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BELGRADE: THE SERBIAN CAPITAL

Situated at the confluence of the Sava and Danube rivers, Belgrade has always been a city of considerable strategic and economic importance in the Balkans and has experienced a very stormy political history. Even in ancient Roman times it served as a key fortress, named Singidunum. After the Turks finally captured the town in 1521, they established it as the administrative center of a separate *pashaluk*, or province. On the border between the Ottoman and Habsburg empires, the city passed back and forth several times between the two great powers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but remained primarily under Turkish control until the Serbian independence movement began in the early nineteenth century. Belgrade then became the capital of the autonomous principality, later the Kingdom of Serbia and subsequently served as the seat of government of twentieth-century Yugoslavia.

Dominating the city is Kalemegdan, the sprawling old fortress located at the northwest tip where the two major rivers meet. The architecture of public buildings gives a sense of simplicity combined with solidity, as in, for example, the massive, copper-domed Skupština (Assembly) or the rather unpretentious Royal Palace opposite it. Of the many Orthodox churches in the city, the immense Church of Sveti Marko (Saint Mark) and the impressive Saborna Crkva (Cathedral) of the Serbian Patriarch may be the most outstanding. Many private dwellings, however, did not survive the devastation of twentieth-century warfare. In the interwar period Belgrade was a rapidly expanding government town, with limited industry but considerable commerce and crafts, and with a proud tradition of resistance and independence. The local inhabitants tended to be friendly and

hospitable in the true Serbian fashion, but were perhaps somewhat provincial on the European scale. Belgrade is still sometimes referred to jokingly as “the largest village in Yugoslavia”

Nothing is known about Belgrade’s earliest Jewish inhabitants, and few traces remain of Jewish life there in the Middle Ages. However, individual Jews evidently did engage in trade there under the Serbian Empire in the fourteenth century; undoubtedly a Jewish community also existed, although perhaps not on a continuous basis.¹ Most of the Jewish settlers arrived after the Turkish conquest.

By the mid-sixteenth century a small Sephardic community had established itself in Belgrade. One of the earliest contemporary documents to survive refers to a fire in 1560 which destroyed a number of Jewish homes in the town.² The first Jews apparently lived in the western part of town near the Sava River in a Christian district, where the oldest Jewish graves have been found.³ Most of the later arrivals, however, settled in a region near the Danube called *Jalija* (the shore) and later also in nearby *Dorćol* (Turkish for “four ways”), neighboring the Muslim section.⁴ This area, several blocks square, to the southeast of *Kalemegdan* became known as *Jevrejska mala*, the Jewish quarter.

A German traveler named *Otendorf*, who visited Belgrade in 1663, reported that “the Jews have a very big two-storied house near the Danube . . . where 800 Jews live, and they have their school there as well.”⁵ This building, surrounding a large courtyard, was sometimes referred to as the *Türkischer Judenhof* and contained 103 rooms, 49 kitchens, and 27 cellars. A smaller structure, which in the eighteenth century became known as the *Teutscher Judenhof*, had 47 rooms, 25 kitchens, and 7 cellars.⁶ Most of the poorer Jews presumably lived in these quarters and paid rent for them. Jews, however, were allowed to own property, and it is believed that some of the wealthier Jews might have lived among the Christians.⁷

Jalija/Dorćol presents the picture of a typical Ottoman Jewish quarter, with its narrow streets and old stone houses, crowded close together. Sanitary conditions were poor because the area was near the Danube and subject to frequent floods. The exterior of the houses did not look very different from other Turkish houses, with their solid stone walls, windowless lower portions and protruding upper stories. Several families lived around an interior courtyard.⁸ As in Sarajevo, Jewish family ties were very strong. Families were large, since early marriages were common and young couples often lived

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with parents. The whole community took part in family celebrations such as weddings and bar mitzvahs.

