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by Norton S. Taichman

Despite its alliance with the Nazis, almost all of Bulgaria's 50,000 Jews survived WWII because Bulgarian Christians protested against the deportation of their neighbors to the death camps. On the other hand, Bulgaria invaded Greece and Yugoslavia and killed 20,000 Jews (as well as thousands of other civilians) in the conquered territories. Should we honor Bulgaria or hold it accountable for crimes against humanity?

[In the preparation of this manuscript it is a pleasure to acknowledge the helpful advice given to me by my friend, Joe Shrager of Philadelphia. I also thank Laurie Naiman and Louise Taichman for proof-reading the final document.]

- **Capitalism and the Jews.** *by Jerry Z. Muller.*
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Researchers can now access the database of the names of approximately 80,000 individuals who were buried in the Okopowa Street Jewish Cemetery.

Bulgaria's Role In The Holocaust: Deserving of Praise or Scorn?

by Norton S. Taichman, Narberth, Pennsylvania, USA

Bulgaria Honored For Saving Its Jews During the Holocaust

For years I've been receiving chain e-mail concerning the fate of Bulgaria's Jews during the Holocaust. Every one of these letters congratulates Bulgaria for saving all its Jews. The most recent e-letter is copied below and was originally published by the "CANDLES Holocaust Museum and Education Center" (*Children of the Nazi Deadly Lab Experiments Survivors*):

< <http://www.candleholocaustmuseum.org/> >.

Sent: Thursday, April 22, 2010 5:38 PM
Subject: Saving the Bulgarian Jews in WWII

The Story of the Bulgarian Jews

A great many Jews know the story of how the Danes rescued 8,000 Jews from the Nazi's by smuggling them to Sweden in fishing boats.

Very few Jews, know the story of how all 50,000 Bulgarian Jews were saved. **Not a single Bulgarian Jew was deported to the death camps** [emphasis by Ed.] due to the heroism of many Bulgarians of every walk of life, up to and including the King and the Patriarch of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church.

In 1999, Abraham Foxman, the National Director of the Anti-Defamation League flew with a delegation to Sophia to meet the Bulgarian Prime Minister. He gave the Prime Minister the first Bulgarian language copy of a remarkable book, "Beyond Hitler's Grasp," written in 1998, by Michael Bar Oar, a professor at Emory University. (A Bulgarian Jew who had migrated to Israel and then to the USA). This book documents the rescue effort in detail. The ADL paid for and shipped 30,000 copies to Bulgaria, so that the population could partake in the joy of learning about this heroic facet of their history.

This story is clearly the last great secret of the Holocaust era. The story was buried by the Bulgarian Communists, until their downfall in 1991. All records were sealed, since they didn't wish to glorify the King, or the Church, or the non-Communist parliamentarians, who at great personal risk, stood up to the Germans. And the Bulgarian Jewish Community, 45,000 of whom went to Israel after the War, were busy building new lives, and somehow the story remained untold.

Bulgaria is a small country and at the outset of the War they had 8 million people. They aligned themselves with the Nazi's in hopes of recapturing Macedonia from Yugoslavia and Thrace from Greece. Both provinces were stripped from them after W.W.I. In late 1942 the Jews of Salonica were shipped north through Bulgaria, on the way to the death camps, in sealed box cars. The news of this inhumanity was a hot topic of conversation. Then, at the beginning of 1943, the pro- Nazi Bulgarian government was informed that all 50,000 Bulgarian Jews would be deported in March. The Jews had been made to wear yellow stars and were highly visible.

As the date for the deportation got closer, the agitation got greater. Forty-three ruling party members of Parliament walked out in protest. Newspapers denounced what was about to happen. In addition, the Patriarch of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, Archbishop Krill, threatened to lie down on the railroad tracks. Finally, King Boris III forbade the deportation. Since Bulgaria was an ally of Germany, and the Germans were stretched militarily, they had to wrestle with the problem of how much pressure they could afford to apply. They decided to pass.

Several points are noteworthy. The Bulgarian Jews were relatively unreligious and did not stand apart from the local populace by virtue of garb, or rites. They were relatively poor by comparison to Jews in other countries, and they lived in integrated neighborhoods. Additionally, the Bulgarians had many minorities, Armenians, Turks, Greeks, and Gypsies, in addition to Jews.

There was no concept of racism in that culture. The bottom line here is that Bulgarians saw Bulgarian-Jews as Bulgarians, and not as Jews. And, being a small country, like Denmark, where there was a closeness of community that is often missing in larger countries. So, here was a bright spot that we can point to as example of what should have been done.

I was not aware of the miraculous rescue of Bulgaria's Jews until 1998 when the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) honored Bulgaria with its coveted, "Courage to Care Award":

ADL HONORS BULGARIA FOR SAVING JEWS FROM HOLOCAUST

Palm Beach, February 13, 1998. Paying tribute to the valiant efforts of a country, the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) today recognized Bulgaria for saving Jews during World War II. President Petar Stoyanov accepted the ADL's Courage to Care Award on behalf of Bulgaria and in honor of the heroism of its people under King Boris III.

Addressing a gathering of national leaders at the League's National Executive Committee Meeting in Palm Beach, Abraham H. Foxman, ADL National Director, presented the award to President Stoyanov. "Today I am here to say thank you – thank you to a people and a nation that unanimously said 'no' to the Nazi killing machine, 'no' to the deportation trains and concentration camps, and 'yes' to its 48,000 Jews," said Mr. Foxman. Mr. Foxman's own life was saved during the Holocaust when his Catholic nanny hid him in Poland.

President Stoyanov expressed gratitude for the honor, but referring to his country's courage stated, "What happened then should not be seen as a miracle. My nation did what any decent nation, human being, man or woman, would have done in those circumstances." He talked of Bulgaria's major contribution to World War II – that Bulgaria saved its Jews – and the relationship it has fostered. "The events of World War II have made the Bulgarian Jews forever the closest friends of my people," he said.

