camp B [...], there were no more bedbugs, but there were lice; only bedbugs are much worse than lice.*”¹⁶³

In the cold and accompanied by bedbugs, they survived the quarantine, which both Erika and Šarika experienced as one of the hardest ordeals, and were then moved or, better, crammed into the already overcrowded barracks. As Kraus and Kulka state, in summer 1944 the barracks designed to hold 500 people were crowded with “no fewer than 1,200 Hungarian women who slept and worked in shifts.”¹⁶⁴

Such were the conditions in which they awaited the autumn, passing their time at the brick road construction site.

“*We went to work every day,*” Erika recounts, repeating several times that she remembers her body being very

“*heavy. They made us hold heavy bricks in our hands. We carried those bricks several kilometres away. The road [...] built with those bricks from Auschwitz still stands today. There is still that brick road in Auschwitz. I did this hard work until autumn...*”¹⁶⁵

She performed this work until early autumn days or until “*all of a sudden*” they were lined up and redistributed. The reason for this was conscription for factory labour and the exclusion of prisoners incapable of performing it. Agents seeking a new labour force recruited only those young and fit, sending the rest back to work in the camp, the hospital, the children’s barracks or the crematorium.¹⁶⁶ According to Erika, the selection for death usually took place during shower time.¹⁶⁷ Then the prisoners were undressed and doctors could examine them more easily. On one such occasion she met “*Mengerle*” for the second time, who separated her from her mother and sister.

“*[O]ne day at the end of September, beginning of October perhaps, we went to that sauna again, as they would say, to take a shower. During the selection we were, of course, ordered to take off*

160 From the narrative account of Erika Fürst.

161 From the narrative account of Šarika Horvat.

162 From the narrative account of Erika Fürst.

163 Ibid.

164 Kraus and Kulka, *Die Todesfabrik*, p. 163

165 From the narrative account of Erika Fürst.

166 On such occasions, female prisoners were completely naked, so that the “*factory owner, who was making the selection, could see how strong we still were, whether we were able to work.*” From the narrative account of Erika Fürst.

167 In this connection, note should be made of the description of the so-called “spring cleaning” ordered, according to Maria Angels Anglada’s novel *The Auschwitz Violin*, by the camp command in early spring 1944, awaiting “other ill-fated prisoners.” See Anglada, *The Auschwitz Violin*, p. 76.

all our clothes, and when Doctor Mengerle came he saw me and pulled me by my ear out of the line.¹⁶⁸ They locked me into some room, a place right behind that door [...] there was a small window and I climbed through [...] and [...] got [back in line] right next to my mother. Mengerle spotted me when he walked past again, he spotted me there and pulled me out by my ear: "Hey, little one, what are you doing here again?" he smiled at me like a weasel and locked me up again. From that room they drove me away, I thought I was going to the crematorium, but they drove me to the children's barracks [that's why] [...] I was certain they were going [...] to the crematorium, my sister, my mother and the others [...]. That was a very difficult moment for me. Then I was left with no one."¹⁶⁹

In reality, neither Erika, nor her mother, nor her sister was sent to the crematorium ... nor was Šarika Horvat, who was even luckier, being sent after one such selection to a "small camp in Germany."¹⁷⁰ Moreover, for a reason unknown to her, there she found herself in the good books of one of the female guards, who later took care of her and thus saved her life:

"The Aufseher, the SS woman ... that woman liked me [...] terrible, of the worst sort [...] [but] she liked me [...] always brought me something, to eat, medications."¹⁷¹

168 Given that she looked like a "withered child," she was convinced that "no one would take her to work." He used similar words to describe her sister, who was older, but nevertheless looked like a "peanut." From the narrative account of Erika Fürst.

169 Ibid.

170 From the narrative account of Šarika Horvat.

171 Ibid.

Tamas B. Schwarz faced similar destiny, after he was gathered "together with a group of younger, taller men" and taken "to Auschwitz, where we were sent to the showers, disinfected and tattooed" and then

"taken to Javischovitz camp [Jawiszowice] near Bžešče, 20 km from Auschwitz. There was a coalmine where older workers worked kneeling. Because of difficult circumstances they dropped dead like flies. Whose with hand injuries were put on a bench, beat up and thrown back into the mine. Many who reported ill to the hospital didn't know it was a gas chamber. Together with other younger prisoners I was working at the surface, collecting coal from the conveyor belt. The dust was so thick I couldn't even see my neighbour. After work, when I already washed myself, Schreiber, who wore a yellow triangle, he was a German criminal, asked my name and how old I was. I said I just turned thirteen today. "Wait," he said and left. He came back with a 3 mm thick slice of dark bread, a sugar cube and a slice of spring onion. [...] The work in the coalmine lasted some seven months. We stayed in wooden barracks, slept on wooden beds, three of us sharing one [...]"¹⁷²

Erika remained in Auschwitz in

"the children's barrack [...] [together with] children from babies to the age of sixteen. The Germans set up the barrack to prove to the International Red Cross that they did not burn all children. And there I couldn't talk to anyone; there were Ukrainian girls, children from all over Europe. I couldn't talk to anyone, because we couldn't understand each other, and we weren't allowed to

172 Zdravec, "Vsak konec je nov začetek," p. 26.

speaking anyway. There were only two sisters from Budapest, both slightly older than me. It was much better for me there, this is why I survived, because there was snow in winter, and we didn't have to stand [outside]. Children were counted in the barrack. Bigger children were sent to a special room every day where we had to sort out wool. People brought all sorts of things to the camp, including heaps of wool. Not in skeins, but wool of various colours, to hide gold in it and maybe some money. Our job was to spin these bales of wool into yarn of various colours. And we happened to find it, us three, the two Hungarian girls and I; we worked in one room and we found one gold ring and a pair of earrings. The older one said: "I'll put this away, because I'm the oldest" [...]"¹⁷³

The disappearance of Erika's young co-workers is another proof that not even children were spared. They, too, had to go to work; they, too, suffered punishment; and they, too, were given downright absurd tasks. In this connection, Erika specifically remembers how they were sometimes forced out into the cold where they had to walk in a circle and sing:

*"[S]ometimes they drove us out into the snow [and] the bigger ones were ordered to stand in a circle and sing a German song. We had to sing very, very loud in that cold, like a merry-go-round; and so we walked in a circle, singing that song..."*¹⁷⁴

"Well, then January was slowly drawing near [...]"¹⁷⁵

... and with it the evacuation of the camp. On 18 January 1945 the Germans started transferring the prisoners to camps in Germany. Most of those who had not frozen to death or fallen under the shots of their guards ended up in Mauthausen, Dachau, Gross-Rosen, Flossenbürg, Ravensbrück, Buchenwald and Bergen-Belsen; about 4,800¹⁷⁶ sick and exhausted women, children and a smaller number of men were left behind in Auschwitz. Now let us take a look at how Erika experienced the preparations for the transfer: "The Germans were already confused," Erika recounts, relating to the preparations for the

"Todesmarsch; it was that death march, the march in which they arranged us all in one column... saying that Auschwitz was going to be bombed, so they said that anyone [who] could stand should get up and leave. I put myself in line as well and left the camp, as the gates were already wide open, and I simply jumped, because the snow was high, I jumped in the snow and hid there. And the others left, with soldiers on either side, soldiers with dogs and guns, of course. I waited for a long time in that snow. By the time the column left, I had already found mother... and I headed for that barrack where my mother was and I lay there on the floor [...] under the bunks [...] [on] the cement [and] hid there. The Germans were still coming back, pulling people from under the bunks. My mother and sister were

173 From the narrative account of Erika Fürst.

174 Ibid.

175 Ibid.

176 According to Hajdinjak's estimates, the number was significantly higher, about 7,500.

in the infirmary, and they were chasing people out, threatening that they would shoot us all. I was hiding there for ten days."¹⁷⁷

... hiding there and taking care of her sick mother and sister, who would surely not have survived without her.

