

**From “Court Jew” Origins to Civil-Servant Nationalism:
Hajim S. Davičo
(1854-1916)**

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Abstract

This article examines the life and works of Hajim S. Davičo in the context of the history of Serbian Jews, of the “Court Jew” Davičo family and of the Serbian and Triestine context of the late 19th and early 20th century. Hajim Davičo was an active proponent of linguistic acculturation, and in his career as a diplomat he proved total devotion to Serbian national cause, to the brink of complete assimilation. Indeed, his national allegiance put Davičo in the position to interfere even in the matters of the Serbian-Orthodox Church. The provisions of the Berlin congress, the Davičo family background and the need of Serbian bureaucracy for capable and educated men, have all contributed to the rise of this Serbian Jewish diplomat in less than two decades after the emancipation of Jews in Serbia.

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Introduction

The emancipation of Jews in Serbia was a result of foreign intervention of the Great Powers in the 1878 Berlin Congress. The recognition of the State's independence was, in fact, bound to the recognition of civil and political rights to religious minorities and thus, also, to the Jews. Yet, even before the Treaty of Berlin the juridical status of the Serbian Jews fluctuated greatly. During the First Serbian Uprising (1804-1813) Jews were treated the same way as the Muslims (or “Turks”). The insurgent Serbs were overwhelmingly peasants and once in revolt, their wrath fell upon all city-dwellers as well as on the

infidels. Both Muslims and Jews were killed, their goods were plundered and even some cases of forceful conversion were registered.¹ However, already during the 1815 Second Uprising and the following reign of Prince Miloš Obrenović² the attitude towards Jews changed dramatically. The new Serbian leader took upon himself the exclusive right to judge in any civil or criminal cases in which the Jews were involved and the protection of the Prince was guaranteed to all Jews.³

The Davičo Family as Court Jews

The only comprehensive work on the Davičo family is the 1992 article by Milica Mihailović, the first curator and founder of the Jewish Historical Museum in Belgrade.⁴ Mihailović already called the first Davičos “Court Jews” without discussing the term itself and how it could be applied in the Serbian case. Indeed, within the history of Court Jews, the Davičo family appears rather late, in the early 19th century. Furthermore they are situated on the border of Central Europe and outside of the Germanic world.⁵ The Davičos were the Serbian branch of the Haim family that fled Belgrade during the First Serbian Uprising and settled partially in Zemun (Semelin) and Vienna, and partially in Belgrade. Of the Habsburg branch, the most important member was probably Leon Israel Haim (?-1887) who was the president of the Jewish Sephardic community in Vienna.⁶ The Belgrade branch of the family remained Ottoman subjects and spoke fluently both Yiddish and Ladino (Judeo-Spanish).⁷

Between 1815 and 1839 Serbia was even more than an absolutist state. It was a vassal territory of the Ottoman Empire and its ruler, Miloš Obrenović, governed like a pasha of the late Ottoman period. The founder of the Davičo family, David (behor) Hajim, known as Davičo (c.1780-c.1860) was a business partner of Prince Miloš, providing the ruler with credit and luxury goods from Vienna and providing the Serbian army with guns and ammunition. In 1835, the old Davičo had seemingly saved the Prince's life,

¹ Bogumil Hrabak, *Jevreji u Beogradu do sticanja ravnopravnosti (1878)* [The Jews of Belgrade until the obtainment of equality] (Belgrade: Srpski genealoški centar, 2009), 225-247.

² Miloš Obrenović (1780-1860) Leader of the Serbs (Knjaz) 1815-1830. Prince (Knjaz) 1830-1839, formally recognized by the Porte; deposed in 1839, returns to the throne in 1858-60.

³ Carole Fink, “Defending the Rights of Others:” *The Great Powers, the Jews, and International Minority Protection, 1878-1938* (Cambridge: CUP, 2004), 25-26. Esther Benbassa and Aron Rodrigue, *Histoire de Juifs séphardes. De Tolède à Salonique*, (Paris: Seuil, 2002; Torino: Giulio Einaudi editore, 2004), 169-170.

⁴ Milica Mihajlović, “Dva veka porodice Hajim-Davičo u Beogradu” [Two Hundred Years of the Hajim-Davičo Family in Belgrade], *Zbornik – Jevrejski istorijski muzej* (1992), 249-276.

⁵ *Hofjuden – Ökonomie und Interkulturalität Die jüdische Wirtschaftselite im 18. Jahrhundert*, eds., Rotraud Ries, J. Friedrich Battenberg, (Hamburg: Christians Verlag, 2002), 11-39.

⁶ Milica Mihajlović, “Dva veka,” 251.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 253.

warning him of an assassination plot set up by the Pasha of Belgrade.⁸ The good relations between Davičo and Miloš, also influenced the overall Jewish culture in Serbia. In 1837, only six years after the establishment of the Serbian state printing-press, set of Jewish fonts were bought starting a printing activity that would last throughout the 19th century.⁹ David Haim's, son Haim (behor Haim David) Davičo (1800-1869), inherited the family business and continued to work even after Prince Miloš's downfall in 1839, yet mostly in Vienna.¹⁰ The deposition of the first ruler of the Obrenović dynasty was, however, not only a setback for the Davičo family but also, more generically, for the position of Jews in Serbia. By 1846 the Jews were banned from the interior of the country and could own real estate or engage commerce only in Belgrade. Within this new context, most of the Serbian Jews did not face physical threats but were driven to a state of extreme poverty and were concentrated in the capital.¹¹ Even within this setting the Davičo family managed to retain a certain degree of prosperity maintaining commercial relations between Belgrade, Vienna and Istanbul, running a few shops and taverns in the Serbian capital and working in the business of money exchange (*saraf*). Samuilo Davičo (1832-1911), son of Haim Davičo was himself a tradesman and was elected several times as the president of the Belgrade Sephardic Jewish community. By 1890, in Belgrade, out of 54.250 inhabitants, 2,599 were Jews, representing roughly half of the country's Jewish population.¹²

Hajim Samuilo Davičo, the grand-grandson of David behor Hajim-Davičo,¹³ was the first of the family to enter Serbian civil service. Hajim's literary, and maybe even

⁸ Bogumil Hrabak, *Jevreji u Beogradu*, 287. Milica Mihajlović, "Dva veka," 249-276.

⁹ Jennie Lebel (Ženi Lebl), *Jevrejske knjige štampane u Beogradu 1837-1905* [Jewish books printed in Belgrade] (Gornji Milanovac: Dečije novine, 1990).

¹⁰ Milica Mihajlović, "Dva veka," 263-266.

¹¹ The only known episode of violence against Jews in modern Serbia (up to 1914) was the so-called Šabac pogrom, in January 1865 when two Jews got murdered, whereas in April of the same year a sixteen year-old girl was baptized by force. Harriet Pass Freidenreich, *The Jews of Yugoslavia. A Quest for Community* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1979), 31. Minna Rozen, *The Last Ottoman Century and Beyond: The Jews of Turkey and the Balkans 1808-1945*, vol. I (Tel Aviv: The Goldstein-Goren Diaspora Research Center, Tel Aviv University, 2005), 183-184. Jennie Lebel, *The Evolution of the Serbian State and the Struggle of Serbian Jewry for Equal Rights*, ed. Minna Rozen, *The Last Ottoman Century and Beyond*, vol. II (Tel Aviv: The Goldstein-Goren Diaspora Research Center, Tel Aviv University, 2002), 45-65.

¹² Harriet Pass Freidenreich, *The Jews of Yugoslavia*, 33. Milan Ristović, "Belgrado, una capitale sul confine ('Ah, ma avreste dovuto vederla al tempo dei turchi?)" eds. Marco Dogo, Amando Pitassio, *Città dei Balcani, Città d'Europa. Studi sullo sviluppo urbano nelle capitali post-ottomane* (Lecce: Argo, 2008), 89-117.