While Bulgaria was allied with Germany during World War II, its people courageously resisted Nazi efforts to have Jews deported to the death camps. They brought the country's Jews from the cities in which they lived to rural areas, saving Bulgaria's entire Jewish community. The Bulgarian people rallied support for the Jews under the leadership of King Boris III, whose personal defiance of Hitler and refusal to supply troops to the Russian front or cooperate with deportation requests set an example for his country.

Avis Bohlen, United States Ambassador to Bulgaria, opened the ceremony by discussing the progress Bulgaria has made under President Stoyanov.

The ADL Courage to Care Award pays tribute to those who rescued Jews during the Holocaust. Initiated in 1987, it honors the bravery of individuals, groups, and even inhabitants of whole towns and countries,

who risked their lives to save Jews during the Nazi regime. Previous recipients of the award include Jan and Meip Geis, honored for protecting Anne Frank and her family; Sempo Sugihara, Japanese Consul in Lithuania who issued Japanese transit visas to nearly 6,000 Jews against the fierce objections of his government; and the French village of Le-Chambon-Sur-Lignon, which hid 5,000 Jews in homes in the towns and farms in the surrounding countryside from Nazi occupation forces.

< http://www.adl.org/presrele/holna_52/3099-52.asp >

Based on the ADL's tribute I placed Bulgaria on a pedestal. But then things started to unravel because I became aware of disturbing facts about Bulgaria's role in the Holocaust, This has caused me to question why the country and its king (Boris III) have received such unreserved praise from so many sources (including the U.S. Congress) for what happened during the war.

My purpose is not to refute the fact that almost all of Bulgaria's Jews were saved from the Germans. However, King Boris III and his military played an active part in deporting thousands of non-Bulgarian Jews to their deaths in the gas chambers of Treblinka.

I am not an authority on this topic but I want to introduce the subject by presenting some of the evidence. I used material researched by others and their comments are set off within text boxes. In some instances facts advanced by one author are contradicted by another. You can draw your own conclusions, and references are provided so that you can go directly to the source.

Bulgarian Jews Pre-World War II

Just prior to WWII approximately 50,000 Jews lived in Bulgaria, constituting about 0.8% of the total population. Most were Sephardim who lived in Sofia, the capital of Bulgaria. The modern age for Bulgaria began in 1877-1878 when the country was liberated from the Ottoman Empire.

Most Jews were engaged in commerce, and the majority was self-employed. In the prewar years, the number of wage earners showed a certain upward trend. A growing identification with Jewish national ideals characterized the intellectual development of the Bulgarian Jewish community. In the interwar period the Zionist movement completely dominated all Jewish communal organizations, including the highest elected body, the Jewish Consistory. The younger generation spoke Bulgarian rather than the Ladino of their fathers.

In 1885, during the war between Serbia and Bulgaria, Jews were drafted into the Bulgarian Army for the first time. The principle of equality concerning the defense of minority groups was emphasized after World War I in the Treaty of Neuilly (1919). However, despite all declarations, the principle of equal rights had no genuine value for Jews; in practice the various Bulgarian governments discriminated against Jews. Anti-Jewish legislation was introduced indirectly in internal clauses and in secret memoranda. Jews were not accepted at the military academy, the state bank, or in government or municipal service. The national uprising in 1923 prepared the ground for the spread of anti-Semitism and its intensification. In the difficult years that followed the Bulgarian people's wrath was channeled toward the minority groups, especially the Jews, whom they held responsible for their hardships. Anti-Semitic nationalist associations sprang up. In 1936 the Ratnik ("Warrior") anti-Semitic association was founded; it was structured on the lines of Hitlerite organizations, accepting their theory of race and adapting it to its own ideological concepts.

The Virtual Jewish Library: <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/vjw/bulgaria.html#ww2>

On the whole, it could be asserted that the Bulgarian people are more or less tolerant to its minorities. More than once have large groups of people, driven out of other countries, been given asylum in Bulgaria - such were the Sefarade Jews in the 15th century, the Russian Kazaks of the Old Rite in the 17th century, and later the Armenians fleeing from the outrages in Turkey, the White Guards fleeing from Russia, etc.

In more recent times, the manifestations of racism, xenophobia, and intolerance are most often the result of concrete events or circumstances. For example, the anti-Jewish declarations by outstanding figures of the Bulgarian National Revival were provoked by the fact that some of the Jews inhabiting the Ottoman Empire were close to the Ottoman administration, as well as by the fact that some of the Western politicians following an anti-Bulgarian politics were of Jewish origin. The persecutions of ethnic Greeks were the deed of Thracian refugees, ethnic Bulgarians brutally driven out of Greece in former times.

http://www.omda.bg/engl/narod/minorities_engl.html

Up to the 1930s, Bulgaria had been an inhospitable environment for anti-Semitic tendencies. *Bulgaria Without Jews?* (1894) and other such journalistic forays into inflammatory politics remained fringe phenomena, unable to create a wider antisemitic climate of opinion.

Only after Bulgaria moved closer to the Third Reich in the late 1930s and began following its lead did nationalistic and ideologically based antisemitic organizations begin to appear, among them Defense of the Homeland, Union of Bulgarian Legions and Fighters for Progress and the Bulgarian Way. In imitation of Germany's major pogrom, the Night of Broken Glass, Sofia witnessed only minor and unpopular acts of vandalism against Jewish businesses in 1939. Historically, the coexistence of many national groups – Greeks, Armenians, Turks, Gypsies – militated toward ethnic toleration.

***Antisemitism. A Historical Encyclopedia of Prejudice and Persecution.* Richard S. Levy, Editor, ABC-CLIO, Santa Barbara, CA. 2005. pp 89**

March 1941. Bulgaria Allies with Germany, Italy and Japan



During the 1930s there was a certain rise in anti-Semitism as Nazism gained in influence. Yet one could not speak of a decline in the condition of the Jews until 1940, at which time Bulgaria began to lean toward Germany (as a result of which it was awarded part of the Dobruja area of southern Rumania, on which the government had long had designs). The definitive step was taken in March 1941 when Bulgaria joined the Axis powers and the German army, entering the country, proceeded to invade Greece and Yugoslavia at the beginning of April. The new Bulgarian government constituted at the time was headed by Bogdan Filov, a supporter of Germany.

