Aron Nissim Alkalai

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Dupnitsa

Bulgaria

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Interviewer: Dimitar Bozhilov

Aron Alkalai is one of the few Jews from the older generation remaining in Dupnitsa. He managed to save his Jewish identity, although he denies that. He thinks that the observation of Jewish laws was truer of his ancestors. He lives in a modestly furnished, but cosy flat in the center of the town. He is sociable and likes spending time outside talking with neighbors and friends. He is a very good cook and makes an amazing rose hip wine. He lives with his wife Ida, and they both miss their children, who recently immigrated to Israel.

I know that my family name Alkalai is a geographical name. It comes from the Alkala Mountain in Spain. It seems my ancestors had that family name and it remained when they moved to the Balkans. 1 The families of my parents are from Kyustendil. My paternal grandparents married in Kyustendil and all their children were born there. Then they moved to live in Dupnitsa [a town in Western Bulgaria]. I do not know when they decided to move. That happened before I was born. The reason to move was work, I suppose. Probably there were more opportunities for trade in Dupnitsa. I have heard that my paternal grandfather Avram Alkalai while living in Kyustendil came to Dupnitsa to sell whole carts full of sea-salt. He bought it from the wholesalers and resold it. He also sold other goods. At that time, merchants sold a lot of things – gas, oil, wool, cotton, paints. My paternal grandfather also had an oven, in which he used to bake prunes, which he sold. My father also did the same. My paternal grandmother Rivka Alkalai was a housewife. I know that she gave birth eleven times. Two of her children died and nine remained. My father was the oldest of them.

I know almost nothing about my mother's parents. I remember that they lived in Kyustendil, where I went in the summer during my vacations. My maternal grandfather Rafael Lazar had a small goatee. I do not know what he worked. I do not remember my grandmother Vinucha Lazar. She was a housewife.

In Kyustendil I visited my mother's relatives and my father's brother who lived there. Once my parents decided to go to Kyustendil. I was not allowed to go with them then. I was very young. But I had decided that I should definitely go. I got on a truck, which was on its way to Kyustendil and so I arrived in the town. I sat on the sidewalk there and waited. My parents saw me and were absolutely surprised. They had to leave me at one of my uncle's for some time.

I do not know how my parents met. When they married, my father was living in Dupnitsa. After they married, they lived in various rented flats in the center of the town. My parents spoke Bulgarian, but their parents spoke Ladino 2. After they married, I was born in 1921, my brother Rafael in 1923 and my sister Riri in 1928. The house where I was born had two rooms and was very

humbly furnished. When I was young, we did not have electricity, we used gas lamps.

My mother's name is Regina Alkalai and she had two brothers and two sisters. Her eldest brother's name is Yosif Lazar. He was a lawyer and lived in Plovdiv. Her other brother's name is David Lazar. He was a merchant and lived in Kyustendil. One of my mother's sisters was Buka and she married in Sofia. Her other sister was Matilda and she lived in Dupnitsa. Her husband's name was Konorti and he was a tailor. Unfortunately, that is all I know about them.

My mother was a teacher in the Jewish school in Kyustendil. Probably she also worked as a teacher in Dupnitsa but for a short time. After she married, she stopped working under the influence of my father. He wished that she would only be a housewife. My mother knew French very well. She also played the guitar and knew songs in Ladino and in Bulgarian. I have seen her singing a melody and playing on the guitar to herself. In the evenings she would go on the balcony and hum a song for 'good night'. Times were more peaceful then and people were less demanding. We did not buy many clothes, did not rely on material things so much and people lived more peacefully than they do now.

My father Nissim Alkalai had a lot of jobs. He had a hard life. At one point he was even a bartender and a cafe owner. When the water-conduit for Sofia was being constructed, he had a small canteen in the Rila Mountain. He cooked for the workers, who were around 150 people. But my father was a very good man and often gave them food on credit. That is why, he did not get rich from that job. There were some Italians who owed him a lot of money. At that time our house was mortgaged. My father had taken a loan from the Jewish bank 'Bratstvo' [Brotherhood] 3 to buy the house, in which we lived. My mother told me that once my father threw in the stove some papers issued to him by a judge and with which he had to collect the money he was owed. He had won a trial against the people who owed him money, but at the last minute he reconsidered. My mother asked him why he was throwing those papers in the fire. He answered that the people had no money to pay him back. For example, one of them had only one cow. If he took it, what would the man have to eat? So, my father was very considerate about the others. The fact that there were five of us and our house was mortgaged was in the background. Because of that nobility and kindness my father was much respected man. He had a lot of friends among the Bulgarians too.

My father was a cashier in the Jewish bank 'Bratstvo' in the years around World War II. It was a local bank governed by the Jewish municipality in Dupnitsa. In 1941 under the Law for Protection of the Nation 4 the bank was closed and my father was left unemployed. I was in the labor camps 5 then, but when I was at home I tried to do some work to help them – as a cobbler or in the tobacco warehouses.

When I was a child, my father could not afford to take us on vacation. We went on excursions in the mountain (Dupnitsa is in the foot of the Rila Mountain). Once I remember that we went to the Rila Monastery with four other Jewish families. Every family had three or four children. There was a special tent for cooking and a tent for sleeping. There was a Bulgarian Aleksander Pilev who transported beer from Samokov and bottled it in Dupnitsa. He had a pub in the town. The beer was left in a well to get cold. A boy, Kole the Blacksmith and I were sent to get them. But we decided to drink secretly and fill up the bottles with water. But the people found that out and criticized the pub owner. He could not say what had happened. In the end the people found out the truth. Another time, once again during an excursion in Rila, we had taken a keg of wine. We sat in a meadow

above a river. There were trees around the river. The keg slid, fell down and crashed. My parents went on excursions in the mountain every summer for about 10-15 days. My father was much respected and had a lot of friends among the Bulgarians. We went on those excursions both with Jewish and Bulgarian families. I do not remember if we sang songs. They were more of daily excursions in the open.

There was a cinema in Dupnitsa where I regularly went. It was a private one and was known as 'Doncho's cinema'. Probably its owner's name was Doncho and that's why it was called that way. I went to buy tickets early in the morning to get cheaper seats. Unfortunately, I do not remember the names of the movies, but when we were young, we were much influenced by them and tried to copy the behavior of the characters in them.

