

# Avram Sadikario

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Skopje

Macedonia

Interviewer: Rachel Chanin Asiel

Date of interview: March 2005

Avram spoke with me in the Jewish community amongst the bustle of the community's preparation for the annual 11th March commemoration of the deportation [see 11th March 1943] [1](#), and the delivery of boxes with copies of his wife's new book. Although he is a retired pediatrician and professor, his true love is writing poetry. He struggles to remember the names, stories and faces of his past but endless Ladino songs and poems are embedded in his heart and mind. Avram is also an avid mountain climber and still walks around the Vodno Mountain in Skopje every week.

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## My family background

My family has lived in Bitola since who knows when; since they came from Spain [see Expulsion of the Jews from Spain] [2](#). I know [their history] as far back as my grandfather, but they have been there for ages.

Before World War I there were 10,000 Jews in Bitola, after it 7,000 emigrated, leaving only 3,000 behind. [Editor's note: From a peak population of about 11,000 in 1900, the Jewish community dropped to 8,900 in 1912, 3,200 in 1940, 57 in 1945 and 1 in 2002. Source: 'Last Century of a Sephardic Community' by Mark Cohen]. After World War I, Bitola became a border town. [Editor's note: Bitola became a border town earlier, in 1913 after the Second Balkan War [3](#).] An economic crisis began. People couldn't survive there. Everything and everyone became poor including the Jews. Seven thousand Jews moved away. Some went to other towns in [the Kingdom of] Yugoslavia [4](#), some to New York, some to Israel [then Palestine] and some to South America, to a town in Chile called Temuco. [Editor's note: Jews from Bitola first arrived in Temuco in 1900, by 1929 there were 40 families from Bitola living there. Source: 'Plima i Slom' by Zeni Lebl] There the Jews established their own Jewish community, the Jewish Bitola community.

Many left and those who remained were poor. Bitola was especially poor; it was the poorest place in all of Yugoslavia, in all of the Balkans. The poor of the poor. During this period there was a lot of solidarity among the Jews. The friends of the community gave money. My parents helped. They

helped a lot. They helped so that others could live. They would have died of hunger, there was not what to live of. The people who were a little richer helped the poor. And we received help from outside Bitola. We received help from the Belgrade Jewish community. In Belgrade there were a lot of Jews who were rich. There was also help from Skopje, Zagreb, and Israel. What do I know where they got donations from? Rabbi [Sabtaj] Djaen [5](#) was a very capable person. He went to America and from America he brought presents - money - a lot of money. And he built that gate at the cemetery. I was little when that happened, but I remember it without the gate. There was some dedication ceremony, but I don't remember it. [Editor's note: When Rabbi Djaen came to Bitola the cemetery, which was established a few years after the expulsion from Spain, was in a terrible state. Many of the oldest and most beautiful stones were being taken away and used for building material in the city. Many times the engravings were not even erased from them before they were used in a construction. In order to address the terrible condition of the cemetery Rabbi Djaen erected a strong stone and iron wall with Jewish stars from funds collected from former residents of Bitola living in America. Built into this gate were two rooms, one on each side of the entrance, which were used for ritual rites. Due to the strong construction of the gate, it survived the desecration and destruction that befell many of the religious buildings in Bitola during the Bulgarian occupation of Macedonia. Today, the Jewish community in Skopje has restored the gate and takes care of the cemetery.]

When I was young Jews were mainly traders of second-hand things, tailors, and cobblers. Jews worked in all trades that existed at the time. All the porters in Bitola were Jews. They carried everything. Today, there are no porters because we have means of transportation, but back then if you had a sack of something they would carry it for you.

## Growing up

We lived in what was called 'Jevrejska mala' [Jewish district]. It wasn't a ghetto, but all the Jews lived there; there was no mixing between Jews and non-Jews. All of our neighbors were Jews. It wasn't forbidden for Jews to live outside the quarter; it was just like that. The Jewish quarter bordered on the center of town. There were no Ashkenazi Jews in Bitola when I was a kid. The Jews called it Monastir, but it was actually called Bitola. [Editor's note: During the Ottoman period the town was called Monastir, when Macedonia was annexed to Serbia (1913), it was renamed officially as Bitola, the Jews, however, continued calling it by its old name.]

Typical Jewish parts of the city were La Tabane, Il Bustaniku and Los Kortizos [Jewish neighborhoods]. The poorest lived in Los Kortezus. It means yard in Ladino. It was terrible there. One third of the population lived there. The people lived outside in fields. The poorest slept outside in the summer time. During the winter they slept inside. It was tight but they managed. We lived in a middle class section called Il Bustanika. Bustanika is a Ladino expression for a small garden. Another neighborhood was called La Tabane. La Tabane I cannot translate. There were poor people where we lived, as well as in La Tabane, but Los Kortizos was the poorest. Ciflik was another poor neighborhood. The Jewish community built about 15 rooms and one family lived in each room in a yard. This was near Bajir, the northern section of the city. Jews and non-Jews lived in Bajir. So Bajir cannot be considered a Jewish part of the city. Non-Jews didn't refer to these neighborhoods with these names; instead they used the street names: Asadbegova Street, Karadjordjeva. But they did call it Jevrejska mala, the Jewish quarter. One half was poor and one half middle class.

Ten wealthy Jewish families lived in a section called Korzo, outside of the Jewish section. My wife [Dzamilia Kolonomos] is from one of these rich families that lived outside. All the rich people lived outside the Jewish quarter, but they came to the quarter. They were Jews but not that religious. My wife's father was the director of a bank. He was a very good man and helped a lot. They lived much better than us.

My family wasn't considered poor. My father had his own store, my brother had his. From my perspective we were middle class.

When I was little the whole city was in 'kalderma' [Turkish word for cobble- stoned streets], except the main street which was modern.

There were four synagogues in Bitola. Before me there were probably more, but in my time there were only four. I assume that when there were more Jews there were more synagogues. [Editor's note: The other large old synagogue in Bitola, El Kal de Portugal, burned down during WWI.]

The big temple in Bitola was called Aragon. It was very beautiful. It wasn't so big because there weren't that many Jews, but it was very beautiful, especially the interior. One third went to Aragon, about 1,000, and the remaining two thirds went to the other temples. Another synagogue was called Havra [El Kal de la Havra Kadisha]. Everyone chose which temple they went to, but once they chose they only went to that one. Those who lived near Aragon went to Aragon. During the occupation Aragon was used as a pigsty [and slaughterhouse]; they fed pigs there. After the war one idiot, whose name I don't remember, demolished all of Jevrejska mala. [Editor's note: Its remnants were dynamited in 1947.]

Havra was a little further away, close to the border with the Christian neighborhoods. I went to Havra. It wasn't that beautiful, but it was OK. This temple was a special building erected to be a temple. The morning prayers were in the lower part of the temple. Everyone had their own seat on flat wooden benches in rows. The rabbi stood on a raised tevah. They read the prayers primarily in Hebrew. The prayer books were also in Hebrew. Everyone sang together. It was still standing until a few years ago. It was used as a warehouse. And since they didn't take care of it, it started to fall apart and then it had to be destroyed. [Editor's note: According to Mark Cohen this synagogue did not survive the war.]

There were other smaller temples, one was called Hamore Levi, but I don't remember the names of the others. [Editor's note: the names of the other synagogues in Bitola up to WWII were: El Kal de haham Jichak Levi (this was a beautiful temple next to the donor's house; El Kal de Shlomo Levi (this was in the donor's house, it did not survive the war); El Kal de Jahiel Levi (in a space dedicated for this purpose); El Kal de Ozer Dalim (in a special building donated by the Aruti family, this one fell to ruins in 1950); a temple for the youth in a school building and a temple in the Los Kurtizos neighborhood. Sources: Zeni Lebl and Mark Cohen]

Noritas was the place where women went in the temple. Women didn't go to the temple together with men. They sat upstairs by themselves. There wasn't a lot of room up there. There wasn't a lot of room because they didn't go that often anyway, but they went for the high holidays, like Yom Kippur. It was totally separate from the temple, but it looked onto the temple. All temples had them.

Big kids went to the temple but little kids did not.

There was no special rabbi for each synagogue; instead there was one rabbi for the whole city. Each synagogue had two or three hakhamim. There was one rabbi for all of Bitola. The first rabbi I remember was Rabbi Djaen. He was a great man. He was a rabbi but he knew a lot of things. He was very tall and handsome. He wore a robe; he also wore modern dress to formal events. He wrote six or seven dramas in Ladino that were performed throughout Yugoslavia, including Sarajevo. [Editor's note: In 1922 he published three plays, 'Jiftah,' 'Deborah' and 'The Daughters of the Sun.' All of his plays were based on biblical themes or about Jewish life. He gave 10 percent of the proceeds of the plays to Keren Kayemet Leisrael. Source: Zeni Lebl] His plays were performed for Purim and Passover, but I don't know what they were about. He organized the building of the Jewish cemetery in Bitola. He collected money in South America for the Jews of Bitola. He gave it to the community and they distributed it to the poor Jews of Bitola. He was religious or at least he looked like he was.

We children were very sad when he left Bitola. When he walked down the street he used to give the children four or five roasted chickpeas from his pockets. When Rabbi Djaen walked down the street his shammash, the servant of the community, that is the temple, would follow 20-30 steps behind. When he saw someone playing marbles he would say, 'Shammash, quickly go over there, so that they don't play anymore, they should go and study.' Rabbi Djaen was very authoritative; we all loved him. He was the chief rabbi in Romania after Bitola. When the Jews of Romania were deported he was caught. But the Italians or Spaniards managed to save him. And afterwards he went to South America. My wife, Dzamila, wrote an article about Djaen, but it wasn't published because someone else wrote one too.

After Rabbi Djaen came Moric Romano's father [Rabbi Avram Romano] [6](#). He was the opposite of Djaen in all respects. He was very quiet, modest. He didn't yell at people while he was walking down the street. People were not scared of him. Romano was very well-educated and he wasn't religious. He pretended to teach us religious lessons. He did not teach us one thing about religion during these lessons. He never mentioned G-d. When the principal would come to our religion class and ask, 'what are you teaching,' he would say, 'Look, prayers and he would sing some song. Not a prayer.' He came to our last class and said, 'I never mentioned G-d or religion during these classes. Religion is a private thing. It is for you to decide.' He never said it, but he was not a believer. He gave lectures and sermons, but he avoided giving them a religious character. Rabbi Romano's son, Moric Romano, is still alive in Skopje.

It was almost the same shammash for the whole time that Djaen was there. When Djaen left, Romano also had a shammash, but he didn't walk down the streets with him and make a scene. Romano didn't [walk down the streets like that]. He was modest. The shammash's job was to take care of the synagogue. He took care of the things in the synagogue during Sabbath. He made sure all was well in the temple. Then people didn't go to the synagogue only on Saturdays; they went in the mornings and evenings too. The temple was always alive. I don't remember the shammash's name, but I can see his face.

There were two shochetim. You bought living chickens, brought them to the shochet and he slaughtered them. He would look to see if it was kosher. If it wasn't good, he would not slaughter it. The shochet had his place in the city where he slaughtered, but he didn't have a butcher shop.

There was one [kosher] butcher in Bitola near the bazaar. The butcher's first name was Kalev, but I don't remember his last name. He worked there with his three sons. His sons were a little older than me. All the Jews in Bitola that bought meat bought it there. Some people didn't have money to buy meat. More than half the people didn't have [money]. They didn't buy any meat. Only Jews could slaughter the meat; it had to be kosher.