After the conquest of Yugoslavia and Greece, Bulgaria fulfilled another territorial aspiration: it received control of part of southern and eastern Macedonia as well as Greek Thrace, thus giving it access to the Mediterranean. Before long, the Bulgarians were resorting to harshly repressive measures to exert their control over the economy, culture, and religious life of these "new territories." On May 14, 1941, they officially annexed Thrace, but the Germans insisted that the final borders of Macedonia not be determined until after the war, for they themselves were interested in the area for military and economic reasons. Meanwhile, the Bulgarians exploited an uprising in Thrace in order to pare down the Greek population: Thousands of people were murdered, others fled or were deported, and Bulgarian citizens were settled in their place.

Bulgaria did not play a significant role in the military operations in the Balkans. Of even greater import was the fact that it not only refrained from declaring war on the Soviet Union but continued to maintain diplomatic relations with Moscow. To the Germans' great irritation, a Soviet legation continued to function in Sofia throughout the war, and the Bulgarian Communists even set up a radio station in Moscow to broadcast to their homeland! It was not until after Pearl Harbor that Bulgaria joined in Germany's declaration of war on the United States and the other Allied powers, though the government did not really intend to become involved in the war.

Leni Yahil. *The Holocaust. The Fate of European Jewry, 1932-1945.* Oxford University Press, 1987, pp 578-579

The turning point in events came on Feb. 15, 1940, with the appointment of Bogdan Filov, a noted scientist and a determined Germanophile, to the premiership. In July 1940 the government announced its decision to curb the freedom of the Jewish minority. In August of the same year the cabinet approved the anti-Jewish "Law for the Protection of the Nation," patterned after Nazi regulations. On Dec. 24, 1940, Parliament approved the proposed legislation, which was officially promulgated on Jan. 23, 1941. On March 1, Bulgaria joined the Tripartite Pact and the German Army entered the country. A declaration of war on the western Allies followed; yet Bulgaria did not enter the war against the Soviet Union, mainly because of Slavophile sentiments of its population. In June 1942 Minister of Interior Gabrovski, the architect of the anti-Jewish legislation, demanded and received from Parliament a blank authorization empowering the government with absolute prerogatives on all questions pertaining to the Jews. Protests against this measure, coming from such well-known democrats as Nikola Mushanov, were of no avail. The fact of such protests was an indicator of things to come. At the end of August the government promulgated new restrictive regulations and provided for the establishment of a Commissariat for Jewish Affairs. On Sept. 3, 1942, the lawyer Alexander Belev, a German-trained antisemite, became the head of this Commissariat.

***Encyclopaedia Judaica.* Ed. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik. Vol. 4. 2nd ed. Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007. pp 267-275**

Examples of Bulgarian Anti-Jewish Actions (Reported in the New York Times)

ANTI-JEWISH LAW IS PASSED IN SOFIA

Rights of 50,000 Limited by
Measure That Bans Masons
and Other Secret Societies

GOVERNMENT JOBS BARRED

Those Who Became Members
of Orthodox Church Before
Dec. 1 Are Not Affected

By Telephone to THE NEW YORK TIMES.
SOFIA, Bulgaria, Dec. 20—After a stormy debate in Parliament the Deputies today passed a new "law for the defense of the nation" limiting the rights of Bulgaria's 50,000 Jews, banning Free Masons and other secret societies and making illegal all antinational propaganda.

This is the first law of its kind in Bulgaria. It has caused consternation among the Jews and many Bulgarian and foreign Jews have left the country.

Jews were made "second-class citizens" with many limitations. The first reading of the bill stated that a person was a Jew if his father was, but the new law considers either parent as sufficient to classify a person as a Jew. But Jews who became members of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church before Dec. 1 will not be affected.

Jews will no longer be permitted to use Bulgarian endings for their names. None will be allowed to become Bulgarian subjects. They cannot be elected to State institutions or to private societies with idealistic aims. They cannot be employed in clerical positions in State or municipal institutions. They cannot enter the army, but must do forced labor instead.

They cannot marry Bulgarians nor can they employ Bulgarian domestic servants. Their attendance at school is limited and no more Jews will be allowed to reside in Sofia. They are not permitted to own or rent rural properties or to own houses in Summer resorts. They cannot own banks, cinemas or newspapers or be directors of such ventures.

Within a month after the law becomes effective, all Jews must register their property with the National Bank.

The New York Times
Published: December 21, 1940
Copyright © The New York Times

BULGARIA TO ACT ON JEWS

Government Gets Full Powers to
'Settle' the Semitic Question

By Telephone to THE NEW YORK TIMES.
BERNE, Switzerland, June 27—

The Bulgarian Government received full power to "settle the Jewish question" in a resolution adopted today by the Sofia Parliament after a two-day debate.

There is every indication that the "settlement" will follow the German model. Interior Minister Petar Gabrovski said as much when he introduced the resolution the day Parliament convened this week, arguing that the matter was one of urgency.

He contended that existing laws for the defense of the realm had flaws "which Jews use to their own ends," and that new measures were absolutely necessary because Jews "worked against the government's policy as well as against the Axis Powers."

The New York Times
Published: June 28, 1942
Copyright © The New York Times

10,000 Jews to Work on Road

BERLIN, May 4 (from German broadcasts recorded by The Associated Press in New York)—Nearly 10,000 Jews will be among 40,000 workmen called upon to build railways connecting old Bulgaria with newly incorporated territories, the Berlin radio quoted Bulgarian papers as saying today.

The New York Times
Published: May 5, 1942
Copyright © The New York Times

BULGARIA DEPORTS JEWS TO GERMANY

Victims to Be Employed on Farms
or in the Ruhr's Industries

Wireless to THE NEW YORK TIMES.

BERNE, Switzerland, March 23—After three months of relative quiescence, anti-Semitism flared up again in Bulgaria this week with mass deportations to the Reich from Bulgaria and occupied Thrace and Macedonia.

An official report from Sofia tonight announced that "the first 10,000 of an estimated 40,000 eventual deportees" had arrived in Germany.