¹³ Homonymy was very extended in the Davičo family as the eldest son of David behor Hajim-Davičo was called Hajim behor David Davičo and his youngest son was also named David Hajim. Finally, Hajim S. Davičo was the son of Samuilo Davičo and the grandson of Hajim behor David-Davičo. This situation has led to much confusion in historiography as even the *Encyclopedia Judaica*, (2nd ed., Vol. 5, 444) attributes to

political, mentor was Stojan Novaković, a leading figure of Serbian intellectual and political life of the late 19th and early 20th century.¹⁴ Novaković was Davičo's professor in the lyceum (*gimnazija*) and had encouraged his talented student to publish prose writings. In fact, Davičo's final bibliography was almost as abundant as that of his mentor, although maybe not of equal quality. Hajim Davičo wrote on a wide variety of subjects including theatre reviews, the transcription of Belgrade Jewish folk tales and songs, current politics, commerce and literature and translated, mostly from Spanish. Davičo's works were published in the most important Serbian journals and periodicals, be it in Serbia (*Otadžbina*, *Videlo*, *Trgovinski glasnik*), Southern Hungary (*Brankovo kolo*) or Bosnia (*Bosanska vila*, *Zora*). After finishing the lyceum, Davičo enrolled in law studies at the Belgrade's *Grande école* (*Velika škola*) but entered the civil service before graduating, since, at the time, Jews could still not become lawyers. In the following years he had worked in the Justice, Finance and Education Ministries and served in the Serbian consulate in Budapest, where he married his wife, Lela, probably of Ashkenazi origin.¹⁵

Hajim Davičo most certainly was not the first Serbian diplomat of Jewish origin, but he was the first Serbian Jew to become a professional diplomat. It must be observed that the organization of the Serbian consular representations and the emancipation of the Jews in Serbia were both the product of the 1878 Berlin Treaty, which gave the country its independence and the local Jews equal rights. The first Serbian consul in Trieste (1884-1888) was a Triestine Jew, Salomon Kabiljo but, during his mandate, the consulate was an honorary one and Kabiljo continued to exercise his profession as merchant.¹⁶ Some ten years younger than Davičo was Pavle Marinković (1866-1925) who had an even more prominent career. Marinković served in the Serbian consulates of St. Petersburg and Athens (1895-1898) and rose to become the Minister of Education and Religious affairs in 1900-1901, becoming, also, one of the authors of the 1901 Constitution. Yet,

Hajim S. Davičo (1854-1918), the author of Jewish short stories, the business partnership with Prince Miloš Obrenović (1780-1860). Mihajlović, "Dva veka," 272.

¹⁴ Stojan Novaković (1842-1915) was historian, philologist and politician. He was twice the Serbian Prime minister (1895-'96; February-October 1909), ambassador in Istanbul and St. Petersburg, and minister in various governments of the Progressive Party (*Napredna stranka*). One of the first members of the Serbian Academy of Sciences, Novaković was the author of some 500 bibliographical units, be it books or articles, mainly in the field of Serbian Medieval history and literary history.

¹⁵ Mihajlo B. Milošević, "Hajim S. Davičo (1854-1918)," *Jevrejski Almanah* (1965-1967), 129-135. Mihajlović, "Dva veka," 268. Biljana Sljivic-Simsic, "Women in Life and Fiction at the Turn of the Century (1884-1914)," *Serbian Studies*, 7/2 (1993): 106-122.

¹⁶ Đorđe Lopičić, *Konzularni odnosi Srbije (1804-1918)*. [The consular relations of Serbia] (Belgrade: Zavod za udžbenike, 2007), 202-204.

though his mother, Velika Klajn, was Jewish, Pavle Marinković was of Christian-Orthodox faith, as was his father Dimitrije.¹⁷

In 1893 Davičo published his first book of Jewish stories entitled *From the Jalija (Sa Jalije)*, the old Belgrade Jewish neighbourhood (*mahala*).¹⁸ As the literary historian Predrag Palavestra has observed, these were probably the first works of fiction to describe, not only the Jews of Belgrade but also the Serbian capital.¹⁹ The plot of these stories, as in most of Davičo's writings, is rather naïve, and the changes that happen in the characters are seldom thoroughly motivated. Furthermore, the abundance of ethnographic material, and the observations on the life in Jalija, at times, depart from the main plot, leaving many loose ends. At the end of each story, these lateral plots are always resolved, *ex machina*, with a wedding. All three stories bear the name of the main female character (*Naumi, Luna, Perla*) and all three are, essentially, love stories, whereas only the first (*Naumi*) ends tragically. Yet, *Sa Jalije* is an incredibly interesting read, not only for a historian or an ethnologist. Descriptions of witches (*vidalonga*) and other unholy spirits are intertwined with quotations of *ladino* poems and, especially, with the description of the local *cousine* and the local kitchens. Kosher is, of course, an essential element of the Jewish religion, but in Davičo, food also connects the inhabitants of Jalija with the Serbian national cause:

“The writer of these images humbly admits that his words are too feeble to describe you, oh glorious kitchen of Jalija! As if you were a University, you have formed generations of honest men, filled with faith in the God of justice, that, in the bloody days of Belgrade, have embraced the struggle of the Serbian hero Miloš against Hagar's bloodthirsty breed.”²⁰

For Davičo, Jalija is, above all, the site of nostalgia.²¹ The author gives an almost timeless character to his stories, and to the Jewish quarter, and even when the story is set in a

¹⁷ *Znameniti Jevreji Srbije. Biografski leksikon*, ed. Aleksandar Gaon, [The Important Jews of Serbia. A Biographic Lexicon] (Belgrade: Savez jevrejskih opština Srbije, 2011), 149-150.

¹⁸ At the time of the writing of this text, the first edition of *Sa Jalije* was not accessible in any of the Belgrade's major libraries. Thus, all the quotations will refer to the second, recent edition of the book: Hajim S. Davičo, *Priče sa Jalije*, ed. Vasa Pavković (Belgrade: Centar za stvaralaštvo mladih, 2000).

¹⁹ Predrag Palavestra, *Jevrejski pisci u srpskoj književnosti* [Jewish Writers in Serbian Literature] (Belgrade: Institut za književnost i umetnost, 1998), 87-91.

²⁰ Hajim S. Davičo, *Priče sa Jalije*, 69.

²¹ Although the author never mentions it, at the time the publication of these stories, the Jalija Hajim Davičo was born in already ceased to exist. In 1867-'68 the whole old part of Belgrade underwent heavy reconstruction, transforming the city's three *mahale* (the Serbian, the Muslim and the Jewish quarters) into a single Central-European urbanistic whole. Of course, similar transformations were happening throughout 19th century Europe, in Rome, Prague, Firenze and other cities. Divna Đurić-Zamolo, “Stara jevrejska četvrt i Jevrejska ulica u Beogradu” [The Old Jewish Quarter and the Jewish Street in Belgrade], *Jevrejski Almanah*

specific historical period (*Perla*) it retains certain qualities of a fairy-tale. Contrary to what might be expected, the female characters are rarely motors of change. Speaking against male predominance in the Belgrade Jewish society, Davičo writes:

“The oriental male despotism and jealousy cannot stand female company in public. The more men believe in the dogma of female modesty and virtuousness, the more cruel they are to women in everyday life.”²²

Yet his female characters are mostly dreamy, beautiful and desperately in love. Otherwise, if they are older, they all seem to be very *tachlis* about the household. The driving factors of social change in *From the Jalija* are men, the fiancés or husbands of the leading female characters. Thus, David in *Naumi*, reads the Old Testament in the 1865 Serbian translation, writes down the songs sung by the old *tija*'s, and finishes as a soldier in the Serbian army, whereas Andžel, in *Luna*, tries to learn Serbian to find a better job. In the background of almost all the Jewish stories written by Hajim Davičo is, however, the conflict within the opposing factions in *Jalija*. Davičo does not name these factions but they could reflect both the Ashkenazi/Sephardim divide in the Belgrade community, judging by the surnames of the characters, or the orthodox/non-orthodox division judging by the ideas exposed.²³ In *Buena*, a short story published in 1913, Davičo centres the conflict on the problem of school discipline and calls one faction *batinaši* (the rod-beaters) and the other *tikvani* (pumpkin-heads) though here the names of the factions are purely contextual to the conflict. The rod-beaters are those in favour of corporal punishment of students, whereas the pumpkin-heads are those who would prefer their children to remain less educated rather than treating them with too much severity. Be as it may, in all the stories Davičo explicitly holds the side of those who are not too strict in the application of religious norms and of discipline in general. Thus, one of his best villain characters is described in the following terms:

“Ćir Čelebon was uneducated, but he masked his lack of knowledge by pedantry and by fanatical orthodoxy, and these things absorbed his thoughts so much that he started speaking with disgust and with poisonous hatred against all those who did not consider the Jewish teachings as a dead pond but as big river that runs into the sea of mankind.