"With [...] my sister and mother being unable to stand on their feet [...] I searched the storage facilities with other prisoners [to see if] the Germans had left anything behind. [...] We collected water from the pool [...] in which the Germans used to bathe during summer [...] I found flour in one corner [...]. I put that flour in my scarf and later made žganci with it. [...] In another storage room [...] I found a metal box [tin] of sour cabbage. It was so big I couldn't lift it, so I simply rolled [it] [...] to our barrack."¹⁷⁸

That tin of pickled cabbage kept all three and a few other female prisoners alive until the arrival of the Russians, who were, as Erika recounts, shocked by the sight they saw on entering the camp:

"They were so shocked to see us, the state we were all in, nothing but skin and bones."¹⁷⁹

177 From the narrative account of Erika Fürst.

178 Ibid.

179 Ibid. According to authoritative estimates, some two million people were murdered in Auschwitz, the vast majority of whom were Jews. According to the estimates of Jaša Romano, most of them came from Poland (about 1,200,000), a little less than half a million from Hungary and "more than 500,000 from other occupied countries in Europe [...] [including] about 20,000 from Yugoslavia." Most of the latter came from present-day Croatia, where Romano also includes the victims from Prekmurje (up to 4,500 from the central part, about 1,500 from Slavonia, about 12,000 from Bačka, Baranja, Medijmurje and Prekmurje, and 300 from Rab and Istria) and approximately 2,000 came from Bosnia. See Jaša Romano, *Jevreji Jugoslavije*, p. 176.

The Russians took them to Auschwitz and settled them in the guards' and soldiers' barracks, where they remained until the beginning of May, and then sent them to Krakow with the "Romanian transport."

And what fate befell the camp prisoners who had been forced on a march towards Germany? In a single word: horrific! They were lined up in a hurry and driven into the January cold. They were forced to take the long march towards Germany partly on foot and partly by train, often in open train cars. Most of them had no extra clothes and food whatsoever. According to the famous graphic novel *Maus* where Art Spiegelman gives an account of his father's story, those who had not been shot on the road, arrived after several hundred kilometres at a small camp at Gross-Rosen in Prussia, where they were herded onto a train heading southwest.

Although from then on they were riding in more or less closed cattle cars, a large part of the passengers did not make it alive until the last station. Some starved to death, others died of thirst. The train would stop only in two cases: to give way to military transports or for the detainees to throw their dead comrades off the train cars. And this is how it continued until they reached their final destination, the Bavarian town of Dachau, where Art's father lived to see the liberation of the camp. But many others, including the father of the Romanian-born writer Elie Wiesel, were too weakened to endure the ordeals of the transport. They were literally decimated by the cold and exhaustion. Both Wiesels ended up in open train cars, at temperatures well under the freezing point.

But we'd best leave it to the author himself to describe the days of agony, from which he remembers two specific things: concern for his survival and for the survival of his weakened father:

"Ten days, ten nights of traveling. [...]"

*One day when we had stopped, a workman took a piece of bread out of his bag and threw it into a wagon. There was a stampede. Dozens of starving men fought each other to the death for a few crumbs. [...] Men threw themselves on top of each other, stamping on each other, tearing at each other, biting each other. [...]."*¹⁸⁰

After ten days they reached their "destination."

*"It was late at night. The guards came to unload [them]. "The dead were abandoned in the train. Only those who could still stand were able to get out. [...] The last day had been the most murderous. A hundred of [them] had got into the wagon. A dozen of [them] got out."*¹⁸¹

Among them were Elie Wiesel and his father. But the joy of having made it through the journey to Buchenwald was short-lived. About a week later, Elie's father died of exhaustion and disease. Elie remembers how "nothing could touch" him "anymore" until the liberation of the camp. He can only remember that he "could not weep," that he "had no more tears."¹⁸²

180 Elie Wiesel, *Night*, Bantam Books, New York, 1982, pp. 84–85.

181 *Ibid.*, p. 86.

182 *Ibid.*, p. 92.

An even worse fate awaited Tamas and his father Josip Schwarz. Tamas only later found out what happened to his father, although they were allegedly on the same transport. According to some witnesses, "he died at a train station in Gleiwitz, when he stepped out of the queue to have some snow to quench his thirst. He was shot dead in the head."¹⁸³ Tamas survived with the help of fellow prisoners, among whom he particularly remembers a diamond dealer from Antwerp, who "offered him a slice of bread" during their ride in open train cars.¹⁸⁴ He experienced the Buchenwald concentration camp as an "especially well-organised camp, where there were mostly political prisoners." This is doubtlessly a consequence of the fact that one internee managed to smuggle him to Yugoslav compatriots "who lived in a so-called commune, sharing everything they had."¹⁸⁵

183 Zadravec, "Vsak konec je nov začetek," p. 27.

184 *Ibid.*, p. 26.

185 *Ibid.*, p. 27.

Back to life...

At about the same time, Erika, her mother and sister were still in Auschwitz, in the warm shelter of the military barracks, and then “*in some school*” in Krakow, where they lived to see the end of the war in Europe.

*“Then [...] my mother decided we’d go home with the Romanian transport [...], there seemed to be a lot of Romanians there, and they were coming to collect their relatives in Krakow. [...] The first transport was [...] Romanian. [...] The journey was long, hard; we rode in open train cars until we reached the Czech border, I think, [...] and then via Prague [...] to Budapest. At the Budapest railway station we were received by people [from] the Jewish community who, again, took us to some school, gave us food [...].”*¹⁸⁶

Whilst in Budapest, they were also offered to migrate to the US for the first time:

*“For people like us, the Jewish community would arrange a journey to America. But my sister and I wouldn’t hear of it, because our father’s last words were: ‘See you back home.’ We firmly believed that our father was waiting for us.”*¹⁸⁷

So instead of setting out for America, they returned to the Budapest railway station and boarded “*some open train car*

*[...] stacked with potatoes, and in that train [...] we then continued our journey to Szombathely, where [...] the Jewish community [...] arranged [...] for us to stay at some gentleman’s house. There we could take a bath, wash and then [...] continue on foot [...] to Körmend.”*¹⁸⁸

From there to Prosenjakovci in Prekmurje, they were frequently stopped by “*the Russians [...] who took us for God knows what,*” and in Prosenjakovci they were received by their father’s acquaintance, who took them to Murska Sobota. There they

*“found everything in shambles. One barn was destroyed, the horse barn; the cellar was destroyed; only the woodshed was left standing. The house was occupied by the partisan army. The flooring was torn out, the electric lines torn out. The partisan army slept on the floor, on hay. They emptied the house immediately. They moved out in two days, but the house was a complete mess, [...] [so] we stayed [...] with some family until the house was whitewashed. My mother got a loan, I can’t imagine on what basis they gave her that loan, and she had the house whitewashed. They installed one light bulb in the kitchen and one in the bedroom and [...] in we moved. [...] We slept on the floor wearing [...] whatever we had worn on our return from the camp. [...] Left with absolutely nothing. [A former] farmhand brought a small pot of lard, our neighbours pitched in a bit of flour, and so, little by little, we returned back to life.”*¹⁸⁹

186 From the narrative account of Erika Fürst.

187 Ibid.

188 Ibid.

189 Ibid.

At about that time and until summer, twenty-five other inhabitants of Murska Sobota and twenty-three Jews from Lendava returned home as well. Together with the survivors from other towns and villages, sixty-five or a little less than 20 per cent of those who had been deported a year before returned to their homes. According to the present data, 387 persons, including Erika's father, died in concentration camps or as a result of forced labour and the death march. In light of the experience of our respondents and based on the known statistics, Auschwitz had the highest death toll. Therefore, after waiting for a while, Erika, her mother and sister began to think that their father and husband might have died there as well, even though the circumstances of his death remained unclear. Such was also the premonition of her mother's sisters, who had stumbled upon him at least once on their return to Birkenau from work at Auschwitz. They said that his feet were "very swollen [...] and covered with blisters,"¹⁹⁰ which was why he must have been sent to the gas chamber sooner or later.

The proverbial German thoroughness, with which the administration kept track of every movement, is also evident from the way they kept daily records of prisoners' journeys to and from work.

Nr. 80

Posten Auschwitz, den

Häflinge

nach

Zweck:

Das Kommando darf die grosse Postenkarte passieren.

