

The Antisemitic Press in Bulgaria at the End of the 19th Century

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Abstract

With the Russo-Turkish War of 1877/78, the history of Bulgaria entered a new stage. According to the regulations enacted in July 1878 at the Congress of Berlin, summoned by the representatives of the Great Powers, the modern Bulgarian state was founded. Its constitution, proclaimed a year later, provided civic and political equality for the religious and ethnic minorities residing in the country, including the Jews. Although the young state was in many ways relatively backwards compared to other European countries, ideas and demands of the new political antisemitism found their echo here, too. In the 1890s, a series of antisemitic newspapers, magazines, brochures and leaflets were issued in Bulgaria, the authors of which saw the “country’s liberation from the Jewish yoke” as their main task. These antisemitic publications were short lived; their demands, however, found a certain audience and were discussed in the Bulgarian parliament at the turn of the century.

This paper is centred on the matter related to the origin and dissemination of antisemitic newspapers, magazines and brochures in the first two decades after Bulgaria’s liberation from Ottoman Rule in 1878. Tracing back to the conditions in which those publications originated, as well as the personalities of their authors and the analysis of the main topics and stories in the articles, further contribute to create a clearer view of the genesis of the antisemitic propaganda in Bulgaria and to outline Bulgarian and Jews cohabiting at the end of the 19th century.

The origination of the antisemitic propaganda in Bulgaria coincides with the origination of the Bulgarian modern state after the Russo-Turkish War, 1877-1878. Under the Treaty of Berlin, which was signed on July 13th 1878 by representatives of the Great Powers, the Principality of Bulgaria was established in the north of the Balkan Mountains (Stara Planina) and the south part was called Eastern Rumelia and remained an autonomous province within the Ottoman Empire under the direct political and military rule of the Sultan¹. Since the newly established countries were heterogeneous in ethnic and religious composition the Treaty of Berlin contained special provisions obliging them to guarantee the rights of the minorities living in their territories. The principle of political and civil equality of all Bulgarian citizens, including the Jews people was put forward in the first Bulgarian Constitution, the Tarnovo Constitution adopted in 1879 by the Constituent National Assembly.

¹ After a series of revolts the two parts unite. Despite the protests of the Sultan and Russia under the Tophane agreement Bulgaria gained diplomatic and international sovereignty. Grown significantly in territory, Bulgaria remained a principality of the Ottoman Empire until the declaration of independence in 1908.

The aforementioned principle of equality gives right to the Jews that lived in the territory of Bulgaria to get involved in the political and mostly economic structures of the new Bulgarian society, which on the other hand does not remain unnoticed and without consequences.

Statistical data show that in 1880–1881 the number of the Jews in both the Bulgarian Principality and Eastern Rumelia was 18.197 or 0.9 % of the whole population. Almost all of them regarded Judeo-Spanish as their mother tongue but there were some that regarded themselves as Germans, Hungarians, Poles, Romanians, etc.²

The number of Jews increased until the end of the century proportionally to the population of Bulgaria although it constantly remained under 1%. In number they were an insignificant minority group, compared to the Muslims, whose relative percentage at the time was about 20%. Unlike the Muslims, however, the Jews live mostly in towns, which were 32 in number at the end of the century and the beginning of the new one.³ The majority of the Jews lived in Sofia, the newly established capital of Bulgaria. Therefore it was not a pure accident that the first antisemitic publications appeared there.

In the first years after the establishment of the state, the number of Bulgarian periodicals began to grow gradually. According to the analysis of the data, made by the scholar of the Bulgarian periodicals, Boris Andreev, there were 648 newspapers and magazines published in the period between 1878–1900, as 288 of them came out in Sofia, 83 in Plovdiv, 57 in Ruse, 37 in Varna, 32 in Tarnovo, etc. These numbers clearly show that more than 85% of the periodicals were published in the five biggest Bulgarian cities and more than 43% in Sofia alone. Of all 455 newspapers, they were 291 weeklies, those that came out twice a week were 51 and the ones that were published three times a week were 19; 18 were the daily papers and 34 editions came out twice a month, 9 of them monthly, 12 had no particular date of issue and 12 were broadsheets. The average circulation was between 3 and 10 thousand copies.⁴ The antisemitic papers and articles published in some of them actually constituted an insignificant percentage in comparison with the total number of the newspapers published in the period.

