

posed to fascist and any other totalitarian ideology, and to relativize the crimes of the Independent State of Croatia. That this book, published in the 1990s, was to serve propaganda and revisionist purposes may be seen from the fact that there soon followed its translated editions in Zagreb and Sarajevo, while the author was awarded a medal for merit by the President of the Republic of Croatia, Franjo Tuđman, known not only as the architect of the ethnic cleansing of Croatia of its Serbian population, but also for markedly anti-Semitic views in his programmatic

book *Bespuća povijesne zbiljnosti*,³² and for publicly stating that he was happy that his wife was neither Jewish nor Serbian. Cohen's purportedly scholarly approach to Serbia's history proves to be just another of many failed attempts to falsify the past in order to accommodate some narrow nationalist or immediate political goals.

³² Franjo Tuđman, *Bespuća povijesne zbiljnosti. Rasprava o povijesti i filozofiji zločinja* (Zagreb: Nakladni zavod Matice hrvatske, 1990).

JAJA ALMULI, *STRADANJE I SPASAVANJE SRPSKIH JEVIJEJA*
[SUFFERING AND RESCUE OF SERBIAN JEWS]. BELGRADE: ZAVOD ZA UDŽBENIKE I
NASTAVNA SREDSTVA, 2010, pp. 392.

Reviewed by Veljko Stanić*

The book of the renowned journalist and publicist Jaša Almulj re-examines the tragic fate of the Jewish community in Serbia during the Second World War. A result of the author's twenty years of research into the Holocaust in Yugoslavia, it belongs to the field of microhistory studies, but it also looks at the Jewish question in occupied Serbia in the overall context of the Holocaust.

Almulj, born in 1918, comes from a Belgrade Jewish family himself. Under Nazi invasion in April 1941, the young man managed to leave Belgrade, but was arrested in Montenegro and transferred to a prison in Italy. After the war, he pursued a career in journalism. He was a distinguished political commentator, news agency editor and foreign correspondent for Yugoslav newspapers, notably from South America and the United States.

The research Almulj, as a privileged interlocutor of Jewish Holocaust survivors, has been carrying out over the last two decades has considerably improved our knowledge and resulted in several important publications, such as *Jevrejke*

govore [Jewish women speaking], *Živi i mrtvi* [The living and the dead], and *Jevreji i Srbi u Jasenovcu* [Jews and Serbs in Jasenovac], the latter being a collection of sixteen testimonies of the former prisoners of Jasenovac, the largest extermination camp in what had been the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, managed by the Croatian Ustasha regime in the Independent State of Croatia 1941–1945.

The book presented here is organized into three main parts. The first offers an account of the persecution of Jews in Serbia by the Gestapo after the Kingdom of Yugoslavia collapsed and Serbia was occupied by German troops and put under a system of military administration. The second part reveals a less known aspect of the occupation period: the rescue of Jews under Nazi threat. Finally, the third part revisits some controversial issues of the Jewish question in Serbia. Apart from doing his own research, Almulj underlines the importance of widely recognized

* Institute for Balkan Studies, Belgrade

studies in this field, such as Christopher Browning's "The Final Solution in Serbia" (*Yad Vashem Studies* XV, Jerusalem 1983), Milan Koljanin's *Nemački logor na beogradskom Sajmištu 1941–1944* (The German concentration camp at Sajmište in Belgrade 1941–1944 [Belgrade 1992]), Menachem Schelach's contributions to the *Encyclopaedia of the Holocaust* etc.

The Jewish ordeal (1941–1945) in Yugoslavia after its dismemberment in April 1941 falls among the most brutal experiences of the Second World War: 67,248 dead, or 81.76 percent of the entire Jewish population of the pre-war Kingdom of Yugoslavia. While the Jews in the so-called Independent State of Croatia, proclaimed in Zagreb on 10 April 1941, were subjected, together with Serbs and Roma, to the genocide planned and carried out by the Croatian Nazi regime, the Ustasha — some 33,000 Jews, or 80 percent, perished — the Jews in Serbia came under the direct control of the Nazi German authorities.