My father had four sisters and four brothers. After him his sister Kalina (Leonova, by husband) was born. She married in Dupnitsa. Then Rashel was born. She lived in Kyustendil and she did not marry. After her is Sara, now Hazdai, who lived in Dupnitsa and Vita, now Isakova, who also lived in Dupnitsa. All my father's sisters were housewives. My father's brothers are Mois, Leon, Solomon and Azarya.

One of my father's brothers – Leon – remained to live in Kyustendil. He sewed ladies' clothes. He had a family with two children. His son Aron later became a painter in Israel. Another brother of my father's – uncle Mois – was a teacher and headmaster of the Jewish school in Dupnitsa. Before that he had worked as a trainmaster. He could speak very well in public. He gave lectures in the Jewish school and was well-known in town both before and after 9th September 1944 6. His first wife [the interviewee does not know her name] was a midwife, but she died early. Then he remarried. He married Sofi from Sofia. He has two daughters - Bela, who was married to the famous Bulgarian historian Ilcho Dimitrov 7. Kalina, my father's sister, went to live in Sofia. She sang very well. When there were operettas in town, she took part as a singer, and so did my aunt Vita, another sister of my father's.

My father had a brother, who had anarchist beliefs. His name is Solomon Alkalai. He took part in the civil war in Spain. 8 He wrote a letter from Spain saying that his dream had come true. I suppose that his dream was related to the ideas of the civil war in Spain. Firstly he went to France, because probably he had been persecuted in Bulgaria. He had said officially that he would study to become a dentist there. He was a very well-read man. He was also a healer and helped people with natural remedies. So, he went to France and in the 1930s when the civil war broke out in Spain he took part in it. Then he went back to France but he was sent to a Nazi camp. He managed to break away and joined the resistance [the interviewee means the French resistance during World War II]. In the camp he shared his food with the others and they all loved him. He wrote about that in his letters. I also know that he was a vegetarian. The daughter of uncle Mois, Bela, visited him in France. She noticed that the collar of his shirt was slightly torn. He sensed her surprise and showed her how many shirts he had at home but he explained to her that he gave them away to poor Spanish people.

Rashel did not marry. She had problems with her eyes. At first she lived with her parents in the old house and then we rented a room for her, which was close to us. I know that they took her to Vienna to treat her when she was young, but unsuccessfully. Now I have a blanket, which I received as a gift from her.

Sara lived in Dupnitsa. She married a cobbler and she had three boys – Leon Hazdai, Aron Hazdai and Hertsel Hazdai. Leon and Aron left for Israel and as far as I know they died. Only Hertsel is still alive and lives in a villa near Dupnitsa. There are beehives, rabbits and a goat there. He was a constructor in a factory for prints and pressforms. He was a very skilled specialist.

Vita had one daughter – Lida Isakova, who became a doctor. Her husband Leon Isakov was mentally ill. His father had a grocery and he worked there. Then he married my aunt. They moved to Israel.

Azarya was a watchmaker. He lived in Sofia. When we were in labor camps, we were close to one another and I often visited him. He had made an improvised underground stove in the ground to keep warm. We were in the camps during the winter. He was very inventive and so, he decided to make that stove. And it was working very well. He was also a very sociable man. He is still alive and is living in Israel. His son Avram is also a watchmaker and brings him some watches with bigger parts to repair because he has problems with eyesight. Uncle Azarya loved his profession and was addicted to it. He was a very kind man and always treated us very well. He lived on Pirotska Str. in Sofia.

I had friends in Sofia. Once my uncle Azarya went out so that we would all gather in his flat and have a party. My friends in Sofia were both Jews and Bulgarians. I met them when they visited the family of uncle Azarya. When I was 17 years old, I went to Sofia on foot. The distance to Sofia is 52 km. I started late in the evening and arrived in Kniazhevo [a district in Sofia] at 8 o'clock in the morning the next day.

The population in Dupnitsa was around 16 000 people and the Jewish community was around 1 800, I think. There was a synagogue, which was built in 1599. The Jewish municipality had its own building and bank. There was a chazzan and a shochet in the synagogue. As far as I remember the name of the chazzan was Haim. I do not remember the name of the shochet. He was in a separate building. The chazzan went to slaughterhouses to look at the meat and said which meat was kosher and stamped it so that the Jews would know which meat to buy. I know an interesting story in a slaughterhouse. Once the chazzan went to the slaughterhouse and the people offered him an anesthetized and nice-looking lamb. But when the chazzan saw him, he told them that that animal was not for our people. The Bulgarians who worked there were shocked. They thought that they had chosen a very nice animal. After they slaughtered it and opened its skull, it turned out that the animal was not well and that the chazzan was right.

There were a lot of tobacco warehouses in Dupnitsa. The tobacco industry was very well developed. A lot of Jews from town earned their living thanks to those warehouses – they worked there. Before the tobacco was sent to the warehouses, while fresh, it was strung in strings of two meters, which were hung into frames to dry. I also went to string tobacco leaves when I was a child to earn some money. When the leaves were dry enough, they were made into bales. Those bales were transported to the warehouse and there they were processed and sorted depending on their quality. Many of our Jews worked in those warehouses – both men and women. The other Jews in Dupnitsa were craftsmen and a small part of them merchants.

The famous tobacco dealer Zhak Aseov had a number of tobacco warehouses in Dupnitsa. I know a story about him. He studied law in Germany. He was very funny and sociable man. Once while he was in Germany, he had an evening walk in some town. There was a ball on the first floor of a

building. He went inside and since he was very sociable and knowledgeable, he impressed the people there. There was a tobacco dealer at the ball. When he found out that Zhak was from Bulgaria, he offered him to buy tobacco as his middle-man and export it abroad. So, they got rich. They had tobacco warehouses throughout the Balkan Peninsula. Everyone who had worked for him said that he was a very kind man. He gave money to Jews in need. He also gave money for the construction of a waterfall in the Rila Mountain. It was very beautiful and close to the village of Samoranovo. Zhak also supported gifted students to graduate high school. In Israel he built a senior home for Bulgarian Jews. I have visited it. It was in a small town whose name I do not remember. I was driven by car then and I did not pay attention to its name. All books in his library had leather covers. He had a very nice restaurant and a garden. He helped people much and was involved in charity.

There were only Bulgarians in the neighborhood where I was born and grew up. While I was a child, we always got on very well with them. We played together, we made pools in the Dupnitsa River and bathed in them in the summer. When the Law for Protection of the Nation was passed, our neighbors did not change their attitude towards us. They always treated us very well. We did not feel any animosity or disdain. People treated us the same way as they did before the war. We greeted each other in the street and talked as neighbors do.