(1965-1967), 41-76. Ljiljana Blagojević, “La regolazione urbana di Belgrado nel 1867: traccia contro cancellazione,” in *Città dei Balcani, Città d'Europa. Studi sullo sviluppo urbano nelle capitali post-ottomane*, eds. Marco Dogo, Amando Pitassio (Lecce: Argo, 2008), 161-180; Stefano Caviglia, *Alla scoperta della Roma ebraica. La storia, i luoghi, la vita della più antica comunità della diaspora*, (Napoli: Intra Moenia, 2013).

²² Hajim S. Davičo, *Priče sa Jalije*, 50.

²³ Up to date, we lack significant literary analysis of these aspects of Davičo's prose in literary history and criticism.

Ćir Čelebon was a widower. People say it was his bad temper that drove his delicate and silent wife into the grave.”²⁴

Thus in all of his Jewish writings, Davičo demonstrated a very heavy instance towards acculturation and integration of Jews, though mostly in the linguistic aspect. This tendency, was coupled by his disdain towards strict orthodoxy, certainly demonstrate the progressist attitude. His protagonists, though conserving their Jewish identity have to embrace the nation-state in order to elevate themselves socially. It is interesting to observe that only in the case of old Čelebon, Davičo uses the title Ćir, similar to the Serbian Kir, probably derived from Κύριος (lord). In 1837, the playwright Jovan Sterija Popović has staged for the first time one of his best-known comedies, “Kir Janja,” about a stingy old man of Greek origin. Thus, Davičo’s short story might be one of the first cases in Serbian literature where Jew is a negative character, even if only in a all-Jewish setting. In any case, the insistence on linguistic assimilation, the opening towards female social emancipation, the attitude against the strict observance of religious norms and the appearance of anti-Jewish stereotypes have all probably contributed to a vehement reaction of anonymous Belgrade Jews against the author of *Sa Jalije*. Though the letter was addressed to the Serbian government, and is still conserved in the private fund of the then Prime Minister Vladan Đorđević, it is clearly directed against Davičo. The letter did not address any particular issues but accused Davičo of atheism and of exposing the Jewish community to ridicule. The letter ended with quite a serious threat.

“In the end, you should know that we will not bear offences silently and that we will persecute you by all means, even in the press. We will beat you up so that the government will see that those who are not loyal to God and to their faith cannot be loyal to the government. You should be aware by now that you have committed your misdeeds in the wrong moment, and that what you have done will cost you your life. You malicious fool, you cosmopolitan scum (*obrazino svetska*)! Many have done as you have, but they have caused their own ruin, while God’s commandments remain unchangeable. So it will be with you, you will pay with your life, while the commandments of our God will remain sturdy as a rock. Amen.”²⁵

In the following five years, until his diplomatic mission in Trieste, Davičo remained silent in the Serbian public life. It is most probable that these intimidations had quite a harsh effect on Hajim Davičo as a person, though it is unlikely that his appointment as a consul had anything to do with this affair.²⁶ It is true, however, that after 1897, Hajim

²⁴ Hajim S. Davičo, *Priče sa Jalije*, 49.

²⁵ Zaveštanje Vladana Đorđevića (Fund Vladan Đorđević), file 121, Arhiv Srbije (Archive of Serbia), Belgrade.

²⁶ Predrag Palavestra, *Jevrejski pisci*, 90; Mihajlović, “Dva veka,” 268.

Davičo did not return to live in Serbia. After his 1897-1900 service in Trieste he got retired and went to live in Munich and Geneva. The author of this essay has not been able to conduct further analysis of when did Hajim Davičo join freemasonry,²⁷ but it is possible that it was in the period after the publication of *Sa Jalije*. The threatening letter does not seem to address Davičo as someone who is no longer a Jew but as a renegade from the Jewish community.

The Jewish Civil Servant and a Peculiar Christian-Orthodox Community: Hajim Davičo in Trieste

Though not a capital, *fin-de-siècle* Trieste was roughly three times larger than Belgrade, as it had 155.471 inhabitants in 1890 and 176.383 by 1900. The Adriatic city had an exponential growth in the 18th and, especially, 19th century as it was granted the status of free port by Emperor Charles VI in 1719. Trieste was thus envisaged by the Habsburgs to represent an aggressive competition to Venice and, later on, Vienna's main outlet to the sea. The 1719 patent was, indeed intended to be temporary but it was confirmed by the new 1725 patents. With these juridical acts, persons of "any nation, condition, and religion" were invited to move to Trieste and engage commerce. Trade was exceptionally profitable with the Ottoman empire as the 1718 Treaty of Passarowitz secured low customs duties with the territories of the Sublime Porte. The early 19th century saw the development of various insurance groups, some of which still exist, such as Assicurazioni Generali (1831) and Riunione Adriatica di Sicurtà (1838). By 1857 the city was connected to the Habsburg railroad system promoting a new boom in the city during the 1860's.²⁸ The port-city was now engaged in a global system of trade including import of grain from the Americas and the exportation of wood to Egypt, while, in the same time naval construction became an important local industry. It is in the 1860's that the number of Jews in Trieste reaches its highest point around 4-5.000 individuals, remaining constant through the rest of the century.²⁹

Davičo's reports from the Serbian consulate in Trieste were, of course, official documents from which we do not see any particular attachment to Jewish identity or religion. Actually, we can observe the Serbian consul attending service in the Serbian

²⁷ Mihajlović, "Dva veka," 268

²⁸ Lois C. Dubin, *The Port Jews of Trieste. Absolutist Politics and Enlightenment Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press 1999), 1-32; Roberto Finzi "Trieste perché," in *Storia economica e sociale di Trieste*, eds. Roberto Finzi, Giovanni Panjek, vol. I (Trieste: LINT editoriale, 2001), 13-67.

²⁹ Tullia Catalan, *La Comunità ebraica di Trieste (1781-1914). Politica, società e cultura* (Trieste: LINT editoriale, 2000), 60.

Christian-orthodox church fairly regularly.³⁰ In these writings, there is seemingly no echo of the Dreyfus affair, whereas Davičo adopted an openly negative attitude towards Italians and Jews from Trieste:

“All the most important bankers and financial operators in Trieste are *Jews*. Their social influence has weakened though, with the decline of house of Morpurgo the former president of the Austrian “Lloyd.” In the old days, this house competed in luxury and abundance with the most wealthy European aristocracy. Though the Jews do not have a predominant role in the local salons, and though the local patrician “casino vecchio”³¹ does not admit Jews among its members, they dominate the *public life* of Trieste. The Diet, the city council and all the financial, charity, (Italian) patriotic and even Catholic foundations and institutions are in their hands. The Jews have a complete monopoly over the local press and have on their side all the intelligentsia: medical doctors, lawyers, professors, artists etc. The Jews run all the exclusive clubs for Italians; they bring Italian patriots to Trieste, organize conferences and theatre plays. Until few years ago, Italian troupes were banned from Trieste because their theatre plays always transform themselves into political rallies. Last but not least, they manage to place their candidates for the Viennese parliament, for the Diet i.e. the city council. In other words the Italians of Trieste are Jews that lead around 20.000 hungry and miserable workers and the whole servile mass of clerks working for the municipality and the other local institutions.”³²

It is, of course, true, that the Jews of Trieste had very developed pro-Italian sympathies, they have almost unanimously gave their votes to the (Italian) Liberal-National party. One of the leaders of Triestine liberals was Felice Venezian, of Jewish origin, who had maintained friendly contacts with many Jews and even with the rabbi Sabato Rafaele Melli.³³ Finally, many Jews of Trieste were filed as *irredentisti* by the local police, a fact that even conditioned the functioning of the local Jewish community.³⁴ Yet, Davičo’s stand on the Triestine Jews resembled much more the rising antisemitic campaign lead in those same years by the Social-Christian League and other conservative, but minority

³⁰ Hajim Davičo to Đorđe Simić, March 4, 1897, *Arhiv Srbije /Archivio della Serbia. Generalni konzulat Kraljevine Srbije u Trstu 1884-1914/Consolato Generale del Regno di Serbia a Trieste 1884-1894*, (Belgrade: Arhiv Srbije, 2009), 31, 130.