According to present plans, roughly one-half of the deported Bulgarian Jews will be employed in agriculture in Greater Germany and one-fourth, reported to be semi-skilled laborers, will be allowed to redeem themselves by "volunteering for work" in the war industries of the much-bombed Ruhr. The remaining one-fourth will be transported to the Government General [German-occupied Poland] for employment in "work directly connected with the war."

Cynically worded reports from German quarters reaching neutral countries state that "the former death rate in the Jewish colonies of occupied Poland has shown a considerable decrease during the past three months." One reason adduced for this decline is that "now many of the male Jews are employed in army work near the fighting zones," and these receive approximately the same rations as German soldiers.

The New York Times
Published: March 24, 1943
Copyright © The New York Times

Germany's Balkan ally Bulgaria took a more cautious line than the Hungarians and Romanians. King Boris III, who ran the country's military and foreign policy and much else besides, was realistic enough to recognize that his army of peasant conscripts was not suited for modern warfare and had no interest in fighting far from home. Boris had to perform a delicate balancing act. He once remarked: 'My army is pro-German, my wife is Italian, my people are pro-Russian. I'm the only pro-Bulgarian in this country.' He had eagerly joined in the dismemberment of Greece and Yugoslavia, and begun the Bulgarianization of the education system and other aspects of public life in the areas occupied by his forces. But the Bulgarian annexation of Thrace sparked serious resistance, leading to a major uprising at the end of September 1941.

Boris claimed with some justification that the army was needed there to put it down, which it did in the following months, killing between 45,000 and 60,000 Greeks and ordering the expulsion or resettlement of

many more. Just as important from the king's point of view, however, was the threat of internal revolt by fascist republicans. Partly to ward this off, but also yielding to German pressure, he had introduced anti-Semitic legislation in October 1940, banning sexual relations between Jews and non-Jews and ousting Jews from a variety of professions and industries. But the Bulgarian legislature had been careful to define Jews in religious terms, and many Jews were able to escape the effects of the legislation by converting, often merely on paper, to Christianity. In addition, the legislation was not very rigorously enforced. Jews were required by law to wear the 'Jewish star' on their clothes, for example, but the government factory commissioned to make them produced so few that the small number of Jews who had started wearing them soon took them off because nobody else was wearing them. The King was also obliged to dissolve the country's Masonic lodges, a favorite target of Nazi and fascist conspiracy theorists, much to the irritation of his ministers, many of whom were Freemasons themselves. But, mindful of the looming power of the Russian colossus on his doorstep, he adamantly refused to provide any troops for the Soviet front, and indeed, although Bulgaria declared war on the Western Allies, it never declared war on the Soviet Union. Half-exasperated, half-admiring, Hitler called him 'a very intelligent, even cunning man', while Goebbels, more bluntly, called him 'a sly, crafty fellow'.

Richard J. Evans. *The Third Reich at War*. Penguin Press, New York, 2009, pp 164-165.

The Fate of the Jews in Bulgaria, Macedonia and Thrace



The German government continued to press those states not under its direct control to deport its Jews. In an agreement signed on February 22, 1943 the Bulgarian government allowed the Germans to deport all eleven thousand Jews from two areas occupied by Bulgaria in 1941: the former Yugoslav region of Macedonia, and the former Greek region of Thrace.

The Germans allocated twenty special trains for these deportations, starting from six collecting points. At the railway stations of Demir-Hisar and Simitli, where there was a change of trains because of the wider gauge, the Germans gave priority in changing trains to 'invalids on stretchers' and women who were 'ready for childbirth'. Conditions inside the trains, and on the barges, in which some of the deportees were sent up the Danube, were horrific: terrible over crowding, no sanitary arrangements, virtually no food, and no water.

Each morning on their journey northward the trains would stop in the open countryside, and the bodies of those who had died during the night were thrown out. The Germans would not allow any form of burial. Several hundred sick and old people died during the six-day journey, which ended at Treblinka.

Shortly after these Thracian and Macedonian deportations, all Jewish property and belongings in Thrace and Macedonia were confiscated and sold. The money raised had first to go towards the cost of the rail and boat 'fare' to Treblinka. The rest was then deposited in bank accounts, and, to give those still in Greece a sense of normalcy, the deposit statements sent to their Jewish owners. These statements reached Treblinka long after the Jews had been murdered.

'The German Reich', so stated the Bulgarian agreement of February 22, 1943, 'is ready to accept these Jews in its eastern regions.' A month after the agreement was signed, 'these Jews' were dead.

Martin Gilbert. *The Holocaust*. Fontana Press, London. 1986, pp 541-543.

... Macedonia was annexed and divided between Albania and Bulgaria following the invasion and occupation of Yugoslavia in April, 1941 by Germany and Axis allies Italy, Hungary, Albania, and Bulgaria. ... On October 4, 1941, Macedonian Jews in the Skopje and Bitola districts were forbidden to maintain any commercial/trade/economic business or to transact any business. Jewish businesses were to be closed down and liquidated by the end of the year. On June 28, 1942, a law was passed which mandated that the Bulgarian Council of Ministers implement "all necessary steps to solve the Jewish question and the problems involved." Bulgaria thus was committed to the implementation of the Final Solution to the Jewish Problem. ... Other anti-Jewish ordinances and orders were enacted by the Bulgarian government. On September 4, 1942, Jews living in Macedonia, Thrace, and Bulgaria were required to identify their place of residence and their businesses. On August 26, 1942, the Bulgarian Commissariat for the Jewish Problem, also known as the Central Commissariat for Jewish Affairs passed an order that mandated that Jews wear a yellow badge. ... Macedonian Jews were further forbidden to frequent movie theaters and cafes. Jews were forbidden to live in the same residence with Bulgarians. Moreover, there was a curfew for Jews forbidding them to leave their homes after certain times or to travel city streets after certain times. Jewish residences and Jewish residents had to be listed. Due to these anti-Jewish measures, Jews were excluded from the social, political, and economic life of Greater Bulgaria which resulted in the ghettoization of the Macedonian Jews.