My paternal grandparents lived in a small house in the Jewish neighborhood. I visited them for the holidays. On Purim we went to their place with a purse so that they would give us some money. Also, in the evening, some of the children put on masks and we went to the houses reciting poems and the people gave us some small change. On Las Frutas 9 we roasted peanuts, almonds, walnuts and put them on the table. I do not remember if they prepared purses for us. On Chanukkah we did not light candles.

On Pesach I went to the Jewish neighborhood. I played walnuts there with the other children. We placed the walnuts in small heaps and aimed at them. We did not eat bread on Pesach. My mother made boykos. These were very hard small flat loaves. Mu mother did not have separate dishes for Pesach, but she boiled her old ones for the holiday. She used wood ash and put it in the boiling water. In this way they got cleaned better. I do not remember if we observed kosher every day. But I remember that I brought the hens to the shochet to slaughter them. The shochet slaughtered the hen without removing its head and waited for some time, then I brought it home. We gathered at my grandfather's place for Pesach but I do not remember what ritual we observed. I do not remember having a bar mitzvah. But I was circumcised. My sons are also circumcised. Each circumcision was accompanied by a celebration.

My parents loved reading. My mother did not have much time to read because of the housework, but my father read all the time. They observed the Jewish traditions more strictly than we did. My father had books in Ivrit and in ancient Jewish, which I have now, but unfortunately I cannot read them because I do not understand the language.

We did not observe kosher at home, because we did not have enough money to be choosy about our food. There were times when there was hardly anything to eat. During the war [World War II] we used coupons to buy food.

Our synagogue was not big. There was a separate building for midrash in the yard. There were benches inside. Jewish weddings were made in the synagogue. I remember that the newly-weds

broke glasses. The interesting thing was that there were amphorae built into the walls for better acoustics in the synagogue. It was destroyed at the end of the 1970s. Then my uncle Mois Alkalai, who was secretary of the Jewish municipality was accused that he and some other Jews had agreed to the destruction of the synagogue. But the truth was that nobody asked them about that. Someone in Sofia decided on that and it was destroyed. [There is no further information on this fact]. There is a Home of the Technics in its place now. Then some people took a brick as a remembrance of it. There was great resonance inside. There was also a choir and a special place for the people. Men always wore a tallit when entering. Hats were not taken off in the synagogue and the chazzan wore a special hat. There were not kippahs then. The Jews in Dupnitsa did not have payes.

I studied four years in the Jewish school. We studied half a day. We studied everything in Bulgarian except our classes in Ivrit. I cannot say that we learned the language. We had a strict teacher in Ivrit – Monsieur Revakh. Monsieur Revakh made us stand in the corner of the room when we did not know our lesson. I remember that the teachers took us to the synagogue. We had a big gym and a stage in the school. That was the only school in town where there was a stage. We performed theater plays there. We placed chairs in the gym. Our parents came and we performed in front of them. I do not remember the names of the plays.

There were two Jewish organizations in Dupnitsa. One of them was the Zionist's one 10 and the other was bigger and its name was 'Saznanie' [Conscience] 11. It was a cultural and educational organization with left ideas. It organized operettas and drama plays. The cultural life of Jews was rich. My father's sisters Kalina and Vita took part in the choral groups at 'Saznanie'. They also had a table for ping-pong for the young people. It was a very good organization. There was a fight for the leadership of the bank and the Jewish municipality between the Zionists and 'Saznanie'. People organized debates and made discussions. The organization had a community house and a big library. As far as I remember they did not have ideological discussions. I was a member of 'Saznanie'. We gathered there as youths and took books from the library. The Zionists appeared to be the richer Jews in town. 'Saznanie' was considered more of a left organization, that is, closer to the socialist ideas. That is why my father, who had left beliefs, was a sympathizer of 'Saznanie'.

After the Jewish school I went to study in junior high school – in the district school 'Evlogi Georgiev' 12. Then I went to study for a cobbler. My father told me that if I did not study, he would send me to work as an ironmonger which was very had work. I enrolled in evening classes in the vocational school. We studied four hours a day - from 6 to 10 pm. They gave us some food – tea with cheese and bread. We studied the anatomy of the human leg, Bulgarian language, literature and calculation of materials. I graduated the school, but I had to repeat one of the years. When I was told that I had to repeat the grade, I went to my practice teacher to ask him if there was some mistake. His name was Mr Peshev. He opened the teacher's book where he had made a note that I had refused to complete the tasks he gave to me. That is why he made me repeat the grade. Then I went to my father and told him that I was made to repeat the grade unfairly and that we should call for a commission from Sofia to review my case. I would work in front of the commission and if they decided that I should repeat the grade, I would. My father talked to the director of the school. When the director heard his story, he advised him not to call for a commission from Sofia because they would probably respect the teacher's decision and he would have to pay for their expenses. So, I repeated the last year of the vocational school. I worked silently the whole year and the

teacher gave me as an example to the others. At the end of the year I received my certificate with a prize. I went for a master's exam in front of a commission, who had come from Sofia. At that time there were no materials and everyone brought their own. At the start of the exam, I started working right away. The members of the commission told me that I should draw a ticket first. I answered that I had materials only for ladies' shoes. But they said that if my ticket said men's shoes, I would change my materials with someone else. I answered that I did not want to give my materials to someone who would ruin them. Yet, fortunately, my ticket said ladies' shoes. I had chosen a simple but nice model for shoes made of suede. I designed and sewed them in the first day. The deadline was in three days. I presented them to the commission and received a master's certificate.

When I graduated vocational school, my father sent me to Sofia to work in a confectionery on 52 Iskar Str. owned by a cousin of his. I could not get used to the life there and went back home. Later in 1941 my father sent me to Sofia again to work for a cobbler. At that time the war had already started and there were Germans in Sofia. I lived at the place of aunt Kalina. I once again did not like life there and wrote by myself a letter addressed to me, in which my father was asking me to go home to Dupnitsa. I showed it to my master and he was surprised at first but let me go. There was no work in Dupnitsa but we managed to make ends meet. I went to work as a cobbler in various workshops. I also worked at home.

We started wearing [yellow] stars in 1942 13. There was a curfew and we were not allowed to go out in the evenings. We could only walk along the river in the Jewish neighborhood. There were special shops for the Jews. There were shops with the notice 'entrance forbidden for Jews'. But there were some very kind Bulgarians who helped us. My uncle Azarya and his family came to Dupnitsa. He was interned from Sofia 14. Relatives of his wife Sara also came. In every Jewish house there were interned people from Sofia.