übergeben: Uhrzeit: übernommen

|| ||

..... Komp.

zurückgebracht: Uhrzeit: übernommen

|| ||

..... Komp.

Kontrolle:

The form of departures and returns from Auschwitz. Courtesy of Erika Fürst.

Nevertheless, after the war Erika wrote to the "Red Cross in Buchenwald," having "heard some rumours that he died in Buchenwald."¹⁹¹ She clung to the tiniest hope that the rumour was wrong and that her father was recovering there, and this hope was reinforced by having noticed that most survi-

190 Ibid.

191 Ibid.

vors were returning home from other camps. The highest survival rate was, in fact, among those who had been selected for factory labour. After all, she, too, could still clearly remember the selections, during which “*that factory owner*” had walked between the lines of women stripped “*naked*,” pointing: “*this one, this one, this one [...] and then drove them [...] to Germany.*”¹⁹² Her hope was also raised by the experience of her acquaintance, also mentioned several times in our narrative: Šarika Horvat. On the other hand, what had ultimately led her to think that her father could not have survived Auschwitz was her own experience, and she concluded our interview saying that of those who had remained in Auschwitz until the very end, Erika, her mother and sister were most probably the only survivors.

Later it turned out that there were several more survivors, but her observations nevertheless proved to be correct, as there were very few men among the returnees: a good fifth, as statistics suggest. The survival rate for the Jewish community in Prekmurje was higher in women, and even then, a majority of them left Prekmurje soon after the war. Most of them migrated to Palestine and the US, and some moved to other parts of Slovenia. Erika’s sister moved with her husband to Maribor, where she was killed not long afterwards in a freak ironing accident when her dress and the ironing board caught fire...

Luck was kinder to Tamas B. Schwarz, who returned from Buchenwald to Lendava via Subotica and Baja, where he found his maternal relatives:

*“The train stood [at the station] in Baja, [where] I stopped a woman and asked her whether she knew the Revesz family, who were my relatives and with whom I had spent a few vacations. This is how I met my relatives, who convinced me to step off the train and stay in Baja, as no one was waiting for me in Lendava, I was the only surviving member of the family. That was true, for later on I learned how my parents died.”*¹⁹³

But let us go back to May 1945 and take a closer look at how the Fürst family tried to resume as normal a life as possible. Erika recalls how she and her

*“sister returned to school already by the end of May. We took validation exams; first we had some courses, then exams. She also remembers how she would “go to school without stockings [...] the first winter” in a “knee-long” coat. “I had one pair, my uncle gave me one pair of men’s knee socks and some boots [...] my aunt’s. I had two aunts in Martjanci, and people in the countryside would put a lot of things away and then give them back. Unfortunately, this was not possible in Sobota.”*¹⁹⁴

She vividly recalls not being able to concentrate, not being able to remember anything. What she learned in the evening, she had forgotten by the morning. From this it may be presumed that Erika’s subconscious need to forget the past year’s horrors had also begun to eat away at her newly acquired knowledge.

192 Ibid.

193 Zdravec. “Vsak konec je nov začetek,” p. 27.

194 From the narrative account of Erika Fürst.

Time of remembrance

And yet, it is memory that must play the central role in our attempt to reconstruct the fate of the Jewish community in Prekmurje. Not least because the processes that took place in Prekmurje were similar to those in other parts of occupied Europe.

Particular attention should be paid to the phenomenon of Erika's problem memorizing school lessons. Like many before us, we are coming to the conclusion that in the first years after the war, which in most cases turned into two decades, the majority of survivors "resorted" to amnesia. There are several reasons for this, but witnesses most often cite fear that something similar could happen again and a wish that the memory of the terrible ordeal would soon disappear. On the other hand, they soon realised that people would not believe them or they had a very hard time coping with what they were hearing. Or, as Marija Dajč Ebenšpanger puts it:

*"They didn't want to believe, because it wasn't true [...] I told [...] my little grandson [...] when he went to school, second grade [...] he told everything at school [...] and it was quite a sensation [...] when those educators, teachers saw me, they didn't know what to do with me and they went, this is your Bojan, it's just horrible what he was saying."*¹⁹⁵

Gathering from survivors' testimonies, the share of those who resorted to hatred was relatively small. One of them is

our Liza Berger, who confided in her interviewer from the Shoah Foundation that she not only hated the Germans but everything that is German.¹⁹⁶

This is also the reason why she, and many others, found it easier to move to Israel, which, in the words of the Nobel Prize Laureate Saul Bellow, to some extent "restored the lost respect of the Jews" or "removed the curse of the Holocaust."¹⁹⁷ Some decided to leave because they had lost their partner or found themselves without any relative at all. Such feelings can partly be relived by listening to the narrative of Marija Dajč Ebenšpanger, whose husband never returned and who recalls how she was constantly complaining about something: *"Everything got on my nerves. I was never satisfied with anything, I always wanted something else, but it never happened. My husband didn't come back; that was the biggest disaster, that I was left all alone, with no one there and so..."*¹⁹⁸

However, not everyone decided to set out for Palestine – or, since 1948, Israel. A great many opted for the US, Great Britain, even Australia. Gathering from the data collected by Marjan

196 "[...] I absolutely hate them, I absolutely hate [...] everything German [...]" From the narrative account of Liza Berger.

197 Saul Bellow, "A Jewish Writer in America – II," *The New York Review of Books*, November 10–23, 2011, p. 28. The quote is taken from Bellow's lecture, originally given in 1988 but only recently published for the first time. Even after the war, one can still notice a deeply anchored belief in Bellow that "viciousness against Jews will never end," which is why "there is no solution to the Jewish problem." Especially in Europe, where "the Jew was always a visitor," and Jews in general "the spiritual aborigines of the modern world" (p. 29).

198 From the narrative account of Marija Dajč Ebenšpanger.

195 From the narrative account of Marija Dajč Ebenšpanger.

Toš, most of the two-thirds that left Prekmurje forever after 1945 emigrated to the newly established state of Israel. In this light, the devastation of the Jewish community in northeastern Slovenia was nearly complete. After more than 85 per cent had been killed during the war, another 10 per cent emigrated after the war was over. In Murska Sobota and Lendava there were not even enough Jews left to reconstruct the religious community.

This aspect of the destruction of the Prekmurje Jewish community can also be illustrated by Tamas B. Schwarz's biography; after he arrived in Israel, he changed his name to Yoel Shachar and created a family.

*"[...] in Baja with my relatives [...] I went to high school for two years. Then I moved to Budapest and participated in a youth Zionist camp. After living in Hungary, Austria and France I left for Israel in 1950 and changed my name in 1953. Then it was no longer German. Soon after arrival I co-founded the Dir kibbutz in the Negev desert, where I spent several years with my family."*¹⁹⁹

Physical extermination was followed in Slovenia by the nationalisation of Jewish property. As Marjan Toš puts it,

"Jewish property [...] was subjected to the same process of confiscation and nationalisation as that of other well-to-do

citizens. Confiscation was not based on nationality, religion or race, but primarily on class. Therefore, it is little wonder that many Jews were proclaimed German nationals or even members of the Kulturbund and expropriated on the basis of the decree issued by the AVNOJ Presidency of 21 November 1944 after the transfer of the enemy's property into the property of the state."²⁰⁰

In most of his contributions, Toš clearly demonstrates the absurdity of the situation or the "paradox" of the process that formally transformed victims into perpetrators due to their pre-war national affiliation and that led to their ultimate expropriation. Even more striking is the negligence of judicial courts that "overlooked" the fact that a majority of the Jews were indeed "Yugoslav citizens of Slovenian nationality, Jewish religion" or, as Erika Fürst also points out, that their "*documents, [...] birth certificates etcetera [...] stated*" that they "*were Slovenes*." Erika also maintains that "*there wasn't a single family in Prekmurje that did not speak Slovene*."²⁰¹

No less cynical was the conduct of neutral Switzerland and its banks in response to a large number of returnees claiming assets that their closest relatives had deposited there before the war. One of them was Lili Hajmer Kožič, who wrote to the Schweizer Bank in Zurich, which told her

199 Zadravec, "Vsak konec je nov začetek," p. 27. In the concluding part of the text written on the basis of an interview with Tamas Berthold Schwarz, renamed Yoel Shachar, Zadravec says Yoel had quite some trouble sorting out his identity, because during the war he was left without his original papers. According to the "Lendava registry [...]" he was considered "dead." After he proved that he was very much alive, he was in for a "long litigation," which reconstituted his family villa and a part of family factory. He is married to a Hungarian Jew, Rachel and they live in Herzliya near Tel Aviv. Ibid.