There was this one story that a hakham knew that it was treyf [food], but he ate it anyway. Hakhamim were at the same time hakhamim and shochetim. In Bitola there were about ten hakhamim. There was some school and otherwise I don't know how they were chosen. Rabbi Romano went to school in Sarajevo. They were very highly educated in religious subjects but not in other subjects. There were mohelim among the hakhamim, one was named Ruben and the others I don't remember.

There was no mikveh in Bitola. Sephardim, unlike Ashkenazim, didn't have a mikveh. [Editor's note: Sephardim do use a mikveh and there was one in Bitola.]

There was a Jewish orchestra called Hatikvah in Bitola. Jews were very musical. There was a special choir. It would sing at weddings and make some money.

In our house we had a bag for money for Israel. It was a small bag and underneath it had a small special opening in which we put money for Israel. Then someone would come to empty it. Almost every house that could give something had one of these. Even the poor gave something symbolically. We would fill it up frequently and call someone to come and empty it for us. Keren Kayemet [Leisrael] [7](#) existed in Bitola and the money went to them. We were all [participants] in Keren Kayemet Leisrael. There was no membership; it was a Jewish fund.

Jews were against politics. You weren't allowed to be involved in politics. That wasn't for Jews. Jews did vote though.

In Bitola there was no anti-Semitism. There were a lot of different nationalities living in Bitola: a lot of Turks, Vlachs [8](#), Serbs, Macedonians, Greeks, Gypsies and others. It was a mixed population that lived well together. Jews had their section, Gypsies had theirs, Macedonians had theirs, Vlachs and Turks had theirs. There was no such thing as a Jew against a Turk, G-d forbid. We all lived very well together.

Tuesday was market day. All the farmers would come and the squares would be full. There were three or four markets in Bitola. The special market for cattle was near where the Jews lived.

The houses were old. All the houses had two floors - a ground floor and an upper floor. Not one house was more than this. Every single house was like this. It was uniform. Our house had a ground floor and an upper floor. It was a typical house. Look, we came from Spain and the houses were typical Spanish houses. When you entered there was a small garden; there were no big gardens. Everyone had gardens but small ones. We didn't grow anything there; it was just a yard. There were trees and grape vines.

We had water of course, but no electricity. Every house had its own well. We lit the house with gas lamps. There was a gas lamp in each room where we lived, ate. Electricity came to the center of Bitola in 1936 but didn't make it to the periphery, where we lived, until much later, maybe 1939. And some didn't get it even then. [Editor's note: The first electrical power plant was opened in

Bitola on 24th December 1924. The plant was owned by a Jew named Todor Aruesti. First the main street was lit and later individual households installed electricity. Source: Zeni Lebl] The bathroom was in the yard. It was simple, outside. We didn't have beds; we slept on the floor on mattresses, which my mother would put away in a special closet each morning.

We had two rooms on the ground floor. One room had chairs and a table. We lived in one of those rooms. My mother and father slept in that room. That was where we ate during the day and then at night we took out the mattresses. The kitchen was outside in the yard. Jews all had their own built-in ovens. They used it with a shovel. My mother made the bread; we didn't buy it.

There were two unused rooms upstairs. One room was full with books, the whole Talmud was in there, and the other room was empty. When my older brother lived with us he lived up there, but when he married he moved out. We spent most of the time downstairs.

We had a basement where we kept all sorts of things. For instance, my father bought cheese, flour, beans and lentils for the whole year and it was all kept in the basement. Meat was also stored there. My mother would take meat and fry it and then pack it up and take it down to the basement. There it hung so that it got air since there were no refrigerators. They sold ice back then, but we didn't buy it. It wasn't necessary. The basement was cold enough.

My maternal grandfather [Avram, surname unknown] wore typical Turkish garbs: a red fez; and he didn't wear pants, he wore a robe that was open- legged. He wore the fez in his shop and at home. He only took it off when he went to bed. He was very religious. He didn't have payes but wore a beard down to the middle of his stomach. No one shaved, neither him nor my father. My grandfather had a two-floor house across the street from us, at Asadbegova 7. We lived at Asadbegova 10. When a child married he left his family's house and went to live with his spouse. Children and parents never lived together. And it was a good thing; they had a lot of children: how would they all live together? If my father had lived with his parents, there would have been 30-40 people together.

My grandfather was very strict. I didn't like him very much; he was too strict. I never got a dinar [Yugoslav currency] from him. He had other grandchildren from his son and he lived with them. He gave everything to those grandchildren. Look, they considered female children to be second place. What the son had was important. He gave everything that he had to his son's children, and nothing to us. And I never asked for anything. But spontaneously he never gave me anything.

My grandfather didn't grow or raise anything in his small garden. He didn't have any household help. His wife did all the housework. My grandfather wasn't involved in politics at all. Politics was forbidden among Jews: 'Politics - no no no!'

I didn't meet my paternal grandfather [Moshe Sadikario], but my father talked about him. He was very religious. On Sabbath they would go to the synagogue in the morning and come back in the afternoon and eat beans. He would go every day, to tikkun and put on tefillin.

I don't remember either of my grandmothers.

Why did my parents have to meet one another? Their parents made a deal and that was it. There was a person who did this [a matchmaker], but I don't remember what that person was called in Ladino. My mother [Vida Sadikario] married when she was twelve years old. The first wife of my

father [Josif Sadikario] died during childbirth. There was a tradition: if a woman had a sister, she had to marry the widowed man. [Editor's note: When the interviewee says 'there was a tradition' he might be referring to the levirate marriage tradition based on Leviticus 25: 5-10. However, this commandment only refers to when a man dies without children and his brother must marry the widow. The Talmud Tractate Jevamot 36:13a states that it is forbidden for a man to marry two sisters, even after one sister has died.] Regardless of the fact that she was young, she had to marry my father. The norm was to marry early, but my mother got married earlier than most because her sister had died. Sixteen, seventeen that was the time when people got married. They married in the temple with the special ritual of kiddushin. There was no civil wedding, G-d forbid a civil marriage. By the time she was 13 or 14 she already had two children: Mirjam, her sister's child, and another one [Mois].

My mother was a housewife. She was a very peaceful woman. She had eight children. She worked only at home. All Jewish women were housewives; they didn't do anything else. Not one woman in my mother's generation was employed. They had kids. There was no limit to the number of kids they had, as many as G-d gave them that's how many they had. My mother had eight children, my sister [Sol] had ten until then maybe she would have had more. My brother [Mois] had three until then; he was young and surely would have had more. [The interviewee means that they would have had more children, had they not been killed in the war.]

My mother was a very good housewife. She knew how to cook and make all sorts of things. She never took us anywhere. She knew an unlimited number of stories, sayings and songs. I cannot remember the stories. I remember but I cannot retell them now. She told us these stories when we were young. She would tell them when the grandchildren came. They would sit there with eyes wide open. She didn't just tell the stories, she told them nicely. She told them so vividly, that I even listened to them when I was older. OK, it didn't interest me that much, but the kids listened.

There was something else about Jewish women, and especially with my mother. She didn't know to speak without adding some saying after every second or third sentence. There was no end to the sayings. No matter what she had to say, she found some saying to embellish it. She had an unlimited supply; there was not one special one. She would speak, speak and pop another saying. When she finished her work around the house, she would embroider. She knew how to make a lot of really nice things. She also made fijdejus [Ladino for small macaronis each about 1-2 cm long]. She took dough and then tak tak tak [with his hands Avram motions cutting off a small piece and turning it and dropping it into something.] In one hour she made a huge amount of them. This was eaten with cheese. It was very nice. When they made these, a bunch of my mother's friends would come over and make them with her. They would talk and make fijdejus. You didn't have to think while making these.

Women got together. Women were always together. My mother was a good cook and young women would come to her to learn. They were very appreciative. She knew this from her mother-in-law.

Young women were dressed regularly, like you and me. But older women were dressed much differently. No woman wore pants; that is a new thing. Older women wore a kerchief. And on special occasions they wore the ones trimmed with ducats.

My father wore regular clothes, not Turkish ones. He wore a hat all the time; he only took it off when he slept. My father had a beard and never shaved it. The way it grew; that was it. Since he was religious he didn't shave, according to the Jewish law. He smoked a lot. My father carried a pocket watch. On Sabbath when he couldn't smoke, he was sleepy. I would ask, 'What is the matter?' and he would answer, 'Sabbath, no smoking.' He was smoking one and before he finished, he already had the next one ready. He rolled his own cigarettes. Almost everyone smoked back then. The younger you were the less you smoked. All the old people smoked and rolled the tutun, Turkish for tobacco, themselves. He also snacked on a lot of seeds.

He was a very good man and well-educated in religious matters. While we were little he spent a lot of time with us. He knew the Torah and Talmud very well. Imagine, he read Aramaic and Talmudic books and translated them into Ladino. He had all those Talmudic books. He read and translated. And he translated well. He didn't speak Hebrew, but he could translate it, and well. He knew the Talmud and so did my grandfather. My father went to work and home, nothing else.

He never took us to the park or anywhere. He would take the really little ones, the grandchildren. Not us big kids. We were independent. We were even a little more than independent, a bit naughty. We went far away from home. We went to Pelister [20 km west of Bitola], an especially nice mountain with a very nice forest. You needed two hours to get there and then another three or four hours to get up and six to reach the summit. We would wake up at three in the summer; the sun was just starting to rise. And we would go from three until nine. Eighteen hours we walked. I started this when I was six and onwards. My father cursed at me but I went. It wasn't rude cursing, rather reprimanding.

He never hit me, but he did hit my brother Solomon. He was naughty. He bothered my mother about food, 'Why did you make this?' She cooked so nicely and we were all more than satisfied. And he complained and it bothered my father and he hit him. And Solomon regularly got hit by my eldest brother, Mois, too. Once Mois married and left the house, it fell to me to hit him. When my father got annoyed he would let me hit Solomon. At home I was good. He would get mad because we went on these excursions, because we were in Hashomer Hatzair [9](#), because we wanted to go to Israel. He was scared that we would go. He scolded me, but not a lot, and he never hit me.

Amongst Jews and others, men carried everything. Women didn't buy anything. Men bought and carried everything home. When they had a lot of things a trunk would come by horse or donkey. All other things from the greenmarket, market, grocery store he bought by himself. My father would do the shopping. He was close to eighty years old and still carrying the groceries. He had his own grocer who sold oil and other groceries.

My parents were not part of any political party. My father worked more with non-Jews than with Jews. He sold leather to Macedonians. If he had worked only with Jews, he wouldn't have survived. The relations were very good among everyone. My father socialized with non-Jews. But it was more socializing in the shop. They came as customers or not as customers. They would come to the store to socialize. They rarely came to the house. Some Turks came to our house and some Macedonians. And in fact my mother didn't socialize with them. She didn't know how to speak anything but Spanish [Ladino]. She knew little Macedonian. A person would laugh [when he heard how she spoke].



We never went on a vacation. We didn't have a weekend house. My wife's parents were rich and they had a place in a village.

I had three sisters and three brothers. Mirjam and Sol married a lot earlier, so I didn't even know them when they were at home. Mirjam's husband, Haim, was a tailor. He had his own shop and he had one for his son too. My sister Sol was a housewife and her husband, Avram, was also a tailor. My sister Rashela suffered from a mental illness and didn't marry. She was at home with us. She died in the camps.