Religious piety was very much a part of everyday existence. Sabbath and holidays were strictly observed. Hanukkah and Purim were especially gala occasions in the Jewish quarter, with singing and dancing in the streets.⁹ In fact life in Dorčol was extremely traditional with a special Sephardic flavor lent by the Ladino spoken in the home and the old Spanish *romansas* sung by the women. A touch of the local influence as well was evident in the tales told about Kraljević Marko and Nasredin-hodža (a Serbian and a Turkish folk hero, respectively) and on the menus, with Balkan specialties such as *pogačica* (little cakes with cheese) and *burekitas* (another type of pastry) for the Sabbath and *šljivovica* (plum brandy) and Turkish coffee.¹⁰

In the seventeenth century Belgrade became the third center of Jewish learning in the Balkans, after Istanbul and Salonika. There exists a considerable body of responsa in Hebrew and Ladino written by the Belgrade rabbis of this period. In 1617 Rabbi Juda Lerma of Salonika became chief rabbi of Belgrade and started a yeshiva there. He was succeeded in 1643 by Simha ben Gerson Koen, a native Ashkenazic Jew of Belgrade, and in 1662 by Rabbi Josef Almoznino of Salonika, a biblical and talmudic scholar educated in Belgrade. This cultural growth was interrupted by the arrival of the Austrians in 1688. In that year Rabbi Almoznino and his family, with a number of other Belgrade Jews, were forced to migrate north to Habsburg territory.¹¹

While Serbia remained under Ottoman rule, the legal status of the Jews living there closely resembled that of the Jews of Bosnia and other parts of the empire. When the Habsburg armies captured Belgrade, however, they brought with them new restrictions and hardships for the Jewish community. The first occupation of Belgrade came to an end with the Treaty of Karlowitz in 1699, leaving the Jewish quarter with most of its houses and public buildings destroyed. Many of the wealthier Jews had fled to the interior of the Turkish Empire for safety; those who remained could not afford to repair the damages.¹² When the Austrians returned in 1717, they found only thirty-three Jewish families living in Belgrade. Two Jewish communities existed, side by side, one Sephardic, composed of the older settlers from Turkey, and the other Ashkenazic, made up mainly of newcomers who came with the Austrians. The new administration was harsher than the old and interfered more in the life of the individual Jews.

Belgrade Jews were subject to much the same limitations as other Jews in the Habsburg Empire. The number of Jews permitted in Belgrade was limited and they were not allowed to live in the Serbian interior. Jews could not own real estate or live outside the Jewish quarter. They could engage in commerce and certain other occupations, but many trades were closed to them. Jews paid a special toleration tax, as well as taxes on such commodities as wine and meat. They were allowed to have their own slaughter house outside of town. Although the building of a synagogue was officially forbidden, with the help of Josef Süß Oppenheimer, the court financier and army supplier to the Governor of Serbia, Prince Alexander of Württemberg, the Jewish community managed to gain concessions in order to rebuild their synagogue and school.¹³ With the Treaty of Belgrade in 1739, the Austrians left the town, along with some of the Ashkenazic Jews, who moved across the Sava to Zemun and Novi Sad.¹⁴

The violent political history of Belgrade had serious detrimental effects on the Jewish community, which stood outside political life and yet was the helpless victim of the frequent military operations. The mid-eighteenth century saw a fifty-year period of quiet development and the growth of the Sephardic community, which was supplemented by new migrations from the south. In 1777 the Jewish population is estimated to have been approximately eight hundred.¹⁵ But this peaceful interlude was shattered by the Austrian-Turkish war of 1788–89, which once again brought general property damage and population dislocation. On the whole the Belgrade Jews, especially the Sephardim, favored Turkish rule over Austrian. Nevertheless, of those Jews who remained after the Austrians came, many left when the Turks returned, fearing Turkish reprisals against them.¹⁶ The position of the Jews was not very secure at the turn of the nineteenth century.