...On March 11, 1943, the Bulgarian Commissariat for Jewish Affairs ordered the seizure and detention of the Jewish population of Macedonia and Thrace by Bulgarian military forces, police, and governmental agencies after consultations with the German minister in Sofia, Alexander Beckerle. The Bulgarian government acquiesced to the deportation of the Jewish populations of Macedonia and Thrace but relented to the deportation of the Jewish population of Bulgaria proper, due to the pressure exerted by the Bulgarian Orthodox Church and Orthodox priests, who opposed the deportations and anti-Jewish policies, and the pressure of public opinion, which likewise opposed the deportations in Bulgaria proper. But there was no such compunction or reluctance in deporting the Macedonian and Thracian Jews, regarded as "foreign" Jews.

... The transport of the Macedonian Jews to Treblinka was supervised by SS Hauptsturmfuehrer Theodor Dannecker. Bulgarian police forces guarded the transports.... Of the 7,144 Macedonian Jews deported to Treblinka, none survived. Of that number, 2,313 children under the age of 16 were killed. ...The round-up and deportations were organized by the Bulgarian Commissariat for Jewish Affairs and implemented by the Bulgarian police.

Excerpts from: Carl K. Savich. *The Holocaust in Macedonia, 1941-1945.*

< <http://www.maknews.com/html/articles/savich/savich4.htm> >

Opposition to Deportation and Extermination of Bulgarian Jews

Jews of Bulgarian citizenship were relatively secure from deportation to German-held territory. However, all Bulgarian Jewish men between the ages of 20 and 40 were drafted for forced labor after 1941, and in May 1943 the Bulgarian government announced the expulsion of 20,000 Jews from the capital, Sofia, to the provinces. (The 1934 Jewish population of Sofia was about 26,000; in that year Jews formed 9 percent of the capital's total population.) Protests staged by both Bulgarian Jews and non-Jews were brutally suppressed by the police. Within about two weeks, almost 20,000 Jews had been forcibly expelled.

Also in the spring of 1943, the Bulgarian government made extensive plans to comply with the Nazi demand to deport Bulgaria's Jews. Significant and public protest from key political and clerical leaders moved King Boris to cancel these deportation plans.

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, D.C.

< <http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005355> >

.... The anti-Jewish campaign met with no understanding by both peasants and city dwellers, by the intelligentsia, the Orthodox Church, and the ruling circles. The planned secret deportation of the Jewish population to the German concentration camps was frustrated by the civil protests, as well as by the official counteraction of the deputies. The Deportation Act was repealed by the then deputy chairman of the National Assembly, Dimitar Peshev. ... One thing is beyond question: the local Jews were not sent to the gas chambers owing to the energetic opposition of the majority of the Bulgarian society.

<http://www.omda.bg/eng/HISTORY/jewshist.htm>

Following German insistence, the Bulgarian government had indeed ordered the deportation of all Jews from Bulgaria proper, some of whom had already been interned. But the deportation order led to such an outcry from the Bulgarian people, including many intellectuals and church leaders that the government rescinded the order, and Jews already taken into custody were released. In the northern part of Bulgaria, farmers had threatened to lie down on the railway tracks to prevent passage of the deportation trains.

Martin Gilbert. *The Holocaust*. Fontana Press, London. 1986, pp 547.

King Boris and His Followers Should be Condemned, Not Honored

The Active Role of Bulgaria in the Holocaust Against the Thrace and Macedonian Jews

Bulgaria headed by King Boris was actively involved in the Holocaust by deporting Jews to extermination. Consequently he should be considered a war criminal even if some people attribute him the merit of not deporting 'his' Jews from 'old Bulgaria' to extermination. Therefore bestowing praises upon Bulgaria and Boris without mentioning explicitly his criminal responsibility in extraditing Jews for extermination will be considered as a criminal act of Holocaust denial.

In May 1941 Germany handed over the occupied territories of **Thrace and Macedonia** to the complete domination of Bulgaria. Contrary to the whole population in these territories the Bulgarian Government deprived in June 1943 by a special legislation the Thrace and Macedonian Jews from the Bulgarian citizenship, leaving them consequently completely defenseless. This act proves according to many historians the *mens rea* of war criminal Boris.

On February 22, 1943, an official agreement was signed between the two allies according to whom 20,000 Jews were to be deported in the first stage to Poland - 12,000 from Thrace and Macedonia and 8,000 from 'old Bulgaria'. Thanks to the intervention of several Bulgarian personalities, parliamentarians and clergy, who exercised pressure on the King and his Government the deportation of these 8,000 Jews was postponed, later on not carried out thanks to the military developments in the Eastern Front. However the Bulgarian Jews suffered discrimination, persecutions forced labor etc. until the end of the war.

But unfortunately in March 1943 Bulgaria cruelly organized and carried out the deportation of the 11,343 Jews of Thrace and Macedonia to Treblinka where all of them were immediately suffocated in the gas chambers. Moreover, the Bulgarian Treasury confiscated their entire property and paid to the Germans a considerable amount of money for having liberated Bulgaria from these Jews. Since the end of the war Bulgaria consistently reminded its alleged positive role vis-a-vis the Jews of 'old Bulgaria' concealing at the same time both its cruel anti-Semitic legislation and its criminal acts against the Jews extradited for extermination. Bulgaria has never admitted its crimes, has never asked pardon from the victims, has never

offered to return their property but knew very well to ask credit and recognition for the survival of 'its' authentic Jews. The Jewish people and the whole humanity will remember forever the criminal role of King Boris, Hitler's friend and ally, and his fascist government. In a telegram of April 4, 1943 Joachim von Ribbentrop reported to Beckerle his Minister in Sofia, that Boris told him on April 1st in Berchtesgaden that he has approved the deportation of the Jews of the annexed territories. Thus Boris is not better than other allies of Hitler as Petain and Laval, Antonescu or Horthy who helped to exterminate the undesired 'alien' Jews saving some or many of their 'own' Jews.

Therefore all loving truth must reject any Bulgarian pretentious aspiration to be accredited with what it does not merit especially not to commemorate a war criminal and his government that extradited Jews in cold blood to their Nazi ally. Such an act will not only profane the memory of the neglected victims of Thrace and Macedonia but will be rightly considered holocaust denial. The survivors and relatives of the victims will not tolerate any exoneration of war criminal Boris and his country from their war crimes.