During the first decade of freedom for Bulgarians i.e. the 80s of the 19th century there were no papers amongst the many, manifesting antisemitic ideas. However, there were separate articles published, as for example those in the comic paper *Rasheto*, which came out in the Danube town of Ruse in 1884–1885; these articles put the Jews in an unfavourable light, depicting them as dishonourable dealers, swindlers and expats. Despite this, the main course of

² Eli Eshkenazy, "Statistički eski belezki iz istorijata na balgarskoto evrejstvo" [Statistical notes about the history of Bulgarian], *Novi dni* [New days] 7 (1947): 9-11.

³ Eli Eshkenazy, "Njakoi statistički belezki za broja na evreite v Balgarija v minaloto" [Some statistical notes about the number of the Jews in the past], *Evrejski novini* [Jewish news], February 1, 1957.

⁴ Boris Andreev, *Načalo, razvoj i vazhod na balgarskija pečata* [Beginning, development and progress of the Bulgarian Press], (Sofia: Globus, 1948), 208-211.

the paper is completely different as it is evident from its subtitle, literary translated as “A humorous and satiric paper /distinguishing the moral from immoral.”⁵ In those first years of antisemitic propaganda in Bulgaria, antisemitism was disseminated mainly through translated brochures and leaflets. The books of Trayko Bojidarov, for example, were translated from Russian and published in Sofia as “Mysteries of the Jewish Faith,”⁶ “The Talmud and its Mysteries,”⁷ “Jewish Processes;”⁸ Samuil Marokski’s “Bringing the Jews to Reason or a Golden Essay” was translated by the Sliven Metropolitan Bishop Serafim;⁹ and also the brochure “The Jewish Religion” of the monk Neofit had been published in Bulgaria.¹⁰ The main motifs in the aforementioned publications were based mainly on religious topics. The Jews were characterised as betrayers, Christ-killers and enemies of Christianity. What was broadly discussed in these brochures was the accusation, dating back to the Middle Ages, that the Jews killed Christian children and used their blood for religious rituals. A few things should be considered when analysing these first antisemitic works thoroughly, which appeared in the territory of Bulgaria back then. Firstly, it is the fact that most of these works were translated from the Russian. The works are most likely to have found supporters and dissemination during and after the Russo-Turkish War when the Russian Army and administrative authorities acted on Bulgarian territory. The negative attitude towards the Jews was wide spread in the Russian Empire at the time and was proclaimed by a large number of antisemitic works, which later was put in practice with the wave of anti-Jewish pogroms in the Empire in the 1880s. The antisemitic stereotypes and prejudice might have been spread by Bulgarian emigrants who lived in Russia before 1878 and moved back to Bulgaria after Liberation.

Secondly, it is confusing that amongst the main figures in the antisemitic propaganda were many priests. Although there is no evidence and it cannot be said for sure, Neofit, the author of the brochure “The Jewish Religion,” is believed to have been a man of God. It is absolutely true for the Sliven Metropolitan Bishop. The participation of those representatives of the Church leads to the fact that there obviously were many of them who shared the stereotypes of Christian Europe and had some prejudice towards the Jews, which were mostly related to the blood libel. Additionally, we cannot ignore the fact that within the next decade there were men of God amongst the Bulgarian translators, authors and disseminators of antisemitic brochures, papers and magazines.

⁵ □□□□□□ [The Colander], Ruse, 1884 - 1885.

⁶ Traiko Bojidarov, *Potainosti na evrejskata vjara* □□ [Mysteries of the Jews Faith], (Sofia: K. T. Kushlev, 1884).

⁷ Traiko Bojidarov, *Talmuda i negovite potainosti* [The Talmud and its Mysteries], (Sofia, 1884).

⁸ Traiko Bojidarov, *Evrejski prozes* [Jews Processes], (Sofia, 1886).

⁹ Samuil Marokski, *Vrazumlenie na evreite ili Zlatno suchinenie* [Bringing the Jews to Reason or a Golden Essay], (Sliven: Balgarsko zname, 1899).

¹⁰ *Neofit, Evrejskata religija* [The Jewish Religion], (Plovdiv, 1885).

As for the circulation of the brochures mentioned above, it cannot be defined for certain. It is also difficult to assume what effects and influence the proclaimed ideas had on society. It is a fact, however, that antisemitic periodicals did not appear. There is no data about the establishment and foundation of antisemitic clubs and organizations in the country. On that side, it gives grounds to make the assumption that the dissemination and the influence these works had on society, was to a greatly restricted. Despite not being big in number and not so popular, the antisemitic works begot a tendency and started processes that continued and developed in the next decade.