200 Toš, "Vrnilo se jih je samo 65," *7 dni*, a weekly supplement to the daily *Večer*, 21 April 2010, p. 43.

201 From the narrative account of Erika Fürst. Mrs. Fürst returned to the issue of national affiliation when asked why she had stayed, why she had not emigrated as well, to which she responded briefly and decisively that she "*loved being [...] a Slovene [and] a native of Prekmurje*."

to send them a “code.” As she did not have it, she never received any response from Switzerland again:

*“And they replied, saying it’s possible. But you must send the code that was given to your relatives. How was I supposed to find any code? Then I wrote to them again if they could try to check the files and see if they kept anything from anyone, not just my relatives, under the name Evgen and Arnold Hajmer, Murska Sobota, Yugoslavia. I never received another word from them.”*²⁰²

Situations of this kind contributed to the extremely poor memory of the Jewish victims during the first decade after the war. People during the post-war reconstruction all over Europe would encounter these memories only on rare occasions and to a limited extent until the late 1960s. And Prekmurje was no exception... One of the first articles to appear in the *Obmurski tednik*, for instance, was a short article by Jože Velnar reporting that “the Jews from Sobota, too” were driven to concentration camps. Apart from being cursory, the article also provided a grossly incorrect estimate (117) of the Holocaust victims. On the other hand, the author devoted much attention to Ali Kardoš, one of the main instigators of the resistance movement in the province.

Unless they were presented in the role of revolutionaries, there appeared to be little room for individual Jews and their personal stories. Thus, in its continuation, Velnar’s article revealed that the revolutionary Kardoš was also a good poet and an excellent translator of the Hungarian poet Sándor Petőfi,

202 From the narrative account of Lili Hajmer Kožič.

and it provided fairly accurate portrayals of all other participants of the national liberation struggle. Apart from Ali Kardoš, there were also Eugen Kardoš, Koloman Hajmer, Ferit Hiršl, Kolman Hiršl, the Fürst brothers, Ignac Boroš and Zoltan Boroš from the Murska Sobota area, and Ernest Balkany, Desider Majer, Beno Teichman, Zoltan Strasser, and Stjepan Blum from Lendava. Nearly every one of them joined the resistance movement in 1941 and most of them died that year or the following year while serving in partisan units in Croatia or ended up in concentration or forced labour camps.²⁰³

If Ali Kardoš is considered to have been an idealist, a dreamer without a proper profession – in a nutshell, a rebellious intellectual – the same can by no means be said of the brewer Majer, the bookseller Balkany and the lawyers Teichmann and Strasser. Nor can it be said of nearly one hundred merchants, eight public officials, a photographer, a tailor, a doctor, a music professor, a surveyor, as well as barbers, printers and transporters who took no part in the resistance movement but nevertheless met the same fate. In other words: if we add their wives and more than sixty children and adolescents, it becomes clear that the province lost a major part of its elite. A more thorough analysis of the professional structure of the Holocaust victims in Prekmurje shows that, much as in other parts of Central and Eastern Europe, the genocide of Jews robbed the province of its economic, cultural and social elite.

203 For more on this, see Jaša Romano, *Jevreji Jugoslavije*, p. 263, and Ferdo Godina, *Prekmurje 1941–1945, Pomurska založba, Murska Sobota, 1967*, p. 85.



Dr. Aleksander Vály, a lawyer from Murska Sobota, during surveys of nationalised land in 1932 or 1933. According to Hajdinjak's findings, he died in Flossenbürg concentration camp. His wife, who lived to see the liberation in Bergen-Belsen, where she had been sent via Dachau, survived the war, as did their son, who had set out for the US in the 1930s to study. Courtesy of Julijana Zrim.

Regrettably, these statistics fail to provide the full picture of the situation of female entrepreneurs and merchants. Although married women usually quit regular work at their store, storage house, crafts workshop, tavern or butcher

shop, their contribution to family life was far from negligible. The same statistics likewise provide no information regarding work performed by unmarried women who, as exemplified by the family of Erika Fürst, hence the Hirschl family, assisted in family stores. The statistics fail to show a significant share of women who never married because of the prejudice of their community or the orthodox views of their fathers and thus continued working in various family-run establishments. They are hidden in the largest group (131) of “homemakers” or “housewives,” some of whom were surely also merchants and artisans.

Unfortunately, such data fail to provide a sound basis for an accurate reconstruction of ownership relations, but it is possible to confirm the general conclusion that a large majority of stores, taverns and butcher shops were in the possession of Jewish families. As the statistics of the Belgrade-based Union of Jewish Communities of Yugoslavia does not contain categories such as “land owner,” “factory owner,” “company or firm owner” and so forth, the latter should be sought under the category “merchant.” And all of them disappeared for good in the warm months of 1944... Just as all of them still remain almost completely unnoticed in the local memorial landscape.

Another compelling manifestation of the local authorities' wartime and post-war attitude towards the Jews in Prekmurje was the destruction of the synagogue in Murska Sobota. In mid-1949, it was purchased for 500,000 dinars by the City People's Council of Murska Sobota, which five years later decided to demolish it. The synagogue in Lend-

ava found itself in a more fortunate position: ever since its restoration in the 1990s it has served as a performance area.

According to the research of Bojan Zadavec,²⁰⁴ unquestionably the greatest authority on the Jewish community in Beltinci, the synagogue in Beltinci – a simple family house converted to a synagogue in 1859 – met the same fate as the local Jewish cemetery. After the last burial, that of the Jew Jan Ebenšpanger, took place there in 1943, “the Jewish cemetery in Beltinci was razed to the ground. Not a single monument has been preserved.”²⁰⁵

Prospects were slightly better for the significantly bigger Jewish cemetery in Murska Sobota, which was moved upon prior consent of the representatives of the Union of Jewish Communities of Yugoslavia.²⁰⁶ Yet even in this case, only a few monuments have been preserved. Of approximately sixty-five gravestones that had been left untouched at the end of the war, only a few were transferred to the memorial park at the end of the 1970s with the official explanation that it was a memorial on the site of “the Jewish cemetery to commemorate Jewish victims of Fascism and Nazism.”²⁰⁷



Memorial park in Murska Sobota stands where once was city's Jewish cemetery. Photo: Marko Zaplatil.

Therefore, the best preserved part of the Jewish cultural heritage in Prekmurje is still to be found in the Jewish cemetery in Dolga vas near Lendava, where 191 gravestones²⁰⁸ and the central monument commemorating the “victims of Fascism” hide in the cypress-shaded area of over two thousand square meters. The central monument honouring the memory of 387 Jewish victims of the genocide was erected in 1947 by a group of four Auschwitz survivors, among them also Messrs. Weiss and Blau from Lendava and their comrade Fürst from Murska Sobota. The cemetery is di-

204 Zadavec, “Židje v Beltincih,” manuscript, Beltinci 2006. The author, one of the most prolific writers of articles on the Jews in the local press, also does research on the past of the former Jewish communities in Murska Sobota, Lendava and Beltinci. His articles appear above all in *Vestnik*. Zadavec also maintains contacts with the Prekmurje Jews in Israel and the US.

205 Ibid. See also Toš, *Zgodovinski spomin*, p. 130.

206 Savez jevrejskih opština Jugoslavije, Beograd. Its main office is at the current Ulica kralja Petra 71a, alongside the Jewish Historical Museum, which also keeps a certain amount of materials relating to Slovenian Jews. We owe this piece of information to Marjan Toš.