³¹ “Casino vecchio” was a club reserved for the Triestine and Habsburg high society in the Adriatic port city. As a partial remnant of the Early Modern estates rationale, this club excluded the Jews, but only informally. It was simply well known in the city that the club would not admit Jewish members and even the richest Jews of Trieste never applied for membership. Tullia Catalan, *La Comunità ebraica di Trieste*, 223-224. Marina Cataruzza, “Tra logica cetuale e società borghese: il ‘casino vecchio’ di Trieste (1815-1867),” *Quaderni storici*, 26/2 (1991): 435-438.

³² Hajim Davičo to Vladan Đorđević, February 28, 1898, *Arhiv Srbije*, 103, 251. All the italics are from the original text.

³³ Tullia Catalan, *La Comunità ebraica di Trieste*, 234.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 186.

elements of the Triestine society. Yet, antisemitism was also embraced by the Slovene-Triestine “Novi List” and “Zorja” periodicals as a mobilisation tool against the anti-Slav Liberal-Nationals.³⁵

In all of the dispatches, Hajim Davičo took a very strong pro-Slavic stand, not only towards the Serbs of Trieste but also toward the Slovenes and Croats who lived in the Upper Adriatic. The already quoted report about the Italians and the Jews continues with the following words:

“Luckily, the Triestine suburbs and the surrounding area are compactly inhabited by Slavs, who are filled with racial and religious hatred toward these usurpers of public rights.³⁶ In any given moment, at a simple wink of the state authorities, the Slavs could destroy all this histrionic urban Italian hood (*varoška izveštačena talijanština*).”³⁷

There are several explanations for this behaviour towards the minorities of Trieste. First of all, Davičo was probably influenced by anti-Jewish attitudes of the Triestine Slavs, or he might have tried to impress his superiors in Belgrade. Furthermore, the years of Davičo’s service in Trieste coincided with a very pro-Austrian turn in Serbian foreign policy. In 1897, the same year Davičo came to the North Adriatic port-city, king Aleksandar Obrenović made a coup in Serbia, abolishing the constitution and setting up a personal regime which was pro-Austrian and anti-Russian in its political outlook. Yet this stand in foreign affairs underlined the precarious position of the Obrenović dynasty. In the country the major party, the Radicals, were decisively pro-Russian in their political orientation and so was the rival Karađorđević dynasty in exile. The independent principality of Montenegro was also traditionally and very strongly pro-Russian, and though poorer and smaller than Serbia, in the late 19th century it launched an intensive nationalistic campaign among the Serbs of Bosnia and Dalmatia in favour of the Montenegrine Petrović-Njegoš and the Serbian Karađorđević dynasties and against the Obrenovići. Furthermore, in 1883 Petar, the first in the line of succession in the Karađorđević dynasty, had married Zorka Petrović-Njegoš the eldest daughter of prince Nikola I (prince 1860-1910, king 1910-1918). In 1896, Zorka’s younger sister, Elena married the Italian king Vittorio Emanuele III thereby giving a rather negative image of Italy within the establishment of Serbia. Within this context, it is important to mention that the Serbs of Trieste were traditionally more in contact with Montenegro than with Serbia proper. Not only did many of the better-off families of the local Serbs come from Montenegro or the bordering Herzegovina,³⁸ but they had family ties with the Petrović-

³⁵ Ibid., 272.

³⁶ Davičo refers to the Italians and the Jews.

³⁷ Tullia Catalan, *La Comunità ebraica di Trieste*, 103, 251.

³⁸ Marco Dogo, *Profitto e devozione. La comunità serbo-illirica di Trieste 1748-1908* (Trieste: Lint editore, 2000).

Njegoš family. In 1855, the Montenegrine prince Danilo I, married a wealthy Triestine bourgeois Serb Darinka Kvekić.³⁹

By the late 19th century, the Serbian-Orthodox community in Trieste was undergoing a process of radical, though maybe not obvious, transformation from a merely religious community of Christian-Orthodox Slavs into a religious-national community of Serbs. The Christian-Orthodox community in Trieste was born in 1751, essentially as a Greek community which had obtained the right to build a church in the city directly from Maria Theresa. Yet, very soon, the Christian-Orthodox flock of Slavic origin started to grow in numbers.⁴⁰ In 1759 the first Serbian priest arrived in the North Adriatic port and ten years later, the Dowager Empress had ordered that in the Orthodox church of Trieste there should always be two priests, one Greek and the other “Illirian.”⁴¹ Yet this decision marked only the beginning of the conflict between Serbs and Greeks. Since the Orthodox liturgy admits only one altar in a church, struggle arose among the two linguistic communities who would have the service on what days. Furthermore, the Serbs became increasingly wary that the Greek parson would impose even a second Greek priest. Thus, in 1771 the Habsburg authorities established the right of the confirmation of the priest by the Confraternity which was constituted by all the paying members of the Orthodox flock in the city.⁴² Although highly practical, this solution had created an absolute precedent within the Christian-Orthodox world as, with the 1772 and the 1793 Statutes, the Confraternity gained the right to confirm or refute the new priest sent by the bishop.⁴³ The priest’s trial period lasted nominally only one year, but the Confraternity continued to exercise control over the priests morality even after that date. The first half of the 19th century was thus dominated by the struggle between the Serbian community of Trieste with the archbishopric of Karlowitz over the appointments of the parson and the priest of Trieste. De facto, the Serbs of Trieste used their right not only as a right of confirmation of the new priest but also to influence the archbishop himself on the election of the new priest. In the second half of the century, the arrival of two long-living and well-liked priests Savatija Knežević (parson, 1865-1900) and Bogoljub Toponarski (priest 1870-1897), meant at least a truce in the struggle

³⁹ Though prince Nikola directly succeeded Danilo on the throne of Montenegro, he was from the lateral branch of the Petrović-Njegoš family. Danilo and Darinka had only one daughter, Olga, before Danilo got killed in Kotor (Cattaro) in 1860. Miodrag Al. Purković, *Istorija Srpske pravoslavne crkvene opštine u Trstu*, [The History of the Serbian Orthodox church community in Trieste], (Trieste: Comunità Religiosa Serbo Ortodossa di Trieste, 1960), 127-129.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 4.

⁴¹ Ibid., 23-30.

⁴² Ibid., 33.

⁴³ This solution was incorporated in all the later Statutes of the community even after the Greeks left the church of St. Spiridion in 1781 to build a new church of St. Nicholas the following year. Ibid., 53-67.

between the Serbian community of Trieste and its diocese.⁴⁴ Yet the second half of the 19th century was also the time of the emergence of the nationalist ideas among the Triestine Serbs. In 1871, the wealthy merchant Jovo Škuljević proposed to the Board (*odbor*)⁴⁵ that the language of the official records of that body be held in Serbian instead of Italian. The proposal was not accepted until 1892 and the last Board report written in Italian is from 1897.⁴⁶ The name of the community was changed from “Comunità Greco-Ilirica” (Greek-Illyrian community) to “Comunità Serbo-Orientale” (Serbian-Oriental) in 1893, though a board with the new name was placed on the church already one year earlier.

A sign of the increasing national identification of the Serbian-Orthodox community of Trieste is certainly the celebration of the day of the national saint, St. Sava, a 13th century Serbian prince-monk that granted autocephaly for the medieval Serbian Church and thus grounded Christian religion in Serbian history. In Trieste, these celebrations started only in 1888, but even ten years later, in 1898, Hajim Davičo still lamented that, in Trieste, this feast did not have the solemnly character it should have:

“The St. Sava Day, feast of the educator of all Serbs, has, in all the areas where the Serbs live, be it on the Adriatic Coast, be it in the newly occupied lands,⁴⁷ a very high importance. It is the day when the Serbs are filled with the love for their brethren. And, what is most important, the love for St. Sava is equally spread among Serbs of all religions,⁴⁸ and the consciousness of the unity of the Serbian tribe never pulsates harder than on that day.

Thus, the celebrations of the Day of St. Sava can be taken as a precise measure of the development of the Serbian national consciousness, but also of its decline. The latter is, alas, especially true among the Serbs of Trieste. “Here, January 14th, the Saint Sava Day passes as all the other religious feasts, and does not leave a trace, it does not awaken patriotic sentiment. It is true that the new priest Mr Leontije Kurtović gave a speech in the school hall but, as the members of this religious community did not make any celebration or gathering, as it is in use in all other lands inhabited by the Serbs, so did the good will of the priest remain unnoticed. It was my intention to give a reception that

⁴⁴ Ibid., 133, 147-149.