All Jews who had not done their military service were sent to labor groups, created especially for us. In 1942 I was sent to the Tran gorge to construct roads and in 1943 I was in St. Vrach (present-day Sandanski), where a railroad was being constructed. We had a production quota of 4 cubic meters of soil to dig out and throw away at some distance. We remained working at the site until we fulfilled our quota. There was no mercy. We slept in sheds, there was no bathroom, we all had lice. Sometimes a special car came, in which we put our clothes to be boiled in steam against the parasites. In winter I put my socks over the fire and heard the lice creaking. Some people burned their clothes because they could not clean them. We dug manually crevices 2 meters deep in the rocks. I had to carry on my back three bags of cement, when we had to unload wagons. In 1943 the Aegean Jews deported to concentration camps in Germany passed by the labor camp in St. Vrach. [Editor’s note: They were deported to the eastern parts not of Germany, but of the Third Reich. Poland was called that way then. The Aegean and the Macedonian Jews were deported to the Treblinka camp, not far from Osviencim (or Auschwitz). The Treblinka camp was set up and started ‘functioning’ in 1942. From 1942 to 1944, 77 000 French, 26 500 Belgian and 50 000 Greek Jews were killed there.] 15 It was a narrow-gauge line with small wagons. We stood on the railway and stopped the train. There were people among us connected to partisans and supporters of them working as railway workers. It seems that the people in the train knew that they would be stopped, because they stopped quickly. The train was full of Aegean Jews, among whom sick and old people. We gathered food and clothes and gave them to them. And instead of us encouraging them, they

shouted at us, 'Courage, hermanos [Ladino: brothers and sisters]!' and they went on. Now people say that the Jews in Bulgaria were saved because of the deportation of those Jews. It is hard to prove that.

While I was in a labor camp in 1943 the Jews in Dupnitsa were detained at their homes for a couple of days – they were not allowed to go out for some days in order to be ready to be deported. Then the Bulgarian politicians, church officials and intellectuals intervened and the deportation was not started. 16

Our Bulgarian neighbors also helped us. There were Bulgarians who brought us bread from the shops forbidden for Jews. They bought what we needed and brought it home. Life for Jews was not easy then. We had to stay at home and could not travel anywhere.

On 9th September 1944 I was in Dupnitsa. Before that other Jewish craftsmen and I were ordered to go to the barracks in the town to sew soldiers' boots. In Dupnitsa there were soldiers from 7th Rila Division [a unit of the Bulgarian army before 9th September 1944]. On 8th September we left the barracks because we could see the turn of events. On 9th September 1944 the partisans came down from the mountain and took over the town. I enrolled as a volunteer in the Bulgarian army. The Bulgarian army turned on the side of the Red Army. 17 We, the Jews, valued what the communists had done for us and sympathized with them. I have heard that there were 50 volunteers to serve in the army from Dupnitsa only. I was a soldier in 3rd Guard Regiment at elevation 711 near Boyanobats in south Serbia. Elevation 711 was controlled by the Germans who did not have many soldiers. They had a good elevated position. One day our aviation and artillery attacked that elevation and the next day the Germans withdrew. Then we headed for Skopje but we did not manage to get there and we returned to Bulgaria. There were Albanians shooting at us from the forests. The commander of the partisans from Dupnitsa was Zhelyu Demirevski 18. He died during an attack at the front.

After 9th September 1944 the rights of the Jews were restored. Then my father became a supervisor of a warehouse in 'Grain Foods'. 19 After that he worked in the Oil Factory and then he was a cashier at the Industry Works 20 and he retired at that position. He died in Dupnitsa in 1967.

I married in 1945. My wife Ida Shekerdjiiska is from Dupnitsa. We married only before the registrar. We knew each other well because when we were young we went out with the same friends. In 1946 our first son Nissim was born and in 1951 – our second son Zhak. In 1948 the big aliyah began 21

Many of our friends decided to leave. I was not determined enough to immigrate to Israel. My parents did not want to leave and influenced me. So, we stayed in Bulgaria. My wife was a housewife and also worked in the Galenov factory producing medicine. When the children were very young, we went to seaside resorts. After 9th September 1944 we could afford to go on vacations.

My brother Rafael Alkalai graduated high school in Dupnitsa and a technical secondary school in optics in Sofia. After 9th September 1944 he enrolled in courses for technical professions organized by the Joint Foundation 22 [One of the main tasks of the American distribution committee Joint was the funding of the association 'ORT' in Bulgaria. It was officially registered in the country on 1st January 1935 and its goal was to disseminate the industrial and agricultural labor among Jews in Bulgaria. The 'ORT' association was directly subordinate to its headquarters in Geneva.] In Sofia

Jewish co-operative societies were established with machines from the USA so that the Jews would have opportunities to work. My brother started studying some technical discipline but he did not finish it because his courses were postponed for some reason. So he started working as an optician. He has a family and a child. My sister Riri also lives in Sofia. She graduated the Pedagogical Institute in Dupnitsa and was a high school teacher. Now she is retired. She lives with her husband Yosif Kalo who was a pharmacist before he retired.

I opened a cobbler's workshop in 1945. It was in the center of the town behind the military club. At the beginning I worked with an older cobbler from the 'Saedinenie' [Unity] workshop. He gave me advice. One day the director of the vocational school came to my workshop to make him shoes. He even brought his own material. I charged him a bit more than I should have which I regretted later on.

In 1948 we established a cobblers' co-operative. I am one of its founders. We entered it with our stock and received 20 000 levs so that we would have capital with which to buy materials. After that we established the so-called 'Zancoop' – a co-operative of all crafts organizations. I was a member of a commission sent to north Bulgaria to see how those 'zancoops' functioned there. Most of the people were not very happy because an enterprise functioned better when it was independent. But they said that if we did not unite, nobody would give us materials. You could not buy materials from the store then, they were provided by centralized institutions in Sofia. So we were forced to become a 'zancoop'. After that all craftsmen became part of the Industry Works. Later a shoe factory was established in which 1200 people worked. Everything was owned by the state and we were given working clothes and shoes. We had a permanent market for our products. Everything was planned. I was a worker there until I retired. As a pensioner I worked in the orders department. That was in the 1980s. But then I had a quarrel with the deputy director and I quit. I suggested to the director to create a department in the factory in which to make shoes from left-over materials – mostly sandals and slippers. I worked there for a couple more years and then a colleague of mine, who was a teacher in shoe making approached me. He asked me how much money I received in the factory and he offered me a higher salary if I worked for him. I agreed and left right away. That took place in 1991. I made a small workshop in our neighborhood near my house. I was very happy because I did not depend on anybody. I communicated with many people. But one morning when I woke up I felt something wrong with my hand. It seems that I had had a light heart attack during the night. I could work no longer and I closed the workshop.