The first Serbian uprising (1804–13) began as a revolt against the lawlessness and violence of the local janissaries, rather than a war of independence against the sultan. The Jews did not take an active part in these events, aside from a few in Zemun on the Austrian side of the Sava who reportedly supplied wheat, animals, and weapons to the Serbs. A large number of Jews fled to Zemun and elsewhere to escape the danger. Once more, despite orders from Karageorge, the leader of the revolt, homes and stores and the synagogue in the Jewish quarter were damaged or destroyed.¹⁷ The second Serbian uprising (1813–17), led by Miloš Obrenović, was a fight for Serbian autonomy, which was formally granted by the sultan in 1830. Now the Jews found themselves not in the Muslim Ottoman Empire or the Catholic Austrian Empire, but in an Orthodox Serbian principality,

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and they were not sure whether to regard the Serbs as enemies or friends.

Miloš Obrenović “remained essentially a pasha, albeit a Serbian one”¹⁸ During his period in office, from 1817 to 1839 and again from 1859 to 1860, the Jews of Belgrade enjoyed favorable circumstances. As ruler, Prince Miloš showed a liking and respect for a number of Jews, whom he appointed to his personal service. Lazar Levenzon, an Austrian Jew, was his tailor. Josif Šlezinger, a Jew from Sombor in southern Hungary, became conductor of the military guard band. Indeed, Šlezinger is referred to as the father of Serbian musical life in the nineteenth century.¹⁹ The most interesting example of such benevolence toward individual Jews, however, is the case of Hajim Davičo, who served as Miloš’ state banker and financier for many years.²⁰

In 1839 Miloš was forced to abdicate his office and go into exile as a result of pressure from the seventeen-man senatorial body which had been created under the Constitution of 1838 granted by the sultan. The same fate befell his successor, his son Michael, in 1842. The Senate elected instead Alexander Karageorgević, son of the revolutionary leader. The weakness of the new ruler, who was completely under the control of his senators, proved unfortunate for the Jews of Serbia.

In Turkish times the towns had been the domains of Turks, Greeks, and Jews, with the Serbian population living in the rural areas. This picture began to change in the nineteenth century as the Serbs joined the urban scene. The growing Serbian commercial class, in particular the businessmen in the provincial towns near Belgrade, carried on an active campaign against their Jewish competitors, who had been living in the Serbian interior, mainly in Šabac, Smederevo, and Požarevac, almost as long as they had been in Belgrade. The demands of the Serbian businessmen to help improve their economic position vis-à-vis the Jews found support among the members of the Senate. On October 30, 1846, a law was promulgated whereby Jews were prohibited from engaging in commerce or owning real estate in the interior. As a result many of the Jews in rural Serbia were compelled to liquidate their property and move to Belgrade or else leave the country entirely.²¹

Both the Serbs and the Jews welcomed the return to office of Miloš in 1859. The seventy-eight-year-old patriarch abolished the restrictions against the Jews with a government decree:

His Highness, wishing to make all the benefits of freedom equal for all subjects of Serbia, regardless of nationality or faith, orders that

all former laws which are incompatible with the present decree be considered abrogated. The authorities will ensure that every inhabitant of this land, whatever his faith or nationality, may not be prevented from living where he wants or from engaging in whatever trade or profession he wishes.²²

Miloš, however, died a year after he resumed office.

His son Michael who again succeeded him (1860–68) did not follow his father's benevolent policy toward the Jews. In 1861 a decree was passed similar to that of 1846, and during the next few years a series of expulsions of Jews from rural Serbia took place.²³

In 1865 several scandals occurred in the town of Šabac which suddenly attracted world attention to the Jews of Serbia. On January 16 a Jew by the name of Jakob Alkalaj was murdered, the following day another Jew, Solomon Abinun, was drowned, and in April of the same year a sixteen-year-old girl was supposedly baptized by force.²⁴ The Jews of Šabac petitioned the Alliance Israélite Universelle in Paris for help. Appeals for diplomatic assistance were made to England, Italy, and the Ottoman Empire. England became directly involved in the plight of the Jews in Šabac after an English citizen, Israel Stern, was prevented from conducting his business activities there.²⁵ Due to expediency, and perhaps outside pressures as well, the discriminatory legislation ceased and Jews were tacitly allowed to remain in the interior.

