



Ivanka Gezenko


**FOR VISITORS
TO THE JEWISH
QUARTER IN SOFIA**

A GUIDEBOOK

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 РЕПУБЛИКА БЪЛГАРИЯ
МИНИСТЕРСТВО НА ВЪНШНИТЕ РАБОТИ
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FOR VISITORS TO THE JEWISH QUARTER IN SOFIA

A GUIDEBOOK

Dear reader,

This guidebook offers a unique three-hour walk through the centre of Sofia. I have picked out three central streets and will tell you about specific episodes in the history of Sofia's Jewish community from the liberation of Bulgaria from Ottoman rule to the present day. With this route, my aim is for us to learn how Bulgarians and Jews co-existed, both in times of peace and during the years of the Holocaust. I hope that every story about each building and the fate of its owners will help us to learn more about the difficult years of hardship. The histories of 24 buildings are included in this unique guide. It uses pictures by Joseph Oberbauer, Nahum Gilboa-Peretz, Jack Avdala, architect Polina Gerdjikova, Boris Schatz, Haralampi Tachev's decorative designs for the synagogue, as well as documents from the Central National Archive concerning the fate of the buildings' owners or their descendants.

Ivanka Gezenko, compiler

SOFIA ON THE EVE OF THE LIBERATION

On the eve of the Liberation, Sofia was an administrative centre (a sandjak) within the Ottoman Empire with a population of around 13,000 inhabitants. The four main streets – Nishka, Lomska, Orkhaniyska and Kyustendilska – made up the city's skeleton and each was bounded by a gate: Nishka by Churkurskata Gate; Lomska by Kurshumliska Gate; Orkhaniyska by Chaush – the pasha's gate; and Kyustendilska by Alkalarska Gate. The city had around 20 neighbourhoods with colourful names – Kaloyanova, Yazadzhi district, Draz district, Korucheshme district, Yuchbunar.



Map of Sofia from the beginning of the 20th century. State Archive – Sofia.



Panoramic view of Sofia. Lithograph from the beginning of the 20th century. Central National Archive (CNA).



Josef Oberbauer. "Turgovska Street in Sofia". Aquarelle. After 1891. Josef Oberbauer (1854-1926). Traces of the city. Catalogue from the exhibition by Sofia City Art Gallery and Sofia History Museum, 2010.



Banya Bashi mosque. The Church of the Holy King (St Nedelya today) can be seen in the background. Lithograph from the beginning of the 20th century. CNA.

Turgovska bazaar was considered to be the city's main artery into which led crooked, narrow and muddy stone-paved streets. One of these was **Pirotska Street**, which officially got its name on 4th July 1878 at a sitting of Sofia's municipal authority. The street took its name from the city of Pirost in south-eastern Serbia which often changed hands between Serbia and Bulgaria in the Middle Ages, but was predominantly inhabited by Bulgarians during the years of the Russo-Turkish War (1877-78). After the Congress of Berlin settlement in 1878, the town remained outside the borders of Bulgaria and some of its inhabitants chose to emigrate to Sofia, where they established themselves in **Yuchbunar neighbourhood (Three Wells)**.

The street begins on Knyaginya Maria Louiza Boulevard (in the east) and ends at Hisar Street and Holy Trinity Park (in the west). It is crossed by Knyaz Boris I, Tsar Samuil and Opulchenska streets and Stefan Stambolov, Hristo Botev, Dimitar Petkov and Constantin Velichkov boulevards, and passes close to both the Women's Market and the Dimitar Petkov market. Back in 1933 the academic Petar Dinekov wrote about this street as follows:



The beginning of Pirotska Street. Lithograph from the beginning of the 20th century. CNA.

“The hustle and bustle is greatest on Pirotska, however. Primarily, this is the street that leads to Yuchbunar, Konyovitsa, Zaharna Fabrika, Razsadnika, where the destitute who don’t even have money for a tram ticket live. And so crowds of people hurry along the streets. But here the hustle and bustle is generated by the shops.”

In the past the street divided two neighbourhoods – Konyovitsa and Yuchbunar (Three Wells). According to urban folklore, the inhabitants of Konyovitsa were known for their crude and bullying nature, which is why you can still hear the nickname 'konyovichar' to this day. Yuchbunar was predominantly inhabited by labourers, Macedonian refugees, Jews and the names of some of the cross streets evoke migrant nostalgia (Zaichar, Bregalnitsa). Today Pirotska Street is a main thoroughfare and part of it is designated a pedestrian zone, transforming it into a typical shopping street with many shops, food outlets, studios and hotels. The latter, western part of the street is open to vehicles and trams travel along it.

Our walk along Pirotska Street will take in the pedestrian zone and go as far as the junction with Opulchenska Street. The route includes stories about Jewish houses along the street as well as those of their inhabitants. This walk will also take us to the district where a colourful Jewish neighbourhood was transformed into the Ghetto in 1942 and, in the garden of 134 School Dimcho Debelyanov, we will see images of the twenty Bulgarians who, through their dignified behaviour, opposed anti-Jewish legislation and became Righteous Among the Nations of the World.

THE HOUSE OF JOSIF MADJAR AND YORDAN DJUMALIEV

Our walk begins on the corner of Maria Louiza Boulevard and Pirotska Street outside the house of Yordan Djumaliev and Josif Madjar.



The house of Yordan Djumaliev and Josif Madjar. View from Maria Louiza Boulevard. 1970s. Library of the State Archive (LSA).



Banski Square with the mosque, Sofia's indoor market and the start of Pirotska Street. You can see the house of Djumaliev and Madjar in this picture by Vladimir Manski. The actual title of the picture is 'G. Dimitrov Boulevard'. Vladimir Manski, oils. Size: 115/132 cm and is in the art collection of the Regional History Museum Sofia.

Back in 1879 – the year in which Sofia was chosen as the capital of the Principate of Bulgaria – the centre of the city was 'confined' between Banya Bashi mosque, the Church of the Holy King and St Nikola Passage. Pirotska Street started directly opposite the Passage, with its little winding lanes and dilapidated houses, and two prominent Sofian citizens built a large building that was modern for its time right at its beginning. This happened in 1881 and its owners were Yordan Djumaliev and Josif Madjar. The two partners wanted to have a beautiful residential building and a source of income and they turned to the architect Aleksi Nachev who designed the building in the then up-to-date neo-classical style. The architect designed the windows in the style of 'edicules' with half-columns on the first floor and pilasters on the second. The apertures of the windows themselves are crowned with triangular segments divided by decorative vase pediments. The balconies are decorated with a beautiful iron parapet combined with precisely crafted stone ornaments and details. The interior had crystal mirrors and a wall clock. The building is in stylistic harmony with the neighbourhood's architectural ensemble.

One of the owners – Yordan Djumaliev (1858-1914) – was a teacher, revolutionary, participant in the Russo-Turkish war of liberation, construction contractor and a native of Ruse. In 1880 he moved to Sofia and became close to some of the capital's most prominent citizens and entrepreneurs, including the Ivanov brothers, Dr Nikola Stranski, General Racho Petrov and Josif Madjar.

As can be seen from his surname, the other owner Josif Madjar belonged to the Ashkenazy and more precisely Hungarian Jews, some of whom had settled in Sofia in 1360 and 1499. ASHKENAZY (Ashkenazy Jews) is the general name for Jews from Germany (Germany – from the Hebrew Ashkenazia), Hungary and other West European countries, who, owing to persecutions starting at the end of the 11th century (1096) and attempts at forcible conversion in the 14th and 15th centuries, went to settle in the Balkans.



Silver Jewish plaque with the image of the Star of David. The plaque is on the case of a Sefer Torah. This plaque was discovered in the old Jewish quarter in Sofia. CNA.

According to the first population census in 1878, 3,600 Jews lived in Sofia and there were 820 Jewish households and 364 shops. There were four Jewish synagogues in the city – that of Gregos or Rumaniot Byzantine Jews (Dondukov Boulevard), the synagogue of the Franks (Maria Louiza Boulevard), the Sephardic synagogue and the Ashkenazy synagogue. The latter was named Kal Kaal Shalom and was built in 1856, with a marble stone bearing an inscription indicating the year of construction and the name of the principal donor (Haim Ben Shlomo Tadjer).



View of the interior of the Synagogue of the Franks, one of the oldest in Sofia. It was located on Maria Louiza and the passageway to Trapezitsa Square. Demolished as part of the regulatory plan of 1890. The synagogue was for Ashkenazy Jews who spoke Spanish, but the religious rituals were wholly Ashkenazy. CNA.

The Kal Kaal Shalom synagogue was demolished in 1888-89 because the then mayor of Sofia, Dimitar Petkov, undertook the demolition of many old buildings in the city in order to build a modern capital with spacious streets. A few years later, in 1901, Sofia's Jewish community elected a committee for the construction of a new synagogue that would bring all Jews together. Josif Madjar was among the members of this committee. The other members were David Shemuel Farhi, Moses Abraham David, Abraham Davichon Levi, Rahamim ben Isaac and Abraham Isaac Levi. After long discussions, the committee took a decision in 1904 to build the Central Synagogue, and in September 1909 the new building was officially opened in the presence of Tsar Ferdinand. Today Josif Madjar's name can be seen on a tile at the entrance to the synagogue which reads:

“The names of the gentlemen who, through their efforts, gave a decisive impetus to the development of the Jewish community in Sofia.”

During our walk, we will try to trace the fates of the people who built and lived in these houses (or their descendants) at the time of the implementation of anti-Jewish laws in Bulgaria between 1941 and 1944. The Bulgarian Jews did not share the tragic fate of their co-religionists in German, Poland, Hungary, Yugoslavia and other European countries, but they were subject to a series of limiting and restrictive measures which deprived them of civil and political rights and their properties were confiscated.

Josif Madjar had two sons – Rudolf, born in 1896, and Isidor, born in 1899. The sons inherited three houses from their father – the one at 1 Pirotska Street, another at 12 Clementina Street and a third, in which they continued to live – at 141 Knyaz Boris I Street. In 1941, the brothers were unmarried rentiers, but under the Single Property Tax on Persons of Jewish Origin Act, the pair had to pay huge taxes on the houses they owned. In a document preserved from 1942, Rudolf Madjar states that on 10th June 1942, the three houses were expropriated. In order to earn money to live on, Rudolf started work as a common labourer at 1 Belchev Street on 3rd September 1942. Rudolf Madjar was forced to declare his most valuable possessions, among which were a violin and a library of rare books. His younger brother Isidor's fate was no happier. From 1942 onwards, the two brothers were forced to live on the attic floor of the house on Knyaz Boris I Street. In May 1943 Isidor was evicted from Sofia and a special commission from the Commissariat for Jewish Affairs listed his property found in the attic and sold his movable possessions at a specially organised auction that August. Isidor evidently loved to draw because large and small picture frames and paint brushes are among the items listed. He also probably liked to skate, but his skates were sold for 150 leva too.