Mois married a little later, so he lived with us some time before he married. He was very well-educated in comparison to my father who knew Ivrit but didn't know these other things. My brother went to a French school, so he was really well-educated. He could read French and Spanish. He got literature from Salonica and he read it. Mois read a Spanish [Ladino] newspaper from Salonica called Lavara. Lavara means 'hyphen' and it was a humorous communist satirical magazine, like Jez [10](#). He got a lot of other periodicals too. My brother got lots of papers from Greece.

I had one sibling who died young. I don't remember her name; she died before I was born.

Shlomo and Sami lived with me. Shlomo was very messy, not in a negative connotation. He didn't want to eat this or that. He would make a big problem, 'Why did you cook this? Why did you cook that?' We were all calm, especially me. Sami also didn't want to eat, in the same way, but he would always find something else. But Shlomo always had to make a big problem. My brother Mois used to hit him. He would take him once or twice and hit him. After he got married he left Shlomo to me. I used to fight with him, 'Why do you bother her?' My mother tried her best. She cooked the best she could. He made problems not just about food but about other things too. But in school he was an excellent student. And he was an excellent partisan. He was great with others, but he made problems at home.

Sami was a very calm child. I loved him very much. He was a little sick and I took him to Sofia for treatment. Sami and Shlomo were in Hashomer Hatzair too. Shlomo and Sami died while with the partisans. Shlomo died in 1944 near Kumanovo and Sami died on the Srem [a part of Vojvodina] [11](#) Front.

That brother [Solomon], he was a terror. The little one, Sami, he was the opposite. He was so quiet.

We celebrated all the holidays. For Rosh Hashanah we went to the temple for two days, from morning to afternoon. They read a lot in the temple. And for Yom Kippur it was all day. The hakham used to blow the shofar. The Yom Kippur fast would begin the soon as three stars appeared and we fasted until three stars appeared the next day. [Editor's note: According to the Shulchan Arukh, the fast begins 18 minutes before sunset.] We went to the temple for the whole day. We were there all the livelong day.

We made a sukkah on Sukkot. Not every house made one, because there was a lot of poverty and not everyone had a yard where they could put one. That's why there was one in the temple. We had our own sukkah and in our neighborhood many people made their own. We didn't have a lulav and etrog at home.

We had one chanukkiyah and we sang every night of Chanukkah. I still sing this for Chanukkah. I don't believe, but I do this as a custom: Maoz cur jeshuati leha nae lesabeah tikon bet tefilati

Vesham toda ledabeah et ahim matbeah nicar anabeah az egmor beshir mizmor hanukat amizbeah az egmor beshir mizmor hanukat amizbeah. [O God, my saving Stronghold, To praise thee is a delight! Restore my house of prayer, Where I will offer thee thanks; When thou wilt prepare havoc For the foe who maligns us, I will gratify myself With a song at the altar. Translation from Hebrew by Philip Birnbaum]

My father would save watermelons and other melons for Las Frutas [Tu bi- Shevat]. He would buy special melons in the summer and store them in the basement. We had all the fruit that could be stored on Las Frutas. All of it was put on the table and you could take as much as you wanted. The children got money for this holiday. It was a very nice holiday.

Purim was also a good holiday. We children got money. And we received and gave tavazikas [Editor's note: Sephardic Jews of Macedonia exchanged platikos di Purim] Mother would make something sweet and something salty and we would give it to someone else; this was tavazikas. And we had 'las paletas,' a noise-maker made from three pieces of wood. We drew in the middle and we moved it when they read Haman's name. There were three or four different kinds of them: one that was turned by hand, one that was hit. We played with this at home, not in the synagogue. We would visit people on Purim. For instance, my father went to visit his daughters and son in their homes. It was the custom that the older people go visit the younger people. And the kids would get a little bit of money, a few dinars. A few dinars was a lot. We had a coin which we called 'dvaestoparac' [1/20 of a dinar]. The younger kids got a few of those, one or two dinars at the most. We ate a lot of sweets for Purim. We went to the temple but it was a short service, not comparable to Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

The month between Purim and Pesach was called Las Tuendas, which means work. The whole time there was work cleaning the house. G-d forbid how much cleaning. Women and girls had to do the cleaning. And in the end we all went around the house with our father looking for the crumbs [before Passover]. And then we carried them to where they put the trash. Some of the things we made kosher. We took a big pot and put boiling water in it and put the things in and that is koshering. The things that couldn't be boiled we hid in a special house, so that they were far away. You cannot touch chametz on Pesach. We had special dishes for Pesach and when it was over mother collected them and put them away again.

For Pesach we all got new clothes. We waited for this. Maybe during the year we bought things sometimes, but for Pesach one simply had to have new clothes. We had these things made by the tailor. My mother didn't sew pants and such things. She sewed small things. My mother didn't know how to use a sewing machine but my two sisters did. And my sister-in-law knew. They were younger than my mother. We got pants, suits, shoes, shirts, socks. Everything that you see and do not see was new. For Pesach everything had to be new.

My mother made boyos, unleavened bread. It was smaller than bread and very hard. And she made matzot in our house too.

We had seder and would sing in both Hebrew and Ladino. For instance we sang: 'a lamana di ahalu avatana b'ara d'mizraim kol' [This is the bread of affliction which our ancestors ate in Egypt]. I used to know the whole song. And we sang: *este el pan de apresion que comieron nuestros padres de tierra en ejipto todo que leaz de menester de trai paskua este ano akizjel ano el vinenen en tierra de israel este ano aki siervo a el ano vinenen entiera de israel izos foros.* [This is the bread of affliction

which our ancestors ate in Egypt. Let all who are hungry come and eat of it; all in need come and celebrate Passover. This year we observe it here; next year may we be in the Land of Israel. This year we are slaves in exile; next year may we be free men in the Land of Israel. Translation from Hebrew by Rabbi Jonathon Cohen]

and then 'mah nishtanah:'

ma nishtana laila ze mi kol alelot shebe kol alelot ain ano matabilim afelu paam ahat. Vhalajla hazeh shte pamim

[Why is this night different from all other nights? On all other nights we need not dip even once and on this night we dip two times.]

When my father sang everyone who knew joined in with him. And I knew the songs, so I sang too. The women didn't sing. They didn't know. We all sang 'manishtana alajla aze mi kol alelot shebe kol alelot.' Which means: 'This night is different from all other nights because all other nights we have intimate relations only once and this night two times.' [Editors note: This is not an accurate translation of the text in the Haggadah.] And so on and so on.

On Shavuot we read: y fue djuzara del djueses de ambre la tiera. y fue el dia de djuzara los djueses y fue ambre la tiera y aduvo va ronde betlehem jehuda por morar il kampo del moav el imusek y deo su zizos.

This is the history of Jews who were in crisis, and couldn't live where they were anymore, so they went to live in another Jewish country. [In Hebrew it is]:

Vayehi b'mea shfot hashafotim Vayehi raav baaretz Vayeleh ish mi beit lechem yehudah Lagor bsde moav

[Now it came to pass in the days when the judges ruled, that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of Bethlehem in Yehuda went to sojourn in the country of Mo'av Ruth 1:1]

It is from Megilat Rut [Book of Ruth] and very long. After Sir Hashirim [Song of Songs] this is the most beautiful poem, the most poetic. And David came from Ruth.

On Shavuot we also sang: es razon de ala vara Dios Santo Poderozo Konte moredad de korason y alegria y qozo. En estedia Santo y temirozo.

[Editor's Note: This is an excerpt from the Shavuot Ketubbah that was read in Balkan Sephardic communities during the morning service when the ark was opened. 'One must give thanks and praise the great and mighty G-d with a trembling heart with joy and delight. On this holy and awesome day.' Translation from Ladino by Rabbi Isak Asiel]

For Tisha be-Av we sat on the floor. We went to the temple and then, when we went home, we didn't eat anything the whole day. We didn't sit on chairs, only on the floor. We had some special prayers for this holiday.

Every Friday female beggars would come and we gave them bread. Since my mother had baked bread she gave them some of it. There were only a few beggars and they were all women. In general, even though people were very poor they didn't beg. They got money, help from the Jewish

community and what they could earn working.

We went to the temple on Sabbath evening. It didn't last long and then we went home. Saturday we ate fizon di Shabbat, Jewish beans. Father would recite the Kiddush.

On Sabbath one couldn't light the fire, so we had a gypsy woman come and light the furnace, and everything that we needed lit, but especially the furnace because in the winter we needed to have it on. They lit them and we paid them.

La mortaza was the special clothing that was made before a person died [kitel in the Ashkenazi tradition]. Everyone had their own mortaza, women and men. Women sewed them. It wasn't any great clothing, just something to wrap a person in when he dies. We sang special prayers and there was a special book of them just for the dead. Only men went to the cemetery. A woman was never permitted to go to the cemetery. Women cried and sang special prayers at home.

After a funeral we sat at home seven days, lasijeti, which means to sit for seven days [shivah]. For seven days we didn't sit on chairs rather on the floor. We didn't do anything. Our relatives brought us food. I was about 17 when my grandfather died. For seven days the mourners were served. I don't remember that I sat these seven days when my grandfather died.

When I was little we played outside. First we played hide and seek. Then we had a stick and hit things. Then we played soccer. I was the goalie and defender. We had a special Jewish soccer club called Atehija or Nada in Serbian. We played with other clubs, non-Jewish, some were better, others worse. I was in the second team. I was too young to be in the first team. Our team was just Jews.

Atheija was a Jewish club that did a lot of things, amongst them there were sporting activities, a choir, literature, all sorts of things.

There was no kindergarten [Editor's note: Rabbi Djaen established the first Jewish kindergarten in Bitola. Teachers brought in from Palestine taught there. The first teacher was Lea Ben-David, who arrived in 1925.]

There was Lumdei Torah [Editor's note: This school was called Lumdei Torah or Torah Learners, it was established by Yitzhak Alitzfen (1870-1948), the chief rabbi after WWI (1920s-1932). The institution was similar in function to a Talmud Torah but had a strong Zionist focus. Source: Mark Cohen]. In the mornings I went to [elementary] school and in the afternoon to Lumdei Torah. When I was ten, maybe younger, and until I was 12-13, Musa Safan taught me religious lessons at the Lumdei Torah. I went there for four years. This was a special building next to the main temple, Aragon. Here I learned the whole Torah and the history of the Torah. He knew this very well. He had a talent for teaching: he spoke so nicely that we remembered everything he said. He also taught us Hebrew. He didn't know it exceptionally well, but he taught us what he knew.

He was an old man, with a beard. He was about 56-57 and we considered that to be old. I went every day for two hours in the afternoon after school. It wasn't obligatory, not everyone went. Whoever wanted went. He was a perfect man. Like all hakhamim he wore a black robe, down to his feet, and not a fez but a special Jewish cap.

He taught the ten or fifteen of us to be little hakhamim. He took us to the temple where we sang. I sang a little better than the others; they sang, but some didn't have good voices, so they gave me

more verses to sing.