The antisemitic propaganda in Bulgaria continued to develop in the last decade of the 19th century, so as to spread over all cities and towns inhabited by Jews. In terms of content it is not different from other European countries; it is based mainly on religious and everyday life topics. Additionally, economic issues are discussed more deeply. The new phenomenon, however, is the foundation of special committees that were set up around some of the antisemitic publications and which claimed their political demands for restriction of the constitutional rights and freedoms of the Jews in Parliament. The latter is a proof for the increasing influence of the antisemitic press at the end of the century. The most remarkable figure that played an important role for the development of the anti-Semitism in Bulgaria was Nikola Mitakov, who was an entrepreneur and owner of sand-pits around Sofia.¹¹

The magazine “Bulgaria for the Bulgarians” [*Bulgaria za Bulgarite*] was first published in Sofia on September, 16th 1893 and its subtitle was “A periodical magazine about political economy and trade.”¹² With its second copy it was renamed to “Bulgaria without Jews” [*Bulgaria bez Evrezi*].¹³ Although the word “antisemitism” was not mentioned directly in the name of the magazine, the line it followed was definitely antisemitic. The content of the magazine and the articles published in it clearly prove that fact; almost all the material was written by Mitakov himself.

In the beginning the author wrote that he is not able to present literary consistent magazine:

“My Dearest Reader,

It is no wonder that while reading my magazine you might come across thousands of mistakes, some of which might be logical ones. I must warn you that I have no intention to present myself as a man of words and a very literate person. My aim is to show to you the truth and explain half-literately though,

¹¹ His son Krum Mitakov was an Anti-Semitist too. D. Benvenisty characterises him as “open fascist.” In 1937 Krum Mitakov published the antisemitic book “The truth according to the Mason’s list.” The main idea is that the Jewish Masons initiated all the revolutions worldwide.

¹² *Balgarski periodiki en peiat 1844–1944* [Bulgarian periodicals 1844 – 1944], ed. Dimitar Ivanchev (Sofia: Nauka i izkustvo, 1966), vol. II, 118.

¹³ Ibid.

some issues of vital interest for each and every one of us, namely of the Jews.”¹⁴

With the first copy of the magazine Mitakov called for despising the Jews and appealed for an antisemitic state in which “Bulgarians, Turks, Germans, French, Gypsies, etc.” should be the only members excluding particularly Jews and Armenians.”¹⁵ The articles that were published in the first copy were further developed and continued in the next two copies. The article entitled “Bulgaria for the Bulgarians in terms of Economics” made an appeal toward all Bulgarians and called for not buying from the Jews but from “their Bulgarian compatriots” because “the richer the Jews gets, the richer his brother gets and the more powerful the Jew himself gets; the richer the Jew gets, the poorer the compatriot gets...”¹⁶ The title of the article “Who are the most dangerous parasites” speaks more than clearly: undoubtedly they are the Jews and the Armenians. Mitakov described the Jews as follows: “They are parasites for the whole world [...] because through their infernal meshes they are trying to catch (and gather) in their bloody hands the whole wealth on Earth, to financially overpower all societies, peoples and countries and ultimately the whole world until they pronounce themselves the masters of the situation and the almighty of the day.”¹⁷ There are offensive epithets and qualifications in the articles “From the Jewish Mysteries,”¹⁸ “The Jews in Villages,” “Jews can lie to the Lord Himself,”¹⁹ “The Blood”²⁰ and so forth as the leitmotiv throughout was the accusation of ritual killings.

The first magazine “Bulgaria without Jews” which was published by Mitakov was suspended after only three issues. After the failure Mitakov started a new project, the paper “People’s Freedom” [*Narodna svoboda*] with the subtitle “a political and antisemitic paper.”²¹ Mitkov himself claimed in the leading article that the aims and the motto of the newly established periodical will be the “relentless struggle against the Jews” and the establishment of antisemitic party with a complicated structure based on his programme, which consisted of twenty items in political and eight in economic aspects.²² Politically he insists on: a “relentless struggle against the Jews as a whole and a restriction to the maximum of the civil and political rights of the Jews in Bulgaria”²³. By this he meant the abolition of the rights and liberties of the Jews proclaimed in the constitution such as the active and passive right of vote, freedom of assembly, of speech, etc. Also Mitakov insisted on “a closure of Bulgarian borders for all

¹⁴ *Balgarija za bulgarite* [Bulgaria for the Bulgarians], September 6, 1893.

¹⁵ *Balgarija bez evrei* [Bulgaria without Jews], January 18, 1894.