Later I tried working from home for pleasure. I made a hundred pairs of ladies' sandals, 30 pairs of which I presented as a gift to the Home for Children and Adolescents in Dupnitsa [an orphanage]. First I asked the director about the shoe size of the children and then I made the sandals. I also gave as gifts 30 pairs of warm boots to poor families. I helped in campaigns raising money for the refugees from Macedonia during the war in Kosovo. There was an announcement at the Jewish club for the money raising. I also take part in charity work for SOS Children's Villages. [SOS Children's Villages is an international child welfare organisation providing long term care for orphans and children in need.] They send me a magazine with a form, which I have to fill in order to send them some money.

My wife and I went to Israel a couple of times. I bought a mezuzah from there and now we have one. During the totalitarian times it was more difficult to go to Israel than it is now. My wife and I went there twice after 1989. 23 We applied for passports and visited our elder son Nissim.

I have a special attitude towards mezuzot. It is nice to be a pious person but every pious person should observe God's laws. There is a poem by Nikola Vaptsarov 24, which I always give as an example about religiousness: 'He slew his father with the ax/ He washed himself, went to church and felt better'. Can such a man be considered a good man – a pious man, but a murderer? He believes in God, goes to church, but he is a murderer. As for mezuzot – we might kiss them on entering and leaving our flats and yet we might not be good people. That's why it is more important to me to be a good person and to do good than to kiss the mezuzah regularly. That is why I do not kiss it.

After 9th September 1944 there were no bad attitudes towards Jews. I do not remember the Jews in Dupnitsa being treated badly. I know that during the wars with the Arabs 25 26 and sometimes before that, some Jews in Bulgaria who were in high positions were replaced. I think that the authorities in Bulgaria suspected the Jews of having links with Israel. Otherwise, on a local level in the neighborhood we did not have any problems.

After 9th September 1944 we managed to pay and build another floor on our house. My parents lived with us on the upper floor. After one of our sons Zhakie married, we went to live on our parent's floor. We worked very hard to renovate the house. My younger son had decided not to do carpentry and took some machines but he did not have much success and he gave up.

We did not have any problems observing the Jewish holidays at home before or after 9th September 1944. We always celebrated Pesach at home. We had a festive dinner with matzah and boyos. On Pesach we always slaughtered a hen. That was a tradition especially when my parents were still alive. Now we also observe Pesach. My wife prepares traditional Jewish meals such as pastel, masapan, burmolikos 27 [typical dishes in the Sephardi cuisine] and leaks balls. In the past we prepared the matzah at home. It was also sold at a Jewish bakery. A Bulgarian worked in that bakery whose name was Eftim. Later, after 1944 we received matzah from Sofia.

My wife Ida and I always fasted on [Yom] Kippur. Traditions should be observed so that a people would be preserved through the times. The fact that we preserved ourselves as a people for 2 000 years is due mainly to our faith and traditions. My father had a book from which he read the Haggadah. Uncle Mois came to our place. First kaddish was said. Then some celery or something sour was put in a small cup – it symbolized the bitterness that Jews experienced in the desert.

My children were raised in the spirit of the Jewish traditions thanks to the holidays. We did not place special attention on our origin. But from an early age they knew about Pesach, Purim and the other higher holidays. We did not distance ourselves from the Bulgarians and neither did they. Our Bulgarian friends were not interested in details about our origin and did not pay attention to that. I was told once that during the Jewish labor camps local villagers came out to see what Jews were like because they did not know what we looked like and they had not heard about us. Now there are not many Jews in Dupnitsa and our friends are mostly Bulgarians. I meet people from the neighborhood when I go for a walk and we discuss the news in our town.

We had a grandson in 1978. Then we were not allowed to give him a Jewish name. We wanted to name him Aron, but that name was not included in the name lists. Those were lists with names, which could be found in every municipality and from which you could choose a name. Yet, the parents of my daughter-in-law managed to receive permission for our son to carry my name. [There is no official regulation on names but at the same time until 1989 there was a name list with

all names allowed in every maternity hospital. The list included typical Bulgarian names. Permission had to be obtained from the citizen's department at the municipalities for the more unusual names.] I remember that when I graduated the third grade in the vocational school they had put Bulgarian endings to my name in my Bulgarian certificate – Aron Nissimov Alkalaev. After the Law for Protection of the Nation was passed my name was changed to Aron Nissim Alkalai in order to emphasize my Jewish origin. I was not bothered by that. Now there are Jews who adopted Bulgarian endings for their names voluntarily.

Our younger son Zhak married a Bulgarian, whose name is Zhechka and our older son Nissim – a Jewess. I cannot say that we raised them to find a wife of Jewish origin. My older son was in Sofia and he met his wife there. Her name is Roza and she is a Jewess. My son Nissim started work in telephone shafts and was promoted to director of a regional office in the telephone company. Here in Bulgaria during those times in the beginning of the 1990s he had founded a construction company and was its director, but he left everything and immigrated to Israel. It was his wife's decision. She wanted that. Now he has problems there because when they left he was 40 years old and he could not find job in his sphere. Now he works in the maintenance of a shopping mall. His two children grew up and married there and have their own flats. My other son Zhak graduated the Pedagogical Institute in Dupnitsa and was sent to work as a teacher in north Bulgaria – in the town of Dalgopol. There he met his wife who is a very nice girl. They have one boy. They also left due to economic reasons. My younger son now works as a cleaner in two places. My son's wives are housewives in Israel.

Now my wife and I are worried about our future because our children are in Israel. They often call us and ask us to go to live with them but we think that we are better off here. We are too old to learn a new language and get used to a new way of life. We often think about that.

After 1989 most of the people here live a worse life than before. According to statistical data of the government we live a better life. But there is corruption now, a lot of factories were plundered. Politics is a dirty business. A lot of plants were sold at extremely low prices and a lot of people were laid off.

My wife and I live a normal life. The Jewish municipality helps us with food coupons. That is a great help. Sometimes they also give us medicines. We manage to cover our expenses. The women from the Jewish organization 'WIZO' 28 gather every day in the Jewish municipality. Sometimes we, the men, also meet there. Now there are very few of us and we meet more rarely. Now we live well although our life is very expensive.