Our route will switch between the left and right sides of Pirotska and will occasionally stop at junctions with other streets. Some of the principle buildings will take us back in time so we learn more about the history of the street as well as the people who were always passing along it.



2.

THE WESTERN GATE OF THE ANCIENT FORTRESS OF SERDIKA



Plan of Serdika fortress.

Source – [https://bg.wikipedia.org/wiki/Сепгика_\(крепост\)](https://bg.wikipedia.org/wiki/Сепгика_(крепост))

We are by the archaeological remains on Washington Street, near the rear gate of the ancient fortress of Serdika.

Over the course of its thousand-year history, Sofia has been called Serdonpolis, Ulpia Serdica, Sredets and Triaditsa but has borne the name of Sofia since the 14th century.

The late-antique fortress of Serdika was built between 176-180 AD during the joint rule of the Roman emperors Marcus Aurelius and his son Commodus. Marcus Aurelius transformed Serdika into a mighty fortress with dimensions of around 340 x 560m (17.5 hectares), surrounded by a wall (a curtain) with circular and triangular towers.

The fortress was probably rectangular in shape and had four gateways facing the four points of the compass, each defended by a two-towered bastion. A road, known as the *intervallum*, circled the inner side of the fortress walls. At the western gate, where we are now, a builder's inscription about the construction of the fortress wall was discovered. It reads:

"Good fortune to you! The greatest and sacred emperor Caesars – Marcus Aurelius Antoninus Augustus, victor over the Germans, victor over the Sarmatians, father of the fatherland, great priest, and Lucius Aelius Aurelius Commodus, victor over the Germans, victor over the Sarmatians, gave these fortress walls to Serdonpolis when Asellius Aemilianus was governor of Thrace."

Even at the time, however, the fortress proved to be too cramped for the developing city and therefore many buildings and temples went up outside the fortress walls. Moreover, in the third century, the wall was badly damaged and, in the fourth century, another Roman emperor – Constantine the Great (306-337 AD), restored it. Chroniclers wrote of the emperor that he resided in Serdika for a long time and often said "Serdica is my Rome". The western wall follows the direction of Washington and Lavele Streets and extends to the Palace of Justice. If we look at the map of Serdika fortress, we will see that the beginning of today's Pirotska Street is found within the bounds of the original fortifications.



Parts of the fortress wall, painted by Josef Oberbauer in his picture "The Goldsmith's Market". Aquarelle, after 1891. Josef Oberbauer (1854-1926): Traces of the City". Exhibition catalogue by Sofia City Art Gallery and Sofia History Museum, 2010..



Josef Oberbauer. "Reconstruction of Ulpia Serdica fortress". Aquarelle, after 1891. Josef Oberbauer (1854-1926): Traces of the City. Exhibition catalogue by Sofia City Art Gallery and Sofia History Museum, 2010.

It should be noted that the Jewish community in Bulgaria is one of the most ancient in Europe. The earliest information about the existence of a Jewish population on Bulgarian soil dates from more than 2,000 years ago. Depending on the time of their settlement, they can be provisionally divided into three main groups: Romaniote, Ashkenazy and Sephardic.

ROMANIOTES (Roman Jews). This is what the Jews who settled within the bounds of the Balkan Peninsula during the time of Roman and then Byzantine rule were called. They were also known as 'Roman Jews'. After the fall of the Jewish state, the destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem (66-70 AD) and the dispersal of the Jewish people across the world, the widespread creation of Jewish communities began. Within the boundaries of modern-day Bulgaria, the Jews created the oldest 'Romaniote communities'. As a result, the Jews living in the epoch of the First (681-1018 AD) and Second Bulgarian Kingdom (1185-1396 AD) were called this.

According to sources from the time of the construction of Serdica fortress, a Latin inscription from the third century states that a settlement had formed on the outskirts of the camp outside the Roman fortress known as 'canabe'. It was occupied by petty traders, artisans and other attendants on the Roman legions. The social make-up of the 'canabe' population included three categories – veterans, Roman citizens and settlers, and among the latter there are reports of Jews in these lands.

More historical evidence from that time is presented by the Roman emperors Honorius and Theodosius (guardian of Arcadius) in 412 AD in the Constantinople Imperial Decree "On the Jews" which states that:

"Nobody who is innocent shall be ill-treated because they are Jewish and, whatever his religion, it should not be the cause of his being insulted. None of their synagogues and dwellings anywhere should be burned or maliciously damaged, for any reason, even more so if he is involved in crime, for there exists the rigour of the courts and state legal protection in order that nobody might be allowed to take revenge himself. Desiring that this should be provided for people of Jewish origin, however, we also consider that the Jews should be reminded of this too, lest they inadvertently behave arrogantly or, being proud of the protection afforded to them, allow themselves to dishonour things relating to the Christian cult. Presented in Constantinople, 6th August, 412 AD, at the time of the consuls Honorius Augustus for the ninth time and Theodosius Augustus for the fifth time."

3.

THE HOUSE OF THE FOUR LADIES AT 8 PIROTSKA ST

We will return to Pirotska Street, but this time on the righthand side. At number 8 there is a house that was owned by several women: Fanka Marco Avramova, Tinka Eliza Levi, Matilda Isaac Gabay, Bertha Asher Alkalay and Rosa Moreno Meshulam. There were two shops in the building.



The house at 8 Pirotska Street in the 1970s. LSA.

The building was built as an investment around 1890 to a design by Nicola Zankov's architectural practice. Architecturally, it consists of a narrow main façade and long arcade. The façade is in neo-classical style and the windows are topped with triangular and segmented pediments, balustrades, pilasters and classical cornices.



Family tree of the Sephardic Meshulam family. According to family tradition, the family originally settled in Bavaria but in 1810 arrived in Sofia. CNA, the family tree was compiled by Jacob Elad from Israel.

Let us note that a census was carried out in Sofia in 1893 and, according to the statistical data, a total population of 46,593 people lived in the city, with the Jewish population amounting to 6,872, of which 6,409 were Spanish-speaking. Ferdinand and Isabella of Castile's infamous edict of 1492 forced around 100,000 Spanish Jews to head for the Balkan peninsula which had already been conquered by the Ottoman Empire. The Spanish Jews were accompanied by the Portuguese and by the beginning of the 16th century a tight-knit group of SEPHARDIC JEWS (S'phardim from the Biblical name for Spain in Hebrew – S'pharad) lived within the boundaries of the Ottoman state. The Sephardic Jews separated themselves into separate communities outside those of the Romaniotes and Ashkenazy. As shown by the statistical data, Spanish-speaking Jews – **Sephardic Jews** – predominated in Sofia. Their language is known as **Ladino or Judeo-Spanish**.

Let us imagine how a Sephardic house at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century looked before our ladies built their own building. We will use Dr Saul Mezan's vivid description from his book *The Spanish Jews in Sofia*, published in Sofia in 1925 and also in French. The typical Sephardic house looked like this:

"Located in the Jewish quarter (giudiria, la maalé guidia), often in a large yard, which the Spanish call *curtizho nuevo* or *viejo* (new yard or old yard). It had large locked gates and high walls. A cobblestone path made with round stones could be seen through the gates (*piedregal*), crossing the yard and leading to the house. In front of the house itself there was a wide space, covered with stone tiles (*lajas*). Very often a large part of the yard was occupied with a carefully tended garden in which grew *ašiboyes* (wallflowers), *kongias* (roses), *claviinas* (carnations), *ruda* (mother-of-pearl), *čemšir* (boxwood), *sari* - *menešer* (yellow wallflowers), *zambakis* (irises), *zimbulis* (hyacinths), *karčićes* (snowdrops), *caricas* (violets) etc. There was a large well in the centre of the yard (*pozo, podzo*), from which water was drawn for every need.

The well was either covered or uncovered and had a bucket. A little to the side of the house there was a separate small building – the kitchen (cuzina) with an oven (orno). If you went into the kitchen, you would notice that there were no creature comforts, but at the same time you would realise that it was well stocked. There you would find a sack of flour, a gas cannister and bags of dry beans (avas, fiones, guirgüelos), lentils (lentejas), tarand (cous cous), fideyo (noodles), yuvkà (pasta), rice (aroz), salt (sal). If you raised your eyes, you would see the walls laced with dried peppers (piperisas), ropes of onions (cevoyas), okra (bamias), as well as little red chilli peppers (šuškà) which only an Oriental stomach can bear. There was plenty of everything in this kitchen: oil (azete), white cheese (quezo), yellow cheese (kaškavál), sausages (sarsichas), sweets (ducles), marmalades (almiśadas), syrups (šurupes), sauces (sumos), pickles (truśis), as well as coal (carvòn) and wood (lenya). In the corners you would see various kitchen accessories, among which would be a mortar (almirez) and its pestle (mano), dibék (large mortar) also with a mano, tavlero (a type of low circular table on which fine crusts or filas were laid out), royadór (a tool for grating hard cheese and biscuits), cedaso (sieve), kalbur (a deep pot, soup cauldron), fleche (rolling pin), tavla de picar carne (a board for tenderising meat), satir (chopper), tropitor (shaker), buru para tostar kavé (a device for roasting coffee), tipsis (pans), tenegerés (pots), sanis (boards), činis (plates), čapčakis (buckets), tases (cups, copper bowls), ornayas (oven dishes), mangales (braziers), steldes (trivets, tripods), maśas (tongs) and palaś (scoops), paylas (copper dishes), oyas (clay pots), scaras (grills), alcuzas (oil and vinegar bottle holders), cantaros (jugs), imbudos (funnels), tinajas (water containers made of stone or from cement or pottery clay) and more. The whole of this arsenal would be necessary for the Sephardic woman because she prepared everything at home, from bread to jam, salad to sausages and cheese. Products were stored in the basement of the house (izba) for winter, as well as bread crates, oil and gas canisters, all kinds of stores.*



Nahum Gilboa-Peretz. 'Street in Sofia'. The reproduction of the painting was published and provided by La Estreya magazine.

"Now go into the house. Even at the door you can see the mezuzá (an amulet, containing parchment with selected texts from the Pentateuch and attached to the side frame of the front door) with the eternal inscription šaday [one of the names of God; an acronym for the gatekeeper of Israel]. If you go into the drawing room, you will note that it is carefully decorated with one long minder (sofa) with countless white pillows on which the adult Sephardic Jews sit without shoes and with legs crossed Turkish style. The drawing room (camerata de vijita) is often decorated with portraits, even though the elders of the family consider photographs to be relics of idolatry. Countless illustrated postcards cover the whitewashed [encalados] walls."