207 Toš, *Zgodovinski spomin*, p. 130.

208 Various sources indicate different numbers of gravestones, namely: 128 (in Gašpar and Lazar, *Židje v Lendavi*, 1997), 176 (in Dolga vas pri Lendavi, Judovsko pokopališče, available at: http://www.slovenia.info/?kul_zgod_znamenitosti=6243&lng=1), and 181 (a project assignment of the third year pupils of Grammar School Lendava in 2008/2009 entitled *The Holocaust – An Inventory of Memorials in the Jewish Cemetery in Dolga vas*).

vided into three sections, still showing clear traces of the former arrangement.²⁰⁹ The cemetery can be entered only through a small building reminiscent of a Christian mortuary chapel with two memorial plaques on its walls. One bears the inscription: “In memory of those buried in the Beltinci cemetery.” The other, older one bears the date of the construction of the mortuary. The inscription reads 1905, the year in which the Chevra (religious benefit society) was led by Jakab Schwarz.

Inscriptions of names and words of farewell appearing on concrete, stone and a few marble gravestones are mostly in Hungarian, followed by Hebrew and Slovene, and seldom in German. Hungarian inscriptions are written in compliance with Hungarian orthography; hence, the last name precedes the first name, and a married woman buried beside her husband is identified as the wife, e.g. wife of Mr. Wortmann or Wortmann Benőne szül. The dates are similar, with the month preceding the day. Most gravestone inscriptions contain the date of birth and death, and a few also indicate the deceased’s age, e.g. élt 69 évet (lived for 69 years). Several gravestones bear inscriptions with the names of those who died in concentration camps, primarily Auschwitz, also spelled as “Ausvic” or “Aušvic.”

Like several monuments at the Žale central cemetery in Ljubljana, a few monuments in the cemetery in Dolga vas have suffered minor desecration. Two or three monuments

in the central section still show the traces of red paint. Authorities on this kind of desecration attribute such acts to anti-Semitism without Jews, a form of anti-Semitism typical of the Central European area thoroughly discussed by this author and Irena Šumi in the twelfth volume of the series *Jews and Slavs*.²¹⁰ So far, it has been established only that the desecration took place in October 1988, that the report was filed by one injured party, that the perpetrators remain unknown and that therefore no proceedings have ever been instituted.²¹¹

Old-style anti-Semitism persists and is joined by new forms of anti-Semitism. One of the causes of this is the image of Jews and Judaism in Slovenian literature. We shall take particular interest in the work of the writer Miško Kranjec, a native of Prekmurje, in which the Jews are portrayed as exploiters of the poor inhabitants of Prekmurje. A Jew most often appears in the role of a merchant who swindles and steals, not because he has a bad character as an individual, but because he is a Jew.²¹² In short, for Kranjec, being a “Jew” defined a person, so that in his essays

210 Wolf Moskovich, Oto Luthar, Irena Šumi, *Jews and Slavs. Jews and Anti-Semitism in the Balkans*, Jerusalem, Ljubljana 2004.

211 Klauđija Sedar from the Milko Kos Historical Institute at ZRC SAZU enquired about the background of the desecration at the Lendava police station and the district court in Murska Sobota.

212 See also Miha Kovač, “O Mišku Kranjcu, komunistični partiji, razrednem redukcionizmu in nacionalsocialistični ideologiji,” in: *Problemi*, vol. 25, no. 277, Ljubljana 1987, pp. 35–40. The author presents the results of the analysis of *Tri novele* [*Three Short Stories*] in a lengthy discussion, concluding that Kranjec’s anti-Semitism finds its fullest expression in the aforementioned short story *Režanja na svojem*.

209 A detailed virtual cemetery is available at <http://www.arzenal.si/zidovski-spomeniki/spomeniki>.

several literary historians and social scientists detect unmistakable traces of the local anti-Semitism of the second half of the 19th century.

This was, on the one hand, an accentuated form of anti-Semitism pursued by high representatives of the Roman Catholic Church and a form of populist hatred towards the Jews; on the other, both fed on uncritical espousal of prejudice from other parts of the monarchy, primarily in Vienna. The most famous ecclesiastical dignitaries to hold open anti-Semitic views were Bishop Anton Mahnič and Janez Evangelist Krek. The former called for a war against Judaism²¹³ and the latter endeavoured to persuade believers that the Jews were transmitters of the most harmful influences.

The harmful influences Krek meant were, first and foremost, “individualism,” “liberalism” and “socialism.” He portrayed Jews as lazy, arrogant and vulgar, and etched his name in the history of local anti-Semitism with the assertion that in an environment where Jews held power Christian peoples were doomed to death.²¹⁴

Militant anti-Semitism reached its peak during World War II, with Lambert Ehrlich embodying the viewpoints of extremely conservative political Catholicism and campaigning against “Jewish Satanism,” which he maintained

was trying to get its hands on other peoples’ national treasures.²¹⁵

However, the anti-Semitism of the mid-20th century, including its covert form after World War II, can be detected not only in so-called high literature, but also in a variety of daily life situations: from newspaper caricatures to ironic and downright racist remarks constantly being made to the survivors after the end of the war. The first major change occurred no earlier than the last decade, when the Jews were discovered by the second and third Slovenian post-war generation, who routinely refer to *cigani* (Gypsies) as *Romi* (Roma) and to *Židi* (now considered a pejorative term) as *Judi* (Jews). All credit for this discovery goes to the teachers and professors who confronted their pupils with the developments in Prekmurje by using the usual narratives about the Holocaust and helped them gain insight into the Jewish memorial landscape with the

213 Anton Mahnič, *Rimski katalik*, p. 340. Here quoted from Egon Pelikan, “Antisemitismus ohne Juden in Slowenien,” in: Wolfgang Benz, *Jahrbuch für Antisemitismusforschung* 15, Metropol-Verlag, Berlin, 2006.

214 Janez Evangelist Krek, *Socializem*, Ljubljana, Slovenian Cultural Economic Union, 1901. Here quoted from Egon Pelikan, “Antisemitismus ohne Juden in Slowenien,” p. ...

215 *Stráža v viharju*, 1 October 1936. Here quoted from Egon Pelikan, “Antisemitismus ohne Juden in Slowenien.” Ehrlich’s militant anti-Semitism fed, on the one hand, on the anti-Semitic tradition of the Slovenian Roman Catholic Church, and on the other, on the reactions the Roman Catholic Church provoked in the popular media. Four Slovenian priests and teachers published texts in the calendar of the St. Hermagoras Society founded in Klagenfurt in the mid-20th century. Especially in the last quarter of the century, annual publications commonly known as “Mohorjana,” published assertions that “no one wants to have anything to do with the Jews,” and “wherever a Jew settles down, the entire village is stricken by poverty.” (See also the article by Rolanda Fugger Germadnik, “Podoba Juda v mohorjani v drugi polovici 19. stoletja,” in: *Zgodovina za vse – vse za zgodovino*, vol. XVII, 2010, no. 1, p. 23). The most anti-Semitic are the descriptions of the trial against Dreyfus. The authors of articles on this subject are all convinced that the “Jews [...] used all their power and money to demonstrate his innocence.” Ibid.

aid of books and newspapers. Thus, the pupils of the Lendava Grammar School combed through the Jewish cemetery in Dolga vas and located a few more gravestones, and the pupils of the Elementary School III in Murska Sobota compiled an interesting e-book titled *Jews in Prekmurje*.²¹⁶ Activities such as locating overgrown gravestones and compiling e-books take pupils far beyond the usual essay writing. Consistently making discoveries in the forgotten cemetery and carefully thinking out the structure of a text makes it clear to pupils from the beginning that the Jews are an integral “*part of Slovenian history*.” Furthermore, under the leadership of their seven tutors, the pupils were able to read through all the relevant literature and do a thorough search for the latest data on the Internet. Then they reconstructed the prehistory and history of local anti-Semitism with astonishing accuracy and provided the latest data on the time and scope of deportation, as well as on the growing number of Jews after 1990. They also paid a visit to several concentrations camp survivors and thus learned first-hand about the life of the Jews during the war (“*When asked whether she could feel any sense of animosity towards the Jews before the war, Elizabeta said, yes, especially from non-Jewish merchants, who were envious of their suc-*

cesses.”) and about the conditions in concentration camps (“*Every morning they were ordered to strip naked and stand in a cold pond. Water reached up to their mouths. This was happening at the time of year when water was already beginning to freeze.*”). With the added explanation of basic terms, e.g. what is a synagogue, and interesting graphic materials produced on the basis of photographs taken by the pupils, we can observe how the completely obscured image of the Jews and their culture slowly begins to take shape again. From another vantage point, this work also shows just how deeply the memory of local anti-Semitism and its consequences has been suppressed.