None of these laws directly applied to the Jews of Belgrade, who constituted more than half of the Jewish population of Serbia. Nevertheless, these unfortunate incidents did have a considerable effect on the Jewish community of Belgrade because on the one hand, most of the Jewish businessmen who left the provincial towns came to the capital in generally impoverished circumstances, and on the other hand, some Jews left Belgrade at this time out of fear of possible future measures.

The Constitution of 1869 guaranteed the liberty and property rights of the individual and made all Serbian citizens equal before the law and eligible for public office. There were to be no religious qualifications for citizenship, and although the Eastern Orthodox Church was named as the official religion, the exercise of all other recognized religions was allowed and placed under the protection of the law. This document specified, however, that the laws of 1846 and 1861 were not to be revoked.²⁶ The Jews of Serbia were thus not granted full civil rights since, in theory at least, they could not live or own property outside Belgrade.

Ironically, even without receiving all the rights of citizenship, the duties of citizenship were required of the Jews. The Balkan Jews had

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never served in the Ottoman military establishment nor had Jews previously served in the Serbian army. In 1869, however, all Serbian subjects, including the Jews, became liable for military service. A number of Jewish soldiers fought in the Turkish wars of 1876–77 and four Jews, two of them doctors, were decorated for bravery. Nevertheless, it is doubtful whether Jews were allowed to reach officer rank before 1888.²⁷

De jure second-class citizenship, however, does not appear to have had a serious detrimental effect on the actual state of Jews living in Belgrade. According to Isidore Loeb in 1877, Jews had all municipal and political rights: they could vote and were eligible for election to the municipal council; they could send two delegates to the chamber of commerce and be arbitrators in commercial disputes; they could even theoretically be named deputies to the Skupština (Assembly) or members of the Senate. Indeed, one Jew, Avram Ozerović (1848–1916), a member of an established Belgrade merchant family, took part in the Skupština debates of 1877.²⁸

In 1878, at the Congress of Berlin, the Great Powers stipulated that the newly won independence of Serbia, Rumania, and Montenegro and the autonomy of Bulgaria were conditional upon the granting of full equality to all subjects regardless of religion. Article 35 of the treaty read as follows:

In Serbia, difference of religious beliefs or creeds may not stand in the way of anyone as a cause for exclusion or disqualification from that which concerns the enjoyment of civil and political rights, admission to public employments, offices and honors or the practice of different professions and occupations in any locality.

Freedom and open practice of all religions are guaranteed to all [persons] under the jurisdiction of the Serbian state as well as to foreigners, and no impediments may be raised, be they towards the hierarchical organization of the different religions, be they towards their relations with their spiritual leaders.²⁹

Unlike Rumania, Serbia complied with her treaty obligations. In 1888 the civil rights of the Jews gained formal recognition in the new constitution in a clause guaranteeing full equality to all residents of the Kingdom of Serbia without distinction as to faith or nationality.³⁰ Thereafter, there was never to be any question as to the citizenship status of Serbian Jewry.

The legal status of the Belgrade Jewish community per se remained somewhat ill defined until the mid-nineteenth century. In 1865 in a book entitled *Les Serbes de Turquie*, A. Ubcini wrote:

The Israelite community, although it has existed in fact almost from time immemorial, has not yet been recognized by law. It possesses nevertheless a synagogue in Belgrade and enjoys full religious autonomy, in the same way, if not by the same title, as Christian churches. A committee was recently established to deliberate together with the rabbi and give the community which he represents the legal sanction which it has lacked hithertofore.³¹