There was a state-run elementary school where the Jews went. There was one Jewish elementary school and many others. There were four grades in the elementary school. The elementary school was called 'La skole de la Zudios' which means Jewish school [in Ladino]. All the Jewish kids went there, but the teachers were Macedonians, that is Serbs. All Jewish kids went to this school. There were no non-Jewish students. [Editor's note: The territory of today's Macedonia was attached to Serbia as a consequence of the Balkan Wars (1912-13) and the Slavic-speaking Macedonians, as a pretext, were considered part of the Serbian nation by Belgrade.] Serbian was taught in the school. In elementary school all the subjects were in Serbian. Nothing was in Macedonian. The Macedonian language was forbidden. It was forbidden as a language. It was forbidden to speak it. If a teacher heard someone speaking Macedonian, he would reprimand the person. It was forbidden because it was understood that Macedonians were Serbs and should speak Serbian and not Macedonian, a gypsy language.

[In elementary school] we learned to read, write, draw, and gymnastics. We never experienced any anti-Semitism. Our professors loved us so much; I still remember a few of them: Mr. Nikola and Mr. Hristo. They taught us everything.

All male Jews, and later females too, finished elementary school. Then only a small number went on to secondary school. Only a small percentage of Jewish kids went to gymnasium. One could choose between the gymnasium or the commercial academy. Secondary school was eight years. There was one gymnasium and one commercial academy for all of Bitola.

I went to the gymnasium. There was no Macedonian in secondary school either. It was not just that it wasn't spoken officially; if someone heard it being spoken in the yard, some people were tolerant, others were not. If they heard someone speaking it they would say: 'What are you speaking?' and take the person by the ear and slap, slap, two or three hits, 'You are speaking some foolish language.'

All the professors were sent from Belgrade. They were all sent from Belgrade and they were all Serbs. There were Macedonians, but only those who considered themselves Serbs. Serbianized Macedonians. There were just a few of them.

[In the gymnasium] Professor Popovic taught French. Professor Civovic taught math and physics. There was a woman teacher named Popovic who taught Serbian. Caslav taught geography and geology. My favorite subject was math. Most people hated it because it was hard.

My wife went to the commercial academy. At the commercial academy they learned to be employees in businesses. After this there were no further [educational options]. Those of us who studied at the gymnasium, we could go further, to university.

My brother [Mois] finished the French school and Dzamila [my wife] studied at the French school which was recognized as secondary schooling. There was a French elementary school and to some point a secondary school. If you finished the French secondary school it wasn't recognized as having finished the final exam for secondary school. The French school lasted up until the time of occupation. During the occupation all French things were forbidden. The French bank and school were closed. The school was run by French nuns.

Solomon finished the commercial academy. Sami studied at the gymnasium maybe to the fifth grade and stopped because of the occupation.

We didn't have to wear a uniform, but we did wear a special school cap. On each cap there was a number with the grade you were in. You had to wear this cap so that one knew you were a student. If you didn't wear it, you could be punished.

Girls didn't go to school, they were illiterate. There wasn't one Jew who was illiterate in Hebrew. Everyone knew how to read, absolutely everyone, there wasn't one who didn't know how to read. And the opposite was true for women; there wasn't one who knew how to read. [Editor's note: According to Bitola Jewish community statistics only 19 Jewish girls in Bitola were enrolled in school in 1932. Source: Zeni Lebl] There was no special school for girls. That changed a little bit already in my time.

I had my bar mitzvah when I was 13 and I read the whole parasha [weekly Torah portion]. My bar mitzvah teacher came to my house and taught me to read my portion. We practiced for more than a month. I knew the whole parasha by heart. It was a big honor in the temple and outside. They made cakes and other things. I got some presents and money.

When I was in the second grade of the gymnasium, I had a magazine called Borba [12](#). This was a magazine that was published in Belgrade until 1922- 23. It was the magazine of the communist party. Borba was an illegal publication from 1922. It was a communist magazine. In 1922 it was legal and then became illegal. It was published even though it was illegal. And a Jewish second-hand shop sold it among other books. I bought it, read it, found it interesting and gave it to someone else. I bought it from a second- hand shop. Petar, the non-Jewish boy who sat next to me in school, wanted to read it. However, he was impatient and he read it during class. The history teacher caught him and gave it to the director. The director called the police. The police didn't arrest us but they kept us there. Petar and I weren't allowed to go home. In the end, I told them where I had bought the book. They asked me, 'Who is that second-hand trader?' and I told them. I also told them that I didn't know what kind of book it was. The man I had bought it from admitted it.

My brother [Mois] learned that this had happened and he took all of my books to his house. If they had caught me with those books I would have had to go to prison. This way he saved the books and me. These were leftist books.

They discussed whether to expel me from school. They decided that if they were to expel me they needed to expel me from all schools in all of Yugoslavia. But there was one mathematics teacher, Prof. Matic, who defended me: 'Listen, if he has to be punished, he should go to prison, but not be expelled from school. But he proved that this was unintentional and that is it.' And that's how he saved me. He was a communist but didn't tell us then. I saw him at a [anti-governmental pro-communist] demonstration in Belgrade in 1938-39 and that's when he told me, 'I am the one who defended you. The communist. I didn't want to tell you.'

Rabbi Avram Romano also defended me. Actually he gave me advice about how to get by. He advised me not to hide the books under another book and not to keep the books at home. He didn't get involved in politics but he was an educated progressive man. He was progressive even though he was a rabbi. He was a [religion] teacher in the school, so he knew about what had happened to

me. I don't know if he spoke on my behalf, but I believe that he probably did.

I knew the non-Jewish religious lessons because I read. I bought the New Testament in a book shop in secondary school. It must have been in secondary school because in elementary school there were only Jews. I read it and learned it but didn't believe it. My father didn't read Serbian, so he didn't know what I was reading. During religious classes we Jews would go outside and walk around. But during the winter it was cold [so we stayed inside]. The person sitting next to me was called on and he didn't know the answer. I whispered it into his ear. And the teacher said to me, 'What are you saying.' 'I didn't say anything,' I answered. 'What do you mean you didn't say anything? How do you know these things?' I answered, 'I don't know these things.' I knew Serbian [Orthodox Christian] religious lessons and the New Testament even then. I still know it.

We had religious lessons also in elementary school but more so in secondary school. Lumdei Torah was separate from the official classes in school. Our Jewish religious lessons were also in school. We learned [Jewish] history and Hebrew, but I don't remember anything. We had religious studies in the school which was taught by the hakhamim. My teacher was Hakham Zaharija. He was very religious, backwards.

I first encountered Christmas and Easter when I started school. They were celebrated but we Jews didn't celebrate.

I never had private lessons. Some kids went for music lessons but they didn't send me. Rabbi Romano sent his kids for music lessons. His son knows how to play the piano. We didn't listen to music at home. At the end we did get a gramophone.

When I was a kid my favorite food was 'aropi.' That is a sweet dish made from pumpkin and honey. The pumpkin was cut up and mixed with honey. My mother would make this for me. We always had it at home. I think that only Jews ate this. [My wife] Dzamila doesn't make this. She could. It isn't difficult to make, but she doesn't.

I became a member of Hashomer Hatzair in 1936. [It was first organized in Bitola in 1931.] They organized us. A sheliach came from Israel [then Palestine], Moshe Ashkenazi. [Editor's note: He arrived in Bitola in 1932 from Kibbutz Merchavia. He understood Serbian and remained in Bitola for two years.] He stayed for a year and taught us Hebrew, history and all kinds of other things. Half of the youth in Bitola were members. These were educated people. Hashomer Hatzair first came to Bitola in 1936. One of the founding members of Hashomer Hatzair was Roza Kamhi's brother, Pepo Kamhi. There were others too. It existed before, but it really developed during the year Moshe Ashkenazi came from Kibbutz Merchavia. He was an exceptionally intelligent, educated, cultured person; he knew everything.

There was also Tehelet Lavan [13](#). This was another organization that was a bit weaker. They accepted everyone - all those who were poor and uneducated and delinquents. Hashomer Hatzair was more elitist.

My parents were not against it as long as we were dreaming, but when we were supposed to go to Israel then they were opposed to it. They didn't want to break up the family. My parents weren't opposed to Zionism. They were Zionists. They were against us going to Israel. They wanted Israel to exist, for a state to be created. But they didn't want us to go [and live there]. They didn't want to

lose their children. And also since Hashomer Hatzair was a Jewish atheistic organization they were against it. I was religious until I was 13-14. I always went to the temple and tikkun, prayers early in the morning. I was very religious. And all at once I became an atheist. I was very insolent and I said there was no G-d, and such foolish things. I openly said this. My father got mad. I made him mad. I am sorry for this. And when I was a little older I didn't [talk like that with him]. I wasn't opposed to the fact that he was a believer. I didn't have other conversations with my father about ideology. He didn't have an ideology to talk about.

Hakhsharah was for those who were preparing to go to Israel. Before one went to Israel, one prepared oneself for agricultural work in hakhsharah. I didn't go. I was too little. [The participants] were from all over Yugoslavia and it was in different places. Every year there was a camp, moshav, in Slovenia. Slovenia is a very nice country for camping. It was like a summer camp. It lasted a month. Jews from all over Yugoslavia came there. Only from Yugoslavia, not from other countries. Every year we went, without parents, by train. We went for ten years for two or three weeks each time.

In Hashomer Hatzair no one could have his own personal money. Whatever money you had you had to give to the group fund. Each kvutzah [Hebrew for group] had its own fund and treasurer. Whatever money we got from our parents we had to give to the kvutzah. And then we would all go out together, equally. If we went to the movies, we all went to the movies. If we went for halva [14](#), we all went for halva. The whole kvutzah together. Niko Pardo was very rich. His father was a saraf, a money changer. He had a lot of money. Everything we gave he would give double. After he gave he still had some for himself. When we caught him with extra money we reprimanded him and he would give even more money. He always had money. He was rich, but he didn't live in the rich section of town. He lived in A la Tabane. He was a student before the war and after the war he went to Israel where he lived in a village as a farmer. When I was in Israel I visited him. He never came back to visit Macedonia.

I stopped keeping kosher in Hashomer Hatzair, when I was 13, 14 or 15. At first my parents didn't know but they suspected it. I felt bad that I defied them, but I kept quiet. But anyway we kept kosher. We didn't go to restaurants and at home everything was kosher. But we didn't especially keep it and when we had the opportunity to eat salami we did. We were all in Hashomer Hatzair and we were all rasha, that is how you say wicked people in Hebrew. It wasn't especially part of the ideology of Hashomer Hatzair, to eat non-kosher. But once you don't keep kosher any more, there is no more kosher. Why keep kosher?

Leon Kamhi, a merchant, was a Zionist from Bitola. He knew French and some other languages, and he knew how to speak in front of people. He was too old for Hashomer Hatzair, but he helped the Zionist cause. His sister, Matilda Kamhi, went to live in Israel, in Kibbutz Shaar Haamakim [15](#), a long time before the war. She was five or six years older than I am. She had been in Hashomer Hatzair.

My wife Dzamila's father was a Zionist but not as active as Leon Kamhi. Dzamila's father was the president of the French-Serbian bank [Editor's note: As a result of the Serbian and French alliance during WWI there were very warm political and business relations between these countries up to the outset of WWII. The French-Serbian bank was surely a result of these relations. There were branches in several Yugoslav cities.] He was a little younger than my father. He was a perfect



person, a good man. However, there was not one person in Bitola, maybe in all of Macedonia, who was more educated than he was. He knew ten languages and everything else. He was an outstanding person. Because he was a banker, many people had professional relations with him. My father did, but I don't know the exact nature of those relations.