⁴⁵ *Odbor* (Board) is still the central governing body in the Serbian Orthodox Community of Trieste. It is elected by and from the confraternity (*bratstvo*).

⁴⁶ Ibid., 149.

⁴⁷ Bosnia.

⁴⁸ “Serbs of all religions” may, of course be referred to Jews but it is more likely that Davičo sees at least parts of Catholic Croats and Bosnian Muslims as Serbs.

day for the main local Serbian families but it was thwarted by grief with the news of the death of my cousins [*moga brata i sestre*].”⁴⁹

Thus, Davičo took upon himself the task of developing Serbian national consciousness in Trieste. Seemingly, this competence was neither discouraged nor fostered by the Ministry in Belgrade. In a letter to his predecessor, Marinović, the Ministry required from the consul the most detailed information on the Triestine Serbs but also recommended that his “relations with the community do not give raise to suspicion of the local authorities.”⁵⁰ We do not have any later instructions to Davičo or his predecessors. It is possible that the new Serbian-Austrian closeness gave the consul in Trieste a wider space for manoeuvre. It is also possible that Hajim Davičo’s character made him simply more incisive. The consular service of Hajim Davičo in Trieste was characterized by rather heavy intervention in the life of the local Serbian religious community.

Only a few months after his arrival in Trieste, Davičo started interfering with local ecclesiastic matters. Having observed, during his “frequent visits to the Serbian church”⁵¹ that in St. Spiridon, the liturgical songs were mostly from Russian composers, Davičo urged the Ministry to send the religious compositions of Serbian authors such as Stevan Mokranjac or Kornelije Stanković.⁵² Having accomplished this first task with success, Davičo started urging the Ministry to send schoolbooks, readers and catechesis for the pupils of the local Serbian school, and to send editions of the best Serbian fiction to the community library.⁵³ Davičo praised the local Serbs for any sign of patriotism. Thus, in one of his last letters, in May 1900, he wrote with enthusiasm about the local Serbian shopkeepers who put samples of Serbian bonds in their shop-window as a sign of their national belonging.⁵⁴ Yet, Davičo’s attitude towards the Serbs of Trieste is mostly negative. Not only they did not celebrate national saints with enough fervour but they did not even speak Serbian.

“Unfortunately, the indifference of the local Serbs towards the Serbian language is getting ever more worrying, as the older men start dying out and the youngsters marry mostly Italian women. It is true that the Serbian sea captains who live in this city with

⁴⁹ Hajim Davičo to [?], January 31, 1898, *Arhiv Srbije*, 98, 230-231. It is not clear whom does Davičo refer to in this passage. The Serbian “brat i sestra” could refer both to siblings and cousins, but usually siblings. Yet, Hajim’s older brother Benko died in 1913 whereas his sister died in 1870. Thus the passage probably refers to some of Davičo’s cousins, yet we were unable to find out who. Mihajlović, “Dva veka,” 273.

⁵⁰ Foreign Ministry to Marko Marinković, January 14, 1892, *Arhiv Srbije*, 12, 82.

⁵¹ Hajim Davičo to Đorđe Simić, March 4, 1897, *Arhiv Srbije*, 31, 130.

⁵² Hajim Davičo to Đorđe Simić, March 4, 1897, *Arhiv Srbije*, 31, 130.

⁵³ Hajim Davičo to Đorđe Simić, May 10, 1897, *Arhiv Srbije*, 36, 139-140.

⁵⁴ Hajim Davičo to Vladan Đorđević, March 15, 1900, *Arhiv Srbije*, 165, 513.

their families love the Serbian language and use it, as it is used by the sailors of the whole [Eastern Adriatic] coast. Yet we must fear even that their children will not learn Serbian since our books are a sheer rarity in these lands.”⁵⁵

In the following years, Davičo would come to blame the community Board even for the linguistic assimilation of Triestine Serbs, but by September 1897 a very serious conflict arose between the Serbian consul and the confraternity of St. Spiridion. The old priest Bogoljub Toponarski had died leaving an empty see, and on his place Leontije Kurtović was to be called by the Board. Not knowing, or willingly ignoring the peculiar situation of the parish of Trieste, Davičo’s report to Belgrade on the election of the new priest was furious:

“As I have found out, this monk comes from Dalmatia and he was recommended by a certain Opujić, a clerk of the Serbian national railroad. It seems that the local community got very positive reports on this monk from his birthplace because it is more than likely that this Kujundžić⁵⁶ will get accepted. He has already been called and is expected in Trieste any day now.

I would say that, apart from this monk, the community could not get any other priest because the Dalmatian Serbian bishops are unwilling to give the permit to any of their subordinates to come here.

I think that the ecclesiastic and lay press, wherever they are published, should start to treat the question of the church of Trieste in accord, so to convince the members of the local community that they are in sin against the spirit and the Canon law of the Serbian Church, that they vilify the sanctities of the Serbian people and of its Church by humiliating the servants of God by treating them as simple clerks.”⁵⁷

Seemingly Davičo did not expose any formal complaint to the church community, and no trace is left, in the existing documents of the Serbian-Orthodox community in Trieste, of the local dignitaries even mentioning the Serbian consul as a factor in the election of the new priest.⁵⁸ Yet, from the following dispatches we can observe a growing conflict between Davičo and the most important figure in the community of St. Spiridion, Risto Škuljević (1843-1908). It is quite interesting that Davičo’s main opponent on the question of ecclesiastical autonomy was one of the main promoters of the Serbian language use within the community of St. Spiridion. In 1886, within the

⁵⁵ Hajim Davičo to Đorđe Simić, May 10, 1897, *Arhiv Srbije*, 36, 139.

⁵⁶ Here Davičo makes a mistake the monks name is actually Leontije Kurtović, not Kujundžić, as Davičo himself will correct in the following letter. Davičo to Đorđe Simić, September 15, 1897, *Arhiv Srbije*, 70, 193.

⁵⁷ Hajim Davičo to Đorđe Simić, September 7, 1897, *Arhiv Srbije*, 70, 192.

⁵⁸ “Sveštenik – Upraznjeno mesto; izbor jeromonaha Leontija Kurtovića” [Priest – the empty position; election of the monk Leontije Kurtović], 1897, Section VI, 47, 47, 50-55, 71, Archives of the Serbian Orthodox Church Community in Trieste, Trieste.

Board, Risto repeated the request already put forward by his father in 1871, that the records be kept in Serbian.⁵⁹ Furthermore, Risto Škuljević was one of the main benefactors of the church of St. Spiridion and it is estimated that the total value of his gifts was around 100.000 Austrian crowns.⁶⁰ Davičo acknowledges the generosity of Škuljević by calling him “ktitor” (main donator) of St. Spiridion, but also characterizes the wealthy merchant as being “extremely short-tempered”⁶¹. It must be remembered that the conflict on the church autonomy developed on top of an already existing anti-Obrenović animosity in the Serbian community of Trieste. In a report regarding a civil decoration⁶² conferred to the president of the Serbian-Orthodox community in Trieste, Sima Malinović, Davičo described the following attitude towards the Serbian government:

“It is my duty to inform you that there are a few Serbs in Trieste who are systematically trying to undermine the importance of Serbian medals and to kill the pride and the happiness in the commended personalities. Such is the case of Mr Milinović who has been told to refuse this medal because he, as a president of a religious community, deserved, at least a class III honour.⁶³ Of course, this brilliant old man refused to act upon such provocations.

The only ones who truly appreciate Serbian honours are the seafarers and ship captains, who have a high sense of chivalry and patriotism. The other local Serbs know their country only from a strictly political-party point of view and while they harbour sympathy to some politicians they are full of prejudice towards the Serbian Royal House and they don't have neither the patriotic understanding nor the healthy ambition for acquiring Serbian honours.”⁶⁴

We do not know whether Škuljević was in the afore mentioned group of Serbs that acted against the acceptance of the medal by Milinović, but by August 1898 the Triestine magnate had acted openly against the House of Obrenović, as he had openly opposed the religious celebrations for the birthday of King Aleksandar. As Davičo puts it:

“It was by the middle of the last month that I paid a visit to the president of the local church community, Mr Sima Milinović, in order to reach an agreement about the celebrations of a mass in honour of His Royal Majesty King Aleksandar. I did so

⁵⁹ Miodrag Al. Purković, *Istorija*, 149.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 182.