Association of Jews from Macedonia in Israel.
Nissim Yosha, Ph.D., 14 Gluskin str, Rehovot 76273, Israel

Bulgaria Wasn't 'Second Denmark'

During the nearly six decades since the end of World War II, Bulgaria's behavior in the Holocaust era has stood out as a courageous but not widely known example of how a country refused to bend to evil -- there was no Holocaust, no mass murder in Bulgaria.

The Balkan land, a wartime ally of Nazi Germany, refused to surrender its Jews to death camp deportations, the people taking a stand comparable in some eyes to better-known Denmark's, although the government did allow the Jews in the occupied parts of Greece and Yugoslavia to become part of the Final Solution. Bulgaria, according to accepted history, passed anti-Semitic legislation but did not enforce it, had forced labor camps but did not run them as brutally as elsewhere in Nazi-occupied Europe, accepted Germany as an Axis partner but did not adopt its discriminatory philosophy.

Now, documents from the period that were obtained in the last few years by the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington and translated by scholars cast Bulgaria's record in a new light. [Emphasis added by Ed.] According to the records, which were classified during the country's communist regime that ended in 1989, the network of labor camps throughout Bulgaria was harsher and more extensive than once believed.

These documents not only aid the writing of history but have a more immediate effect -- because of the revelations, the German government, which determines eligibility for the compensation payments administered by the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany, ruled this week that Jews who were forced to work in Bulgaria's labor camps can receive one-time payments and monthly pensions. The Bulgarian recipients, who must meet income and length-of-incarceration criteria set by Germany, will become the first Bulgarians to get such German reparations besides a handful who received one-time payments in the 1950s.

"This is a tremendous breakthrough," said Israel Singer, president of the New York-based Claims Conference. "The Nazi machine with its ugly local collaborators spared few Jewish communities in Europe. Unearthing the true history of the Holocaust is of the utmost urgency." According to the Claims Conference research, an undetermined number of Jewish men -- most likely in the tens of thousands -- were forced to work at 112 labor camps around Bulgaria during the war in conditions of "malnourishment, exploitation, and brutal labor."

"The work consisted primarily of road and railway construction, often in difficult marshy locations, involving long work days, heavy work norms, and exposure to extreme temperatures," a Claims Conference report stated. "These prisoners faced frequent beatings by superiors, subsisted on an inadequate diet, and lacked the clothing or boots needed for working in the cold, rugged terrain." These claims of cruel conditions, obtained from official wartime reports and testimony filed subsequently by survivors, contradicted the earlier conception of relatively benign conditions in the Bulgarian labor camps.

The Claims Conference research in the Holocaust Memorial Museum's Bulgarian archives is "part of the effort to uncover aspects of the Holocaust that are unknown and to ensure the recognition for those who suffered," said executive vice president Gideon Taylor. "Stories emerge from thorough research. This assures that the history of what happened during the Holocaust will be saved." To stave off German pressure to turn over Bulgarian Jews, King Boris in 1943 ordered the Jews deported to the interior of the country, where nearly 20,000 lived in cramped quarters and many men were put into forced labor.

"The conditions were severe" in the labor camps, Taylor said, adding however that "they certainly were not death camps." "It was severe enough that the German government," with which the Claims Conference has negotiated for liberalized inclusions standards for compensation payments, "has accepted that these will be included in future Article 2 and Central and Eastern European Funds payments.

The Claims Conference report confirmed what Holocaust experts had already asserted -- "that Bulgaria had a mixed record" in treating its Jewish population, said Michael Berenbaum, author and the first project director of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum.

Berenbaum called the new allegations "a black mark for those who had been apologists for Bulgaria." "Bulgaria had seen itself as 'The Second Denmark,'" citizens rising up against the Nazi ideology, he said. "Such claims were exaggerated." In the labor camps under Bulgarian auspices, "there is no evidence of systematic torture" or of genocide, he said. "They were willing to torture, maim, persecute, harass -- not kill. They had a red line. In the context of Nazi Germany, that was a virtue. In the context of anything else, that was a horror. "You can now have an accurate history" of how nations behaved during the Holocaust, Berenbaum said.

The total number of men eligible for the German compensation payments, including those still in Bulgaria as well as those who settled in Israel, the United States and other Western countries, is probably less than a thousand, Taylor said. Bulgaria, which had a prewar Jewish population of 48,000, had some 49,000 after the war. Most immigrated to Israel in 1948. The Claims Conference will publicize the new eligibility standards for the Bulgarians in newspaper ads and announcements to groups of Bulgarian Jews, and on its Web site (www.claimscon.org), Taylor said. Members of the small Jewish community in Bulgaria -- estimates range between 3,000 and 8,000 --are pleased that "the record is set" about what happened there during the war, said Jorge Diener, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee's country director for Hungary and Bulgaria. "People are happy that the Bulgarians have been recognized to have the right to have compensation," Diener said. "They also suffered."

The Bulgarian Embassy in Washington did not return a request for comment from The Jewish Week. For eligible survivors of Bulgarian labor camps, monthly pensions will be up to \$325. One-time payments for those who do not qualify for the monthly payments will be as high as \$9,000. These sums are considerable for Bulgarian Jewry, which ranks with Romania as the continent's poorest Jewish community.

"Your enormous and invaluable help will offer us the possibility to live our old days somewhat more peacefully," one labor camp survivor in Bulgaria wrote in a letter of thanks this week to the Claims Conference.