Indeed, with the sanction of Prince Miloš, the community built a *beth hamidrash* (study house) in 1818 and the following year, on Rosh Hashanah, it celebrated the opening of the newly renovated Old Synagogue.³² It was not until 1866, however, that the community was formally constituted and received an official charter. The first president, Jahiel Ruso, was reported to be a very hard taskmaster, holding board meetings which lasted over two hours every day of the week except Saturday.³³ While previously the community had conducted all its internal business in Ladino, Ruso introduced Serbian as the language of administration for Jewish affairs. In order to do this, he had to hire a Serbian secretary, named Kuzman Kuzmanović, who took charge of keeping records and correspondence until the transition was complete.³⁴ Thereafter, the legal position of the Sephardic community was clearly defined and regulated by communal statutes. The Ashkenazic community in Belgrade evolved into a completely separate entity. Ashkenazim began arriving in Belgrade in significant numbers only in the second half of the nineteenth century. In 1869 they took over the old National Theater to use as a synagogue, and in 1892 the Serbian government formally granted religious autonomy to the Ashkenazic community.³⁵

After emancipation, the Jewish community of Belgrade entered an era of steady growth, as did the capital as a whole. Unlike Sarajevo, Belgrade demonstrates a considerable degree of ethnic and religious homogeneity. Since the second half of the nineteenth century, over 75 percent of the local residents have been Serbian Orthodox. The remaining inhabitants have consisted of Catholics (including not only Croats, but also Germans, Hungarians and other Slavs), Jews, Muslims, and Protestants.³⁶ The Jewish population of the city grew from 2,599 in 1890 to 4,844 in 1921, to 7,906 ten years later. (See table 3). By 1939 an estimated 10,388 Jews, 8,500 of whom were Sephardim and 1,888 Ashkenazim, were living in Belgrade.³⁷ The absolute number of Jews climbed rapidly, the result mainly of a high birth rate before World War I and migration from other parts of the country

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in the postwar period, but their relative strength diminished against the background of the flood of newcomers to the Yugoslav capital. Thus their percentage of the population total declined gradually from 5 percent in 1895 to 3 percent in 1931.

Until the late nineteenth century virtually all of Belgrade's Sephardim continued to live in Dorćol. In the 1870s the wealthier members of the community began to move out of the Jewish quarter one by one, thereby creating the dichotomy between *los de abajo* (Ladino for "those from below"), who remained behind, and *los de arriba* (those from above), who had climbed the social ladder to Zerek, the business section up the hill and across the streetcar tracks. This geographic separation based on socioeconomic differentiation remained significant in communal life, especially until World War I when the old Jewish quarter was heavily bombed and many of its inhabitants were forced to find new homes.³⁸ In 1921 there were 3,171 Jews—65 percent of the city's total Jewish population—still living in Dorćol. That old Jewish neighborhood had lost much of its Jewish character, however, as only 23 percent of its population were now Jewish. The rest of the Jews were fairly evenly distributed among five other sections of town, showing some preference for the central business districts. In the wealthiest suburb of Topčider-Senjak, however, only 16 Jews were to be found.³⁹ Those who had escaped from the lower class Jewish district had improved their social status but apparently not yet reached the top.

The Ashkenazic Jews, most of whom arrived in Belgrade in the twentieth century, neither lived in Dorćol in significant numbers nor really formed an enclave of their own. Like their counterparts in Sarajevo, the Ashkenazim of Belgrade lived wherever their financial resources permitted, mainly in the more respectable central districts of the city. While the bulk of the Sephardim remained within the former Jewish quarter, their wealthier brethren as well as the Ashkenazim lived outside it, distributed in the various parts of the capital.⁴⁰

The Jews in Belgrade, as elsewhere in Yugoslavia, were heavily concentrated in commercial activities and white-collar employment and, to a lesser extent, crafts and the free professions. Interestingly enough, on the eve of World War II, the occupational structure among the Sephardim and the Ashkenazim displayed striking similarities. In the Sephardic community in 1940 among the 2,002 taxpayers, 27 percent were merchants, 21 percent clerks or employees,

8 percent artisans, and 4 percent physicians, lawyers, or engineers. Among the 1,091 Ashkenazic communal taxpayers, 20 percent were merchants, 25 percent white-collar workers, 6 percent artisans, and 8 percent members of the professions mentioned.⁴¹ Thus, while a higher proportion of professionals and white-collar workers were to be found among the Ashkenazim and more merchants and artisans among the Sephardim, these discrepancies were not very pronounced.