⁶¹ Hajim Davičo to Vladan Đorđević, February 15, 1898, *Arhiv Srbije*, 101:241.

⁶² Davičo was very keen on conferring medals and other decorations. In December 1898 he had contacted the British consul Haggart asking for an intervention at the Humane Society in order to confer a medal to a Serbian captain who had saved the life, at sea, of a British subject. John G. Haggard to Foreign Office, December 5, 1898, FO 590/10: 455-456, The National Archives, Kew Gardens, London.

⁶³ He received the Order of Takovo class IV.

⁶⁴ Hajim Davičo to Vladan Đorđević, February 17, 1898, *Arhiv Srbije*, 102, 247-248.

knowing that some scared member of the church Board might make some troubles or obstacles in the last moment, as it had happened last year.⁶⁵ Mr Milinović told me to speak directly to the priests as the local church Board does not make any celebrations for foreign rulers, and does not want to participate in them, whereas the priests are free to celebrate given services on the request of private citizens. Thus, I went to see the priest Leontije Kurtović, who had told me he would be delighted to serve the religious service of thanksgiving, but that he needed to discuss the matter with his superior, Savatije Knežević, who was on a leave, at that time.

Yet, after some ten days, Kurtović not only did not give me any response but had started avoiding me. Thus, with utmost discretion, I tried to find out the reason for the delay and I came to know that Mr Škuljević, a local millionaire and partner of Messrs Aničić, had prohibited the priests to give the thanksgiving mass in honour of His Royal Majesty King Aleksandar, because of 'King Milan who resides in Serbia.'⁶⁶

[...]

Not willing to give a complete victory to Messrs Škuljević and Aničić, I had invited for lunch all the brighter young people of the local Serbian colony, including Mr archimandrite Kiril (Živojin Jovičić) and Mr professor Milovanović from Novi Sad, both of whom were here on a visit, and Messrs priests Knežević and Kurtović. On the very day of August 2nd, I have attended, in my ceremonial uniform, to the mass in the local Serbian church, and there, after the church service, I have gathered the greetings of well-known ship captains, of Ilija Korać from Belgrade, of the president of the Serbian community Mr Milinović and of various other Serbs from different countries.⁶⁷

Thus, by August 1898, in the conflict with the Serbian-Orthodox community of Trieste, Hajim Davičo was losing his battle. In the following two years he had tried the strategy of appeasement in order to regain some influence within the community. According to Davičo himself, the central piece of this new strategy was a short story, entitled *On the Adriatic Sea*, published in Karlowitz (Sremski Karlovci) in 1899.⁶⁸ The stories generic setting in a town on the Adriatic is made more specific by the name of the coffeehouse in which part of the story unfolds, that is, "kod Severnjače" – At the Polar Star. *Caffè Stella Polare* still exists in Trieste, in the same block of houses as the Church of St. Spiridion,

⁶⁵ No such record has survived.

⁶⁶ King Milan Obrenović (b.1854-d.1901; prince 1868-1882; king 1882-1889) had abdicated after a more liberal constitution was introduced by the Radicals. During his reign, the Serbian court was one of the main topics of most European tabloids, due to his problems with queen Natalija, of Romanian origins and of strong Russian sympathies. The two had separated in 1886 giving much scandal. After a certain time spent abroad, Milan returned to Serbia in 1897 and this return was symbolic for the personal rule of his son, king Aleksandar.

⁶⁷ Hajim Davičo to Vladan Đorđević, August 15, 1898, *Arhiv Srbije*, 120, 319-320.

⁶⁸ Hajim Davičo to Vladan Đorđević, December 15, 1899, *Arhiv Srbije*, 159, 491. Hajim Davičo, "Na Jadranskom moru," *Brankovo kolo* 28/V(1899), 866-872, 899-904.

and since the early 19th century it was the gathering-place of the local Serbs, among others.⁶⁹ The ethnographic descriptions in this Davičo's story are rather meagre, when compared from those of the Jalija. The only passage with such ambitions is the one describing a mass in the local church:

“It was Sunday, and the Serbian church was full of people, mostly merchants, who were visiting the city N. for business. Oh my God! But so many different characters were there! The whole Empire of Dušan⁷⁰ could have been read on those faces. Genteel Serbs, handsome Bosnians, Herzegovians with their heavy moustache, the brave Montenegrines, the shapely Dalmatians, and the serious inhabitants of Old Serbia, and a whole range of Serbian figures, mostly from the southern parts of Serbdom. Side by side, they prayed to God.”⁷¹

Again, the plot is rather naïf, revolving around two long-lost friends who had separated when one of them, Stojan, had planned marry an Italian woman. The story starts with the other friend, Simo, arriving to the city N., where Stojan resides, and chatting with the local crowd at the “Polar Star.” Simo is feeling guilt for his chauvinistic anti-Italian beliefs:

“I have left this city full of prejudice, without any hope in the better future of Serbdom, - he told them. I thought that the Italian influence [taljanština] made us weak and that it had dried out the spine of our national consciousness. I thought that all Catholics are spies and enemies of the Serbs. I was desperate, believing that we were morally and materially doomed. This, and many other illusions, oppressed my soul. But I have shaken them off during my last travels and now, as I think of these sad thoughts, it seems as though I was mentally ill.”⁷²

Except for the general benefits of travel, Davičo does not specify where or how Simo had received this catharsis. But whereas Simo's prejudice in general is deemed wrong by the author, in the specific case of Stojan's engagement, Simo was right all along. As we find out a few lines later, Stojan's former fiancé wanted a large sum of money for the engagement and desired that Stojan use his influence so that her bridegroom become a

⁶⁹ Andrija Gavrilović, “Dositije u Trstu 1802-1806” [Dositej Obradović in Trieste], *Godišnjica Nikole Čupića*, XXII (1904), 233-268.

⁷⁰ Dušan Nemanjić (b.1308-d.1355) Serbian medieval king (1331-1345) and Emperor of Serbs, Bulgarians and Greeks (1345-1355). Actually, Emperor Dušan never controlled many of the territories described by Davičo, but in 19th century, “Dušan's Empire” was used as a synonym of all the lands inhabited by the Serbs.

⁷¹ Hajim Davičo, “Na Jadranskom moru,” 899.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 868-869.

baron or a *cavalliere*.⁷³ Thus, Stojan had broken the engagement. Both Stojan and Simo have female relatives who appear in the story as the two friends make peace, and the story ends as the two friends are falling in love with each other's relatives.⁷⁴

On December 15th 1899, Davičo reported to Belgrade:

“Last week, in the local Serbian Orthodox community, elections have been held for the new annual Board. Instead of the old members, who were already elected 8 times consecutively (i.e.: Sima Milinović, Lučić and Knežić), Messrs Škuljević, Kvekić (the brother of the Dalmatian deputy to the Viennese parliament) and Todorović were elected. Judging by these personalities, the new Board brings hope that the Serbian population in this city will be more strongly defended against decay. Many local Serbs are assuring me that my sketch “On the Adriatic sea” published in “Brankovo Kolo” had made a deep impression on the local Serbs and has influenced, somehow, the election.”⁷⁵

Of course, it is impossible to verify such claims, yet two observations can be made on this passage. First of all, though we do not know the exact modalities, the conflict between Davičo and Škuljević seems to have ceased by the end of 1899 as the latter is quoted among those Board members who are capable of bringing new hope for the community of St. Spiridion. Secondly, Davičo was most probably convinced that his short story had made some impact, be it political or literary, as he used the same plot-structure in 1913, to write the last of his Jewish stories, Buena. Yet, in the immediate aftermath, some grudge was still remaining. In his second-last report to Belgrade, Davičo had described the funeral of the parson Savatija Knežević in the following terms:

“In my previous reports I had the honour to inform you that the local Serbian church does not belong to any bishop's diocese⁷⁶ and that it elects its own priests and dismisses them as if they were private clerks. Thus, the late Knežević was not particularly considered and did not have much influence in the community matters. Serbian national consciousness did not get forgotten in this city but the Serbian language has largely fallen into disuse. Furthermore, the late Knežević belonged to the faction that considers Montenegro as the centre of Serbdom and in Serbia, it considers that only Radicals are good patriots. It is also true, however, that he always came to our general consulate to bless our holy water, but he was also among those who made problems about the thanksgiving religious service in the local church, for the birthday of His

⁷³ Ibid., 870. Davičo uses the term *đuvegija*, which, in Serbian tradition, is the man who contracts the marriage for the bride, usually the father or the brother.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 904.