A Jew named Kamhi was the first to have a car in Bitola. It was an open-air car [cabriolet]. He was a little wealthier and he bought a car. Everyone in Bitola was amazed, 'what is this strange thing?' This was the first car, and it was bought by a Jew.

I never went to a restaurant with my parents. In the first place they were treyf. There was a kosher restaurant in the Jewish quarter, but I don't remember what it was called. I went a few times to eat there. It was owned by relatives of the former president of Israel, [Isak] Navon. He was from Bitola. [The interviewee is mistaken. Isak Navon, the former president of Israel, was born in Jerusalem.] I don't remember him; he must have left for Israel very early. But some of his relatives owned the restaurant.

There was a Turkish cake shop called Ambi where we would go. They had good halva there. I went there with other kids, not with my parents.

After high school I started to study medicine in Belgrade [see School of Medicine at the University of Belgrade] [16](#). I had to go to Belgrade because there was nothing in Skopje. In the beginning I ate at the Jewish community's kitchen but then it was too far for me and I ate in the cafeteria at the medical school.

I studied for three years in Belgrade. I escaped from Belgrade two days before the bombing of Belgrade and headed back to Bitola. The Germans had declared war and what was I supposed to do? [see German Occupation of Yugoslavia] [17](#) At first there was a little bombing, actually a lot. In 1941, when the Germans came, the streets were deserted, some people resisted but they killed them all. Just like that. The Germans were in Bitola a very short time before the Bulgarians came and occupied Bitola [see Bulgarian Occupation of Macedonia in World War II] [18](#). Older Macedonians greeted them like liberators. They considered Bulgarians to be their own people. [Editor's note: Macedonian and Bulgarian are very similar languages; in Bulgaria Macedonian is often considered as a dialect of Bulgarian.] The young people did not. The majority of the young Macedonians were against this. They were opposed to the occupation.

## During the War

At the beginning of the occupation life was not different than before. Whatever you did before you continued to do. But it was different when the Law for the Protection of the Nation [19](#) was adopted. This was in 1941. At the beginning it wasn't so bad, afterwards it got worse and worse. First of all, it was forbidden for Jews to work. Second, it was forbidden for Jews to live outside the Jewish quarter. They reduced the size of the quarter and made a special quarter where we could live. We had to pay a very high tax. It was terrible. Most were poor to begin with, but those who were not became poor. We could only walk around in the Jewish area, outside of that it was forbidden.

We had to wear stars [see Yellow star in Bulgaria] [20](#). We had to wear the pins [yellow stars] for Jews which we bought at the Jewish community. They were not expensive. We had to wear them all the time. Since we weren't allowed into certain parts of the city, if we went there we covered them

up.

We only had contact with non-Jewish youth. My friends from school were very good, I maintained contact with them. Some of them came to us. They could come to us but we couldn't go to them.

I officially joined the Party in 1941. Before that I was a member of SKOJ [21](#) starting in 1938. The committee evaluated my activities and recommended that I be a member of the Party. There were no signatures. It was all illegal. They reviewed my activities and recommended me. There were not a lot of members of the Party. A party member was extremely active. In Bitola I would say, among Jews and non-Jews, that there were 30-40 members. All 30-40 of them would never get together. When there were demonstrations yes, but they didn't know who the others were. I didn't know who was a member of the Party. When they first recommended me I refused because I didn't deserve it. But you couldn't just say 'I do not deserve.' They just recommended you. The president of the cell, Done Popandonov, came to me to tell me this.

There was a cell in Bitola; there were cells everywhere. This was the basic [underground] organization. Each cell had about three to four members. We each did what we were directed to: we carried leaflets, we distributed bullets, and we organized demonstrations in the center. Jews didn't participate in the demonstrations because if we had participated, they would have arrested us. Not everyone could become a member of a cell. In addition to being a party member I was in a cell with: Viktor Pardo, Moric Shami, the father of our Shami [Zdravko, the current president of the Jewish community of Skopje]. The president of my cell was a Macedonian named Done Popandonov. There was another member but I don't remember his name. Done Popandonov wasn't famous when he was a member of my cell. However, afterwards, he was arrested and then worked for State Security. He worked there and was very well respected; he knew a lot. It was strange how much he knew. In fact he didn't finish university, but he knew more than professors at university. We were friends until his death. He was also an alpinist. He died three or four years ago.

I was also the founder of one cell that included: Nisim Alba, Marcel Demajo, Kalderon. I was in one cell and then, as a member, I established another cell. I also led some SKOJ cells. These cells each had three to four SKOJ cells under them. Under my direct control there were a hundred or so Jews. Demajo died fighting in Greece in 1942-43. He was caught and killed. And Kalderon lives in Israel, in Kfar Sirkin. And Nisim Alba lived in Belgrade. He died a year ago.

My cells distributed leaflets, organized demonstrations and prepared to join the partisans. All of Hashomer Hatzair was transformed into cells like ours and the ones we created. One kvutzah, a group of ten members, was turned into two, three cells since they had to be smaller. For example, Alba and my three organized all of Tehelet Lavan. All of Tehelet Lavan was organized. Niko Pardo and Shami had Hashomer Hatzair. So that all of Hashomer Hatzair and Tehelet Lavan were organized. And not only that, there were also people who were not members of these groups that were organized.

My father was old and scared. He wasn't against communism; he was against us being communists. My [older] brother wasn't organized, but he was a supporter.

I stole from my father. We took money from him. Because Jews saved, he saved. He saved so that he would have money for bad days. And we stole that money and gave it to the Party. Idiots. I stole, OK? And without my knowing it, my brother also stole. And then my other brother. We all

stole, the three of us stole. I didn't know that the others were taking money. My sister's husband, Hajim, said, 'What are you doing? Are you not ashamed that you stole all of your father's savings?' I asked, 'Who stole?' He answered, 'You stole, Sami stole and Shlomo stole. You all stole. You have left him poor.'

When my father learned what we had done, he knew that we didn't take the money for our own personal use. But he was scared that no one should find out. Since I buried it next to the house, I knew where it was. I hadn't taken all of it. I just took one part. After that, the second took another part and then the third a third part. Surely they left something small, but still.

Once they arrested a Jew named Isak Levi: 'You participated in demonstrations.' 'No, I did not.' They didn't believe him and they beat him, beat him and beat him. When he was released, we received a directive not to speak with him for some time to make sure that he hadn't become an agent. Later we heard that he wasn't an agent, and he told us the whole story. 'You participated in demonstrations; you spoke against us Bulgarians.' 'Why do you think I said that?' There was no one calmer than Isak Levi; he wasn't even a member of the Party.

I was a member of the Party in Belgrade as well. There I participated in demonstrations. Oh, how I was beaten there. There was a demonstration against the government on 14th December 1939. All governments were reactionary and unjust. The governments changed but the relations were the same. They were against communism, against freedom, etc. There were a lot of people at the protest. It was a demonstration for communism. There were maybe a thousand students and workers there. They were all for communism. Communism was very widespread. The demonstration went from Slavija to Vuk Karadzic monument. [Editor's note: Slavija Circle is one of the main intersections in Belgrade. This intersection is named after the hotel that Frantisek Nekvasil, a Czech, built in 1885. In the 1970s a new hotel with the same name was erected in the same place. At the intersection of Bulevar Kralja Aleksandra and Ruzveltova stands the Monument to Vuk Karadzic which was erected in 1937 by the Belgrade municipalities for the 150th anniversary of his birth. Vuk is considered the father of the Serbian language.] In the middle the police came and started to beat us and we started to beat the police. We had rocks. We had collected rocks and kept them in our pockets. They hit us and we hit them.

There was another demonstration in Kalemegdan [medieval fortress of Belgrade] in December 1939. I wasn't at that one, but it was bad. When [the protests] were at Slavija or somewhere else in Belgrade, they [the police] couldn't shoot a lot because there were others around who were not participating. The police used rifle butts. They hit us but didn't shoot except for a little bit. But everyone who was at Kalemegdan was opposed to the government and there they shot an awful lot. I wasn't there. I don't know why.

The first time I felt any anti-Semitism was when the Bulgarians occupied Bitola. They spread this [anti-Semitism], but it wasn't accepted by the people. Only a few people accepted it, a very few.

My father worked until 1942; by the end of 1942 he wasn't working. They took his store. He had some money that he lived of. On 11th March 1943 [see [Deportation of Jews of Bitola to Skopje](#)] [22](#) they [Bulgarians] seized the whole city. There was a curfew in the whole city, no one was allowed out, not Serbs, not Jews. And the Jewish quarter was occupied and blocked off by the Bulgarian police. There was specially reinforced police near each house; they collected everyone, took them to the train station, and sent them to Skopje. In Skopje they were sent to the [Monopol] tobacco

factory [23](#) where they lived for three weeks. [Editor's note: Between 22nd and 29th March, three railroad transports took the Macedonian Jews from Monopol to Treblinka. The trip took approximately six days.]

In 1942 I took my brother [Sami] to the hospital in Sofia for treatment. One could travel with special permission, if he was sick or a student. They let me travel as a student even though I was expelled from school. They let me study there, but I went with a special certificate. We went by train. We sat with all the other travelers. There couldn't be a special section for Jews. We could travel to a place where there were Jews. We went to Sofia because in Bitola there were only general hospitals for infectious diseases, illnesses affecting the elderly. He had a nerve condition that couldn't be treated in Bitola. He had nerve attacks and spasms. There was no neurology in Bitola, so we went to Sofia. I was there with him a few weeks. And then he returned.

Since some cells had been discovered I wasn't permitted to go back with him. So I went underground in Sofia. All the members of my cell, Viktor Pardo, Shami, Moric and all the others who remained, went to jail in Bitola and then to Varna [470 kilometers from Sofia], Bulgaria, near the Black Sea. That is how they all remained alive. I remained underground in Sofia and stayed with a Macedonian man named Slave a few months. When my brother got back to Bitola he informed me that no one was looking for me. So, I came out of hiding but didn't go back to Bitola. [She remained in Bulgaria] When the deportation began I went back underground. In 1942 I was underground because my cell had been discovered and in 1943 because of the deportation.

I stayed in Sofia and pretended to study. I didn't study. Instead I did illegal work with a group of Macedonian students, much like I had before. Everything was good until I needed to go underground again. But now where can one go underground? I couldn't go back where I was before because they would look for me there. So, I went to the gynecological clinic. There I passed through a few [medical student] rotations. A [medical] student had to do a 15-day rotation, so I registered for them. I finished my first 15-day rotation and then I called some Macedonians, there were two or three, and I took their rotations. I was in the hospital a month and a half. Then I found a place to be underground with some Jew in Sofia. I lived with them and they hid me. I was with them from March until August. But then the Jews were expelled from Sofia. Thirty thousand Jews were scattered all over the country.