Communal tax records, the basis for much of this analysis, do not provide a complete picture of Jewish occupational stratification, however. They tend to include only heads of households or independent self-supporters, and they exclude all persons not earning enough income to pay taxes. Furthermore, from such sources it is impossible to arrive at an accurate estimate of the participation of Jewish women in the working market. According to the 1940 Belgrade tax lists, 405 of the 3,193 taxpayers, that is, 13 percent, were women: 235 Sephardic and 170 Ashkenazic. Further analysis reveals that 67 percent of the total—76 percent of the Sephardic, but 55 percent of the Ashkenazic tax-paying women—were either housewives, property owners, or “unemployed” while the remaining 33 percent were mainly clerks, merchants, or fashion experts. There were 6 women physicians (2 Sephardim and 4 Ashkenazim), 3 teachers and 1 engineer (all Ashkenazim).⁴² From this rather limited sample, it might appear that in Belgrade a somewhat higher proportion of Ashkenazic women worked to support themselves and their families as compared to their Sephardic sisters. This data is, however, insufficient to determine how many Jewish women were actually employed outside the home.

Along with occupational diversity, the question of relative wealth should also be considered. Since tax lists supply the primary information on this subject also, there are dangers inherent in any attempt to determine financial status on the basis of such material. The major problem stems from the fact that those members of the Jewish community who did not earn enough income to pay taxes—especially the unemployed and those on welfare, but also the poorer workers—were not recorded in these sources. Hence an accurate estimate of their numbers in either absolute or relative terms is extremely difficult to determine.

In 1932, in addition to the 1,297 taxpayers in the Belgrade Sephardic community, there were an estimated 175 households of unemployed and needy poor who were tax exempt. Some 83 families were receiving aid from various Jewish communal agencies.

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Among those able to pay taxes, by far the largest group, 919 taxpayers, or 71 percent, were in the lowest category, paying less than 480 dinars each, while a relatively small group of wealthy at the top (104 households) paying more than 1, 800 dinars comprised only 8 percent of the tax-paying membership.⁴³ Eight years later, by 1940, the tax list expanded by about 33 percent to 2,009 taxpayers, whereas the community as a whole grew only by about 25 percent during that period. It cannot be determined how many Jews were excluded from taxation in that year, and undoubtedly there were still a considerable number in that category. Nevertheless, in a comparison of distribution figures by wealth for 1932 and 1940, despite the fact that now 73 percent belonged to the lowest tax bracket, the conclusion cannot be that the community was growing poorer. On the contrary, more people were able to pay taxes, hence the lowest category expanded to include at least part of those formerly exempted. The wealthier element in Belgrade Sephardic society seems to have remained fairly constant.

The Ashkenazim in Belgrade, by comparison, showed a somewhat greater leaning toward the middle and upper tax brackets. While 67 percent of the Ashkenazic households belonged to the lower income category, it would appear from the high number of taxpayers relative to the total size of the community (1,085 heads of families out of 2– to 3,000 individuals) that few, if any, of the Belgrade Ashkenazim were tax-exempt due to financial circumstances.⁴⁴ The Ashkenazim included fewer poor and slightly more well-to-do than their Sephardic brethren.

Thus, Belgrade Jews, while by no means affluent as a group, were by and large gainfully employed and economically upwardly mobile. The Belgrade Sephardic community was fortunate not to have been faced with a poverty problem comparable to that of its Sarajevo counterpart. It would seem that wealth was distributed somewhat more equitably in the national capital than in the Bosnian center.