216 The e-book *Jews in Prekmurje* was produced within the framework of the call for project proposals issued by the Ministry of Education and Sport, “Make your hand into a fist,” to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the uprising against the occupation and the 20th anniversary of the independent state of Slovenia. With the aid of the computer scientist and librarian, the teachers of English, Slovene and history concluded that the pupils took the greatest interest in the fate of the Jews in Prekmurje.

IN PLACE OF AN EPILOGUE

For this reason and especially given that the Jewish past of Prekmurje was not brought to light until just before the turn of the millennium, which means that there is still plenty of research to be done in this field, I shall not offer here the usual conclusion, but a selection of open questions and one of the saddest photographs in the history of Prekmurje.

Let us begin with the photograph:



Group photo of returnees from the concentration camps across Europe in the Vály's villa garden, 1945. Courtesy of Erika Fürst.

It shows a group of sixteen Jewish survivors in the company of their friends and acquaintances, mostly former co-workers. This group makes up a little less than one-third of

all survivors. Owing to slow recuperation in various collection camps, many did not return until later, whereas the photograph in the courtyard of Aleksander Vály's villa was already taken in summer 1945. For a while, the villa housed a soup kitchen for survivors returning from concentration camps and other war victims. Another thing that makes this photograph so special is that it is a very rare document of the time immediately after the war. The survivors' serious, almost grim faces, only now and then touched by the shadow of a smile, reveal not only their physical condition but also their emotional and psychological state, reflected in their bitter sadness. The latter is most vividly expressed on the face of Liza Berger in the centre of the photograph, a face that simultaneously displays a sense of presence and absence and that covers the hint of a smile with a distrustful stare beyond the camera.

The face of Liza Berger provides us with the best possible basis for the conclusion that, even after the discovery of the Holocaust, its central victims largely remained invisible and voiceless.²¹⁷ Omer Bartov, a Professor at Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island, maintains that until a systematic collection of testimonies began in the late 1980s, scholars devoted most of their attention to Nazi ideology, the relationship between capitalism and communism and potential responsibility of either of them for the outbreak of the war, as well as to the definition of

217 Omer Bartov, "The Holocaust as 'Leitmotif' of the Twentieth Century," *Zeitgeschichte*, vol. 31, no. 5, September/October, Studien-Verlag, Innsbruck 2004, p. 316.

the term genocide,²¹⁸ while disregarding the victims and their suffering.

To a certain extent, this was caused by the behaviour of the returnees themselves, who were often so traumatised that they could not or would not speak about the conditions in concentration camps. Part of the blame most certainly lies with the people from their home environments or the environments where they settled. On the one hand, they would not or could not believe that such horrors could have occurred and, on the other, they began to draw more or less inappropriate comparisons with their own suffering. A similar inclination may be found among Slovenian revisionists, who use the terminology of the Holocaust – genocide, killing fields – to describe the fate of the Home Guards who died in post-war killings.

Illuminating here is the *Question of German Guilt*, a book by the German philosopher Karl Jaspers, who wrote twenty years after the war that all Germans must admit their guilt. By this he meant not only those criminally and politically responsible, but also those guilty morally and metaphysically. Jaspers wrote, “It is never simply true that ‘orders are orders’),”²¹⁹ i.e. the question is always whether someone did everything possible to prevent a crime.

This is one of the reasons why the Slovenes should be more eager to follow similar examples from other parts of

Europe, for example the Netherlands and the Scandinavian countries, most notably Norway with the recently established special Centre for the Study of the Holocaust and Religious Minorities, whose central museum exhibition focuses on the deportation and destruction of the Jewish community in Norway. The centre is housed in a huge bourgeois villa, the wartime residence of Vidkun Quisling, the Norwegian collaborationist leader. The Norwegian government donated the villa for this purpose in 1999.

The Norwegian example is interesting for Slovenia or, more specifically, Prekmurje for several reasons. Firstly, because of the number of victims. In October and November 1942 and March 1943, 767 or one-third of all the Jews in Norway were deported from the country. Most of them, like most of the Jews from Prekmurje, were murdered in Auschwitz, and just as in Murska Sobota, Lendava and other places in Prekmurje, the first deportations from Oslo and other Norwegian cities were carried out with the assistance of the local police. Not only that, in Oslo even local taxi drivers offered to contribute their share and drove the deportees to the port free of charge. At this point the similarities between Prekmurje and Oslo end. In 1996 the Norwegian government decided to set aside two-thirds of the compensation for the victims to set up a special foundation for Holocaust studies. That is why the so-called Villa Grande houses not only the aforementioned exhibition, but also a research centre with its own special library and additional premises, including a small café. Of even greater consequence is the ambition of the Norwegian authorities to “de-

218 Raphael Lemkin is said to have coined this term, which was established after 1948 on the basis of a Resolution of the United Nations or, rather, during the Nuremberg trials against Nazi war criminals.

219 Karl Jaspers, *The Question of German Guilt*, Fordham University Press, New York, 2001, p. 25–26.

contaminate” the centre of Norwegian collaboration precisely by preserving the memory of its victims. What truly speaks volumes about the strong opposition to any attempt to revive the tradition of Norwegian National Socialism under Halldis Neegaard Østbye and Vidkun Quisling is the popular renaming of the centre as the House of Shame.

In Prekmurje or, rather, for Prekmurje, a similar task is presently being performed by the Maribor Synagogue and a few individuals from other institutions, within the framework of minor and periodic projects. Their work is sometimes the target of vicious attacks by the last generations of National Socialists and Neo-Nazis. Some individuals comment on newspaper articles discussing the Jewish past with assertions that the “Holocaust never happened,” that the “Jews are the most exploitative nation, which seeks to bring all other nations under its dominion,” that the Germans did not “attack the Jews” but “the other way around,” or those who regard the function of the director of the synagogue as “flogging the Holocaust to death.” If we also add the common comparison of the Holocaust to current events in Gaza and Israel in general, or the occasional graffiti on the façade of the synagogue centre and the vandalising of signposts leading to it, we are presented with a classic example of anti-Semitism without Jews. The consequence of such an attitude is also an exceedingly bare memorial landscape. Aside from the Jewish cemetery in Dolga vas, the synagogue in Lendava and the decayed cemetery in Murska Sobota with a handful of tombstones standing as witnesses to its former existence, the memory of the fate that befell the Jews of

Prekmurje and Styria is kept alive only by *Stolpersteine*, or “stumbling blocks,”²²⁰ in Maribor and a monument in front of the Murska Sobota railway station. It is known to the local inhabitants as *The Forgotten Suitcase*.

220 On the initiative of the Public Library of Maribor, the First Grammar School Maribor, the Maribor Synagogue and the Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts, the conceptual director of the project *Stolpersteine* (cobblestone memorials), Gunter Demnig, installed the first twelve *Stolpersteine* in mid-July 2012. These are the first Slovenian “stumbling blocks” among the altogether 35,000 installed by Demnig in collaboration with local initiators since 1994 in “750 places from Belgium to Ukraine.” See Boris Hajdinjak, “In vendar so Židi bili,” *V soboto, Večer*, 14 July 2012, p. 24.

APPENDIX

Lexicon of anti-Semitism, Nazism and the Holocaust²²¹

Final solution, literally “the final solution to the Jewish question,” was the term used by the National Socialists for the persecution and killing of Jews in Germany and all European territories occupied by the German army and placed under the authority of the German Reich.