I went with them. What else could I do? I had to go with them even though I was underground. I went with them to the camp in Pleven [174 kilometers northeast of Sofia]. We all went to the camp. And we were there through the summer. And then the Jews were freed from the camp, but we were still underground. We helped in planning the 8th September 1944 attack on the central prison in Pleven. [When I got to the prison] there were other members of the organization like me and other people who were not members of the organization, who had their own prisoners inside, friends or relatives. We broke into the prison, captured the guards and freed everyone inside. A huge number of people entered [the prison] and the guards were not able to hold their positions and they became scared. We disarmed them all and freed the prisoners. No one was killed there because no one shot anyone. There were hundreds and hundreds of prisoners there and we freed them all. They were all important people. The entire Central Committee of the Bulgarian Party, the Central Committee of the Macedonian Party was there. Jews from Bitola were not there; they were in Bitola. There were two people from Kumanovo [38 kilometers northeast of Skopje] that I knew there. I had helped collect money for them and sent it through a mother who had a son in the prison.

They sent their neglected army after us to bring us back. We chanted: 'The people with the army. The people with the army.' And they gave up. That is how we captured some generals. We captured the guards, disarmed them and beat them up. I don't know what happened to them afterwards, if they were killed or not. I carried a gun, but I didn't know how to shoot.

I worked for state security for six or seven months in 1944 in Pleven. My first job was to capture the enemies. They gave us rifles to pretend we would shoot, but we didn't shoot at anyone. When we captured someone we handed them over for a trial. At first I worked as a police officer until they learned that I was a doctor. I had not finished my studies; I was in the fourth year. Then I worked as a doctor. Then I requested to be released to go and finish my studies. I worked three or four months as a police officer and then another three or four months as a doctor. When I wanted to be released from service in state security I asked the president of state security - I don't remember his name - to let me go. I went to them and said, 'First I worked in general as a police officer, and then as a doctor. I didn't finish my studies and now I want to go to Sofia to finish.'

#### Post-war

Then I went to Sofia to finish my studies which I did in 1945. I came to Kumanovo, Macedonia, in 1946 after finishing my studies and one part of my residency. In Kumanovo I ran a pediatric medical clinic. At the end of 1946 I came to Skopje.

During this time I did go back to Bitola to see what had happened to our things. But I didn't take anything nor would I have taken anything. I went for the first time to see in 1946. I went by myself. The first thing I saw was that my house had been destroyed. Then I went to see other houses: my sisters' houses, my brothers', my uncle's and grandfather's... Other people lived in those houses. I went into some of them. The people were scared. At [my brother] Sol's they said, 'We are not guilty for everything that happened. Here are the things we collected. We are returning them to you.' I answered, 'No, guys, I just came to see. Be calm. I didn't come to throw you out. You are not guilty. And I don't want to take the things. I just came to see.' I didn't take anything. Nowhere else did they give me anything, but to be honest I didn't ask either. Maybe they would have given me things. I didn't go to take things.

I've known Dzamila since we were children. Dzamila was married after the war, at the end of the war. Her first husband died in a traffic accident. He was driving a motorbike and somehow crashed. I saw her the first time after the war when I went to Bitola. She was there too. The fact that we shared the same fate brought us together. And she lost everything: brothers and sisters. And I lost everything. Everything. Including my two brothers who were killed while with the partisans.

At the time I was in Kumanovo and came back each week. We've been together since 1945. But we were not married until 1946 because the whole year they wouldn't let us. She accepted my offer, but the Party didn't permit it. Kolisevski's [24](#) wife, Ljiljana Calovska, was a very unpleasant woman. She wanted my wife to marry one of their functionaries and she recommended someone. Dzamila said, 'I don't want to marry that one.' Calovska suggested another one. Dzamila answered, 'I don't want to marry that one. I want to marry this one.' 'But he is not a functionary.' 'So what if he is not a functionary. He has been a member of the Party since 1941. His brothers were killed.' And the whole year she bothered us and we were unable to marry. Then they sent the whole question to the Central Committee in Belgrade. The Central Committee answered: 'What kind of manner is this to not allow her to marry a man who has been a member of the Party and a fighter since 1941. His

brothers were fighters. All of them were fighters. She can marry a person who is not a member of the party, whoever she wants, especially this man.'

We married in 1946 in Skopje in a civil marriage. I don't remember the date. We went to the municipality. There were two witnesses. Dzata Kalderon was one witness. He was a friend from Bitola. He moved to Israel and has died by now. There was another witness, but I don't remember who it was. Then we came home, Dzamila served something, then I went to work. As if nothing had happened. After we married we lived in Dzamila's apartment on Ilindenska Street. We were on the lower floor and someone else lived above us.

I was in France for specialization in pediatrics. I was very, very well accepted by Professor Robert Debre [25](#). He was a famous professor. He was the son of a rabbi. He was a famous professor and when he died, a hospital [in Paris] was named after him. When he learned that I was a Jew, he treated me exceptionally well. I didn't go to his house, only met with him in the hospital. There were three of us from Macedonia, but we were not always together. There were more people from Yugoslavia. I was there for the whole year in 1949-50. After that I went there for pediatric congresses and the day of pediatrics. They had them every year or six months, but I went almost every other year. Either my clinic would finance the trip or the French would; the latter happened more often.

I [also] studied with Jean Bernard [26](#). He was a hematologist and also a Jew. All were Jews. In French medicine there were a lot of Jews. He wasn't only a member of the [French] Academy of Science but also the president of the Academy. He was accepted as a member for two reasons, not only because of medicine but also because of literature. He wrote poetry and other things. He is the one who accepted me as a member of the [French] Academy, in 1984. When I was accepted into the academy, I gave a lecture at the academy in French entitled, 'Epidemic of Talasemija in Macedonia.' Afterwards they asked me question after question. It was hard for me to answer, not because of a lack of knowledge rather because of the language. These are special questions and a special language is needed to answer them. So, it was hard for me but I answered. I was accepted as a foreign member of the French Academy of Science. There were people from other countries as well. From Yugoslavia there was one more person who was given membership.

After the war we lived normally, like everyone else. [I have two children, Sami and Mira [Dzamila's child from her first marriage who he adopted]]. My children were always members of the Jewish community. Mira was eighteen when she was killed. She had just finished secondary school. She was more of a Jew than all of us combined. She was always searching for something: this Jew, that Jew.

I was all over Europe for different congresses. I was in Greece four or five times. I was in Bulgaria a lot of times. In Belgium. In Holland. In Denmark. In Sweden. We had passports and visas. We received exit visas and entrance visas very quickly. When I went abroad, I would buy the kids little presents: shoes, toys.

After the war Dzamila worked in Bitola for the Party Committee. Then she came to Skopje. She was there already in 1945-46 and there she worked for the Central Committee. She was responsible for personnel and later a cultural worker. After that she enrolled in and finished university. And then she went to France where she wrote her doctorate. She was there almost a year. And I was there almost a year during that time. The children were with us. She went first and was there some time

without me. I don't know how many months. Then, I got a scholarship and joined her.

First Dzamila lived with her relatives and then we lived in a hotel for six- seven months. Then Dzamila finished her doctorate and defended it. She was a professor at the university. After the [Skopje] earthquake [27](#), when our daughter, Mira, was killed, she didn't want to work at the university anymore. Then she began to work at the department for protection of mothers and children. This was a special organization for educating children. This was a special organization which existed in all of Yugoslavia. She was the president and received her salary from there. She retired in the '80s.

Dzamila has a doctorate in Judeo-Espanol and she learned a lot about this. She works on this theme a lot, and on Jewish history and on Jewish themes in general. She wrote several books. She wrote two extensive books on anti- Jewish laws, one on sayings, another one and one that was just published.

When we went on vacations we went to Brioni [60 kilometers west of Rijeka] on the northern Adriatic coast. Then we went every year for twenty years to Ohrid. But we have not been in twenty years. In twenty years we have not been on a trip.

During the earthquake Dzamila and I were covered in rubble. The house collapsed. We survived, but we couldn't get out. Mira was in another room where she got stuck and died. After the earthquake we went to Ohrid to tell our son, who was living there, that his sister had died.

We moved into this house in the eighties. After the earthquake and before this house we lived in very nice barracks. We got the barrack from those donated by the Slovenians [to Macedonia]. The municipality gave it to us because our apartment had been destroyed. This house we built ten or fifteen years ago. We bought this plot of land and built the house. The barrack [that we received after the earthquake] is here, my son lives there with my daughter-in-law, and we built the house around it, and the garden.

The Jewish community in Skopje existed before World War II, but the Jews left [and were killed]. In 1945-46 we re-established the Jewish community in Skopje. I was one of the founders. The president was a very good man, also a partisan fighter, named Blajer. He was in favor of us establishing a Jewish community. And we, the remaining three hundred Jews, did it. We came from different places: partisans, refugees, who had been in Albania, etc. In 1948 many of them went to Israel, only about 50-60 remained: those of us who were not allowed to go. [Editor's note: Soon after the creation of the State of Israel, the Yugoslav authorities permitted Jews to emigrate there freely if they so desired. At first, doctors and other professionals were discouraged from leaving, but later they too were allowed to go with their families. Source: Harriet Pass Freidenreich] Doctors, like me, were not permitted to go because there were not enough of us. And then inertia set in and we stayed here, we complained, but we stayed. I regret that I didn't go to Israel. I wanted to.

I was there in 1952. Everyone lived in tents then. I haven't been there since. Now I very much want to go, but I don't have the energy. They lived very difficult lives there, in tents, but they were Jews. I wanted to be amongst them, there. I regret it. Because of Dzamila's position she couldn't ask to go. [She held a political function that precluded her from leaving for Israel.]

One Macedonian Jewish woman, Mirjam Marija Popadic, named Blajer as a supporter of the Informbiro [28](#). He was sent to the central camp, Goli Otok [29](#). After he was released, he came back to Skopje but became ill and died. We only found out later that she was the one who had betrayed him. She was a communist, but she was against the Informbiro. That is OK, but why did she have to betray him? We were all anti-Stalinists, but we never betrayed anyone.

The 50-60 of us who remained married and had children, so that today there are about 200 members of the Jewish community. We observed all the holidays in the community. The president led the activities; he did a very nice job. We received help and money. And the government didn't have any problem, on the contrary. It wasn't a problem for those of us who were members of the party to participate in the community, but we could not go to Israel.

When the State of Israel was established this was a big deal for us. There was a gathering in the Jewish community and we celebrated, celebrated and celebrated. We had meetings, sang.

I founded the community because it is different to identify yourself as a Jew for that. I am a Jew. I feel like a Jew. How could I be a Bulgarian, a Macedonian, a Serb; I am not. I am a Jew. It is another thing that I am an atheist; that has nothing to do with it. Because the nation doesn't need to be connected to the religion. And all of my friends are like that too. And some are even Christians. When there is a census I always declare myself to be a Jew.

Sami, my son, is married. They couldn't have children, so they adopted children [Hana and Lea]. The girls live in Tel Aviv. One works in a shop and the other at the airport. The one who works at the airport has a good salary and the other one doesn't do badly. They are in a good financial position. They come to visit rarely. They will come these days but only stay ten days. Before they came more often and stayed longer. As their grandfather it is hard for me that they live there, but they are in love with Israel. I haven't been to visit them but my son has. My daughter-in-law celebrates Easter and Christmas in our house. I sing their Christian songs to joke around with them.