⁷⁵ Hajim Davičo to Vladan Đorđević, December 15, 1899, *Arhiv Srbije*, 159, 491.

⁷⁶ Not entirely true. See p. on the history of the Serbian orthodox community in Trieste.

Royal Highness king Aleksandar. My wife and I have assisted the requiem in the church, but for the reasons quoted above I have not sent a wreath on the grave.”⁷⁷

Upon his arrival in Trieste in 1897, Hajim Davičo came in contact with a very peculiar Serb-Orthodox community he seemingly refused to understand. It is quite curious that, at least in the aspect of the flock’s capability to elect and dispose of their own spiritual leader, the community of St. Spiridion might have resembled more a synagogue than a traditional Christian-Orthodox church. Of course, no such parallel is given by Davičo in his dispatches to Belgrade. As Davičo himself acknowledges in this last dispatch, the nationalism of the Serbs of Trieste had taken a relatively different form than the nationalism fostered by Belgrade. Instead of religious hierarchy and linguistic unity, the flock of St. Spiridion fostered community participation accompanied with a more abstract sense of national belonging. Again, no parallel with the Jews was made by the Serbian consul. Unlike his predecessor, consul Marinović, who considered the question of the Serbian church in Trieste outside his area of competence,⁷⁸ Davičo took a very aggressive stance against the local ecclesiastic autonomy. There is no evidence that, at any point, Hajim Davičo had converted to Christianity, nor does any trace of *herem* against him exist in the Archives of the Jewish community in Belgrade⁷⁹, yet during his mission in the North Adriatic he acted as if he were of Serbian-Orthodox faith and seemingly his interlocutors accepted him as such. Hajim Davičo was a zealous diplomat that had sent his dispatches to Belgrade roughly once in every 8 days (7,934 days) whereas the mean of dispatches of both his predecessor and his successor are considerably higher.⁸⁰ Yet, when he presents his victory to Belgrade in the 1899 election of the Board of St. Spiridion, and even in the dispatch on the funeral of Savatija Knežević one cannot help but notice that it was Davičo’s own stand that had become considerably softer. On the long run, his

⁷⁷ Hajim Davičo to Vukašin Petrović, June 16, 1900, *Arhiv Srbije*, 173, 538.

⁷⁸ Marko Marinković to Mihajlo Đorđević, January 17, 1892, *Arhiv Srbije*, 13, 82.

⁷⁹ The Archives of the pre-World War II Jewish community of Belgrade have been looted by the Nazis, intercepted by the Soviets and, after the end of the Soviet regime, are undergoing the process of restitution and cataloguing in the Jewish Historical Museum in Belgrade. See *Nazi-Looted Jewish Archives in Moscow: A Guide to Jewish Historical and Cultural Collections in the Russian State Military Archive*, eds. David E. Fishman, Mark Kupovetsky, Vladimir Kuzelenkov, (Scranton: University of Scranton Press, 2011). Thus, my previous statement is based only on the exam of the two archive inventories of Moscow and Lviv available at the Jewish Historical Museum in Belgrade: ЦДІА УРСР у м. Львов, [Central state Archive of the Ukrainian Socialist Republic in Lviv], *Церковно-шкільна єврейська громада, м. Белград, 1866-1928*, [The religious and school community in Belgrade], Fund 497, and; Російски государственный военный архив, [The Russian State Military Archive] *Еврейская синагогально – просветительная община, г. Белград. 1815-1941гг.* [The community of the Jewish synagogue and school in Belgrade, 1815-1941], Fund1429/k.

⁸⁰ The predecessor, consul Marinović wrote a dispatch roughly three times a year (109, 260) while the successor wrote to Belgrade once in a two and a half months (47, 714). The data is derived from *Arhiv Srbije /Archivio della Serbia. Generalni konzulat Kraljevine Srbije u Trstu 1884-1914/Consolato Generale del Regno di Serbia a Trieste 1884-1894* (Belgrade: Arhiv Srbije, 2009).

actions against the local church autonomy had absolutely no effect. A new Statute of the Serbian-Orthodox Community in Trieste has been proclaimed only in 1950 and even then the autonomy of the community did not get thwarted.⁸¹ In July 1900, after having finished his mandate in Trieste, Hajim Davičo was retired from state service and went to live in Munich.

Retirement: Munich and Geneva

There is considerable disagreement among scholars on the functions that Hajim Davičo had in Munich. Eli Finci states that Davičo was consul in Munich;⁸² Predrag Palavestra asserts that Davičo was a Serbian trade representative in Germany;⁸³ and Milica Mihailović affirms that Davičo got retired and was then made Head of the Serbian trade mission in the Bavarian capital.⁸⁴ Actually, the state almanacs after the year 1901, give Hajim Davičo only as a retired general consul.⁸⁵ On March 14th, 1903, Aleksandar Z. Jovičić, Head of Section at the Serbian Ministry of Foreign Affairs wrote to the honorary Serbian consul in Munich, Julius Auspitzer a letter ordering the consul to hand over the accountancy books of the Munich consulate to “Haim Davitcho, ehemaligen General-Consul in Trieste,” for inspection.⁸⁶ It was only on June 15th 1910, that Hajim Davičo got appointed as a Trade agent of the Serbian honorary consulate in Munich⁸⁷. But since no dispatch is conserved in the Archive of Serbia even from the consul Auspitzer, no trace of any practical activity seems to be connected with the function of the Serbian Trade agent. Furthermore, in the state almanacs, Davičo continues to be given as a retired consul.⁸⁸ On May 7th 1912 the Trade agency of Munich is transferred to Geneva, and that is where the documentary traces of Hajim Davičo in the Archive of Serbia seem to

⁸¹ Miodrag Al. Purković, *Istorija*, 173-180.

⁸² Eli Finci “Davičo, Hajim,” *Enciklopedija Jugoslavije*, vol. 2 (Zagreb : Leksikografski zavod FNRJ, 1956), 668.

⁸³ Predrag Palavestra, *Jevrejski pisci*, 88.

⁸⁴ Milica Mihailović, “Dva veka,” 268.

⁸⁵ Državna štamparija Kraljevine Srbije [The State press of the Kingdom of Serbia], *Državni kalendar Kraljevine Srbije za godinu 1901, koja je prosta*, [State almanac of the Kingdom of Serbia for the year 1901, which is ordinary] (Belgrade: Državna štamparija Kraljevine Srbije, 1901), 139.

⁸⁶ MID, K, Mh, F II, r.27/914 (Munich, consular, folder I, file 27/914) Arhiv Srbije (Archive of Serbia), Ministarstvo inostranih dela (Ministry of Foreign Affairs), Belgrade.

⁸⁷ MID, K, Mh, F I, r.25/913 (Munich, consular, folder I, file 25/913) Arhiv Srbije (Archive of Serbia), Ministarstvo inostranih dela (Ministry of Foreign Affairs), Belgrade.

⁸⁸ Državna štamparija Kraljevine Srbije [The State press of the Kingdom of Serbia], *Državni kalendar Kraljevine Srbije za godinu 1910, koja je prosta*, [State almanac of the Kingdom of Serbia for the year 1910, which is ordinary] (Belgrade: Državna štamparija Kraljevine Srbije, 1910), 167. Državna štamparija Kraljevine Srbije [The State press of the Kingdom of Serbia], *Državni kalendar Kraljevine Srbije za godinu 1911, koja je prosta*, [State almanac of the Kingdom of Serbia for the year 1911, which is ordinary] (Belgrade: Državna štamparija Kraljevine Srbije, 1911), 172.

disappear.⁸⁹ Yet retirement did not represent, for Hajim Davičo, an end in the participation in public life. From Munich and from his travels he had published a series of articles in the Belgrade business newspaper “Trgovinski glasnik” that shed a very interesting light on the worldviews of this writer and diplomat.