¹⁶ *Balgarija za bulgarite* [Bulgaria for the Bulgarians], September 6, 1893.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Balgarija bez evrei* [Bulgaria without Jews], January 18, 1894.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Bulgarian periodicals 1844-1944*, ed. Ivanchev, vol. II, 27.

²² *Narodna svoboda* [People’s Freedom], January 15, 1895.

²³ *Ibid.*

scum belonging to the race of the Jews.”²⁴ In his programme Mitkov urged for the immediate Bulgarian Declaration of Independence and the status of a kingdom; he appealed: “Bulgarian politics must be in accordance with Russian politics and Sofia must be in full harmony with St. Petersburg”²⁵ and so on and so forth. In terms of economics the demands set forth are mainly protectionist. The last item number 20 is quite interesting: “Those who want to be supporters of the antisemitism are obliged to guard against any relations with the Jews. The antisemites will have to say ‘*Don’t buy from the Jew*’ as they say ‘Good morning’. And the Jew will not have the right to set up any business and will be despised by every anti-Semites”²⁶.

Not only was this copy full of accusations and ritual killings but the rest of them were too; there were constant appeals for restriction of the rights and freedoms of the Jews people as well as a number of advice and suggestions for taking special measures against them, for example banishing all of them from Bulgaria in the way that most of the civilised countries had already done. It is interesting in terms of stylistic what epithets were used by Mitakov when describing the Jews people. They are highly varied. For example, in one of his articles, published in copy 1/ 24. 11. 1894 when describing the Jews, he uses 73 offensive words following one after another : “a Jew, bur, counterfeiter, crook, failure, Beelzebub, Satan, vampire, goblin, despot, villain, outlaw, scoundrel, bastard, rascal, twerp, brute, beast, swine, dog, snake, sly fox, bootlicker, pimp, crook, swindler, creep, infidel, corrupt, creeping creature, caterpillar, sponge, parasite, worm, leech.”²⁷

One of the basic characteristics of Mitakov’s propaganda is the fact that it is interrelated to antisocialist propaganda. He was convinced that the socialists were his biggest opponents and the greatest supporters of the Jews. Since he belonged to the entrepreneurial class, Mitakov protected their interests. This is the reason why the paper “People’s Freedom” took a stand against the project for taking a state loan from Vienna banks, which he called “the banks of the Jew”. Because of the financial affiliations between the two countries Mitakov called the Prime Minister K. Stoilov “a blind Jew tool and bootlicker of his aunty Austria.” Mitakov was taken to court for those and similar statements and was liable for offence to the Knyaz /prince regnant/ and the Prime Minister.²⁸

The other periodical that made an attempt to establish “the traditions” of the antisemitism is the paper “Echo” (*Otziiv*). Compared to Mitakov’s papers that were short-lived it was published for a relatively longer period, from 1897 to

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid., November 24, 1894.

²⁸ Vasil Topencharov, *Bulgarskata zhurnalistika 1885 – 1903* [Bulgarian Journalism 1885 – 1903], (Sofia: Nauka i izkustvo, 1963), 541.

1903. The new paper supported the ideas of the Liberal party of Doctor Vasil Radoslavov and was one of the first to give a public forum to the criminal sensation.

Most probably it was for economic reasons that the paper started to proclaim antisemitic ideas amongst the society with its very first copy from February 17th 1897. There were accusations that the Jews were unpatriotic and did not cherish Bulgaria. They provided as an example the fact that during public ceremonies and holidays the Jews openly expressed a cold attitude towards Bulgarian interests. During the visit of the Serbian King Alexander in Bulgaria they were the only ones “who decorated their shops, located in the most overcrowded area in Sofia, with (Serbian) flags, which looked like rags” and this was done to discredit Bulgaria.²⁹ “The Echo” also published a number of materials about “the Austrian Jewish impudence” and stated that “we have warmly welcomed them and generously opened our doors for them”³⁰, and continued ridiculing them as focusing on “the Jewish greed”³¹. The paper repeatedly put emphasis on “the well-known fact” that the Jews speculate with the labour of the Bulgarian people and “lay their hands on Bulgarian trade and crafts, which actually makes them our masters and us, on the other hand, their economic slaves”³². “The Echo” discussed broadly that the Jews were foreigners who settled in our lands to suck Bulgarian blood.³³