My son is a doctor who finished the medical school in Skopje. He has gone to the Jewish community since he was little. Now he is the president of the Jewish Fund in Skopje. He was the initiator of this action to build the Holocaust museum [in Skopje]. [Editor's note: The Jewish Community of Macedonia is in the process of building a Holocaust Memorial Museum in Skopje.] After the war, I never had a problem being a Jew, but my son did. He had a colleague, a fellow endocrinologist, who was an open Nazi. He said, 'That one needs to be born again to get rid of all the Jews.' My son replied, 'You can't get rid of just the Jews because they are almost gone already. Who are you going to get rid of? You are going to get rid of the Slavs.' But this is an exception. Everyone condemned him. [Because of this incident] my son left endocrinology and became a cardiologist. They didn't have to accept my son in cardiology but they did, even though it isn't his specialty. Endocrinology was his specialty. But, see, for that you need to know a lot about cardiology, it is that kind of specialty.

Before this rabbi came, I was the rabbi. [Editor's note: There is actually no full-time rabbi in Macedonia. There is a cantor who leads the services and a rabbi that comes from Belgrade a few times a year.] They called me the rabbi because no one knew Jewish history as well. For each holiday I would tell something about Jewish history and something for Pesach, Purim, Rosh Hashanah. They called me rabbi and I said that I am an atheist rabbi. I think we need to have a synagogue for those who are religious, let them go. I am an atheist, but in that respect I am not



particularly opposed that someone prays.

There was never a service in the community because we were all atheists. [Editor's note: The Bet Yakov synagogue, which was built before WWII, was destroyed during the Skopje earthquake and was not rebuilt.] Now they made a synagogue upstairs. [Editor's note: The Jewish community of Skopje built a small chapel on the second floor of their community building in 2001. This is the first synagogue to exist in Macedonia since the war.] When they built the synagogue in Skopje a few years ago, I thought it a little strange. What do we need a synagogue for? But now it is good that they built it. There are services every Sabbath. And we go for the holidays. I do not believe but... There are religious people amongst us, especially among the foreigners [Editor's note: Because of the political situation in former Yugoslavia, especially in Kosovo, there are many foreigners living, working or passing through Macedonia, some of whom are Jews who come to the synagogue.] When there is a service I go to the prayers. I do not believe, but I go.

When they laid the cornerstone for the museum this was a big thing. [Editor's note: the cornerstone for a Holocaust Museum was laid in September 2005. The museum and accompanying offices and commercial space will be built with funds given by the Macedonian government as restitution from WWII.] It was a significant moment because we want to leave a remembrance. That is one thing. And the other is that this museum is only the fourth of its kind in the world. There is Yad Vashem [30](#) in Jerusalem, one in New York, one in Berlin and that is it. There are no others. In Skopje there's going to be the fourth. Now there is an initiative to build similar structures in other places. This is a huge thing that we, a small Jewish community with 50 members, can build this kind of thing.

After the war there was a Jewish camp. I didn't go, the younger people went. My son didn't go to those camps. My grandchildren went to the Jewish camp in Hungary [Editor's note: Annual international Jewish youth camp, organized by the JDC (Joint Distribution Committee) and the Lauder Foundation in Szarvas, Eastern Hungary.]. We celebrated all the holidays at home. For Chanukkah we lit the chanukkiyah. I'm not a believer, but I do it out of tradition.

I retired in 1984. At first I went to the clinic everyday, then every second day, every third day and now I go once a week on Fridays. I still go every Friday to the hospital. There I participate in the weekly conference where they present different cases. Then I go to the hematology department to participate in the examination of the patients. Of course I participate in the conference. There are some other retired doctors who come, but I'm the most frequent one.

I also write poetry. I started writing when I was still a school kid. Then I wrote articles not poetry. I wrote poetry for a long time, but I didn't publish my work. It was more for me. I don't know how people found out, but when they did they wanted to publish my works. Especially one very famous poet named [Jovan] Kotevski [31](#). I published my work under his supervision. Some of my books I published and some were published by others, including the Macedonian-Israeli [Friendship] Society [32](#). This society was established about ten years ago by [Ivan] Dejanov [33](#). He was a doctor, a scientist and a great professor. We were friends. I have been a member of the society for ten years already. I have published eight books. [These are: Ni Krik ni Camina (1973); Oci i Kolenja (1974); Zapleno Leto (1975); Pogledi i Svona (1976); Hanilea (1985); Zamolknata Pravdina (1987); Datum na Pekolot (1996); Onacvelki Prizivi (1995).] And I am still writing. I wrote one collection in Ladino, translated it into Macedonian and then Serbian. I received a prize from the Jewish

Community in Belgrade for this. The collection was in honor of 3,000 years of Jerusalem. I wrote it in Spanish [Ladino], but no one in Belgrade knew enough to translate it, so they told me to do it. I translated it into Macedonian but no one knew Macedonian, so I needed to translate it into Serbian.

Every week I go hiking in the mountains. Before I used to go twice a week, Saturdays to the Skopje Crna Gora and Sundays to Vodno. Now I only go once a week with friends to Vodno.

These days I wake up early at around 6-7am, nap at 12 noon and go to bed early, at about 9pm. But I don't go to sleep until 12; I read for three hours every night. Today I am reading poetry and philosophy; right now I am reading Nietzsche [34](#).

Dzamilia and I speak in Macedonian and in Spanish [Ladino]. My children learned Ladino but they have forgotten some of it. When they were little we spoke to them in Ladino but when they began school they started to forget. They speak as if they are foreigners [non-native speakers].

I don't get any money from Claims or any other [restitution] fund. I never asked for it.

The break-up of Yugoslavia was something terrible for us. We still think that not only is it not a holiday but that it is a disaster. I loved the old Yugoslavia more than I love what we have now. I love Macedonia with Yugoslavia. And I think that the break-up of Yugoslavia had consequences.

"Y voy por el mundo por el recuerdo desde amor

Donde estas corason

O, mi alma perdida esta grande dolor no yo pedia la soportar

Yo queria burar ma, non tengo mandiento la queria lo tanto se fue para nunca tornar mas

Dia de la primavera,

De mis brazos de ya murio de entonse me voy porel mundo

Con el recuerdo desde amor."

[I am going through the world/ Remembering love/ Where are you my heart/ In my lost soul/ There exists a big pain/ And I cannot withstand it/ I would like [unknown word]/ But I do not have the patience /I loved her so much, and she left me/ And she will never return.

One spring day/ In my arms she died/ And from then I have been wandering around the world/ With the memory of her love/ [Translated from Ladino into Serbian by Avi Kozma]

This song is about a woman who died. She was sick and she died in his arms and he was sad the rest of his life, etc. This is a song I learned in my youth. My mother sang, but I didn't learn a lot from her. My sister sang very well and I learned a lot from her. My brother sang but not that well. That is how I learned hundreds of songs.

## Glossary:

### **1 11th March 1943**

On this day all of the Jews of Macedonia were rounded up and taken to a temporary camp in the Skopje tobacco factory, Monopol. They remained there for eleven days before the first of three transports transferred them by cattle car to Treblinka in Poland. Almost 98 percent of the Macedonian community was annihilated in this action.

## **2 Expulsion of the Jews from Spain**

The Sephardi population of the Balkans originates from the Jews who were expelled from the Iberian peninsula, as a result of the 'Reconquista' in the late 15th century (Spain 1492, and Portugal 1495). The majority of the Sephardim subsequently settled in the territory of the Ottoman Empire, mainly in maritime cities (Salonika, Istanbul, Smyrna, etc.) and also in the ones situated on significant overland trading routes to Central Europe (Bitola, Skopje, and Sarajevo) and to the Danube (Adrianople, Philipopolis, Sofia, and Vidin).

## **3 Second Balkan War (1913)**

The victorious countries of the First Balkan War (Bulgaria, Greece and Serbia) were unable to settle their territorial claims over the newly acquired Macedonia by peaceful means. Serbia and Greece formed an alliance against Bulgaria and the war began on 29th June 1913 with a Bulgarian attack on Serbian and Greek troops in Macedonia. Bulgaria's northern neighbor, Romania, also joined the allies and Bulgaria was defeated. The Treaty of Bucharest was signed on 10th August 1913. As a result, most of Macedonia was divided up between Greece and Serbia, leaving only a small part to Bulgaria (Pirin Macedonia). Romania also acquired the previously Bulgarian region of southern Dobrudzha.

## **4 Kingdom of Yugoslavia**

Upon the collapse of Austria-Hungary in 1918, Serbia had won high praise by the League of Nations members, while Croatia and Slovenia were in danger of losing land to the Italians after siding with the Austrians. In an attempt by European powers to unite all Southern Slavs, Croatia and Slovenia joined the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes on 1st December 1918. The dominant partner in this state, which included Montenegro, Bosnia-Herzegovina and the regions of Vojvodina and Macedonia, was Serbia. In 1929 it adopted the name Yugoslavia. Despite the name change it did not resolve the ethnic division that were already bubbling beneath the surface in the new entity.

## **5 Rabbi Sabtaj Djaen (1883-1946)**

He was born in Bulgaria and served as the chief rabbi of Bitola from 1924-1928. Prior to this post he held rabbinical positions in Sarajevo and Belgrade. He was a strong proponent of Israel and worked hard to encourage emigration to Palestine. During his tenure he also raised money in the Americas on behalf of the poor Jews of Bitola. He also made some revolutionary changes in Bitola's religious life, such as removing the mechitzah [divider] from the Kal Aragon synagogue. After Bitola he was chief Sephardi rabbi in Argentina and later in Romania. He died in Argentina in 1946.

## **6 Rabbi Avram Romano (1895-1943)**

He was born in Sarajevo and arrived in Bitola in 1931. He served as the last chief rabbi of Bitola. He was a supporter of the Zionist cause and used his position to promote this ideology. Part of his mission was to bring the dire condition of Bitola's Jewish community to the attention of other Yugoslav communities in an effort to raise support for this poor community. He was killed in Treblinka.

## **7 Keren Kayemet Leisrael (K**

K.L.): Jewish National Fund (JNF) founded in 1901 at the Fifth Zionist Congress in Basel. From its inception, the JNF was charged with the task of fundraising in Jewish communities for the purpose of purchasing land in the Land of Israel to create a homeland for the Jewish people. After 1948 the fund was used to improve and afforest the territories gained. Every Jewish family that wished to help the cause had a JNF money box, called the 'blue box'. In Poland the JNF was active in two periods, 1919-1939 and 1945-1950. In preparing its colonization campaign, Keren Kayemet le-Israel collaborated with the Jewish Agency and Keren Hayesod.

## **8 Vlach**

This is a Slavic term used to designate the Latin peoples of South-Eastern Europe: Romanians, Aromanians, Megleno-Romanians and Istro-Romanians. It also acquired a second meaning: 'shepherd,' after the occupation of many Vlachs of Greece and Serbia. Historically, it was used to refer to all Latin people of the Balkans, but nowadays it refers to the Aromanians, Istro-Romanians and Megleno-Romanians. However, in Serbia, the Romanian minority (living especially in Vojvodina, Timok valley), although they are speaking the Daco-Romanian (standard Romanian) dialect, are still referred to as 'Vlachs.' In the Yugoslavian census figures, the Aromanians of Macedonia and the Romanians of Serbia were both classified as 'Vlachs.'

## **9 Hashomer Hatzair in Yugoslavia**

Leftist Zionist youth organization founded in 1909 by members of the Second Aliyah, many of whom were active in revolutionary movements back in the Russian Empire. In the diaspora its main goal was to prepare Jewish youth for the hard pioneering life in Palestine. It was first organized in Yugoslavia in 1930.

## **10 Jez**

A humoristic-satirical periodical established by the Newspaper Society of Belgrade. Its first issue was published in 1935 under the name Osisen Jez. It was published until the beginning of WWII. After the liberation it was published under the name Jez.