"A few chairs, a table, most often massive and made of walnut (gévis), a sideboard, a large copper brazier (brazero) – these are all the 'luxuries' in the house. The bedroom. If the house is a truly old one from a certain period, you will be surprised by the lack of beds. There is not a single one. At the same time, you will see large wardrobes (almarios) built like alcoves into the walls. Open them and you will discover carefully arranged sheets and pillows inside, but the beds are missing. There is a very good reason for this; you sleep on the floor. On top of the wardrobes you will see a wide wooden rim, this is a flat plank (tavladico), on which fruit is arranged – pears (pera), apples (manzanas), quinces (bimbrios), walnuts (muezes), oranges (portocales) and others. On both sides of the wardrobes you will see wooden niches cut into the wall that are called raf (short for rafizico). Cast a look at them: very often you might find a talega (a bag), tefillin (tablet) and los libros de tefilla (prayer books). In addition, the windows (ventanas) are covered with curtains (perdes) and the floor with carpets (tapetes, kilimes) or simply with čergas (rugs), čules (mats made of goat's wool) or esteras (mats). But what else will we discover in the wardrobe? A small door with a tranka (latch). Open it and you will see a small room which is called a kultük (closet). Several chests, various clothes, but no windows; despite this, however, the place is well lit by a candelabra in the ceiling. Opposite you – several steps and a door. You are in the Turkish bath, very often made of marble with rounded lines, with two taps (mušlukes) – for hot and cold water – and a pila (trough). And here a lot of light comes in from the roof. Having seen what's interesting about one old Sephardic house, you will realise that this is a Turkish house, simplified, without selamlık and haremlık (the men's and women's parts of a Turkish house). If you cast a look at the fence, you will see a kumšilik (komshilik) through which you talk to the neighbours. Go through it and you will be arrive in another Sephardic house, which also has a komshilik, and if you carry on, you might visit the whole Jewish quarter without needing to go out onto the street."



Nahum Gilboa-Peretz. "Portrait of a Jewish family". The reproduction of the picture was published and provided by La Estreya magazine.

But let us return to our four owners. We have found information about **Matilda Isaac Gabay**. According to the records, she was born in 1891 in Belgrade, where she lived at 19 Tsar Stefan Uroš Street. By 1941 she was a housewife and had three children – Luna Gabay (28), Zelma Gabay (25) and Bubi Gabay. Although she wasn't living in Sofia at the time the anti-Jewish laws were introduced, Madame Gabay was an obedient citizen and through her proxy Tinka Elizah Levi declared the property that she owned in the city. Here we will unfold a little of the story of the fate of the Jews in Belgrade. In April 1941 the Nazis occupied Yugoslavia. Soon afterwards property owned by Belgrade's Jews was confiscated and they were arrested and gathered into the Staro Sajmište camp near the city in November 1941. From March-July 1942 the majority of them were killed in a particularly cruel manner – gassed in specially adapted trucks called soul killers. Staro Sajmište had opened in 1937 with a very different purpose as a shopping complex and today is connected with the development of Belgrade Fair. We do not know whether Madame Matilda Gabay saved herself and her children from mass murder, but we will continue to search for information about her and her family. From the records of another owner –

Rosa Moreno Meshulam – we have established that the house with four owners was confiscated in May 1942 and that that all their capital in the Yuchbunar Popular Bank was frozen.

THE HOUSE OF THE REFETОВI FAMILY

4.

Next door, at 10 Pirotska Street, is the house of the Refetovi family. The building was built in 1895, both as a place to live and as an investment. The architectural design includes an asymmetrical bay window on two floors, ending in a gabled pediment, pilasters, cornices and frames.




View of the Refetovi house in the 1970s. LSA.



Abraham Refetov. The photograph is from after the First World War, around 1920, and is published in the book *Prominent Jews in Bulgaria*, vol. 4, Tel Aviv, 1970, National Library.

The documents discovered lead us to think that the house was owned by Abraham Israel Refetov, a native of Sarajevo, whose family relocated to Ruse and then to Sofia. While they were still living in Ruse, Abraham Israel's father liked to give legal advice, which is why he was nicknamed Refet and the Turkish authorities in Ruse recognised him as a lawyer. To some extent, however, this predetermined the fate of his son Abraham, who graduated from the Law Faculty of Sofia University and became a lawyer. Prior to this, Abraham Refetov graduated with honours from the Military School in Sofia and served for a short time as an officer in the retinue of Prince Ferdinand. Refetov was a good lawyer and public speaker and actively took part in the life of Sofia's Jewish community – in 1900 he was a member of the committee to select the chief rabbi and in 1910 he was chosen as chairman of the Jewish School Board. As an officer, Abraham Refetov took part in the Balkan and the First World Wars for which he was awarded a medal for bravery. He died in Sofia in 1929.



From the Jewish buildings seen so far, we can conclude that wealthier Jews, some of whom were, so to speak, notables of the Jewish community in Sofia, lived towards this end of the street. How in fact was the Jewish community in Sofia organised at the beginning of the 20th century?

The Constituent Assembly in Tarnovo in 1879 was a notable event in the construction of the modern Bulgarian state. The first fundamental law – the Tarnovo Constitution – regulated the state political system of the country in the spirit of the separation of powers – legislative, executive and judicial. On top of which it guaranteed equality for all Bulgarian subjects, freedom of religion and the inviolability of private property.

In 1880 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Religious Confessions (MBPI) drew up **“Temporary Rules for the Spiritual Management of Christians, Muslims and Jews in Bulgaria”**,

according to which the Jewish population in the Principality “is governed religiously, administratively and judicially by the religious community, the Chief Rabbinate and the spiritual courts.” Until 1888, Jews in Bulgaria were organised into 33 religious communities in the larger cities and there were also three Ashkenazy Jewish communities in Sofia, Ruse and Varna.

With Law 367 of 14th October 1906, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Religious Confessions recognised the Consistory as an official institution, at the head of which stood the Chief Rabbi.

By 1915, the **Jewish religious community** was a legal entity with the right to own property, accept donations and bequests and enjoy all the rights of a legal entity, with the synagogue's board of trustees, its school board and its community council as its official institutions. The Jewish population in Bulgaria lived a vigorous life in conditions that created religious freedom and autonomy. At the same time the Bulgarian Jews were not an isolated and self-serving community – in line with and as part of the general cultural and social revival, every Bulgarian town with a significant Jewish population saw the appearance of social, cultural, educational, charitable, sporting and touring societies, choirs, theatrical circles and associations of artists and performers which established and affirmed cultural traditions that were equally significant for both Jewish and Bulgarian culture.

5. THE HOUSE OF YAKO AND LEVI COHEN

The house of Yako and Levi Cohen at 17 Pirotska Street. The two-storey building was built in 1911. There were leather shops located on the ground floor and the second floor was intended as a residence. On the architectural side, the building was designed with a simple, undecorated façade, but in stylistic harmony with the commercial district's architectural ensemble.



View of the house of Yako and Levi Cohen in the 1970s. LSA.

We will use the former leather shops in this house to tell you about the Cordovans. Leatherwork is a characteristic old Jewish trade. Its origins are connected to the Spanish city of Cordoba and it's possible to come across someone in Sofia with the surname Cordova to this day. In the 16th century a large section of the Sephardic Jewish community from this town brought the complex treatment of hides known the world over by the name Cordovan to Bulgaria. Cordovan leather is horse hide which is found on the high rear part of a horse's back, close to the tail.

Cordovan leather is the intermediate membrane between two layers of epidermis and obtaining it is more complicated and labour intensive, and only two pieces of Cordovan leather are produced from one rawhide, enough to make a pair of shoes. We do not know whether they sold Cordovan leather in Yako and Levi Cohen's leather shop, but we do know that from the 16th century Jews who settled in Bulgaria had been trying to divert the traditional trade route via Dubrovnik and to connect directly with Split, the most important city in Dalmatia.



Diagram of a horse hide showing where Cordovan leather is obtained. Sourced from the internet.



Today Cordovan products look like this. Source – www.carminashoemaker.com

Hides – raw and processed – wool, silk and wax remained the main imported and exported goods in this period. Trading with Transylvanian towns and especially with Sibiu, Jews exported Cordovan leather, processed goat skin and materials from western countries and from the various provinces of the empire – mohair, cotton, tobacco, woollen cloth, cotton thread – as well as importing a variety of materials into Bulgaria. Commercial exchange was carried out through cooperatives – associations primarily founded in the personal labour of each member. In the 17th-18th centuries the Jews lost their position in commercial trade in Bulgarian lands, both because of the decline of intermediary trade with the Italian maritime republics and of the appearance of competition from emerging local merchants much more tightly bound into the domestic market. Within the Ottoman Empire, Jews were predominantly an urban feature, and that tendency continued after the Liberation. Alongside educated doctors, lawyers and industrialists, another section of Sofia's Jewish population was made up of tradesmen, silversmiths, tinsmiths, glaziers and peddlers.

HOUSE OF HAIM AARON COHEN

6.



The house in the 1970s. LSA.

We are in front of a house belonging to Haim Aaron Cohen at 19 Pirotska and Tsar Samuil Streets.

The building was built in 1929 and has entrances on two streets – Pirotska and Tsar Samuil. The ground floor was intended for shops in which fabrics were sold and the second floor for accommodation.



There is no better place to talk about the clothing of Sephardic Jews than the fabric shops on the ground floor of the house.

Sephardic women always dressed in the latest fashions which gave rise to great envy. The men also dressed well and always in European style. In the first decades of the 20th century mature men in padded jackets and Turkish fezzes almost completely disappeared and those who sometimes wore homespun clothes and caps were encountered more rarely. At the beginning of the last century Sephardic women shed the heavy embroidered velvet dresses called bindalli in favour of elegant costumes as the occasion required.



A Sephardic woman's outfit. The dress has traditional bindalli gold embroidery. Behind her can be seen a richly decorated screen. Photograph from 1949. CNA.



In order to preserve Jewish tradition, however, a Jewish woman's trousseau (ashugar) always contained a dress and an outer garment of satin with bindalli gold embroidery. In the Sephardic family, the woman occupied the place that was due to her. She received incomparably better treatment from her husband and it was exceptionally rare to see a Jewish man who let himself go home drunk or treat his wife badly. As well-educated as her husband, the Sephardic woman held great authority in the family, especially after wars started and she had to manage the house and shop alone during her husband's long absences. Bulgarian Sephardic women were hospitable, but quite restrained in their behaviour and much more earnest than their compatriots in other Balkan countries.