In addition to this, it is a characteristic of the antisemitic propaganda of the paper to pay significant attention to the status that Jews have in the rest of the European countries. The extensive review “About the Jews once again,” which was published in several copies of the paper, aimed to answer the question why the Jews had been persecuted for centuries, wherever they went. The further example given is the ancient historian Flavius Josephus, who also had a Jewish descent and “denounced his compatriots as being guilty of corrupting Roman moral, procuring, appropriation of estates and kidnapping young women, being thieves, frauds, swindlers and as a whole extremely sluttish.”³⁴ The Jewish were called “parasites” and “international leeches” and this is exactly what was stated as a reason for banishing them from Spain and persecuting them in Russia. According to “The Echo,” the Jews had to be blamed for “the disgrace of Poland” because “their race became related to the Jews and thus betrayers were born and the Polish sold their homeland for 3 million roubles.”³⁵ Concerning Jewish settlement within the Ottoman Empire the paper commented that after leaving Spain they settled down “in the diseased organism of Turkey and it gave them the favourable grounds for shady affairs

²⁹ *Otziv* [The Echo], February 18, 1897.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, March 28, 1897.

³¹ *Ibid.*, March 3, 1897.

³² *Ibid.*, February 24, 1897.

³³ *Ibid.*, July 14, 1897.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, May 28, 1898.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

and speculation.”³⁶ A few years later Turkey started to collapse. The reason is more than obvious “the Jews had a demoralising influence on the Turkish authorities and bribed them, procured, stole and to a great extent contributed to the Turkish corruption.”³⁷ In this sense, the paper did mention “the active” participation of the Jews in the Turkish massacres of the Armenians. The above, according to “the Echo” give reasons to all peoples in the world to despise the Jews who are “parasites,” “international leeches,” “exploiters,” “men of no God,” “parasite nation,” “disgraced people,” “despised people,” etc.³⁸

The paper payed “due attention” to the biggest contemporary spy scandal, in which Jewish were involved, the Dreyfus Affair. The paper qualified him as “the biggest of all Jewish scoundrels” who “allied with some deluded French and corrupts and started a new wave and raised a row with which they aimed to misguide the public opinion.”³⁹ The Jews agreed to demand publicity about the documentation on this case but they did not render an account to the fact that a lot of French state secrets would be brought to light because “a brother of theirs, a spy had more value to them than the defence of an entire country.”⁴⁰ According to the paper, Dreyfus himself had used “the typical Jewish trick-betrayal.” The article finished as follows: “Such corruption could be generated only by the race of Abraham, damned by their God.”

The Jews who live in Bulgaria were not indifferent toward the antisemitic propaganda of “The Echo.” In issue number 419 from May 19th 1898, the paper reprinted in its column a letter from the Chief Rabbi to the Sofia District Attorney in which the Jews claimed from the Sofia City Court to take measures” against the liable and attacks on us aiming to provoke hatred against Bulgarian Jews [...] and I do request to take into consideration what The Echo writes in its issues.”⁴¹ There is a further article published on the matter in which the authors wrote that they “were astonished by the insolence of the Chief Rabbi an impudent and Pharisaic man who gave the following speech in the Synagogue yesterday: “The antisemitic trend will finally end up with as a futile attempt. Before they manage to ban the Israeli from Bulgaria it is highly probable to have the kingdom vanished from the map of Europe.”⁴² In their conclusion the authors of the article called the Jews “international wolves” and a “mean tribe.”⁴³

A new paper with similar content and name appeared in 1898 in Sofia- “The New Echo” (*Nov Otzivi*)⁴⁴. The new edition actually was a sequel and supplement to “The Echo.” Similarly to its forerunner it was a daily paper

³⁶ Ibid., June 16, 1898.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid., July 8, 1897; May 28, 1898; June 16, 1898; May 27, 1901; August 18 1903.

³⁹ Ibid., July 8, 1898.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid., May 19, 1898.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ *Bulgarian Periodicals 1844-1944*, ed. Ivanchev, vol. II, 61.

proclaiming the ideas of Radoslavov and was full of sensational crime news and reports and antisemitic material. The topic which was most broadly discussed is the Dreyfus affair. The paper severely criticised Bulgarian defenders of Dreyfus qualifying them with offensive epithets. In a series of articles like “Not so baptised Jew,” “Jews charged” and so on, “The new Echo” claimed that the sentencing of Dreyfus was right “although the Jews have been moving heaven and earth to prove the spy and charlatan innocent.”⁴⁵

As well as this the paper constantly appealed for pursuing the Jews in the way they did other countries pointing out that they use Christian blood for religious rituals and continue to publish materials mocking and accusing them.⁴⁶

In the last issue of the paper the editor-in-chief Petar Petrov stated the reasons for the fiasco of the journal. According to him, the reasons were deeply rooted in the lack of interest of the Bulgarian society in anti-Semitism. He also mentioned indirectly that certain Jewish circles had offered him money to stop his antisemitic activities. “If we had taken the 40.000 *levs* (Bulgarian currency – V. K.) for the 2.000 subscriptions, which the Jews promised us for seizing the attacks against them, we wouldn’t be deprived from our home now.”⁴⁷ This sentence speaks quite eloquently about the motives that the editors of the antisemitic publications had in the first two decades after the Liberation.