## **11 Vojvodina**

Northern part of Serbia with Novi Sad (Ujvidek, Neusatz) as its capital. Ethnically it is the most mixed part of the country with significant Hungarian, Croatian, Romanian, Slovakian population as well as Roma and Ruthenian minorities (and also a large German population before and during World War II, which was expelled after the war). An integral part of Hungary, the area of present day Vojvodina was attached to the newly created Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians (Yugoslavia after 1929) at the Trianon Peace Conference in 1920. Along with Kosovo it used to be an autonomous province within Serbia between 1974 and 1990, under the Yugoslavian Constitution. [12](#) Borba: The first issue of this daily appeared on 19th February 1922, but a newspaper under this title had occasionally been printed in Yugoslavia since 1st January 1881. It was turned into a political daily under the government of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Borba

was the only newspaper published in the occupied part of Europe during WWII. [13](#) Tehelet Lavan in Yugoslavia: Moderately leftist Zionist organization. In Yugoslavia it was founded in Novi Sad (Vojvodina), where it opened its office in 1937. It was also popular in Macedonia. [14](#) Halva: A sweet confection of Turkish and Middle Eastern origin and largely enjoyed throughout the Balkans. It is made chiefly of ground sesame seeds and honey.

### **[15](#) Kibbutz Shaar Hamakim**

founded on 2nd June 1935 by groups of young pioneers from Hashomer Hatzair in Romania and Yugoslavia. Today the kibbutz, which is situated on the boundary between the Jezreel Valley and the Zebulun Valley, has 310 members. Amongst its many agricultural and business operations it runs Chromagen, Israel's manufacturer of solar energy systems.

### **[16](#) School of Medicine at the University of Belgrade**

The first initiative to start a medical school in Serbia was taken in 1876. The University Act of 1905 created the university and explicitly stated that 'the University consists of five schools,' including the School of Medicine. It was not until 9th December 1920, that the first generation - 286 young men and women - entered the classrooms of the School of Medicine at the University of Belgrade. Since its foundation, more than 30,000 students have graduated from the School of Medicine at the University of Belgrade.

### **[17](#) German Occupation of Yugoslavia**

On March 25, 1941 Yugoslavia signed the Tripartite Pact, allying itself with Hitler. Two days later, however, a bloodless coup d'etat took place in Belgrade, led by a Serbian general, Dusan Simovic, evidently in opposition to the government's pro-Axis policies. As a result, on April 6, German bombers attacked Belgrade, while the Italians struck Dalmatia; shortly after, Hungarian and Bulgarian troops also invaded the country. Within less than two weeks the Yugoslav armed forces surrendered.

### **[18](#) Bulgarian Occupation of Macedonia in World War II**

In April 1941 Bulgaria along with Germany, Italy and Hungary attacked the neighboring Yugoslavia. Beside Yugoslav Macedonia Bulgarian troops also marched into the Northern-Greek Aegean Thrace. Although the territorial gains were initially very popular in Bulgaria, complications soon arose in the occupied territories. The oppressive Bulgarian administration resulted in uprisings in both occupied lands. Jews were persecuted, their property was confiscated and they had to do forced labor. In early 1943 the entire Macedonian Jewish population (mostly located in Bitola, Skopje and Stip) was deported and confined in the Monopol tobacco factory near Skopje. On 22nd March deportations to the Polish death camps began. From these transports only about 100 people returned to Macedonia after the war. Some Macedonian Jews managed to reach Italian-occupied Albania, others joined the Yugoslav partisans and some 150-200 of them were saved by the Spanish government which granted them Spanish citizenship.

### **[19](#) Law for the Protection of the Nation**

A comprehensive anti-Jewish legislation in Bulgaria was introduced after the outbreak of World War II. The 'Law for the Protection of the Nation' was officially promulgated in January 1941. According to this law, Jews did not have the right to own shops and factories. Jews had to wear the distinctive yellow star; Jewish houses had to display a special sign identifying it as being Jewish; Jews were dismissed from all posts in schools and universities. The internment of Jews in certain designated towns was legalized and all Jews were expelled from Sofia in 1943. Jews were only allowed to go out into the streets for one or two hours a day. They were prohibited from using the main streets, from entering certain business establishments, and from attending places of entertainment. Their radios, automobiles, bicycles and other valuables were confiscated. From 1941 on Jewish males were sent to forced labor battalions and ordered to do extremely hard work in mountains, forests and road construction. In the Bulgarian-occupied Yugoslav (Macedonia) and Greek (Aegean Thrace) territories the Bulgarian army and administration introduced extreme measures. The Jews from these areas were deported to concentration camps, while the plans for the deportation of Jews from Bulgaria proper were halted by a protest movement launched by the vice-chairman of the Bulgarian Parliament.

## **20 Yellow star in Bulgaria**

According to a governmental decree all Bulgarian Jews were forced to wear distinctive yellow stars after 24th September 1942. Contrary to the German-occupied countries the stars in Bulgaria were made of yellow plastic or textile and were also smaller. Volunteers in previous wars, the war-disabled, orphans and widows of victims of wars, and those awarded the military cross were given the privilege to wear the star in the form of a button. Jews who converted to Christianity and their families were totally exempt. The discriminatory measures and persecutions ended with the cancellation of the Law for the Protection of the Nation on 17th August 1944.

## **21 SKOJ (Alliance of the Communist Youth Yugoslavia)**

The organization was established in Zagreb in 1919 and was closely tied to the Yugoslav Communist Party. During World War II many of its members were imprisoned, others joined Tito's partisans and participated in the anti-fascist resistance.

## **22 Deportation of Jews of Bitola to Skopje**

On 11th March 1943 all the Jews of Macedonia were collected and taken to a temporary collection center in Skopje at the Monopol tobacco factory. This round up and deportation of the Jews from Bitola was executed by Kiril Stoimenov, the inspector of the Commission for Jewish Questions. At two in the morning the city was under a blockade, at five the carefully assembled forces informed the Jewish population to prepare for a trip and at seven they began the deportation to the Monopol tobacco factory in Skopje.

## **23 Monopol Tobacco Factory**

situated on the periphery of Skopje, the Monopol factory was made into a detention center for Jews from Skopje, Stip and Bitola during WWII. Within the complex there were four four-story buildings with a large yard and high fence. Train tracks ran through the factory property. When the Jews were brought to the factory, everything was taken from them and they were not fed at all for the

first five days they were there. There was no toilet in the facilities were there were held. They remained there for eleven days before the first of three transports transferred 7,148 Macedonian Jews by cattle car to Treblinka in Poland. Almost 98% of the Macedonian community was annihilated in this action.

#### **24 Kolisevski, Lazar (1914-2000)**

born in the small Macedonian town of Sveti Nikole, he finished a military school in Kragujevac, Yugoslavia, and worked as a metal worker before WWII. During this time he began his work for the illegal communist party. He was a member of the communist party since 1935. During WWII he was captured and imprisoned by the Bulgarians and liberated on 9th September 1944. He was president of Macedonia from 1945-53. After this he held several positions in the Yugoslav government.

#### **25 Debre, Robert (1882-1978)**

born into a rabbinical family from Alsace. By the time of his death, he was considered by many to be the father of modern pediatric medicine. Already in 1910 he was at the head of the effort to promote BCG vaccines against tuberculosis. Dr. Debre is credited with having introduced the notion of teaching hospitals-thus joining the university and the hospital. In Touraine he transformed an asylum into a full scale pediatric teaching hospital. After his death, the city of Paris named one of its biggest pediatric hospitals, 'Robert Debré, Centre hospitalo-universitaire pour la mère et l'enfant,' after Dr. Debre.

#### **26 Benard, Jean (1907-)**

born in Paris on 26th May 1907, he studied medicine at the Pasteur Institute. During WWII he was in the French resistance and imprisoned in the Fresnes German camp. He began his distinguished medical career in 1946 as a staff doctor. He then specialized in oncology and went on to become the Director of the Saint-Louis Hospital. Later he further specialized and became a renowned hematology expert. During his distinguished medical career he received many awards and honorary degrees. He was elected to the French Academy of Science in 1972.

#### **27 Skopje Earthquake**

Half of the city of Skopje was destroyed, and over 1,000 people were killed, in a devastating earthquake on 26th July 1963. The city was rebuilt after a great deal of funds was channeled there from the Yugoslav government and people as well as an extraordinary contribution from foreign governments.

#### **28 Informbiro**

Information Bureau of the Communist and Worker's Parties (Informbiro) was established in Warsaw in 1947. The organization was headquartered in Belgrade until the dispute with Russia began in 1948 when it moved to Bucharest. In June 1948 Stalin made a resolution accusing the communist party of Yugoslavia, among other things, of not holding true to the values of Marxism-Leninism. The resolution expelled the Communist Party of Yugoslavia from the Communist Information Bureau

and thus it fell outside the Soviet control. This period was also marked by dissent within the communist party of Yugoslavia and the subsequent repression and imprisonment of political opponents, notably in Goli Otok. The Informbiro was dissolved in 1956.

### **29 Goli Otok**

lit. 'naked island', situated on the Croatian Adriatic coast between the northeastern coast of the Island Rab and the mainland. The whole island was officially made into a high-security prison in 1949 by the authorities of communist Yugoslavia. It was used to incarcerate political prisoners.

### **30 Yad Vashem**

This museum, founded in 1953 in Jerusalem, honors both Holocaust martyrs and 'the Righteous Among the Nations', non-Jewish rescuers who have been recognized for their 'compassion, courage and morality'.

### **31 Kotevski, Jovan (1932-2001)**

contemporary Macedonian writer and poet. He was born in Prisovjani near the city of Struga. After finishing secondary school he began work as a journalist with 'Nova Makedonija' and was president of the Council of the Struga Poetry Evenings festival. He was a member of the Macedonian Writers Association starting in 1956. He published 25 works including: Pred Zori; Zlodoba; Senki; Zlatni porti; Povtorna Zlodoba. During his career he was the recipient of many awards including: Kocho Racin Award, Aco Shopov Award, Grigor Prlichev Award; Miladinov Brothers' Award and Narci Award.

### **32 Macedonian-Israeli Friendship Society**

This non-governmental and non-political association works to strengthen cooperation with the World and European Jewish Congress, the Macedonian community in Israel, the Jewish community in Macedonia, and other associations. Its activities include projects which promote the language, culture, religion and history of Macedonia and Israel and on strengthening mutual interests such as: economic and political developments between these two countries. Dr. Ivan Dejanov was elected president in 1994.

### **33 Ivan Dejanov (1932-2001)**

Dr. Ivan Dejanov was born on January 6, 1932 in Kjustendil, Bulgaria and died in 2001 in Skopje, Macedonia. He was a medical doctor and was inducted into the Macedonian Academy of Arts and Science in 1997. Dr. Ivan Dejanov was elected president of the Macedonian-Israel Friendship Society in 1994.

### **32 Nietzsche, Friedrich (1844-1900)**

German philosopher and poet. Long misunderstood and even reviled as a result of misuses of his work, most notably by the Nazis, Nietzsche has become one of the most influential philosophers of the late 20th century. Nietzsche is famous, among others, for the theory of the Übermensch, which he developed in Thus Spoke Zarathustra. In 1889 he suffered a mental breakdown from which he



never recovered.