Most of Davičo’s articles in “Trgovinski glasnik” bear the title *Letter from Germany* (*Pismo iz Nemačke*) and range over a wide array of topics. Most are reports on new financial and economic tools and institutions such as checks, insurance companies or the new laws on commercials. Much space is given to the official German policy towards the Balkans and to the possibilities of German-Serbian trade. In a fashion very similar to his dispatches from Trieste, Davičo also recommends certain Serbs that live in Germany, mostly artists, to the Serbian public. Instead of asking honours and medals for the worthy from the Belgrade government, he now asked the wealthy merchants of Belgrade to support Serbian contemporary art abroad.⁹⁰ Davičo’s relationship towards Germany is, however, rather ambiguous. In most articles, he praises German progress but does not fail to mention that:

“It is true that great disorder reigns in our country. But we should not forget that we are building a new stately edifice and that, while construction goes on you always find some broken bricks and tiles around, as well as other forms of dirt. We should have patience and observe the unfolding of events without preconceptions, but with firm faith in the elementary force of progress, so that we shall see that beyond the scaffolding and beyond all the chaos, lies the future house of the Serb, more modern and comfortable than the one projected by those who see Prussia as their ideal and wish that we, too, import their police empire.”⁹¹

In fact, Davičo sharply condemns German militarism and the arms race Germany had started in Europe, but highly praises Prussian bureaucracy. In a 1910 article, Davičo discussed the new Prussian law on the retirement of civil servants in which the retirement age had been lowered to 65. Siding decisively for the conservatives who were in favour of a higher age limit, Davičo argued that it was the experience of the old bureaucrats and their true dedication to the interests of that nation to make Germany one of the Great European powers.⁹² This “letter” was, however, implicitly arguing against the Serbian law on retirement, an argument developed some two years later in the cover story of “Trgovinski glasnik” in an article entitled *Retirement in Serbia*

⁸⁹ MID, K, Mh, F III, r.36/914 (Munich, consular, folder III, file 36/914) Arhiv Srbije (Archive of Serbia), Ministarstvo inostranih dela (Ministry of Foreign Affairs), Belgrade.

⁹⁰ Hajim Davičo, “Pismo iz Nemačke,” *Trgovinski glasnik*, March 18, 1912.

⁹¹ Hajim Davičo, “Žalbe sa svih strana” [Laments from all around], *Trgovinski glasnik*, December 3, 1911.

⁹² Hajim Davičo, “Pismo iz Nemačke,” *Trgovinski glasnik*, February 19, 1910.

(*Penzionisanje u nas*). Namely, in Serbia of the early twentieth century a civil servant would get retired after only ten years of service, and an early retirement apparently came as a shock for Davičo himself. In a segment that is probably crucial to the comprehension of Hajim Davičo's worldview and of his actions as a consul in Trieste, he writes:

“For a worthy clerk, no death is more horrible than having to leave the service he is dedicated to, and honoured by, and that had entered his very blood. Only those bureaucrats who were never really loyal to the state service can overcome, survive or even desire such a heavy blow.”⁹³

It should thus be rather safe to assert that one of the most important elements of Davičo's personal identity was that of being a civil servant. It is this trait that made Hajim Davičo intervene in questions that could be seen as internal to the Orthodox Christian faith, as in the case of the community of St. Spridion. On the pages of “*Trgovinski glasnik*” Davičo continued with a similar attitude as he argued, in the January 1st, 1908 editorial that the Serbs should pass from the Julian to the Gregorian calendar. Though this did not affect directly the Serbian Church, which, in fact, still maintains the Old Style calendar, Davičo did find it necessary to underline that:

“Fortunately, the heavens do not make mistakes. For 5668 years, according to the biblical, and several million years, according to the scientific time count, the Earth has been orbiting the Sun, never making the slightest error. It is this regularity that compels the souls of men to believe in God.”⁹⁴

Yet, whereas Davičo's atheism or faith in God might not be in question, his attitude towards religion is an important part in reconstructing his identity. On this question, another of Davičo's later articles could be somewhat helpful. In 1911 he had published an article called *Reflections upon Holidays (Razmišljanja o praznicima)* in which he expressed his views on religious festivities and, thus, indirectly, towards religion. The article starts as a criticism to liberal economic theories that see holidays as the enemies of the productivity of national industries. To these unspecified theories, Davičo opposes both the Bible, i.e., the God's will that the men rest once a week, and natural history, i.e., the need for rest in other animals. Thus, he argues, even the French revolution had to comply to the natural need for rest, but in doing so it had changed the purpose of the holidays into events for “national and civic education.”⁹⁵

⁹³ Hajim Davičo, “Penzionisanje u nas,” *Trgovinski glasnik*, January 29, 1912.

⁹⁴ Hajim Davičo, “O računanju vremena” [On the calendar], *Trgovinski glasnik*, January 1, 1908.

⁹⁵ Hajim Davičo, “Razmišljanja o praznicima,” *Trgovinski glasnik*, December 21, 1911.

“In the civilized countries, many of the ideas of the French revolution on public holidays are getting accepted entirely or are getting adapted to the particular national individuality. Everywhere, we can observe the tendency to use the holidays for general national education and for the opening of the hearts of the young and the old. So, in the villages we can find church singing accompanied by the organ, concerts of spiritual music and shooting contests. In the cities, the museums remain open, or they give free entry to the visitors; galleries of all art forms are open too, as are the technical, craftsmanship and agricultural exhibitions. Public conferences have very low entry fees and, in theatres, dramas and musical concerts are shown that have a particularly high moral value.

The middle classes are delighted to participate in such celebrations thereby reinforcing the democratic spirit of the nation.

The Orthodox Christians have more festivities than the Catholics. Yet, the festivities are not harmful in themselves but it is the use we make of them that determines their efficiency.”⁹⁶

Conclusions

Emancipation, acculturation and assimilation are concepts that were not hitherto discussed in this article, which tried to provide an outline of Hajim S. Davičo’s biography rather than a structured conceptual analysis. Yet, some words could be said on these topics in the conclusion. Though in a very different context than the German or Central-European Court Jews, Hajim Davičo did wholeheartedly embrace modernity in its most nationalist form. Being largely imposed from the Great Powers, and coming after a period of general, though mild, discrimination, the emancipation of Serbian Jewry could not be opposed even by the Davičo family.⁹⁷ In his Jewish writings, Hajim Davičo was an active proponent of linguistic acculturation, and in his career as a diplomat he proved total devotion to Serbian national cause, to the brink of complete assimilation. Indeed, his national allegiance put Davičo in the position to interfere even in the matters of the Serbian-Orthodox Church in which, one would expect, he shouldn’t have competence, neither as a Jew, nor as a freemason. We must also remember that the last of Davičo’s Jewish stories was written in 1913, and it was breathing the same mixture of sympathy, identification and nostalgia as any of the 1893, *Sa Jalije* works. In the last quarter of the 19th century, the Jews of Serbia were formally emancipated but they were still living in a highly traditional way. In contrast, Hajim Davičo, maybe even more than any other members of his own family, was highly acculturated into the Serbian and lay European culture of his own time. Paradoxically,

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ On the question of Court Jew opposition to emancipation: Steven Lowenstein, “Court Jews, Tradition and Modernity,” in *Hofjuden*, 153.

the question of “exit, voice or loyalty”⁹⁸ in the case of Hajim Davičo was turned upside down: his loyalty to the Serbian state and nation, voiced through a relatively mild critique of the Jewish community of Belgrade, probably influenced his exit, not wholly from the Jewish identity, but from the Serbian state.

Thus, it is possible to say that the authors of the anonymous 1893 threatening letter were right, to a certain degree. Even if Hajim Davičo was not an atheist, he had a very instrumental view of religion, subjugated to national interest. Yet he was, above all, a zealous servant of the State and a fervent Serbian nationalist. The provisions of the Berlin congress, the Davičo family background and the need of Serbian bureaucracy for capable and educated men, have all contributed to the rise of this Serbian Jewish diplomat in less than two decades after the emancipation of Jews in Serbia.

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⁹⁸ For a reconstruction of the 1974 debate between Brian Berry and Albert Hirschmann: *Paths of Emancipation. Jews, States and Citizenship*, eds. Pierre Birnbaum, Ira Katznelson (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1995), 31-33.