The growing trend among Belgrade Jews toward white-collar jobs and the free professions was made possible by the shift in the late nineteenth century from purely religious to predominantly secular training. As in Sarajevo, in the first half of the nineteenth century, the education of Jewish children in Belgrade lay completely in the hands of the Jewish authorities. It is unknown whether any Jewish children attended state schools at that time. The census reports of 1822 listed 239 Jewish taxpayers, with 22 individuals legally taxexempt as reli-

gious officials, teachers, or students. By 1845 there were 6 teachers and 76 pupils reported.⁴⁵ In 1847 a fund was established for a new Jewish school, which was to serve as the office for the community officials and the rabbi and as a library and meeting place as well.⁴⁶ In these years instruction was given not by trained teachers, but by part-time religious officials, with the rabbi teaching the more advanced students. The language of instruction was Ladino; Serbian was not taught in the schools but had to be studied with a private tutor.⁴⁷ In the 1860s, however, Serbian and German were being taught, along with Jewish subjects, in the higher grades and teachers were being paid by communal tax.⁴⁸

By the second half of the century, Jewish children were also to be found in state schools. In 1869 a total of 146 boys and 63 girls were attending elementary schools, presumably both state and private institutions, and 21 Jewish pupils were reported to be attending high school for the first time.⁴⁹ Four years later there arose a problem as to the language of instruction to be used in the public school in the Jewish quarter, since the teacher complained that the majority of his pupils could not understand Serbian.⁵⁰ Perhaps as early as 1864 the state established a Jewish girls' school with a Jewish woman as teacher.⁵¹ Because religious instruction was compulsory in state schools, special arrangements were made for Jewish pupils: in elementary school they supposedly received eighteen hours a week of religious training and in high school, six hours. Bible was taught in Hebrew and the rest of the subjects in Serbian.⁵² Thus, by the turn of the century Jewish children received their early education in public schools, which were essentially secular in nature, and used Serbian as the language of instruction. Jewish religious education became supplementary to the regular curriculum.

Until the end of the nineteenth century, Ladino constituted the dominant language of the Sephardic community in Belgrade. Almost the entire literary output of the community was published in Ladino, although some works also appeared in Hebrew. In 1837 a Jewish press was established in Belgrade, the only one in the Balkans outside Salonika and Istanbul. Among its first publications were some of the writings of Jehuda Haj Alkalaj, the rabbi in nearby Zemun, who was one of the forerunners of modern Zionism. This press also issued the translations and educational texts written in Ladino by Moša David Alkalaj, a native of Belgrade and for many years rabbi in the Sephardic community of Vienna.⁵³ The chief rabbi of the

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Sephardic community from 1886 to 1894, Simon Bernfeld, a well-known scholar from Berlin, published a Ladino translation of his *History of the Jews*.⁵⁴ The only Jewish periodical to appear in Belgrade before the end of the century was a popular monthly in Ladino called *El amigo del pueblo* (The Friend of the People). Such a preponderance of materials in Ladino is indeed striking.

In the 1895 census 80 percent of Serbian Jewry declared Ladino as their mother tongue, and only 3 percent claimed Serbian. The rest acknowledged German, Hungarian, or other languages. (See table 5.) The case in Belgrade was much the same: 77 percent opted for Ladino and only 4 percent chose Serbian. Only five years later a remarkable shift in linguistic affiliation took place. A mere 27 percent of the Jews of Serbia reported themselves as native Ladino speakers, while 46 percent adopted Serbian.⁵⁵ This fantastic jump in the number of native Serbian speakers from less than 3 percent to 46 percent over a five-year period cannot be accepted without question, however. Undoubtedly, by the turn of the century increasing numbers of Jews had acquired a working knowledge of Serbian, whether at school or in the marketplace, but it seems highly unlikely that Serbian had actually become the language most frequently used in the home at that date. According to this evidence from the 1900 census over half of the Jewish population of Serbia, and hence of Belgrade, were undoubtedly bilingual. Claiming Serbian as one's native tongue, while clearly not absolutely honest, nevertheless seems to indicate a significant change in identification with their environment for Serbian Jews especially among the Sephardim.