Steve Lipman in "The Jewish Week". Published by the Jewish Federations of North America. 2004. < <http://www.jewishfederations.org/page.aspx?id=68270> >

What led this small and rather helpless nation to defy Hitler for the sake of saving the lives of its fellow citizens of Jewish origin? Very different historical interpretations have been offered about who was responsible for the partial rescue of Bulgaria's Jewish minority. The Communists, for example, used this tragic episode to condemn the treachery, inhumanity, and anti-Semitism of King Boris and his fascist regime, blaming them for the extermination of the defenseless Jews from Bulgarian-controlled Macedonia, Aegean Thrace, and Pirot. In their self-serving explanation of these events, it was the valiant and heroic struggle waged by the Bulgarian Communist Party (today renamed the Socialist Party) and many ordinary Bulgarians from all walks of life but especially from the working class, that saved the lives of the Jews in Bulgaria proper. On the other hand, Bulgarians on the political Right (such as ex-President Petar Stoyanov) claim to this day that it was Boris III who saved Bulgaria's Jewish population from certain death in the gas chambers, hailing the king as the hero of heroes in this untold drama. Under their influence, a monument was erected at Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Museum in Jerusalem, to honor Boris and his wife, Queen Giovanna, for sparing the Bulgarian Jews during the war. But that controversial monument was removed in 2000, following vigorous protests by many Bulgarian-born Jews and after a semi-official Israeli inquiry established that the king had personally approved the deportation of more than 11,000 doomed Jews from wartime Bulgaria's annexed territories. And, of course, all of Bulgaria's post-Communist governments have shamelessly exploited these grisly events either to score political points at home or to ingratiate themselves in the eyes of their Western mentors and patrons in a campaign to obtain foreign economic assistance and investments as well as membership in coveted Euro-Atlantic institutions such as NATO and the EU.

Rossen V. Vassilev. "The Rescue of Bulgaria's Jews in World War II".
In: New Politics, Whole #48, Winter 2010. < <http://newpol.org/node/183> >

[*Editor:* Rossen Vassilev is a former diplomat with the Bulgarian Mission to the United Nations and currently a lecturer in political science at the Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio. The concluding portion of his essay is given above and was posted to the web just as I was ready to publish this issue of the e-Newsletter. I highly recommend his paper as an excellent, comprehensive analysis of Bulgaria and its Jews during WWII.]

AfterWords

We Jews are constantly searching for a glimmer of hope, decency and humanity in the *churban* (Yiddish: destruction) that almost annihilated European Jewry. When it emerged that Bulgaria's Jews were saved from obliteration, it was only natural to hail this as one of the very few miracles to come out of that dark time in history. For Bulgarian Jews it was an especially momentous event, and they had every reason to rejoice at their deliverance. Initially, King Boris III was given almost all the credit, and he was celebrated by the civilized world as the knight in shining armor who protected his Jews from Treblinka.

But soon cracks began to appear in the myth. Boris III turned out to be a fascist, joining the Axis in waging war against his neighbors. He invaded Greece and Yugoslavia to regain territory lost during WWI. The campaign was ruthless and thousands of Christians were slaughtered. As well, Boris enforced anti-Jewish edicts in the conquered territories and in his own country. Ultimately, the Jews of Macedonia and Thrace were sent to Treblinka, and Bulgaria's Jews were brutalized and humiliated by their king and his henchmen. It was not until the Nazis defeat was inevitable that Boris thought twice and began to rescind anti-Jewish legislation and to ignore Hitler's persistent

calls for the deportation of Bulgaria's Jews. Boris died in 1943. He was no hero. He was a dictator, an opportunist and a criminal. He deserves only our scorn.

Despite these revelations, it is hard to understand why numerous Jewish organizations (eg, the ADL) and the U.S. Congress ignored the full story of Bulgaria's role in the Holocaust. The facts have been known since the fall of Bulgaria's communist regime in the early '90s. I can only speculate that a critical investigation was never undertaken to unearth what really happened. And as far as I know neither the ADL nor the U.S. Congress have repealed the posthumous awards they showered on Boris III. On the other hand, Israel, which initially was taken in by the pro Boris propaganda, has dismantled the monuments that were erected in his honor.

The real heroes in this chapter of the Holocaust were some of the people of Bulgaria. A critical number of ordinary citizens and those in authority stood up to protest what Boris III had in store for his Jews. Yad Vashem has recognized 14 Bulgarians as *Righteous Among the Nations*. One of



them was *Dimitar Peshev*, the Speaker of the National Assembly of Bulgaria. On learning of the plan to deport all Bulgarian Jews, he petitioned and succeeded in persuading members of the Cabinet to block the "aktion". Also, two prominent members of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church engaged in diplomatic maneuvers and civil initiatives to save Bulgarian Jewry. They were Sofia's *Metropolitan (Bishop) Stefan* and Plovdiv's *Metropolitan Kiril*. A stamp honoring Dimitar Peshev and Metropolitan Stefan was issued by Bulgaria in 2004. Had a similar popular mutiny occurred in other Nazis-dominated countries, such as Germany, Austria, Belgium, France, Holland, or Poland, the story of the devastation of the "Six Million" may have been very different.

In conclusion, I feel compelled to comment on the role of the internet in perpetuating misinformation. First, don't believe everything you read. I keep on getting chain e-mail applauding Bulgaria for saving its Jews but ignoring that it killed thousands of Jews (and others) in its quest to restore a lost "empire". Another recurring example is the claim that the United Kingdom has deleted the history of the Holocaust from its primary/secondary school curriculum. This never happened. And most recently there has been a plethora of e-mail demonizing President Obama for allegedly abandoning Israel and the Jewish people. His visit to a mosque and his speech in Egypt are seen as betrayals. But those espousing this view conveniently ignore that Obama has hosted two Pesach seders in the White House, addressed numerous Jewish organizations, appointed several Jews to his cabinet and White House staff and nominated a Jewish woman to the U. S. Supreme Court. The story of Obama and the Middle East has yet to play out. Of course, we must be watchful and critical of any missteps. However, it is also incumbent on us to recognize that Obama is trying to break an impasse that imprisons both Palestinians and Israelis. Time is not on our side: if nothing changes the Arab population in Israel will soon outnumber the Jews, and hostile Arab nations (and the terrorist organizations they support) will acquire weapons that can cause grievous harm to Israel. I don't know how to resolve the very complex issues that separate both sides, but at least Obama is trying to get them to talk to each other. And despite all the rhetoric to the contrary, I don't think he regards Israel as expendable.