Translated by Ivelina Karcheva

Glossary

1 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).

2 Ladino

also known as Judeo-Spanish, it is the spoken and written Hispanic language of Jews of Spanish and Portugese origin. Ladino did not become a specifically Jewish language until after the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492 (and Portugal in 1495) - it was merely the language of their province. It is also known as Judezmo, Dzhudezmo, or Spaniolit. When the Jews were expelled from Spain and Portugal they were cut off from the further development of the language, but they continued to speak it in the communities and countries to which they emigrated. Ladino therefore reflects the grammar and vocabulary of 15th century Spanish. In Amsterdam, England and Italy, those Jews who continued to speak ‘Ladino’ were in constant contact with Spain and therefore they basically continued to speak the Castilian Spanish of the time. Ladino was nowhere near as diverse as the various forms of Yiddish, but there were still two different dialects, which corresponded to the different origins of the speakers: ‘Oriental’ Ladino was spoken in Turkey and Rhodes and reflected Castilian Spanish, whereas ‘Western’ Ladino was spoken in Greece, Macedonia, Bosnia, Serbia and Romania, and preserved the characteristics of northern Spanish and Portuguese. The vocabulary of Ladino includes hundreds of archaic Spanish words, and also includes many words from different languages: mainly from Hebrew, Arabic, Turkish, Greek, French, and to a lesser extent from Italian. In the Ladino spoken in Israel, several words have been borrowed from Yiddish. For most of its lifetime, Ladino was written in the Hebrew alphabet, in Rashi script, or in Solitro. It was only in the late 19th century that Ladino was ever written using the Latin alphabet. At various times Ladino has been spoken in North Africa, Egypt, Greece, Turkey, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Romania, France, Israel, and, to a lesser extent, in the United States and Latin America.

3 Jewish bank 'Bratstvo' [Brotherhood]

Co-operative bank 'Bratstvo' in Dupnitsa exists since 1st January 1925. It was officially registered on 12.12.1924 in the District Court in Kyustendil. Before that the association existed for many years under the name 'Dupnitsa mutual benefit association 'Bratstvo', but since it did not correspond to the law of co-operative associations, it was closed down and founded on the basis of the principles written in the law. A new statute was prepared, which was approved by the Bulgarian People's Bank. The object of the co-operative bank 'Bratstvo' was to help its members with an accessible credit in the form of three-month loans, saving accounts and other bank operations. The bank was governed by a board of directors, consisting of nine people; a director and an accountant. At the official registration of the bank Haim Alkalai was elected chairman of the board of directors and its members were Buko Leonov and Leon Levi. St. Hristov, a long-time teacher and clerk in the Bulgarian Agricultural and Cooperative Bank, was the director of the bank. The bank was housed on the second floor of the Jewish municipality in Ruse. Despite the large number of Jews in that bank, it was not a part of the Jewish municipality. It was subordinate to the co-operative association, whose goal was to give credits to its members, to arrange the transactions with its goods, provide machines and equipments for the development of crafts. The bank existed until 1947 when it was nationalized by law.

4 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.

5 Forced labor camps in Bulgaria

Established under the Council of Ministers’ Act in 1941. All Jewish men between the ages of 18–50, eligible for military service, were called up. In these labor groups Jewish men were forced to work 7-8 months a year on different road constructions under very hard living and working conditions.

6 9th September 1944

The day of the communist takeover in Bulgaria. In September 1944 the Soviet Union declared war on Bulgaria. On 9th September 1944 the Fatherland Front, a broad left-wing coalition, deposed the government. Although the communists were in the minority in the Fatherland Front, they were the driving force in forming the coalition, and their position was strengthened by the presence of the Red Army in Bulgaria.

7 Dimitrov, Ilcho Ivanov (1931-2002)

a Bulgarian historian, an academic. Born on 12th July 1931 in Sofia. He graduated history in Sofia University 'Kliment Ohridski' in 1953. Until 1959 he worked as an editor in 'Mladezh' [Youth] magazine and the 'Narodna Mladezh' [People's Youth] Publishing House. In 1959 he became an assistant professor in the Sofia University. He wrote a dissertation titled 'The Bourgeois opposition in the period 1939-1944'. In 1972 he became an associate professor with his work 'The King, the Constitution and the People'. He specialized history in England, France and Italy. He wrote the monograph 'Bulgarian – Italian Relations 1922 – 1943'. He became a professor in 1976. From 1972 to 1978 he was deputy director of the United Center of History at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. From 1979 to 1981 he was rector of Sofia University 'Kliment Ohridski'; 1984-1988 – deputy chairman of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. He was twice education minister – 1986-1990 in the government of Georgi Atanasov and 1994-1997 in the government of Zhan Videnov. He died on 13th March 2002 at 71 years of age. His son, Ivan Ilchev is also a Bulgarian historian, professor, doctor of history sciences. Born on 25th June 1953 in Sofia. He has a degree in contemporary history from Sofia University 'Kliment Ohridski'. Master of history science since 1981. He worked as a guest professor at the State University of the State of Ohio – Columbus and the Maryland State University – USA. In 1987 he became an associate professor in contemporary

history of the Balkan nations. He did a PhD in history in 1993 and became a professor in 1995. He is the author of 11 monographs, 10 co-edited books, 50 scholarly studies and articles and 67 popular science publications.

8 Spanish War

It started in July 1936. It is a civil one and is waged between the advocates of the republic and Franco's supporters, also called nationalists. On 12th August 1936 the Bulgarian government announced its position of non-intervention into the Spanish war and banned the export of military equipment to both zones. Two Spanish diplomatic representations were opened in Sofia. Carlos de Miranda was the leader of the legation of the nationalists and Luis Tobio – of the republican one. 460 Bulgarian volunteers, almost all on the side of the Republic, took part in the conflict, which took more than half a million lives. Three Bulgarians took part in the war on Franco's side.

9 Fruitas

The popular name of the Tu bi-Shevat festival among the Bulgarian Jews.

10 General Zionism

General Zionism was initially the term used for all members of the Zionist Organization who had not joined a specific faction or party. Over the years, the General Zionists, too, created ideological institutions and their own organization was established in 1922. The precepts of the General Zionists included Basle-style Zionism free of ideological embellishments and the primacy of Zionism over any class, party, or personal interest. This party, in its many metamorphoses, championed causes such as the encouragement of private initiative and protection of middle-class rights. In 1931, the General Zionists split into Factions A and B as a result of disagreements over issues of concern in Palestine: social affairs, economic matters, the attitude toward the General Federation of Jewish Labor, etc. In 1945, the factions reunited. Most of Israel’s liberal movements and parties were formed under the inspiration of the General Zionists and reflect mergers in and secessions from this movement.