The other paper that played a significant role amongst the others with an antisemitic content is “The National Defence” (*Narodna Zashchita*). It was published three times a week and represented the opposition. Similarly to the antisemitic papers and magazines already mentioned, the National Defence made efforts to create negative attitudes toward the Jews in Bulgaria. For that purpose they systematically published material accusing Jews of speculation, greed, meanness, etc. and used article headlines as follows: “Speculation Makes its Way through the Courts,”⁴⁸ “Brothers Unite,”⁴⁹ “Jew and Medicine,”⁵⁰ “Chronic Disease,”⁵¹ etc.

Unlike the other similar papers “The National Defence” viewed the Jews not as Jews only but rather as non-Bulgarians. To a great extent it is due to the line that the paper followed, which was mainly nationalistic. In this respect the paper claimed that its aim is to fight not particularly against the Jews but against everybody who is not Bulgarian. In terms of quality and quantity the paper mostly attacked the Greeks. The appeal was to appoint to administrative jobs only native Bulgarians, not foreigners (Greek, Jews, Armenians, Italians, Serbs, etc.). According to the paper only the pure-blooded Bulgarians could be

⁴⁵ David Benvenisty, “Neblagoprijatnitate uslovija za razprostranenie na antisemitskata propaganda v Balgarija 1891 - 1903” [The inauspicious conditions for spreading the antisemitic propaganda in Bulgaria], *Annual Shalom*, 16 (1980): 197-244.

⁴⁶ *Nov Otziv* [The New Echo], September 7, 1899.

⁴⁷ *Narodna zashchita* [The People’s Defence], February 18, 1901.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, January 13, 1899.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, March 31, 1899.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, April 10, 1899.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

patriots. They were the only ones who truly love Bulgaria and everybody else is far away from Bulgarian national idea.⁵²

A few months before its last issue the paper printed an article with the headline: “The anti-Semitism in us.”⁵³ It was exceptionally curious. Bulgarian Jews spoke passionately against the acts of antisemitism. It was confirmed that the antisemitic propaganda in Bulgaria had no success whatsoever; it was further emphasised that Bulgarian people had no hard feelings towards the Jews. However, the article appealed for a complete assimilation of the Jews: “It is no doubt that we are friends of the Jews [...] we have been living together for centuries [...] they would not endanger us in any way in the future as they had never been before.”⁵⁴ This is a landmark article that fully turned the attitude of “The National Defence” towards the Jews onto its opposite. Unfortunately the concrete reasons for its publication remain unknown.

At the borderline between two centuries, the antisemitic papers and magazines were published not only in the capital, but also in other towns like Vidin: “The Defender” (*Zashitnik*), subtitle “Organ of the craft-guild against the Jews”⁵⁵ and “Futurity” (*Badeshtnost*).⁵⁶ Both editions were short-lived; “The Defender” had only six copies published and “Futurity” just five. There was a similar antisemitic paper published in Varna: “*Strandzha*”, named after a mountain massif in southeastern Bulgaria. Actually this paper was the organ of the Association of the Thracian Refugees in Bulgaria and it fought for the rights and interests of the Bulgarians in East Thrace (Edirne Thrace) which remained within the Ottoman Empire after the Russo-Turkish War. Basically the paper wanted to promote the Bulgarian national cause, i.e. unification of all the territories with Bulgarian population in one sovereign state. In this respect, most of the articles published in the paper were of a nationalistic character. In most of the articles the patriotic motives were related to antisemitic ones. “The Strandzha” represented the Jews as supporters of the Ottomans and in this sense as enemies of the Bulgarian people. The paper called them “the bitterest enemies of the Bulgarians, because the Ottomans are the almightiest and the Jews are spies.”⁵⁷ Referring the inborn, innate aptitude for betrayal of the Jews “The Strandza” came to the following conclusion: “Wherever Christian blood was shed, there were Jews involved.”⁵⁸

One of the antisemitic papers which was published in the country and played a central role was “the organ of the Burgas Antisemitic Committee” the paper *Golgotha*.⁵⁹ Similarly to the other antisemitic papers it was short-lived because it

⁵² Ibid., January 31, 1899.