The first noteworthy feature of Almuli's book is the chronology of the extermination of Serbia's Jews in 1941/2. About 14,500 (88%) Jews from the parts of Serbia under German occupation and the Banat (administered by the local *Volksdeutsche*) were killed at the hands of the occupying force. The author insists on the phased unfolding of the process and on German supreme command in it. Barely arrived in Belgrade in April 1941, the Germans ordered the registration of all Belgrade Jews. More than 9,000 Jews (of a total of 10,500) were subjected to forced labour. The so-called *Regulations* decreed by the German occupation authorities on 31 May contained discriminatory measures targeted at Jews and Roma. Three months later, on 25 August 1941, arrests began. Thousands of Jews were sent to Nazi camp "Topovske šupe" in Belgrade. By December 1941, about five thousand Jewish men interned in this

camp had been executed by Gestapo firing squads on several locations around Belgrade, notably at Jajinci. In early December 1941, Germans set up another camp in Belgrade (formally on the soil of the Independent State of Croatia, on the left bank of the Sava river) — Staro Sajmište or *Judenlager Semlin* — where Jewish women and children, as well as patients of the Belgrade Jewish Hospital were confined. Between March and May 1942, in a secret Gestapo-led operation, more than 7,000 of them were suffocated with exhaust gases fed into a truck (*Gaswagen*).

Almuli rightly points out that the extermination of the Jews in Serbia took place at the beginning of the "Final Solution" in Europe, and ascribes exclusive responsibility to the Gestapo: arrests, internments and executions. Collaborators from the ranks of the quisling Nedić government played an auxiliary and secondary role. In the case of Staro Sajmište, for example, the collaborationist regime was responsible for supplying food and heat to the camp, while the personnel structure of the camp and executions were led by the occupying authorities.

The second part of the book returns to several key questions concerning the destiny of the Jews in German-occupied Serbia, including the question of rescue and civil disobedience. Almuli presents forty-one personal stories reconstructed in detail. Relying on various sources, including personal testimonies, memoirs, correspondence and archival documents, the author relates the untold story of rescue networks in occupied Serbia. His approach opens a panoramic view of social history and reveals an unjustly forgotten complex phenomenon. It encompasses all categories of the Jewish population, intellectuals, physicians, teachers, merchants, craftsmen. Rescue mechanisms varied from one case to another, ranging from hideouts in Belgrade and escape routes

out of the country to, more frequently, shelter found in the Serbian countryside. Almuli explains that the system depended both on Jewish circles themselves and on Serbs. The assistance provided by Serbs naturally relied on pre-war connections and relationships, which, according to Almuli, shows that the Jewish population was highly integrated in Serbian society. In most cases, Jewish women and children found shelter in Serbian villages. The farmers were not always aware of their identity, but took them in as though they had been members of their own families. In order to elucidate more profoundly the nature of these networks of Jews and Serbs, Almuli takes a glimpse into a more remote past of the Jews in Serbia. In the manner of a well-informed researcher, he offers an overview of the lives of several illustrious figures of Jewish origin in Serbian society, whether prominent intellectual figures or soldiers fighting in the Serbian Army during the Great War or as members of the antifascist Resistance movement in the Second World War.

An unflinching well documented analysis of the phenomenon which is the focus of the author's attention is pursued in the third part of the book, which looks at its important aspects, such as the routes of escape from Belgrade or the methods of forging identity documents and disguise. Furthermore, the author revisits the role of the collaborationist Nedić government in the persecution of the Jews in occupied Serbia, stressing once more their indirect involvement. In other words, Almuli claims that the documentary sources substantiate the conclusion that the genocide against the Jews in occupied Serbia was fully planned, controlled and led by the occupation authorities. The nature of this involvement has, however, been largely misrepresented. The resulting distorted interpretation was widely exploited for propaganda purposes in Tudjman's Croatia in the 1990s. Almuli offers a crit-

ical reassessment of this political propaganda, including some journalistic work of Ante Knežević and Marko Attila Hoare in Great Britain, which base their vilification of Serbia and Serbs on purported Serbian anti-Semitism and the destruction of the Jewish population in Belgrade in 1941/2. In this perspective, Almuli also casts a new light on the relationship between Jews and the Yugoslav Army in the Homeland led by Colonel Dragoljub Mihailović. He insists on the existence of various factions within Mihailović's royalist Resistance movement and, consequently, on the existence of various attitudes towards the Jews. He also draws attention to the presence of some Jews in the ranks of Mihailović's forces, and cites Mihailović's *Order* of April 1944 banning anti-Semitism and condemning violence against the Jews.

A precious collection of personal oral histories, Almuli's book is also an intimate history of the Jewish community in Serbia. The richness and complexity of the information obtained and its thorough documentation make this book an indispensable source for any research into the Holocaust, but also into the history of the Jewish community in Serbia.