11 'Saznanie' [Conscience]

a Jewish self-educational association. It was founded in Dupnitsa on 7th January 1902. Its founders were mostly members of the Bulgarian Workers' Social Democratic Party. They were: Israel Yako Levi – a tobacco worker, Israel Daniel – a tailor, Moshe Alkalai – a tailor, Aron Luna – a merchant, Yako Yusef Komfort – a merchant. The goal of the association was to improve the culture and education of its members, help poor students with books, clothes and money. Another goal of the association was also the fight against nationalism and chauvinism of the Zionist organization, 'which poisons the mind of youths and strives to detach them from the class fight of the laborers.' The number of the members of 'Saznanie' reached 150 at one point. The leadership consisted of seven people – a chairman, a secretary, a treasurer, a cultural teacher, and three people as supervisory council. There were different sections in the association – a temperance one, a tourist one, a sports one with their own groups, which educated the members. The association in Dupnitsa had a library with mostly fiction and Marxist literature. There was also a choir, an orchestra and a theater group. The operetta 'Natalka-Poltavka' was staged in Dupnitsa, as well as the following

plays: 'The High Laugh' by Victor Hugo, 'Intrigue and Love' by Schiller, 'The Barber of Seville' by Beaumarchais, 'The Victim' and 'The Dowery' by Albert Michael, 'Tevie The Milkman' by Sholom Aleichem, 'Les' by Ostrovsky, 'George Dandin' by Moliere. The members of 'Saznanie' such as Mois Alkalai, Kalina Alkalai, Mair Levi, who was the choir conductor, Buko Revakh, Roza Chelebi Levi were some of the best amateur actors. The main role in the play 'Tevie The Milkman' was performed by Mois Alkalai. Everyone admired his acting and the distinguished actor Leo Konforti (also of Jewish origin) was among his students. Some of the plays were performed in Judesmo-Espanol (Ladino), and the others in Bulgarian. The association was closed under the Law for Protection of the Nation. With its activities it contributed to the development of culture and education and left a permanent trace in the minds of the people in Dupnitsa.

12 Georgiev, Evlogi (1819–1897)

a Bulgarian political activist, merchant and banker born in Karlovo. At a very early age he immigrated with his brother Hristo to Romania where they founded trading companies in Galats, Bucharest and Braila. They headed the 'party of the old' founded by the Bulgarian emigration in Romania. The goal of the party was the liberation of Bulgaria from Ottoman rule by peaceful means. After the end of the Russian-Turkish war in 1878 and the liberation of Bulgaria Evlogi Georgiev left 6 million gold levs to the Bulgarian state for the construction of a higher school – present-day Sofia University.

13 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.

14 Internment of Jews in Bulgaria

Although Jews living in Bulgaria where not deported to concentration camps abroad or to death camps, many were interned to different locations within Bulgaria. In accordance with the Law for the Protection of the Nation, the comprehensive anti-Jewish legislation initiated after the outbreak of WWII, males were sent to forced labor battalions in different locations of the country, and had to engage in hard work. There were plans to deport Bulgarian Jews to Nazi Death Camps, but these plans were not realized. Preparations had been made at certain points along the Danube, such as at Somovit and Lom. In fact, in 1943 the port at Lom was used to deport Jews from Aegean Thrace and from Macedonia, but in the end, the Jews from Bulgaria proper were spared.

15 Annexation of Aegean Thrace to Bulgaria in WWII

The Treaty of Neuilly, imposed by the Entente on Bulgaria after WWI, deprived the country alongside with its WWI gains (Macedonia) also of its outlet to the Aegean Sea (Aegean Thrace) that had been a part of the country since the Balkan Wars (1912/13). King Boris III (1918-43) joined the

Axis in 1941 with the hope to be able to regain the lost territories. Bulgarian troops marched into the neighboring Yugoslav Macedonia and Greek 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. Although the Jews in Bulgaria proper were saved they were exterminated in the newly gained territories. Over 11.000 Jews from the Bulgarian administered northern Greek lands (Thrace and Macedonia), mainly from Drama, Seres, Dedeagach (Alexandroupolis), Gyumyurdjina (Komotini), Kavala and Xanthi were deported and murdered in death camps in Poland. About 2.200 Jews survived.

16 Plan for deportation of Jews in Bulgaria

In accordance with the agreement signed on 22nd February 1943 by the Commissar for Jewish Affairs Alexander Belev on the Bulgarian side and Teodor Daneker on the German side, it was decided to deport 20 000 Jews at first. Since the number of the Aegean and Macedonian Jews, or the Jews from the 'new lands', annexed to Bulgaria in WWII, was around 12 000, the other 8 000 Jews had to be selected from the so-called 'old borders', i.e. Bulgaria. A couple of days later, on 26th February Alexander Belev sent an order to the delegates of the Commissariat in all towns with a larger Jewish population to prepare lists of the so-called 'unwanted or anti-state elements'. The 'richer, more distinguished and socially prominent' Jews had to be listed among the first. The deportation started in March 1943 with the transportation of the Aegean and the Thrace Jews from the new lands. The overall number of the deported was 11 342. In order to reach the number 20 000, the Jews from the so-called old borders of Bulgaria had to be deported. But that did not happen thanks to the active intervention of the citizens of Kyustendil Petar Mihalev, Asen Suichmezov, Vladimir Kurtev, Ivan Momchilov and the deputy chairman of the 25th National Assembly Dimitar Peshev and the Bulgarian Orthodox Church. Before the deportation was canceled, the Jews in Plovdiv, Pazardzhik, Kyustendil, Dupnitsa, Yambol and Sliven were shut in barracks, tobacco warehouses and schools in order to be ready to be transported to the eastern provinces of The Third Reich. The arrests were made on the eve of 9th March. Thanks to the intervention of the people, the deportation of the Jews from the old borders of Bulgaria did not happen. The Jews in Dupnitsa were also arrested to be ready for deportation.