Adolf Hitler already made his plan to annihilate the Jews publicly known in his speech to the Reichstag on 30 January 1939: “If the international Jewish financiers in and outside Europe should succeed in plunging the nations once more into a world war, then the result will not be the Bolshevisation of the earth, and thus the victory of Jewry, but the annihilation of the Jewish race in Europe!”

The formulation “final solution to the Jewish question” was first used 12 March 1941 by Adolf Eichmann, Head of the Department for Jewish Affairs of the Reich Main Security Office, best known by its original name, *Reichssicherheitshauptamt*, or the abbreviation RSHA Referat IV B 4, and in an order issued on 29 May 1941 by the RSHA to the Gestapo and SD divisions as an instruction for the “future final solution to the Jewish question.” Just to mention in passing, Boris Hajdinjak has already stated in a number of his newspaper

articles and papers that this notorious criminal also made at least one visit to Maribor, in spring 1941.

By that date, thousands of Jews in Poland had been murdered in mass executions carried out by special SS squads; the first Polish Jews were deported to ghettos and concentration camps. From 22 June 1941 onwards, German military units entering the Soviet Union were followed by special squads with the task of carrying out the “full-scale extermination of Jews.”

On 31 July 1941, Hermann Göring issued a written order to the Chief of Security Police and SD and Head of the Reich Main Security Office, Reinhard Heydrich, to undertake meticulous preparations for the mass murder: “I further commission you to submit to my office in the near future an overall plan that shows the preliminary organisational, practical and material measures requisite for the implementation of the projected final solution of the Jewish question.” The call for a large-scale organisation of the “final solution to the Jewish question” was heeded on 20 January 1942 at a conference held in Berlin’s picturesque suburbs on the shores of the Wannsee Lake attended by all relevant offices and ministries.

In September 1941 – four months before the Wannsee Conference – the first gassing experiments were carried out in Auschwitz. In October 1941, the first order was issued for the deportation of Jews from the German Reich. On 23 October, Jews were prohibited from emigrating. In December 1941, the first mass murder took place in the Polish extermination camp Chelmno using transportable gas chambers fed with engine exhaust fumes.

221 Partly taken from Hilde Kammer, Elisabeth Bartsch, *Jugendlexikon. Politik*, Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag, Hamburg 2006.

The aim of the Wannsee Conference was therefore not to endorse mass murder but to ensure the coordination of measures already being executed and to draw up plans for future measures.

Command over the systematic implementation of the final solution was taken by the Reich Main Security Office, the most powerful organisation in the domain of the Reichsführer-SS and Chief of German Police.

From 1942 onwards, Jews from all territories under National Socialist rule were transported en masse to concentration and extermination camps. In concentration camps they were used as labour until they died of exhaustion, torture and the consequences of medical experiments. In extermination camps they were killed in gas chambers and mass executions and their bodies were then burnt in camp crematoria or buried in mass graves.

The words of the Governor General of Poland, Hans Frank, uttered on 16 December 1941 soon became brutal reality: “We will have pity only for the German people and for nobody else in the world. [...] And what should be done with the Jews? [...] We must destroy the Jews wherever we find them.”

According to studies drawing almost exclusively on SS documents, European countries estimate approximately five million Jews among the victims of the final solution.

Blood Protection Law was the term denoting the “Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honour” passed by the Reichstag on 15 September 1935 at the annual NSDAP rally in Nuremberg. The law prohibited marriages and extramarital sexual intercourse between Jews and non-

Jews. Combined with the Reich Citizenship Law, which was adopted on the same day, the Blood Protection Law formed part of National Socialist Nuremberg race laws also known as the Nuremberg Laws.

The preamble of the Blood Protection Law stated: “Entirely convinced that the purity of German blood is essential to the further existence of the German people, and inspired by the uncompromising determination to safeguard the future of the German nation, the Reichstag has unanimously resolved upon the following law.”

The first paragraph of the Blood Protection Law stipulated: “Marriages between Jews and citizens of German or kindred blood are forbidden.” The second paragraph stated that “[s]exual relations outside marriage between Jews and nationals of German or kindred blood” were forbidden.

Violations were punished with imprisonment.

The formulations “purity of German blood” and “of German or kindred blood” were concepts taken from the National Socialist “race science,” which divided people into superior and inferior races, with blood as the carrier of racial features. Germans considered as kindred “essentially all European peoples [...] without any admixture of foreign blood.”

The definition of a Jew was not contained in the Blood Protection Law, but was added in the First Implementation Decree to the Reich Citizenship Law of 14 November 1935 classifying as “a Jew anyone who descended from at least three racially full Jewish grandparents [...] Grandparents shall be forthwith regarded as full Jews if they belonged to a Jewish religious community.”

The last sentence clearly shows that the National Socialists were unable to derive the definition of a Jew solely from their racial doctrine. Rather, they sought to demonstrate the inferiority of their race on the basis of their belonging to a religious community.

The First Implementation Decree to the Blood Protection Law of 14 November 1935 stipulated that marriages between “citizens of German or kindred blood” and “Jewish Mischlinge (crossbreeds)” must be approved by the Reich Minister of Interior and Deputy Führer. The classification “Jewish Mischling” – again, according to the provisions of the First Implementation Decree to the Reich Citizenship Law – applied to persons with two Jewish grandparents, designated as “Mischling of the first degree” in official language, or “half-Jews”; “Jewish Mischlinge” with only one Jewish grandparent were classified “Mischling of the second degree.” “Mischlinge of the second degree” were to be treated as people “of German blood.” The decree prohibited them from marrying Jews.

The sixth paragraph of the First Implementation Decree to the Blood Protection Law further restricted marriage, so as to allow its interpretation beyond the wording of the law: “Marriage is also prohibited if offspring from such a union would endanger the purity of German blood.” The provision thus applied also to marriages between Germans and Sinti and Roma (Gypsies) or Negroes.

The Blood Protection Law contained two additional prohibitions: Jews were forbidden to display the Reich flag and to employ non-Jewish servants in their households.

Nuremberg Laws. This term is used throughout the world in reference to two notorious laws that were announced on 15 September 1935 during the NSDAP rally in Nuremberg. The Reich Citizenship Law impinged on the rights of all German citizens of Jewish faith or all German citizens with two grandparents of Jewish faith. “The Law on the Protection of German Blood and German Honour,” also referred to as the Blood Protection Law, forbade and punished marriages between non-Jews and Jews. The Nuremberg Laws constituted the legal basis for the persecution of Jews, which had already begun in 1933 with the National Socialists’ rise to power.

The National Socialists referred to the Reich Citizenship Law and the Blood Protection Law as the “Nuremberg Race Laws”: “The Nuremberg Race Laws are the cornerstone of German race legislation. As regards the constitutional and hereditary biological aspect of the race issue, they will give racial strength to the German people and educate a ‘Germanic tribe of German nationality’ that shall preserve its kind by protecting it from mixing with alien races.”

The Nuremberg Laws have become the global symbol of National Socialist contempt for humanity. They set the foundation of the most atrocious persecution in the history of mankind, which drove millions of Jews into endless suffering and death.

The NSDAP rally of 1935 took place under the cynical slogan “the Rally of Freedom.” The Reichstag – having been degraded to an institution of acclamation without any legislative power after the adoption of Enabling Act of 24 March 1933 – was summoned to Nuremberg with the sole purpose of approving the law.

The Third Nuremberg Law, i.e. the Reich Flag Law, determined black, red and white to be the official colours of the German Reich and the swastika flag to be the national flag of the German Reich.

Jews not wanted and “Die, Jew!” were the two most frequent slogans of National Socialist propaganda, whose primary aim from the very beginning was to discriminate, humiliate and ostracise Jews. The National Socialists used every means at their disposal to indoctrinate the Germans into implementing or at least endorsing the persecution of Jews, a process which, culminating in the final solution, led to an almost complete destruction of European Jewry.

They created a children’s board game called “Jews out!”; the press propagated the motto “Jews are our misfortune!” The SA, the NSDAP’s storm troopers, marched through the streets carrying posters stating: “Germans! Resist! Do not buy from Jews!”