Tsar Samuil is one of the streets crossing Pirotska Street.

Tsar Samuil is one of Sofia's central streets. Named after the Bulgarian ruler Tsar Samuil, who ruled over Bulgaria from 997 to 1014, the street begins on Patriarch Evtimiy Boulevard and extends as far as the area around the Central Station. We will see several Jewish houses close to the junction with Pirotska Street. We will leave Pirotska Street for a short while in order to look at the beautiful monumental building called Moskovich Palace.

MOSKOVICH PLACE AT 93 TSAR SAMUIL



General view of the building from the 1970s. LSA.

It was built in 1911-12 for Luka Moskovich's hotel. It had a ground floor and three storeys and there were six entrances. The building is in the shape of an inverted U, with an inner courtyard with a fountain and a sweeping façade. In the 1930s it was rebuilt, the corridors were partitioned and residential apartments were created.

Sofian citizen and rentier Luka Laba Moskovich (1867-unknown) and his wife Toni were known for their charitableness. In 1927 he built another massive building in a spacious yard in the Lozenets district of Sofia which he gave to the Ashkenazy women's charitable organisation Podkrepa or Support.

The donation came with the explicit proviso that the building would be used as a home for the elderly, bore the name **Toni and Luka Moskovich** and would accept "on an equal footing needy Ashkenazy and Sephardic Jews living in the city of Sofia, who through advanced age and infirmity are no longer capable of work, providing them with free shelter and food while they live, as well as boarders for a fee if there is enough free space". As well as this Luka Moskovich added another proviso – that there would be at least five free places in the old people's home for "Jews passing through Bulgaria" who had fallen into poverty. When he donated the building in 1927, Mr Moskovich was exactly 60 years old. He could hardly have suspected that ten years later more Jews from Germany, Czechia and Hungary would leave their home countries, fleeing the Nazis, and that many of them would travel through Bulgaria, seeking a way to reach the Promised Land by land and sea.



Toni and Luka Moskovich's family. LSA.



Architectural details from inside the entrance to the Moskovich building. Photograph: Ivanka Gezenko

The entrance to the inner courtyard of the Moskovich building at 93 Tsar Samuil Street.

Photograph: Ivanka Gezenko



The fountain in the inner courtyard. Photograph: Ivanka Gezenko

THE HOUSE OF SABAT EZRA TADJER

Immediately after the junction of Tsar Samuil Street and Todor Alexandrov Boulevard is the house of Sabat Ezra Tadjer at 81 Tsar Samuil.

8.



View of the Tadjer family home in the 1970s. LSA.

Built in 1914 as a three-storey residential building. The architecture is notable for the moulding at the entrance, the bow window and the crowning cornice.

Sabat Ezra Tadjer was born in 1886 in Sofia and had a family of four – his wife Rachel and two married daughters – Nelly (29) and Elza (20). He was a trader by profession and part of the trading company Tadjer & Hannanel, but in accordance with article 51 of the Regulations for the Implementation of the Law for the Protection of the Nation, Sabat Tadjer ceased commercial activities on 8th April 1942. All his financial holdings in the bank were frozen, because of which he begged the Commissariat for Jewish Affairs to release a small monthly sum to live on while another part of his money was destined to pay the huge taxes on the house on Tsar Samuil Street.

THE HOUSE OF JACK LEVI AND NISSIM DAVID

9.

We continue our walk back on Pirotska Street in order to look at the house of Jack Levi and Nissim David at 23 Pirotska.

The house was built in 1900 with ground-floor spaces for shops selling haberdashery and jewellery, with the other floor designed for accommodation.

Here is the place to note that the Sephardic Jews in Sofia loved luxury, ornaments, jewels, spectacular fabrics, hubbub, travelling, resorts, good cooking, beautiful furniture. So they strove to seek a dowry (contado), la anšugar (trousseau), furnished their interiors in an incomparably nicer way than Bulgarians of their rank, spent money on works of art and charity, and eventually died without leaving a single house to their family, which in most cases was large and numerous.

The food in a Sephardic family was almost always good and abundant, including good quality meat and wine. As is characteristic of Jewish cuisine, it is prepared strictly and solely according to the kashrut (clean food or allowed and forbidden foods), it cannot contain meat and milk simultaneously. In general it is bound to centuries-old Jewish rules and religious restrictions regarding food. And since Pirotska Street was mostly populated by Sephardic Jews, we will mention that their most characteristic dishes were filas – enchusa (pastry with a dough base with cheese, vegetables and egg on it), pastel (pastry similar to a banitsa with a meat or milk-based filling), chikur (chukur – a twisted banitsa with cheese), buikos (cheese cracker with butter dough with a filling), borekas (small banitsas), tishpishti (a dessert dish made with semolina and covered with sugar syrup). The Ashkenazy also prepared stuffed jelly fish called gefilte fish, a pasta casserole called kugel or slow-cooked cholent, and on every Jewish holiday, both Sephardic and Ashkenazy cooked rich spreads of dishes typical for holidays.



31. The house of Messrs Levi and David in the 1970s. LSA.



Tasty Sephardic burekas. Source – <https://cookpad.com>



10.

THE YUCHBUNARSKA POPULAR BANK

Almost opposite it stands the beautiful Yuchbunarska Popular Bank building at number 20, which in its time served the run-down district of Yuchbunar and was the only bank on Pirotska Street.

The building was built around 1912 on the eve of the Balkan War in the architectural style of the Secession. Having begun operations in January 1922, the Yuchbunar bank was founded on cooperative principles and had the task of satisfying “the needs of one of the city’s suburbs, through which the powdered Sofian walks with a scornful grimace, observing and being disgusted by the miserable appearance of the streets and dwellings”. It is indicative of the bank’s stated ambition that by the end of the 1920s it had only opened branches in the then dilapidated suburbs of Draz Mahala, Konyovitsa and Malashevtsi.



The Yuchbunarska Popular Bank building. The photograph was published in 1937 in the bank’s report. Source: <https://alba-books.com>



How the bank’s shares looked in 1937. Source: <https://balkanauction.com>

THE HOUSE OF THE LEVI FAMILY

11.

We carry straight on and after the junction of Pirotska Street and Hristo Botev Boulevard, we will see the neat house of the Levi family at 41 Pirotska.

The building was built in 1909 and consists of ground-floor premises, two floors and an attic dwelling. The façade is remarkable for the moulding of the windows with profiled frames and geometric ornaments, sashes and parapets beneath the windows.



View of the house in the 1970s. LSA.

THE THIRD SOFIA BOYS HIGH SCHOOL

The most prestigious school in Sofia – The Third Sofia Boys High School – is at 68 Pirotska Street.

The school building was built in 1907 to a design by the architects Kiril Marichkov and Georgi Fingov. There were three departments in the school – commerce, practical and classical. The official consecration of the school took place on 4th January 1910. That same year the school was named after William Gladstone – the British statesman who raised his voice in defence of the Bulgarians at the time of the 1876 April uprising.

In 1916, during the First World War, the school was turned into a hospital. In 1939 its third floor was raised and an annex was added to its east wing after it was affected by the 1944 air raids.



Tableau of portraits of Third Sofia Boys High School pupils and view of the school. Sofia, 1923-1924 academic year. CNA.

Because there were no restrictions on Jewish children until the implementation of the Law for the Protection of the Nation, many of them were educated at the then prestigious Third Sofia Boys High School. A characteristic feature of Bulgarian Jews was their striving to get a good education. We will note that by 1936 there were 15 Jewish kindergartens, 26 primary schools and five Jewish junior high schools (with instruction in Bulgarian and Hebrew) operating in Bulgaria, with a total of around 3,000 students, and that separate school buildings had been built in Sofia and Pazardzhik. The number of Jewish newspapers and magazines published in Bulgarian had reached 88 and those in Ladino and Hebrew 57.

After the implementation of anti-Jewish laws, many of the students of Jewish origin were deprived of their right to be educated in Bulgarian schools as the ban also applied to Jewish teachers.



Students from the Yuchbunarsko Jewish School. Sofia, 1932. CNA.

13. AT THE CROSSROADS OF PIROTSKA STREET AND OPULCHENSKA STREET

One of the main streets in Sofia that crosses Pirotska is Opulchenska Street. Immediately after the junction of the two, there is a small garden in which there are two landmarks – St Nicholas of Sofia church and the memorial to the volunteers of the 58th Infantry Regiment at Edirne.



Postcard with a view of the church.
Source: <http://stara-sofia.com>

In 1896, following a decision by the church board, the construction of an Orthodox church began in Yuchbunar district which was inhabited by many Macedonian refugees. The church was completed and solemnly consecrated on 3rd December 1900. It is dedicated to and bears the name of the Holy Martyr Nicholas of Sofia, who, according to his biography, was a shoemaker – prominent, pious and a hard-working citizen. After he moved from Ioannina to Sofia, the Ottomans began to tempt him into accepting their religion. Nicholas refused and was bound and subjected to torture. They dragged him in front of the kadi, who didn't find him guilty and told them to let him go, but the malicious crowd dragged him to a place in Yuchbunar on 17th May 1555 and stoned him to death.

The church has four thrones, the central one dedicated to St Nicholas of Sofia, who is honoured by the Bulgarian Orthodox Church on 17th May. The northern throne of the church is dedicated to St Marina the Great Martyr. The southern one to St Ekaterina the Great Martyr, and the fourth throne in the church is dedicated to the Reverend Petka Tarnovska – all of them Sofian martyrs, killed for their orthodox beliefs. In the church there is a richly decorated iconostasis, the work of the Debar masters Nestor and Lazar Alexiev to a design by the artists Anton Tornovov and Stefan Badjkov. The iconostasis was finished in 1919.

THE VOLUNTEERS MONUMENT

The Volunteers Monument is not far from the church.

It is dedicated to the fallen volunteers of the 58th regiment, who fought in the Balkan Wars. The initiative to build it dates from 1913, but its construction began in 1928, when 220,000 leva had been collected. Sofian citizens and institutions donated the resources for the monument and it was ceremonially unveiled on 3rd October 1932. It consists of a pedestal and statue, the base is 7 x 7 metres and is 12 metres tall and the statue itself is 2.8 metres tall. The design and construction were the work of the sculpture Toma Deliradev. He used Vlodaya granite for the construction of the pedestal and white Vratsa stone for the statue. The statue itself represents a volunteer with a great coat, cape, cap, rucksack, cartridge pouch, spade, bandolier and a rifle in his hand. The monument was raised in honour of the two officers, ten non-commissioned officers, two corporals and 149 privates from the 58th regiment killed during the siege of Edirne fortress. A bronze medallion surrounded by a laurel wreath and bearing the inscription "In memory of the epic struggle at Odrin (Edirne) 1912-13 and the fallen volunteers" was placed on the front side of the pedestal. The names of those killed near Kavkaz Tabia, Demir Kapu and Kaik Tabia are inscribed on three sides of the monument. On the western side of the monument, beneath the inscription Kartal Tepe is inscribed part of the act for the construction of the monument which is also laid into its foundations.