According to the 1931 Yugoslav census, 4,285 Jews, or about 54 percent of the total Jewish population of Belgrade and the surrounding district, considered Serbo-Croatian to be their mother tongue, 2,350 individuals (30 percent) claimed Ladino, while the remaining Jews reported German (8 percent), Hungarian (5 percent) or other foreign languages (3 percent).⁵⁶ The proportion of native Serbo-Croatian speakers proved to be considerably higher among the Sephardim than among the Ashkenazim in Belgrade, however. About one-third of the Sephardim still retained Ladino as their dominant language, but close to two-thirds of the Sephardic community had officially adopted Serbo-Croatian. By contrast over 90 percent of the Ashkenazim reported non-South Slav languages for census purposes.⁵⁷ While this Ashkenazic figure seems extremely high, it may be accounted for, in part at least, by the relatively recent arrival of the vast majority of the Belgrade Ashkenazic community. At any rate there is very little doubt that the Belgrade Sephardim were much

better acculturated linguistically to their Serbian milieu than their Ashkenazic counterparts. By 1939 virtually the entire Sephardic population had definitely acquired a knowledge of the local vernacular, either as their primary or secondary language, and many, if not most, of the Ashkenazim had probably done so too.

A further possible outward sign of linguistic acculturation is the changing of Jewish names to match those of the local populace. This form of integration never occurred in Yugoslavia on any significant scale. Only on rare occasions did Jews add the South Slav suffix *ić* to their last names. Even when such an operation was performed, the Jewish origin of the name was seldom erased. In Belgrade, for example, one finds among the Sephardim such surnames as Avramović, Rafailović, Rubenović, Jakovljević, or even Čelebonović, Demajorović, and Tajtacaković. It is quite clear, however, that these Jews, in adapting their names, were merely trying to display patriotism without attempting to disguise their real identity. In general, Jewish names in Belgrade tended to retain their nonslavicized form. Among the Sephardim the most common family names proved to be Alkalaj, Almozlino, Demajo, Kalderon, Konfino, Mevorah, Pijade, Pinto, Romano, and of course, Levi and Koen, although other surnames also occurred.⁵⁸ Within the Ashkenazic community the range of family names was much greater, but they too tended to be fairly easy to identify amid the general nomenclature of the local Slavic inhabitants.⁵⁹

The Jewish population of Belgrade, especially its Sephardic component, appears to have been more fully integrated linguistically into its environment than its Sarajevo counterpart, adopting Serbo-Croatian considerably earlier in its schools and for its communal records. According to the census data, at least, Belgrade Jews, especially the Sephardim, began to claim Serbian as their native tongue much sooner than the Sarajevo Sephardim. Belgrade Sephardim were more likely to slavify their names, both first and last, than their Sarajevo brethren. Belgrade Jews were in general less distinct from their overwhelmingly Serbian Orthodox neighbors than the Sarajevo Jews in their multireligioethnic milieu. The evidence would seem to indicate less cultural differentiation and greater overall acculturation among Belgrade Jewry than among Sarajevo Jewry.

By the time Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia on July 28, 1914, Belgrade Jewry had already proven themselves loyal Serbian citizens. Both Sephardim and Ashkenazim had fought bravely in de-

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fense of their country in the Balkan wars, and they continued to display their patriotism both on the battlefield and on the home front throughout World War I.⁶⁰

The Jews of the capital, especially the Sephardim, were accepted as part of the local scene and generally enjoyed a friendly relationship with their Serbian neighbors. They spoke Serbian, as well as Ladino, sent their children to Serbian schools, and participated actively in public life.

In the twentieth century the overall population of Belgrade grew rapidly, and so too did its Jewish component. Much of this increase must be attributed to immigration rather than to a particularly high birth rate. Because of its economic opportunities, the national capital was an expanding metropolis that naturally attracted Jews as well as many others from the surrounding areas.

While as a group these Jews can by no means be considered affluent and some poverty did exist among them, for the most part, they were comfortably situated. The Ashkenazic newcomers tended to be economically somewhat better off than the Sephardic “natives” but the discrepancy between them was not very great.

The Sephardim and the Ashkenazim continued to maintain separate communal institutions, but relations between them gradually improved with the passage of time.

Belgrade and Sarajevo constituted the two largest and most important Sephardic centers in the South Slav lands. The third major Jewish community and the Ashkenazic stronghold was to be found in Zagreb.