Fervent National Socialists voluntarily marked their storefronts or even place name signs with the warning: “Jews are not wanted here.” The term “*judenfrei*,” “no Jews,” served as an expression of success where all Jews had been moved out, deported or otherwise forcibly removed from a certain municipality, city or the entire region.

Persecution of Jews. This formulation primarily refers to the beginning of the process of exterminating European Jewry during the violent National Socialist rule of 1933–1945.

The consistent aim of National Socialist policies and propaganda was to slander Jews and ostracise them. Draw-

ing on National Socialist “race science” the Nazis maintained that Jews were an inferior race from which Germans, whom the propaganda declared to be mostly members of the Nordic race, should protect themselves. Blood was regarded as the carrier of racial features.

Righteous among the Nations. As in several other parts of occupied Europe, there were a few Slovenian men and women who did what was in their power to help Jews and thus found their names inscribed on the list of the so-called Righteous among the Nations.

Apart from the famous example of the Chief of Border Police, Uroš Žun, who saved sixteen Jewish girls, and the priest Andrej Tumpej, who saved a Jewish family during his service in Belgrade, four other Slovenes were awarded a place in the valuable list, on which there are, as yet, no natives of Prekmurje (?). But before we take a closer look at some of the known examples, let us first mention that Boris Hajdinjak collects materials on people who hid Erika’s uncle Emerik or Mirko Hiršl. So notwithstanding the fairly strict criteria (1. the individual made an actual attempt to rescue one or more Jews; 2. his or her life was in danger while attempting to rescue Jews; 3. the individual demanded no compensation for his or her act of rescue; 4. the individual was actively and not just passively involved in the rescue attempt; 5. the rescue must be confirmed by a reliable witness or document.), there is reason to believe that the current six Slovenian Righteous among the Nations may soon be joined by another one from Prekmurje.

The idea of conferring the title Righteous among the Nations was born already in 1953, parallel to the establishment of the Yad Vashem memorial centre in Jerusalem, and the actual list was brought to life ten years later. By mid-2011 it contained no fewer than 23,832 names, and the most recent proposals have been submitted from Eastern Europe, especially in the territory of the former Soviet Union, where this subject remained more or less underexplored, if not ignored altogether, until 1991.

The most famous among the Slovenian Righteous is the Lazarist Andrej Tumpej, who spent years serving in Macedonia, Kosovo and southern Serbia and then came to Belgrade in 1929 to assist in the construction of the church in Čukarica. In 1930 he was also appointed the first parish priest of that church, which is still called the Church of St. Cyril and Methodius today. There Andrej met Antonija Ograjenšek, who had married a Jewish merchant Jakov Kalef at the end of the 1920s. As Dona Kalef, she kept in touch with Tumpej even after the wedding, so he also knew her daughters Matilda and Rahela. After a large part of the extended Kalef family left Belgrade fleeing from the Germans, “Volksdeutsche” (ethnic Germans) and other Serbian quislings, and after she put her disabled husband and her mother-in-law in a nursing home, Dona had no one else to turn to for support than her brother and Andrej Tumpej. And after her brother left Belgrade as well, Tumpej’s help became even more critical. Once the Sajmište concentration camp began imprisoning women and children, he decided to hide Antonija and her two daughters in the parson’s house. What is more, he issued new birth

certificates for the girls: Matilda thus became Lidija and Rahela became Breda. Three months later, all three were moved to a building above the Hippodrome, where the girls lived on whatever income their mother, who began to use her old name Antonija again for safety reasons, could earn working on a farm outside Belgrade. The girls stayed at the Hippodrome until their makeshift apartment was blown up in an Allied bombing raid or. After that, a woman living nearby gave them shelter. In the meantime, the parish priest Tumpej was arrested, imprisoned, tortured in a Gestapo prison, and released a few days afterwards. He was recognised as one of the Righteous among the Nations in 2001, mainly owing to Breda Kalef, who kept her other name as an expression of gratitude to her rescuer.²²²

Nyilas or members of the Arrow Cross Party and Hungarian Holocaust

The Nyilas were a monstrous hybrid between the German National Socialists, Italian Fascists and Croatian Ustaše. Just like the latter, the Nyilas were particularly vicious towards the Jews, Roma and representatives of democratic parties, including Hungarian communists who during wartime operated within the framework of the so-called Peace Party. For a better understanding of their conduct, to the degree that it is at all possible to understand genocide,

222 We obtained most of information on Father Andrej Tumpej from the Belgrade feuilleton “Ko je spasavao Jevreje u Srbiji: Nemoj nikad da piškiš pred drugom decom (9)” published in *e-Novine*. See <http://www.e-novine.com/feljton/45071-Nemoj-nikad-piki-pred-drugom-decom.html>.

one must also be mindful of the conditions in Hungary after the summer of 1943, when Endre Bajcsy-Zsilinszky and Zoltan Tildy, representatives of the Small Holders' Party, wanted to break the alliance with Germany and sign a peace treaty with the Allied forces. Hitler responded with an ultimatum to the regent, i.e. the President of Hungary, Admiral Horthy, who was forced to appoint a new Prime Minister. Miklós Kállay was thus replaced by the former ambassador to Berlin, Döme Sztójay, who, with the backing of the Hungarian National Socialists, banned all opposition parties. In addition, more than 3,000 "undesirable" politicians and their sympathisers were in prison by the end of April 1944. In the meantime, preparations had been underway in Berlin since September 1943 for the German occupation of Hungary. The campaign known as "Operation Margaret" had disastrous consequences for both Hungarian Jewry and Hungary as a whole. Instead of withdrawing Hungarian soldiers from the Eastern Front as promised, Hitler pressured the new government into deploying another 300,000 soldiers for the operations in the East, and in May 1944 440,000 Jews were sent to Auschwitz from the whole of Hungary, except Budapest. 320,000 never returned, and a similar fate was in store for the Jews in Budapest itself, who were temporarily confined to a city ghetto. Conditions took another turn for the worse in the middle of autumn when Sztójay was replaced by General Géza Lakatos, who in conjunction with Horthy negotiated another peace treaty, this time with the Soviet Union. However, the lack of measures following this treaty only turned the already difficult situation into a disastrous one. With

German help, Ferenc Szálasi deposed the Lakatos government, forced Horthy to resign and placed him in German captivity. The new head of government and self-proclaimed leader of the nation invited Eichmann, the organiser of the spring deportation of Jews and Roma to Auschwitz, to pay another visit to his country. What followed was one of the darkest episodes in Hungarian history, marked by the first systematic murder of the ghetto Jews. According to Laszlo Kontler, the author of the book *A History of Hungary: Millennium in Central Europe*, approximately 100,000 Jews were killed in pogroms carried out by Arrow Cross units. Some were hidden by their Hungarian neighbours and friends. About 50,000 were sent westwards and taken to labour camps, where most of them died of exhaustion and hunger while fortifying the last front positions. The cost of Horthy's indecisiveness and the Nyilas' terror was immense. Some half a million Hungarian Jews, including more than 300 from Prekmurje and about 400 from Medjimurje, died or were killed in Nazi concentration and labour camps during the construction of the so-called Southeastern Wall (*Südost-wall* or *Reichschutzstellung*)²²³ in the southeastern part of the Reich stretching between the Danube River near Bratislava and the Drava River near Ormož, hence along the eastern border of present-day Austria.

223 Some 300,000 people laboured from November 1944 to March 1945 on the never-completed system of fortifications intended to stop the Red Army's advance towards Austria. Among them were also 55,000 Hungarian Jews and Jews from various parts of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia.

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MARGINS OF MEMORY

Anti-Semitism and the destruction of the Jewish community in Prekmurje

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“They opened the train cars; the German soldiers were shouting at us ‘alle raus,’ everybody out. We were not allowed to take anything; women not even a toiletries case, nothing whatsoever. But there was word going around that we would be left only with what we were wearing. So we put on some underwear, a blouse dress, a skirt over that, then a winter coat, and over that a trench coat. So my sister and I looked older, stronger, and so we jumped out of the train car. There we were lined up by the soldiers constantly shouting at us: ‘faster, faster,’ and then we walked along the railway line until we reached a certain point [...].”