The Volunteers Monument in the garden beside the church. 1932.

Source: <http://stara-sofia.com>



A group of young people in the garden before the final completion of the monument – still lacking the figure of the volunteer.

Source: <http://stara-sofia.com>

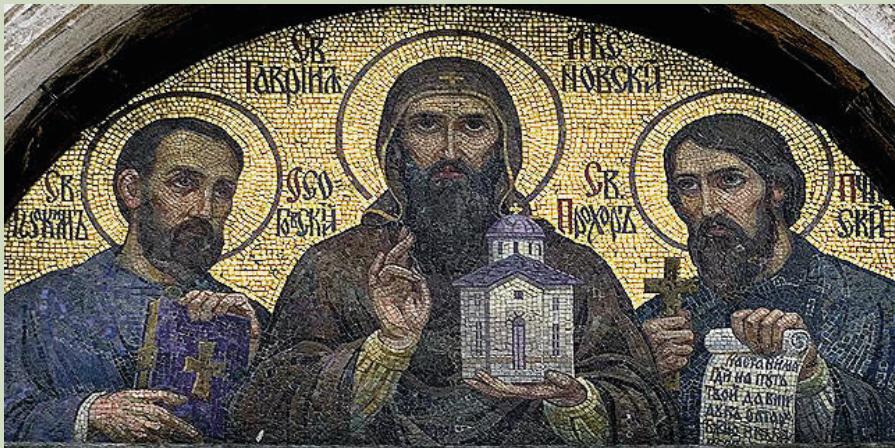
Here is the place to note that many Bulgarian Jews fought on the frontline alongside Bulgarian soldiers in the Serbian-Bulgarian, Balkan and First World Wars. To be more precise, we should note that during the **Balkan and Inter-Allied Wars** 229 Jews in the ranks of the Bulgarian army (three officers, nine non-commissioned officers and 217 privates) were killed and the overall number of Bulgarian Jews killed in the First World War was 636 (30 officers, 40 non-commissioned officers and 566 privates). Rahamim Mushonov, Abraham Tadjer, Moreno Graciani, Sason Alkalay, Abraham Refetov, August Rosenthal, Hezkia Sabetai Davidov, Joseph Herbst achieved military ranks in the Bulgarian army. Among all of these the two Rozenthal brothers – August and Juliusz – who gave their lives for Bulgaria stand out.

Juliusz Augustov Rosenthal (1872-1903) was a poet and member of the Internal Macedonian-Edirne Revolutionary Organisation and he was killed during the suppression of the Ilinden Preobrazhenie Uprising. The author of the poetry collection *Unsung Songs* and translator of Henryk Sienkiewicz's novel *With Fire and Sword*.

His brother August Rosenthal was an artist and took part in creating the external mosaic at Alexander Nevsky cathedral. He died for the freedom of Bulgaria as a volunteer in the Balkan War on 9th October 1912.



Portrait photograph of Juliusz Rosenthal. CNA.



The external mosaic icon of Prokhor Pchinski, Joachim Osogovski and Gavril Lesnovski above the southern entrance to Alexander Nevsky Cathedral in Sofia.

Source: <https://bgportret.com/avgust-rosental>

15.

THE EMIL SHEKERDJIYSKI JEWISH CULTURAL CENTRE AND "FROM NEEDLE TO THREAD"

We again cross the street in order to tell you two stories about one and the same building. Opposite the park, at 79 Pirotska Street, there is a building in which two organisations have had their premises over the years. Today you will find the Emil Shekerdjiski Jewish Cultural Centre there. We should note that until 1928 one of the most visited cultural centres in Sofia was the H.N. Bialik Jewish Cultural Centre and by that same year it had 2,000 books. From 1953 until today, the library of the Emil Shekerdjiski Jewish Cultural Centre – which offers a variety recreational activities – has been at number 79.



Letterhead with an image of the Dobrodetel society building.
Source: <http://stara-sofia.com>

Before that, this same building housed the Yuchbunar provident mutual aid society Dobrodetel. The main aim of the society was to ensure that its many regular members in Yuchbunar district received a proper burial and to offer material help to their families. More than 1,500 inhabitants of the impoverished district were society members. Until 1939 the society held its meetings in various rooms in the neighbourhood, and from 1939 it moved in to its "Own home. Pirost St 79, Three Wells neighbourhood", an inscription which is officially stamped on the letterhead of its documents. It is noteworthy that, in the first years communist power was established, a great part of the funds collected did not go to support the relatives of people who died in the neighbourhood, but were redirected to the new Homeland Front government's election campaigns. Some members of the board of trustees were accused of being Germanophiles, which became the reason for their dismissal. Besides which citizens of "good conscience" indicated to the national militia that the society had capital and owned its own home to the value of 10 million leva, as well as two shops, an extensive garden with a beer shop and a cinema from which they received an annual income in the region of 1 million leva. The activities of the society were discontinued in 1949.

Nearby at 83 Pirotska St, back in 1940, Mr **Moshe Josif Lereya**, rented a shop from the brothers Daniel and Stefan Pantevi, in which he started offering men's shirts and various haberdashery items – from needles to thread. His business was relatively successful, but in 1942, like other men of Jewish origin, Mr Lereya was mobilised and sent to a Jewish labour group. These groups, also known as labour camps, were created in 1941 and every male Jew between the ages of 20 and 46 was sent to them in order to work on building roads and bridges or cleaning riverbeds. They worked from March to November. On 30th May 1943 the family of Mr Lereya were resettled in Razgrad, and the Commissariat for Jewish Affairs confiscated his shop and sold off all his stock.

134 SCHOOL DIMCHO DEBELYANOV



The building of the Hristo Botev Junior High School on Pirotska Street. Look carefully – the monument to the volunteers has not yet been erected in the garden by the church. LSA.

Offering study in Hebrew and English, 134 School Dimcho Debelyanov is found almost opposite the Emile Shekerdjijiski community centre. The school is the heir to one of the oldest schools in Sofia – The First Junior High School Hristo Botev. As we have already noted, Dimitar Petkov – one of the first mayors of Sofia – gave himself the ambitious task of rebuilding the city with wide streets and putting up new and modern buildings.

16.

At the same time, around 1890, the population of Yuchbunar district numbered close on 20,000, and its young inhabitants needed a school, because of which a neighbourhood school was built and opened in the 1891-2 school year. It was located in the middle of a garden and was housed in two one-storey buildings. The school had two girls' and two mixed classes supervised by ten teachers. Later, in place of the little building with a view onto Pirotska Street, a two-storey building was built in a mixed, predominantly neo-renaissance style that was characteristic of the period. It had 16 classrooms, a spacious staff room, directorate, office and a high attic floor and other rooms. This is where the First Junior High School Hristo Botev opened in the 1912-13 academic year. During the First World War, the building was used as a military hospital and the students were taught in private premises. At the time of the Second World War, the school building was again used as a hospital, but this time the students were given shelter by 136 School Lyuben Karavelov. Many different educational institutions have been accommodated in the school building – The Pedagogical School for Primary Teachers was accommodated there in the 1950-51 school year while Hristo Botev School's elementary courses continued to be taught there. In the 1991-2 academic year the school was designated for the study of the mother tongue – Hebrew – as a freely optional subject. It was turned from a municipal to a national school by statute. In 2003 one of the oldest humanitarian Jewish organisations – ORT – returned to Bulgaria. Together with the Ronald C. Lauder Foundation, it set up a Technology Centre in 134 School Dimcho Deblyanov, which had modern computer rooms and technology laboratories. ORT's newest project at 134 School led to the creation of a school media centre, including photography, television and sound recording studios and its high attic was transformed into a modern educational centre with its own TV studio.

Medal of Honour of the Yad Vashem Institute in Israel awarding the title Righteous among the Nations of the World. Source: <https://www.yadvashem.org>



Along with its remarkable and innovative solutions in the field of educational practice, the school can also rightly be proud of the memorial that was unveiled in the school yard in 2021. The memorial bears the name **The Wall of Righteous Bulgarians of the World.**

It is dedicated to the twenty honourable Bulgarians who helped and protected their Jewish fellow citizens during the years of the Holocaust. The memorial was conceived and built through the means of Roman Stoyanov, a descendent of one of the Righteous Bulgarians of the World. Thus we pay tribute to the deeds of all those who didn't hesitate to risk their own lives to save their Jewish compatriots.

The Yad Vashem memorial, dedicated to the Holocaust, was created in the State of Israel in 1953. One of its aims is to seek out and perpetuate the memory of 'the righteous of the world' – people from non-Jewish backgrounds who saved Jews from their executioners. By 2020 they had accepted more than 25,000 people from 49 countries with 20 righteous Bulgarians amongst them.

The honourable title of Righteous among the Nations of the World is awarded to those who, on their own initiative and in conditions of Nazi terror, helped Jews in the following ways:

- providing secret hiding places. In many cases, this form of help was simply a refuge, but at the same time it was very difficult and risky because even when the secret hiding place in which Jews were concealed was not located directly in the protector's home, they took responsibility for taking care of those under their protection. Sometimes the protector and his family lived under constant fear of being denounced for years.
- cooperating in the concealment of Jews and helping them by preparing false papers (identification certificates, birth or baptism certificates etc) or by finding a safe house and sometimes work as well.
- participating in the organisation of an escape from a ghetto or concentration camp and subsequent concealment as well as cooperating in the transfer of escapees to a neutral or less dangerous country.
- participating in the protection of Jewish children in situations when separation from their parents was unavoidable (in cases where the parents were sent to a concentration camp or deported from one place to another).

The names of Bulgarians, admitted among the Righteous:

1. Dimo Totev Kazasov (1886-1980). Journalist, public and political figure. Minister of railways, post and telegraph (1923-1924), minister of propaganda, information and arts (1945-47). In 1940 Kazasov wrote an open letter to the Prime Minister Bogdan Filov against the implementation of the Law for the Protection of the Nation. Together with a group of well-known intellectuals – former ministers and army officers – he openly and courageously protested against the order to deport Jews from Sofia in May 1943. In addition to this he gave shelter in his home to three leaders of the Jewish community – Josef Geron, Dr Isaac Kalmi and Menahem Fayonov. Declared Righteous among the Nations of the World on 31st May 1966. Immortalised at the Yad Vashem Memorial Museum with a tree planted on the Alley of the Righteous.