17 Bulgarian Army in World War II

On 5th September 1944 the Soviet government declared war to Bulgaria which was an ally to Hitler Germany. In response to that act on 6th September the government of Konstantin Muraviev took the decision to cut off the diplomatic relations between Bulgaria and Germnay and to declare war to Germany. The Ministry Council made it clear in the decision that it came into effect from 8th September 1944. On 8th September the Soviet armies entered Bulgaria and the same evening a coup d'etat was organized in Sofia. The power was taken by the coalition of the Fatherland Front, consisting of communists, agriculturalists, social democrats, the political circle 'Zveno' (a former Bulgarian middleclass party). The participation of the Bulgarian army in the third stage of World War II was divided into two periods. The first one was from September to November 1944. 450 000 people were enlisted under the army flags and three armies were formed out of them, which were deployed on the western Bulgarian border. Those armies took place in the Nis and Kosovo advance operations and defeated a number of enemy units from the Nazi forces, parts of the 'E' group of armies and liberated significant territories from Southeast Serbia and Vardar Macedonia. The

second period of the Bulgarian participation in the war was from December 1944 to May 1945. The specially formed First Bulgarian Army, including 130 000 soldiers took part in it. After regrouping the army took part in the fighting at Drava – Subolch. At the end of March the Bulgarian army started advancing and then pursuing the enemy until they reached the foot of the Austrian Alps. The overall Bulgarian losses in the war were 35 000 people.

18 Demirevski, Zhelyu (1914-1944)

His real name is Vasil Sotirov. A member of the revolutionary workers' movement. Born in Dupnitsa, member of the Bulgarian Communist Party. From 1938 to 1941 he was secretary of the district committee of the BCP in Dupnitsa. He organized and led the strike of the tobacco workers in the town in 1940. In 1941 he founded and became the commander of a partisan squad and from 1943 he was the commander of the Rila–Pirin partisan squad. After 9th September 1944 he left for the war front as a commander of the 3rd Guard Infantry Regiment. He died in Yugoslavia.

19 'Grain Foods'

After 9th September 1944 that is a state autonomous self-supported enterprise for the collection, processing and trade, including import and export of agricultural produce. It had a department 'Mills and rice warehouses'. In 1951 the company was renamed into State Co-operative 'Grain Foods' and had a well-developed network of offices throughout the country.

20 'Industry Works'

In 1948 under the Constitution of the People's Republic of Bulgaria the Ministry of Communal Industry, Welfare and Roads were created. Its main task was the governance, control and equipment of the industrial and other enterprizes of local importance nationalized in 1947, which were turned to the people's councils. In this way every town in the country – from the smallest to the largest one – had offices of the Ministry known as Industry Works.

21 Mass Aliyah

Between September 1944 and October 1948, 7,000 Bulgarian Jews left for Palestine. The exodus was due to deep-rooted Zionist sentiments, relative alienation from Bulgarian intellectual and political life, and depressed economic conditions. Bulgarian policies toward national minorities were also a factor that motivated emigration. In the late 1940s Bulgaria was anxious to rid itself of national minority groups, such as Armenians and Turks, and thus make its population more homogeneous. More people were allowed to depart in the winter of 1948 and the spring of 1949. The mass exodus continued between 1949 and 1951: 44,267 Jews immigrated to Israel until only a few thousand Jews remained in the country.

22 Joint (American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee)

The Joint was formed in 1914 with the fusion of three American Jewish aid committees, which were alarmed by the suffering of Jews during World War I. In late 1944, the Joint entered Europe’s liberated areas and organized a massive relief operation. It provided food for Jewish survivors all over Europe, it supplied clothing, books and school supplies for children. It supported the

establishment of cultural meeting places, including libraries, theaters and gardens. It also provided religious supplies for the Jewish communities. The Joint also operated DP camps, in which it organized retraining programs to help people learn trades that would enable them to earn a living, while its cultural and religious activities helped re-establish Jewish life. The Joint was also closely involved in helping Jews to emigrate from European and Muslim countries. The Joint was expelled from East Central Europe for decades during the Cold War and it has only come back to many of these countries after the fall of communism. Today the Joint provides social welfare programs for elderly Holocaust survivors and encourages Jewish renewal and communal development.

23 10th November 1989

After 35 years of rule, Communist Party leader Todor Zhivkov was replaced by the hitherto Prime Minister Peter Mladenov who changed the Bulgarian Communist Party's name to Socialist Party. On 17th November 1989 Mladenov became head of state, as successor of Zhivkov. Massive opposition demonstrations in Sofia with hundreds of thousands of participants calling for democratic reforms followed from 18th November to December 1989. On 7th December the 'Union of Democratic Forces' (SDS) was formed consisting of different political organizations and groups.

24 Vaptsarov, Nikola (1909-1942)

born in the town of Bansko, Vaptsarov ranks among Bulgaria's most prominent proletarian poets of the interwar period. His most well known volume of poetry is 'Motoring Verses'. Vaptsarov was shot in Sofia on the 23rd of July 1942.

25 Six-Day-War

The first strikes of the Six-Day-War happened on 5th June 1967 by the Israeli Air Force. The entire war only lasted 132 hours and 30 minutes. The fighting on the Egyptian side only lasted four days, while fighting on the Jordanian side lasted three. Despite the short length of the war, this was one of the most dramatic and devastating wars ever fought between Israel and all of the Arab nations. This war resulted in a depression that lasted for many years after it ended. The Six-Day-War increased tension between the Arab nations and the Western World because of the change in mentalities and political orientations of the Arab nations.

26 Yom Kippur War

The Arab-Israeli War of 1973, also known as the Yom Kippur War or the Ramadan War, was a war between Israel on one side and Egypt and Syria on the other side. It was the fourth major military confrontation between Israel and the Arab states. The war lasted for three weeks: it started on 6th October 1973 and ended on 22nd October on the Syrian front and on 26th October on the Egyptian front.

27 Burmoelos (or burmolikos, burlikus)

A sweetmeat made from matzah, typical for Pesach. First, the matzah is put into water, then squashed and mixed with eggs. Balls are made from the mixture, they are fried and the result is something like donuts.

28 WIZO

Women's International Zionist Organisation; a hundred year old organization with humanitarian purposes aiming at supporting Jewish women all over the world in the field of education, economics, science and culture. The history of WIZO in Bulgaria started in 1923. Its founder was the wife of the rabbi of Sofia, Riha Priar. After more than 40 years of break during communism WIZO restored its activities oi 1991 with headquarters in Sofia and branches in the countryside. From that moment on it organises a variety of cultural and social activities and cooperates with other democratic women's organisations in the country. Currently the chairwoman of WIZO in Bulgaria is Ms. Alice Levi.