We have an obligation not to contribute to the refuse that contaminates our computers. Be wary of mail ending with, "Pass This On To Everyone You Know!" or "This Message Was Meant to Reach 40 Million People Worldwide!" Be suspicious of warnings that the sky is about to fall on us. Think carefully before forwarding letters filled with malice, vindictiveness, and slander. Try to determine the original source of the material. And make sure you can stand behind what you pass on to others. Your signature is on every piece of e-mail you send into cyber space. If you peddle trash your recipients will eventually question your judgment and your credibility.

Book Review:

Capitalism and the Jews. by Jerry Z. Muller

267 pp. Princeton University Press, 2010.

reviewed by **Catherine Rampell** (*Economics Editor at NYTimes.com*)

The New York Times Sunday Book Review. February 12, 2010.

Jews and the Burden of Money

The question of why so many Jews have been so good at making money is a touchy one. For hundreds of years, it has been fraught with suspicion, denial, resentment, guilt, self-hatred and violence. No wonder Jews and gentiles alike are so uncomfortable confronting Jewish capitalistic competence. Still, in his slim essay collection “Capitalism and the Jews,” Jerry Z. Muller presents a provocative and accessible survey of how Jewish culture and historical accident ripened Jews for commercial success and why that success has earned them so much misfortune.

As Muller, a history professor at the Catholic University of America, explains it, much anti-Semitism can be attributed to a misunderstanding of basic economics. From Aristotle through the Renaissance (and then again in the 19th century, thanks to that Jew-baiting former Jew Karl Marx), thinkers believed that money should be considered sterile, a mere means of exchange incapable of producing additional value. Only labor could be truly productive, it was thought, and anyone who extracted money from money alone — that is, through interest — must surely be a parasite, or at the very least a fraud. The Bible also contended that charging interest was sinful, inspiring Dante to consign usurers to the seventh circle of hell (alongside sodomites and murderers). In other words, 500 years ago, the phrase “predatory lending” would have been considered redundant.

Lending at interest was thus forbidden across Christian Europe — for Christians. Jews, however, were permitted by the Roman Catholic Church to charge interest; since they were going to hell anyway, why not let them help growing economies function more efficiently? (According to Halakha, or Jewish law, Jews were not allowed to charge interest to one another, just to gentiles.) And so it was, Muller explains, that Judaism became forever fused in the popular mind with finance. In fact, Christian moneylenders were sometimes legally designated as temporary Jews when they lent money to English and French kings.

As Europe’s official moneylenders, Jews became both necessary and despised. The exorbitant interest rates they charged — sometimes as high as 60 percent — only fed the fury. But considering the economic climate, such rates probably made good business sense: capital was scarce, and lenders frequently risked having their debtors’ obligations canceled or their own assets arbitrarily seized by the crown.

This early, semi-exclusive exposure to finance, coupled with a culture that valued literacy, abstract thinking, trade and specialization (the Babylonian Talmud amazingly presaged Adam Smith’s paradigmatic pin factory), gave Jews the human capital necessary to succeed in modern capitalism. It also helped that Judaism, unlike many strains of Christianity, did not consider poverty particularly ennobling.

Most of Muller's strongest arguments are in his first essay, which draws on everyone from Voltaire to Osama bin Laden to illustrate how the world came to conflate the negative stereotypes of Jews with those of capitalism's excesses. The book's remaining three essays deal somewhat unevenly with the fallout of the Jews' economic success, and in particular the resentment it inspired among history's economic also-rans. Muller explores, for example, how Jews improbably became associated with both abhorred poles of political economy: hypercapitalism and Communism.

Some Jews had indeed sought refuge from anti-Semitism in the seamless brotherhood imagined by Communism (as others did in the nationalist rebirth promised by Zionism). But in a mostly perfunctory history of socialism in Eastern Europe, Muller argues that "Judeo-Bolshevism" was a myth, promoted perhaps to malign the Communist movement.

Of course, just as often this stigma-by-association has run in the opposite direction: from economic phenomena that commentators have found distasteful, to the Jews (see "Hitler"). But such smears and scapegoating stuck largely because Jews had, for centuries, been thoroughly identified with other capitalist-conspiracy theories.

While this book is ostensibly about "the Jews," Muller's most chilling insights are about their enemies, and the creative, almost supernatural, malleability of anti-Semitism itself. For centuries, poverty, paranoia and financial illiteracy have combined into a dangerous brew — one that has made economic virtuosity look suspiciously like social vice.

On-Line Search for Ancestors Buried in Warsaw's Jewish Cemetery

The **Okopowa Street Jewish Cemetery** [*Cmentarz żydowski w Warszawie*] was established in 1806 and contains over 200,000 marked graves. Also, there are several unmarked mass graves of approximately 80,000 victims of the Warsaw Ghetto.

The burial ground was closed during the German occupation and reopened after WWII. However, the small number of Jewish survivors could not afford to maintain the graveyard. Consequently, it has been overtaken by nature, but a portion still serves Warsaw's Jewish community.

The cemetery is filled with monuments of ordinary as well prominent individuals. Most markers are simple headstones. Others are more elaborate shrines with detailed information about the wealthy and the famous. Wandering through this historic site is a profoundly moving experience because it is possible to sense the depth and diversity of the vibrant Jewish Civilization that once existed in Poland.

In 2006 Polish volunteers began recording data from every single matzevah in the cemetery. They anticipated finding about 120,000 gravestones with names and other details. However, the ravages of time and neglect have destroyed many matzevot and only about 80,000 remain. The project was scheduled for completion by April 2010, and it is now possible to search online for the names of individuals in the cemetery's database: < <http://www.cemetery.jewish.org.pl/> >

Search results display variations in the spelling of surnames from Hebrew into Latin script. First names, father's names, maiden and husband's names are listed, as well as dates of birth and

death. And a photograph of the stone or monument is also displayed. The database is a significant contribution to Polish-Jewish history.

Two additional websites (see below) will help you appreciate the physical appearance of the cemetery and the dedication and commitment of the Polish volunteers who painstakingly carried out this important research project:

A Panoramic View of the Warsaw Jewish Cemetery

< <http://www.360cities.net/image/jewish-cemetery-warsaw-poland#721.77,-20.47,69.1> >

Recording the Inscriptions on the Gravestones in the Warsaw Jewish Cemetery

< <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k1tiLrbJUh0> >

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