2. Stefan (real name Stoyan Popgeorgiev 1878-1957). Archimandrite (1911), bishop (1921), Metropolitan of Sofia (1922), Exarch of Bulgaria (1945-1948). A shining defender of the Bulgarian Jews in the years of the Second World War. Declared Righteous among the Nations of the World on 11th November 2002. His name is inscribed on the Wall of Honour at the Yad Vashem Memorial Museum.

3. Kiril (real name Constantin Markov 1901-1971). Historian, Doctor of Theology (1927), academician (1970). Bishop of Stobi (1936), Metropolitan of Plovdiv (1938), Patriarch and Metropolitan of Sofia (1953). Consistent defender of Bulgarian Jews during the years of the Second World War. Declared Righteous among the Nations of the World on 11th November 2001. His name is inscribed on the Wall of Honour at the Yad Vashem Memorial Museum in Israel.

4. Mikhail Georgiev Mikhailov (dates unknown). Accountant. Born in Sofia. In 1942 secured food for his Jewish friends who had been sent to labour camps. The same year he helped to get David Josef Azisov and his father released from prison. At the time of the deportation of Sofian Jews in May 1943, Mikhail Mikhailov saved the property of his Jewish friends. Declared righteous on 2nd February 1971. Immortalised in the Yad Vashem Memorial Museum with a tree planted in the Alley of the Righteous.

5. Vera Paseva-Ichkova (dates unknown). Born in Sofia. Hid Jacob and Nissim Levi (father and son) in her home from 1942 until 1944. Two years after the end of the war, Vera Paseva was still looking after young Nissim. Declared righteous on 4th March 1987. Immortalised in the Yad Vashem Memorial Museum with a tree planted in the Alley of the Righteous.

6. Dimitar Josifov Peshev (1894-1973). Politician and public figure, minister of justice (1935-1936), deputy chairman of the XXIV and XXV Ordinary National Assembly (1938-1943). He initially supported the union between Bulgaria and Nazi Germany in the hope that it would help the country recover territories lost in the Balkan Wars 1912-1913. When, on 9th March 1943, a deputation from Kyustendil came to see him and told him that the government intended to hand over more than 8,000 Bulgarian Jews to the German First Army Group for deportation, he decided to oppose it. In his capacity as deputy speaker of the National Assembly and accompanied by a group of deputies, Peshev went to the minister of internal affairs Petar Gabrovski with a request to cancel the order. As a result of a fiery confrontation, Gabrovski ordered the deportation to be postponed. Peshev wrote a letter of protest signed by 42 other deputies which was addressed to the government and the Tsar. In the letter he pleaded that the name of Bulgaria not be dishonoured by an agreement to deport Bulgarian citizens to Nazi concentration camps. Honoured with the title of Righteous among the Nations of the World on 10th January 1973. His name is inscribed on the Wall of Honour at the Yad Vashem Memorial Museum.

7. Asen Syuchmezov (1899-1977). Tradesman, member of the Kyustendil delegation. Honoured with the title of Righteous among the Nations of the World on 10th January 1973. His name is inscribed on the Wall of Honour at the Yad Vashem Memorial Museum.

8. Ivan Momchilov (1888-1966). Lawyer, member of the Kyustendil delegation. Honoured with the title of Righteous among the Nations of the World on 4th September 1991. His name is inscribed on the Wall of Honour at the Yad Vashem Memorial Museum.

9. Vladimir Kurtev (1888-1946). Teacher and VMRO activist, one of the four people from Kyustendil who created the Public Committee for the Protection of Bulgarian Jews in 1943. Honoured with the title of Righteous among the Nations of the World at an official ceremony on 3rd May 2010 at the Yad Vashem Memorial Museum.

10. Petar Mikhalev (1899-1985). Lawyer, deputy in the XXV Ordinary National Assembly. Member of the Kyustendil delegation that met Dimitar Peshev, deputy speaker of the National Assembly. Honoured with the title of Righteous among the Nations of the World on 10th January 1973. His name is inscribed on the Wall of Honour at the Yad Vashem Memorial Museum.

11. Dr Pavel Gerdjikov (1906-1985). Born in Shumen, later his family moved to Sofia. Graduated from the First Boys High School (1920), from Sofia University in medicine (1932), specialised in Berlin. His surgery in Sofia was at 2 Benkovska Street at the junction with Dunav Street. When the Sofian Jews were ordered to leave the capital in May 1943, Gerdjikov secured a shelter for his friends Abraham Levi, his wife and their two teenage daughters Erica (later Rozenkrantz) and Yahel (Ambash). The family hid behind a false wall (a door in the apartment) and stayed there until January 1944. Through the whole of that time he cared for the family in hiding's every need. Gerdjikov even managed to secure false documents for all of them. Declared Righteous among the Nations of the World on 29th January 1980.

12. Nadezhda Vasileva (1891-unknown). Medical nurse. In March 1943, she distributed food and medicine to Jews from the Aegean at the railway station in Lom. When the Bulgarian police tried to stop her, she replied: "Kill me, if you want, but first let me give water to these unhappy people." Declared Righteous among the Nations of the World on 18th December 2001.

13. Mladen Ivanov (1923-2012). Lived with his parents in the middle of the Jewish quarter in Sofia. He spoke Ladino and was seen as part of the Jewish population he'd grown up amongst. A sincere and true friend to the Jews, he became known as "the defender of the ghetto". He secured false documents for his Jewish friends. He was arrested and tried by a military court in 1943. Declared Righteous among the Nations of the World on 11th February 1991. His name is inscribed on the Wall of Honour at the Yad Vashem Memorial Museum.

14. Stanka Stoicheva (unknown-1964). Born in Turgovishte. Together with her family, she concealed the family of Yakov Nissim Ephraim in her home in 1943. One of the married daughters Leah Farhi was pregnant and gave birth prematurely. With the help of Stanka, Leah gave birth to the baby girl Medi in the outbuilding where they were hiding. Stanka and her mother also helped other women no matter what their religious or ethnic origins. Declared Righteous among the Nations of the World on 21st December 2004. Her name is inscribed on the Wall of Honour at the Yad Vashem Memorial Museum.

15. Rubin Dimitrov-Bichko (1915-1995). Hid around 20 Jews after the Sofian Jews' protest demonstration on 24th May 1943 in his father's bakery in Yuchbunar. He helped with food for many of the 400 arrested Sofian Jews. When the police saw him speak with a Jew he was arrested and beaten up, as a result of which Rubin Dimitrov's eyesight was severely damaged. Honoured with the title of Righteous among the Nations of the World on 16th June 1963. His memory is immortalised with a tree planted on the Alley of the Righteous at the Yad Vashem Memorial Museum.

16. Dr Atanas Kostov (1900-1961). Doctor. In 1941 he was sent to Skopje. At the time of the arrest of Jews in Skopje in 1943, Dr Kostov helped his Jewish friends and their families – 58 people – declaring in front of the authorities that these people were necessary to him for the prevention of epidemics and in this way he succeeded in obtaining an order for the release of his Jewish colleagues – doctors and pharmacists and their families. Honoured with the title of Righteous Among the Nations of the World on 14th April 2002. His name is inscribed on the Wall of Honour at the Yad Vashem Memorial Museum.

17. Anna Georgiva Damyanova Popstefanova

(dates unknown). Theatre actress. Anna Popstefanova was the wife of the regional police chief in Skopje – Stefan. At the beginning of March 1943, the Jewish community in Skopje was notified that on 11th March all Jews must gather at the railway station. The Popstefanovi knew Moni and Rachel Kario and their children and warned them not to go to the station, but to try to escape. Anna Popstefanova hid the Kario family in her home for several days and then transferred them to the home of Anna Surchadjieva. Honoured with the title of Righteous Among the Nations of the World on 21st April 1983. Her name is inscribed on the Wall of Honour at the Yad Vashem Memorial Museum.

18. Spiro Denkov

(1919–1996). Helped his Jewish friends with food and resources. After the Sofian Jews' demonstration on 24th May 1943, Miko Ofer was arrested and sent to the camp at Somovit. Spiro Denkov visited him and brought him food and letters from his family and friends. He managed to get a group of Jews into Romania illegally, who from there managed to reach Palestine. Honoured with the title of Righteous among the Nations of the World on 5th January 1971. His memory is immortalised by a tree planted in the Alley of the Righteous in Yad Vashem Memorial Museum.

19. Vassily Ivanov

(dates unknown). Helped a Jewish family in Odessa by hiding them. Honoured with the title of Righteous among the Nations of the World in 2007.

20. Anna Surchadjieva

(1914–2007). Daughter of a prominent jurist of Jewish origins, Josif Fadenheht. In 1943, together with her husband – the theatre director Stefan Surchadjiev – Ann was in Skopje. She hid the Kario family in her home, even though there were Germans quartered in the house they lived in. Honoured with the title of Righteous among the Nations of the World on 7th June 1983.

THE WOMEN'S MARKET

The Women's Market is among the landmarks that Pirotka Street passes.



17.

Architect Polina Gerdjikova, daughter of Dr Pavel Gerdjikov, Righteous among the Nations of the World. A copy of the picture 'Jewish street in Sofia' by Nahum Gilboa-Peretz. Gilboa painted the start of Exarch Josif Street in the area around the Sofia Indoor Market. The Sinai bookshop, owned by the artist's father Isaac Peretz, is depicted in the corner of the picture. The couple embracing in the foreground and Nahum himself together with his beloved Rachel.



Josef Oberbauer 'Market in Sofia'. Aquarelle, 1899. Josef Oberbauer (1854-1926): Traces of the City. Catalogue for exhibition by Sofia City Art Gallery and Sofia History Museum, 2010.

"That's what we called the village market which took place every Friday on the stretch of street between Banya Bashi mosque and the theatre-circus Bulgaria. Although relocated, it has preserved its name until today. As we have already explained, its name is due to an old custom from the Turkish enslavement which did not allow women to visit a market other than the village market for purely women's needs."



Nahum Gilboa-Peretz, 'Market with monkey', Nahum Gilboa (1917-1976) was an Israeli artist of Bulgarian origin and a great many of his paintings are dedicated to his beloved hometown, Sofia. In 1949 Gilboa moved to the State of Israel where they call him the "Israeli Brueghel". Reproduction of the painting is published and licensed by La Estreya magazine.