⁵³ Ibid., December 15, 1899.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ *Bulgarian Periodicals 1844-1944*, ed. Ivanchev, vol. I, 306.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 115.

⁵⁷ *Strandzha*, July 17, 1898.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ *Bulgarian periodicals 1844 –1944*, ed. Ivanchev, vol. I, 222.

was published only for half a year. N. Ivanov was the editor-in-chief and D. Boev was the organisational secretary. The leading article first published on December 25th 1899 had the headline “Instead of a Programme” and it clearly stated the aims of the paper and the newly founded committee: “to free the country from the economic slavery of the Jews.”⁶⁰ The authors of the article claimed that the Jews were pursued wherever and whenever they lived and that it was their own fault. The usual accusations were repeated throughout, mostly the ones that the Jews had betrayed Jesus Christ and supported the Turks in the Russo-Turkish War, the massacres of the Armenians, etc. In the first issue of the paper the Jews were qualified as “parasitic warms,” “disseminators of corruption and the Evil,” “parasitic nation,” etc.⁶¹

It is interesting how the Burgas Antisemitic Committee was founded. Most probably it was founded mainly because of economic reasons. One evidence about that is not only the leading article but a number of later contributions published in the paper, e.g. the statement of the authors that “the Antisemitic Committee was founded as a consequence of the bad economic situation of the country, the big national debt and the poverty of the population.”⁶² Furthermore, the article “Why are we against the Jews?” explicitly stated that “the Jews themselves make us turn against them because of their speculations, exploitation and godlessness. They make us turn against them because we fear that with their thriving for money by all means, they will one day drive our people into bankruptcy and will leave them devastated both economically and emotionally; they will deprive us of our trade as they have done before, and finally will enslave us economically.”⁶³ These are the arguments, which inspired the founders of the antisemitic organization in Burgas and probably in other cities in Bulgaria. What should be mentioned too is the fact that the organisational secretary D. Boyev owned of a big shoe store in Burgas.

According to the organ of the Burgas Antisemitic Committee there were no people as worse as the Jews. They were carriers of all the bad characteristics that a man could have. The Jew was “morally obliged to be a liar, thief, bandits and murderer and they are fatal for the people around them, for those who are from different faith; If the Jews have no those qualities they would be discharged from their own cast.”⁶⁴ Hence, according to “The Golgotha” publishers the Bulgarians must detest the Jews even more than the Turks: “The Turks massacred us, they hang us with no mercy for five centuries. We did not suffer such barbarity from the Jews. It is only natural that we must detest the Turks more than the Jews but to us it is the other way round- we detest the Jews more.”⁶⁵ The paper viewed the antisemitism as a movement, which “will enlighten the society” and “will find a solution for some racial and cultural

⁶⁰ *Golgotha*, December 25, 1899.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.*, March 5, 1899.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, April 4, 1900.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, May 25, 1899.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, December 25, 1899.

differences between the Christians and the Jews,”⁶⁶ and then called for anti-Jewish pogroms in Bulgaria, following the example of some other European countries.

As for the readers of the paper it announced that it is distributed nationwide and has 1600 subscribers.⁶⁷ Unfortunately this statement can be neither proved, nor argued these days. Most probably the figures for the subscription were exaggerated since the paper was published for half a year only.

All of the editorial staff and the contributors to “The Golgotha” were members of the Burgas Antisemitic Committee. Their activities were mainly pointed towards sending petitions to the National assembly with demands for legal restrictions of Jewish rights in Bulgaria. One of these petitions is kept in the archives of the Bulgarian Parliament. It was sent by the members of the executive board of the Burgas Antisemitic Committee in 1899 and contains the following:

“1. From now on to legally restrain Jews from settling in Bulgaria; 2. To restrain by law the purchase of land by Jews in the territory of Bulgaria; 3. To ban them from trading outside cities and remove them, once and for all, from participation in public enterprises and strictly control them not to appoint third persons on such positions; 4. To ban the Jews from working in commissioning and acting as intermediaries when clearing goods through the customs; 5. To amend the Criminal Code by adding a special clause stipulating death penalty for Jews persons attempting directly or indirectly to kidnap Christian children and to sentence them to death without exception; 6. To impose a special tax on their stay in the territory of Bulgaria regardless of their sex for everybody at the age over 21, as this is the case of Romania; 7. To shall legally renounce any bank loans or credits to Jews in Bulgaria.”⁶⁸

The initiative of the Burgas Antisemitic Committee was supported through petitions to the National Assembly signed by similar antisemitic organisations in Shumen, Pazardzik, Silistra, Ruse, etc. The resolution was forwarded and filed in the Parliament in December 1899 by the Tutrakanian MP Iv. M. Abrashev, who was a member of the Liberal Party, and it was signed by 48 of his colleagues.⁶⁹ There were no debates on it and it is important to point out that it was rejected.