The Women's Market is the oldest market in the capital. Created after the Liberation, it developed rapidly and little by little became the most influential and prestigious commercial centre in the capital in the 20th century. It is located in the capital's city centre between two main boulevards – Todor Alexandrov and Slivnitsa, close to Lion's Bridge. The market is a living history of commercial relations in the centre of Sofia. The old town architecture, combined with the modern pavilions and trade stands for the sale of fresh fruit, vegetables and foodstuffs, creates a unique atmosphere and sense of authenticity and the history that accompanied the development of this commercial centre.

Near to the market can be found the houses of the Jewish families Franko (free) and Meshulam (reward). Both surnames suggest the Sephardic origin of their owners and their translated meanings seem to warm our hearts.

В продължение на няколко столетия сефардите в Османската империя се придвижват и установяват завинаги в градове на територията на днешна България. Така дългото пътуване от земите на Сфар'ад (библейското наименование на Испания, споменато в Стария завет) завършва за някои от тях тук, в България, но корените им са там, в Испания. Въпреки дългото странстване, сефардите пренасят със себе си вековните си традиции и духовност. Навсякъде в страните от Балканския полуостров можете да чуете фамилии с испански привкус като Кордова, Толедо, Магрисо, Розанес, а почти всички фамилии водели началото си от китните испански градове, от които угвали.

THE FRANCO HOUSE AT 33 STEFAN STAMBOLOV BOULEVARD AND THE FREQUENT STROLLS OF BORIS SCHATZ

From the righthand side, at the very entrance to the market, we will see two neighbouring houses on Stefan Stambolov Boulevard, the Franco house is at 33. The building was built in 1910 with two floors and a ground floor with shops. The façade has modest sculptural decoration.

Maybe the noisy Women's Market is a suitable place to talk about one person who left a lasting impression on Bulgarian visual art. He probably didn't know the Franco family, but he often came to the market with a pencil and paper and studied the faces of the merchants and all those who visited the market. But let's start a little further back:

The Art School opened in Sofia in 1896 and is today called the National Academy of the Arts. The first teacher of sculpture was the Lithuanian sculptor of Jewish origin – Boris Schatz (1867-1932). Trained as a rabbi in the family tradition, the young Schatz changed his fate and became a student of the famous sculptor Mark Antokolsky.

He worked successively in Warsaw, Paris and established himself in Sofia in 1895. His contribution to the creation and shaping of artistic perspectives in the field of the plastic arts in Bulgaria has been the subject of in-depth research into the overall development of Bulgarian art over the last 140 years. But why are we talking about him precisely at the Women's Market and the house of the Franco family?

As well as teaching at the Drawing School, in his capacity as court artist to the Bulgarian Prince, Boris Schatz carried out official orders, including a sketch (1901) of a monument to the heroes of the Liberation War 1877-1878 which glorified the name of Bulgaria at the Paris Exposition and exhibition at St Louis, USA. At the same time Boris Schatz was drawn to national characters, mainly old people, no matter whether they were Bulgarians, Jews, Roma or Turks. The artist came to the market and quickly sketched the characters he encountered. In just a few years he created his beautiful works 'Grandmother', 'Seated Jew' (1897), 'Turk' (1897), 'Woodcutter' (1898), 'Grandfather' (1898), 'Bakshish' (1898), 'Witch' (1898), 'Black thoughts' (1898), 'Wretch' (1898), 'Laughing gypsy' (1899), 'Peasant at market' (1898) and the well-known bust of a peasant – 'Svircho' (1896) - which today are in the possession of the National Gallery in Sofia.

In 1906 Schatz left for Jerusalem and opened the art and craft school Bezalel. He died in 1932. Today, 150 years after the birth of Boris Schatz, in Israel he is 'the father of Israeli art' and, in Bulgaria, the first sculptor who, despite being a foreigner, began the line which confirms the national singularity of Bulgarian art.



Boris Schatz. 'Peasant'. CNA.



Boris Schatz and his characters from the Women's Market. National Library.



Boris Schatz. 'Svircho', 1896. CNA.



The artist Boris Schatz in his studio. One of his famous works, 'Piper', can be seen towards the bottom of the picture. CNA.



But let's not forget the house of Franko, which looked like this in the 1970s. LSA.

18.



THE HOUSE OF JACK MESHULAM

The house of Jack Meshulam at 37 Stefan Stambolov Boulevard. The building was built in 1922 with three storeys and a ground floor which served as an inn. The façade is symmetrical with garland decorations under the windows.

Although the photograph is from the 1970s, the garland decorations under the windows can be seen. LSA.

THE HOUSE OF ELI PANIZHEL



In the 1970s there was a shoe shop on the ground floor. LSA.

Our walk will continue along another central Sofian street – Exarch Josif – and along that part of it which runs parallel to Pirotska Street in order to see the house of Eli Panizhel at number 3 Exarch Josif Street.

The building was built in 1915 with two storeys, a ground floor and attic. The architecture is distinguished by a curved bay window, top cornice, the shape of the windows and other silhouette accents.

19.



In 1991 the Bulgarian artist of Jewish origin Jack Avdala drew a characteristic view of the Jewish quarter in the years of the Holocaust. The picture bears the name 'Somewhere in Yuchbunar'. Source: <https://www.marginalia.bg>

The owners of the house were Eli Haim Panizhel and his wife Esterina. According to the Law for the Protection of the Nation, the name of Madame Esterina was changed to Esther because Esterina could be considered a German name. The family had an eighteen-year-old daughter Henrietta who also had to be renamed with the Jewish name Hemda. Mr Panizhel was a trader and member of the management board of the Jewish bank Geula. Everyone in the family was educated, they had a piano and a wireless which was confiscated in 1941, and Mr Panizhel paid over 150,000 leva as a one-off tax on his house. In 1943 the Panizhel family were deported from Sofia to Pleven. Eli Haim was actively involved in the work of the Pleven Jewish community and, together with two other Jews deported from Sofia, he organised a community kitchen for his destitute brethren, found accommodation for all those deported Jews arriving from other towns, whilst simultaneously securing schooling for Jewish children who lacked education. Among the records we found information that the Panizhel family managed to get a Turkish visa and did everything possible to leave for Palestine during the summer of 1944. The documents show that Eli Haim Panizhel died in 1948.

On the corner of Exarch Josif and Knyaz Boris I streets is found a beautiful house. Do you remember the sons of Mr Josif Madjar? They lived here, not far from the synagogue, and in 1941 they were forced to move into the attic floor of their own house.

THE CENTRAL SOFIA SYNAGOGUE

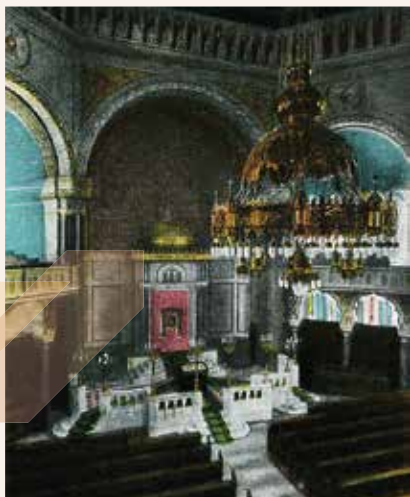
The Central Sofia Synagogue is also found on Exarch Josif Street at number 16.



Bullock carts can still be seen around the synagogue. CNA.

When we began our walk, you will remember that, as members of the special building committee, Mr Josif Madjar together with David Shemuel Farhi, Moses Abraham David, Abraham Davichon Levi, Rahamim ben Isaac and Abraham Isaac Levi decided in 1904 that a synagogue should be built in Sofia which would be for all the Jews in the city. They decided that the new synagogue would be on the site where the old Ahava and Hased synagogue had stood. The construction of the Central Sofia Synagogue was completed in 1909. It was designed by the famous Austrian architect Friedrich Grunanger, who took the synagogue in Venice – later destroyed by the Nazis – as a model.

The synagogue was officially opened on 9th September 1909 in the presence of Tsar Ferdinand and the entire ceremony was a holiday for the city.



Look carefully at the huge chandelier which they say weighs two tons. Source: <http://stara-sofia.com>



Sofia synagogue. Around 1936. CNA.

20.



How the invitation to the ceremonial dedication of Sofia synagogue looked. CNA.



Postcard of the dedication of the synagogue. Source: <http://stara-sofia.com>



Photograph of foreign Jewish prisoners in Sofia synagogue at Passover. Sofia 1918. LSA.



Sofia Synagogue is the largest on the Balkan peninsula and the third largest in Europe (after the synagogues in Budapest and Amsterdam), as well as being the largest Sephardic synagogue on the continent. It can hold more than 1,000 people in the central space (reserved for men) and on the internal balconies (where women pray). The chandelier decorating the temple is the largest in the country (with a weight of two tons) and a true work of art. There is a mikveh – a small bath for ritual Jewish ablutions – in the garden.



Nahum Gilboa-Peretz. "My Sofia". The artist's painting radiates a festive mood around Sofia Synagogue. The reproduction of the picture was published and provided by La Estreya magazine.

Perhaps here we should mention the Jewish holidays, other than the traditional Saturday sabbath, for which people gathered in the synagogue. According to the Jewish calendar they are:

Rosh Hashanah – the start of the year – New Year – anniversary of the creation of the world when every creature is judged. The sound of the shofar (a perfect ram's horn) recalls the sacrifice of Isaac and calls on God for mercy and invites the faithful to purification.

Yom Kippur – the day of atonement, the great forgiveness. God forgives the sins committed against Him, but everyone must ask forgiveness for sins against their neighbours. A one-day fast passed in prayers for forgiveness and "to be listed with the good in the book of life".

Sukkot – the feast of the tabernacles – seven days when the faithful eat and sleep in the tabernacle whose roof allows them to see Heaven.

Simchat Torah – celebration of the Torah. Marking the giving of the Torah to Moses. The cycle of readings of the Law finishes on this day and begins again the same day. The scrolls of the Torah are taken out of the Holy Ark. The holiday is noted for much singing and dancing.

Hanukkah – the festival of lights. Celebrates the miracle of the lamp that continued to shine for eight days rather than one during the re-dedication of the Temple in 164BC. Every day over the course of eight days an additional candle is lit on the candelabra with eight branches – the Hanukkah, equipped with an additional device for placing a candle that's designed to light the others.

Purim – the Feast of Lots (pur in Hebrew means lot). 'The Lot' cast by Haman, prince of the Persian King Artaxerxes, to choose the day of the extermination of every Jew in the empire but which went against him thanks to Esther. On this day the Megillah of Esther – the Book of Esther – is read in the synagogue. A ceremonial family lunch with gifts for children and a carnival.

Passover – dedicated to the liberation by God of the Jewish nation enslaved in Egypt. A ceremonial dinner (Seder) during which the Haggadah is read – the story of the exodus from Egypt. It is obligatory to prepare matzah – unleavened bread, also known as the bread of humility, and all other bread is ignored during the eight days of the feast.

Shavuot – feast of the weeks or Pentecost – 50 days after Passover – celebrates the giving of the Law (the Torah), directly from God to Moses.

Tisha B'Av – a day of mourning and fasting in memory of the destruction of the two Temples of Jerusalem.

Tu B'Shvat – "the new year of the fruit trees".

Lag B'Omer – holiday for students.

Before we walk along one of the oldest streets in Sofia, now called Princess Maria Luiza

Boulevard we should note we have left the boundaries of the old Jewish quarter as it was before the adoption of anti-Jewish laws in Bulgaria. In order to monitor their implementation, the most formidable institution was created in 1942 – the Commissariat for Jewish Affairs (CJA). The Commissariat initiated both measures against the Jews and monitored their application. One of the first acts of the CJA was factual identification, not only of property and production, but also every person of Jewish origin. From 29th September 1942, every person of Jewish origin over the age of 10 was obliged to wear a yellow star on their outer garments. Immediately after this the Commissariat for Jewish Affairs tried to turn the Jewish quarter into a ghetto. It issued an order which defined the boundaries of the neighbourhood in which Sofian Jews could live. Every Jew who had a house on Alabin and Tsarina Joanna streets, in Macedonia Square and Maria Luiza Boulevard was forced to leave it and to go and live in the specified neighbourhood – Yuchbunar.

We will mention that the boulevard bears the name of the first wife of Prince Ferdinand I – Maria-Luiza of Bourbon-Parma. During socialist times, the same boulevard bore the name of the communist leader Georgi Dimitrov.

21.

THE HOUSE OF MARKO ASSA

The house of Marko Assa is at 32 Maria Luiza Boulevard. The building was built in 1932 with three storeys and a ground floor. In regard to architecture it is distinguished by a beautiful top cornice, bay window and balconies.



We have not found documents that reveal how the family of Marko Assa survived the years of the Holocaust. We have discovered his letter of 1953 in which we are assured that he and his wife Loti are well, they are working and in their free time go for walks on Vitoshka and at Pancherevo, and in the summer of that same year they were at the seaside for the first time and travelled along the entire Bulgarian Black Sea coast. Even in his letter to his friend Stoyan Stojmenov, Mr Assa writes that "The Black Sea is a huge treasure for our country".

And in the 1970s the top cornice of the building looked good. LSA.

22.

THE HOUSE OF LUNA FARHI



The house of Luna Farhi at 50 Maria Luiza Boulevard – the building was built around 1912 with three storeys and a ground floor. With regard to architecture, it is distinguished by its façade which has diverse classical elements – window pediments, a top cornice with brackets and tracery and handsome iron balconies. After 1942, the family of Mr Luna Farhi was also forced to leave their beautiful house.

The house of Luna Farhi in the 1970s. LSA.

THE HOUSE OF DR MEVORAH



Today the house of Dr Mevorah at 59 Maria Luiza Boulevard does not exist, but this does not prevent us noting that the beautiful building was built around 1890 in the spirit of neo-classicism and was impressive, with Corinthian pilasters and stone frames around the windows, complemented by a keystone in the form of a head.

The house of Dr Mevorah looked like this in the 1970s. LSA.

23.

The house belonged to Dr Mevorah, but since we have not been able to discover his first name we will mention only that, at the time of the implementation of the Law for the Protection of the Nation in 1940, there were 172 Jewish doctors among a total of 3,200 practising doctors in Bulgaria. Maybe precisely because of them and their high degree of professionalism, the National Council of the Bulgarian Doctors' Union wrote a protest letter to the Chairman of the National Assembly against the implementation of the Law for the Protection of the Nation. In it they wrote: "As professionals, Jewish doctors have always been extraordinarily correct members of the medical collegiate, fulfilling their professional and moral duties most conscientiously. We appeal to you and beg you, Mr Chairman, to do whatever is possible not to apply the restrictions provided for in the bill ..."

24.

THE HOUSE OF ISAAC ARIE

We are in front of the house of Isaac Arie at 58 Maria Luiza Boulevard.



View of the house in the 1970s. LSA.

The building was built between 1924-1926 as a house for a rich Jewish family. The ground floor facing the street was used as a shop and there was an outbuilding in the inner courtyard – a workshop for the production of toilet soap. The façade facing the street is in the modern style with simple, but weighty detail, with vertical indentations and balconies on heavy brackets. The attic floor is shaped differently. The rooms are arranged according to the vestibule system and the reception rooms in the residence had rich plaster ceilings and huge portals. Today the Centre for Education, Science and Culture Project Lab is on the second and third floors, but in the past it belonged to the distinguished Arie family – rich industrialists who cultivated charitable activity and generously supported Bulgarian culture.

The Sephardic family Arie (Lion) originate in Spain, but after the expulsion of the Jews the family established itself in Austria. Towards the beginning of the 19th century, the Arie arrived in Vidin along the Danube and after that moved to Samokov, which at that time was an important commercial centre within the Ottoman Empire. Among the different activities they engaged in, it is known that they showed an early interest in essential oils. These were one of the Ottoman Empire's valuable products. From the beginning, the Arie traded in essential oils on international markets, and later showed interest in their application in perfumery. In the 1930s the brothers Jack, Isaac and Leon Arie owned the biggest factory for cosmetic products in Bulgaria, Germaindre, which was at 58 Maria Luiza Boulevard, near to the Hotel Savoy that was famous in the 1940s. There was a house by the factory in which Leon Arie, his wife Rachel and their children Claudia and Rene lived. According to the Law for the Protection of the Nation, the Germaindre factory was placed in liquidation and, towards the end of 1942, had to sell off its products. The grocer Vladimir Slavkov took some of the Germaindre soaps and sold them at a large premium.



The beautiful advertisement for soaps and toilet water produced by Germaindre.

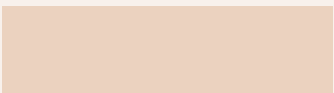
Source: <https://www.ploshadtaslaveikov.com>



Powder box with the inscription Germaindre. Source: <https://www.ploshadtaslaveikov.com>

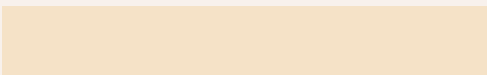


XJulio Palencia and his wife Zoe. The photograph was provided by Mr Vernar Dichek, Israel.



This speculative deal was investigated by the police. Under questioning, Slavkov accused the brothers Leon and Rafael Arie and a criminal case was begun against them. At the time the case became known as The Soap Affair in the press. The brothers Arie were sentenced to death by hanging and the sentence was carried out on 15th April 1943. We mentioned that Isaac Arie had two children – Claudia and Rene. When their father and uncle Rafael were hanged, Claudia was 19 years old and her brother Rene was 17. We also shouldn't leave out the story of a gallant Spanish diplomat who came to the aid of the orphaned family. His name was **Julio Palencia Tubau** (1884-1952). He was a diplomat who carried out his obligations beyond the call of duty and saved many human lives in the dark years of the Holocaust. Palencia presented his credentials in December 1940, when the XXV Ordinary National Assembly voted and passed the Law for the Protection of the Nation which deprived Bulgarian Jews of civil and political rights.

On 24th July 1941 he visited the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and protested about the mobilisation of Jewish Spanish subjects for labour and stated that it was contrary to international law. In May 1943 he opposed the eviction of Sofian Jews of every nationality and social position. He helped Jews from Skopje to leave the city and, in June 1943, the orphaned Claudia and Rene Arie.



Claudia and Rene before leaving Bulgaria. CNA.

In the Spanish legation to Sofia's verbal note #44 of 8th June 1943, Julio Palencia requested the issuance of diplomatic passports for his adopted children, Claudia and Rene Arie. His main aim was to save the youngsters whose father had been sentenced and executed that same year. As a result of his overall activity, he was declared a persona non grata in 1943 and left the country that August. The Spanish Jews in Bulgaria loved and remembered the diplomat Palencia. Those who survived the Holocaust called him Don Julio and for many of them he was their only hope of salvation and a memorial plaque in his honour was placed on the wall of the Spanish Embassy in 2010.

In 1943 Julio Palencia took steps to save Jews from Skopje, claiming they were Spanish subjects.



The memorial plaque in honour of Julio Palencia, placed on the building of the Spanish Embassy in Sofia. Photograph: Ivanka Gezenko.



Postage stamp with the image of Julio Palencia. The stamp was issued in 2017 at the suggestion of OEB Shalom. Source: philatelicmarket.com



However, 11,343 Jews from Aegean Thrace and Vardar Macedonia were deported

to death camps. On 22nd February 1943, the German representative Teodor Daneker and the Bulgarian Commissar for Jewish Affairs Alexander Belev signed an agreement for the deportation of "20,000 Jews from the new lands first of all". In the title of the document the words "new lands" are underlined and in practice it came into force for all Bulgarian Jews.. The agreement was approved by Bogdan Filov's office and in order to supplement the figure of 20,000, Commissioner Belev prepared lists of another 8,000 Jews living in Plovdiv, Pazardzhik, Kyustendil, Varna, Sliven and other Bulgarian towns. His attempt failed because, in March 1943, many Bulgarians protected their Jewish fellow citizens. After the failure of the attempt to evict Jews living within the territory of the Kingdom of Bulgaria, Commissioner Alexander Belev developed a new plan, which envisaged the deportation of 25,000 Jews living in Sofia to the provinces. We have already told you about some of them. The end of the Second World War found many deported Bulgarian Jews in different small towns around the country and very soon after the restrictions in the Law for the Protection of the Nation were lifted.

So our walk that we provisionally called 'For visitors to the Jewish quarter in Sofia' ends. We have tried to tell you how Bulgarians and Jews built houses together, how they lived from the Liberation (1878) until the implementation of the Law for the Protection of the Nation (1940). We 'peeked' into old Jewish houses to sense the way of life and atmosphere inside them. Our walk passed through the dark years of the Holocaust and caused us to recall the restrictions imposed on Bulgarian Jews, but at the same time we could not fail to tell you about the 20 honourable Bulgarians who helped their Jewish compatriots. And maybe here is the place to mention the words of a Bulgarian scholar: **"The other beside us is what we are beside others"**. Maybe these words of Professor Alexander Fol will help us to understand that, both in the past and in the present, we all create our story together.



Haralampi Tachev's design for a decorative frieze for the walls of the synagogue in Burgas. CNA.