Although it failed, the act gives grounds to make several important conclusions about the development of the anti-Semitism in Bulgaria for the period under scrutiny. The antisemitic ideas were spread only in a few periodicals but they were not harmless at all. The resolutions, ideas and demands of the Burgas

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, June 25, 1899.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, May 21, 1899.

⁶⁸ “Petition of Antisemitic Committees to stop the Jewish settlement in Bulgaria, 21 November 1899-20 December 1899,” National Assembly, fund 173K, opp. 1, file 1618, Central State Archives, Sofia.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, file 1024.

Antisemitic Committee were supported and shared by antisemitic committees in nineteen other Bulgarian cities.

The number of the people who signed those documents is not so insignificant. Hence, the anti-Semitism in Bulgaria had increased its influence at the end of the 19th century.

Conclusion

It is an undisputable fact that at the end of the 19th century the antisemitic messages and attitudes, which were spread in Europe, also reached the newly established state of Bulgaria. There are various reasons why this happened and they could not be explained without a more thorough analysis of the overall political and economic situation in the country in the first years after the Liberation. The bitterest enemy of Bulgaria, the Ottoman Empire failed after 1878. However, that fact did not solve the problems, on the contrary it led to even more difficulties. Bulgaria's opening toward Europe, the modernization and industrialization evoked instability and fear amongst society. Discontent was expressed in various ways, and a whipping boy was sought in form of the "other," in most cases, "non-Christians" or "non-Bulgarians." Because of the mass emigration of Muslims after the Russo-Turkish War, the Bulgarian Jews were particularly suited for this role.

The economic crisis in Bulgaria began at the end of the 19th century and it was caused by the decline of crafts and the import of cheaper and most often more qualitative goods by higher quality from Europe. This brought considerable discontent among the so called craft-guild. On the other hand, there were common interests in trade and it led to interweaving between Jews and Bulgarians, which eventually made the latter try to get rid of their serious competitors, the Jews. One of the ways in doing this was spreading lies and accusations against them. It was no accident that most of the antisemitic brochures, papers and magazines appeared in the trade centres and department stores first, where according to the anti-Semites "the foreigners" held key economic positions. These editions set the goal to eradicate "the Jew" and to "protect" the craftsmen, merchants and industrialists from decline. The editors and authors of antisemitic literature were mostly entrepreneurs and tradesmen and their motives were mainly commercial in character. For example it became clear that in a letter written by N. Mitakov that the publisher of "Bulgaria without Jews" and "Bulgaria for the Bulgarians" had gone deeply in debt to Jewish creditors who rejected his request to remit his debt, after which he started his antisemitic papers.⁷⁰

Despite the efforts made by Mitakov and his "comrades," the antisemitic ideas did not spread amongst Bulgarian Society. An example of this could be not only the short life of the papers but the appeals for subscription and donation,

⁷⁰ Kiril Fitovsky, *Evreite v celija svijat* (The Jews around the World), (Svishtov: A. H. Dankov, 1898), 15.

permanently made by the editors. On the other hand, there were objective reasons for that and they can be explained with the fact that at the time a big percentage of the population was uneducated and illiterate, living mostly in the rural areas of the country. As already mentioned the antisemitic brochures, papers and magazines were disseminated mainly in the cities. Another reason for the failure of the antisemitic press might have been the Bulgarian cultural background and the fact that during the Ottoman Empire Bulgarians were used to live peacefully and to cohabite their lands with other ethnic groups, including Jews.

If one assumes that some of the attempts of the Bulgarian anti-Semites to popularise blood libel were to a certain extent successful, for example there were court trials in 1891 in Vratca and 1898 respectively in Yambol charging Jews with kidnapping and murdering Christian children for religious purposes, anti-Semitism failed from a political point of view. The antisemitic committees tried to put pressure on the Parliament to pass an antisemitic Law, but this initiative turned out to be completely unsuccessful. Thus, in spite of being a lucid touch in the whole picture of the new Bulgaria, anti-Semitism did not succeed in becoming a mass phenomenon on the verge of the 20th century.

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