

REBEKA TATJACAK

The presence of Jews in Krusevac was first noted in 1519 when two Krusevac Jews - Lezer and Ismail - were listed as debtors of a merchant of Dubrovnik. Since then, their gradual settlement has begun, both in Krusevac and in other places in the interior of Serbia. Laws of local rulers, including in Serbia, forbade them from owning land, and thus settling in rural areas and on rural estates and engaging in agriculture, so they were mostly directed to engage in crafts, trade, medicine, pharmacy and banking. In dealing with all these affairs, they became a fierce competition in the trade of Armenians, Greeks and finally Serbs.

During the reign of Prince Milos Obrenovic (1815-1839), due to the participation of Jews at the beginning of the uprising in 1815, in the supply of Serbian uprisings, Prince Milos accepted them without prejudice and with respect.



Prince Milos Obrenovic I of Serbia

Moreover, several people from his close surrounding were Jews: a wholesaler and a secretive Serbian army chef Hajim Behor David (former president of the Jewish Municipality of Belgrade at the time of the First Serbian Uprising in 1835, who ran out of his shop at the Greek Queen ", in front of Milos and warned the prince about the trap that his Belgrade vizier Yusuf Pasha was preparing for him).

The Prince Milos' personal physician was Italian Jew Bartolomeo Kunibert, then personal tailor Lazar Levenzon. Capt. Joseph Schlesinger, the conductor and chief of the Milos Guards Military Music Orchestra, was the first composer of military marches in Serbia as well as the founder of the First Serbian military orchestra.

At that time and in such an atmosphere, the number of Jews who settled permanently in Krusevac increased to dozens. Unfortunately, with the change of government and the departure of Prince Milos in 1839, circumstances for Jews, and especially in the interior of Serbia, got worse.

During the Constitutional Court regime (1842-1858), domestic traders because of competitive reasons made it difficult for Jewish traders, so that by the Decree of November 12, 1846, Jews were prohibited from any further staying in the interior of Serbia and possession of the real estate.

The provisions of this Decree also reflected the everyday life of Jews in Krusevac. During those years, more than a dozen of Jewish families in Krusevac, with dozens of household members, converted to Orthodoxy and began a new life.

At the beginning of the crisis mentioned above, in the 1845s, one of the decrees of the Ministry of the Interior required that all members of the Jewish family, after the death of the oldest member and founder of the family, move from the interior of Serbia to Belgrade.

When, in 1858, Milos Obrenovic came to power again (until 1860) he issued a decree granting religious freedom to all citizens. This allowed Jews again to settle freely in the interior of Serbia.

This attitude towards the Jews persisted, more or less, until the Berlin Congress of 1878 when almost everything changed in favor of the civil equality of Jews in Serbia.

During the First World War, 1914. Member of the Board of Directors of the Association of Serbian War Volunteers, Jew Natalie Neti Munk, opened the Military Hospital in Krusevac. She was also the first Serbian volunteer nurse and a managing member of the Jewish Women's Society, the first women's association established in Serbia.

The story of Avram Levic, whose family originates from Krusevac, is also interesting from the time of the First World War. As the longtime Chief of the Ministry of Finance, Serbian Jew Avram Levic, was an important contributor to two Serbian finance ministers - Dr. Laze Pachu and Stojan Protic. What also binds Levic to Krusevac is the famous Miroslav Gospel from the 12th century, the oldest monument of Serbian literature, which Levic, along with a complete treasury and about 200 boxes of gold, received in October 1915 in Krusevac for trust and preservation, when the Serbian government, army and National Assembly retreated in front of the Austrians, Germans and Bulgarians, during the First World War. Thus, under the watchful eye of Levic, Miroslav's Gospel would cross the path of Albanian Golgotha with the Serbian people and then return to the country in 1918 through Corfu and Thessaloniki.

Then, Eva Nahir (Panic) is a native of Cakovec. She was born on August 3, 1918. The first husband was a pre-war cavalry officer, killed by the Ustasha. She later married Radosav Panic from Mala Krusevica near Krusevac. They worked illegally for the partisans. They were hiding in their house. After World War II, Radosav Panic, who was unexpectedly arrested by the Informbiro resolution and accused as a "people's enemy", deeply disappointed, hanged himself in prison the same night. Because of her refusal to sign a statement that her late husband was a "traitor and national enemy," a statement that should have been published in the newspapers, and insisting that this was not true, Eve herself "as a national enemy of the state" first spent six months in investigative prison in Belgrade and then she was sent to Goli Otok, that is, the female section of Gregory Island, where she stayed for the next 19 months, until November 29, 1953. In 1966 she emigrated to Israel, where she lived on the kibbutz of Shar Hamakim until her death, in July 2015.

During the Second World War, Golderberg Meyer a banker, came to Krusevac with refugees from Slovenia. He was arrested, quite by accident, when he was sitting in the garden of the Hotel Europa and having a breakfast. He was recognized by a German officer, a neighbor from Vienna who marched on a city patrol. He was shot in Bagdala. They also arrested Mr. Singer, who was an

interpreter at the district command of the city of Krusevac. Along with them, the Germans arrested Arpad Frank and Otto Haydn.

At the beginning of 1941, when the Germans took Serbs, Jews, Gypsies and others as hostages in Serbia, the life of Krusevac Jews got worse. A large group of hostages was gathered in Obiliceva Street, about 80 people and sent to a concentration camp on the Red Cross in Nis. The merchant Jakob Gutman, a Jew from Osijek, who had taken refuge with a friend in Krusevac was also arrested in those days. At the same time, a camp was established in Krusevac, the so-called "political camp", and to this day the name of the "Penitentiary" under Bagdala remains the same. Barutane's cadet, Milhstein, whose Serbian name was Zdravko Miladinovic, was also detained there. In those days in the village of Sibnica, two Jewish women were hiding there, Rose Klein and her mother. The mother was sick and stroked, and they killed her in bed.

One of the most famous Jewish families of Krusevac was the Tajtacak family. Anđelko Tajtacak (1838-1920), was the first founder in the cultivation of silkworms in the Moravian Region. He died in Krusevac. His successor, Moric Tajtacak, married in Krusevac with Rebeka, born Adut, from Belgrade. Both came from successful trading families. Moric inherited the cereal merchant business from his father, and also, managed his silk mill. They had three daughters: Sultana, Natalia and Sophia, and a son, David. Moric went to World War I, crossed Albania with the Serbian army, fell ill, and, with the help of his sister Kalina, found himself in Switzerland, Zurich, for treatment. He died there in 1918, and today there is a stone sign in the Zurich cemetery which reads: "Moric Tajtacak, serbischer soldat".



Moric Tajtacek

At that time women were not engaged in trading business, even less in producing silk. Rebeka, when left alone with young children, sold silk machines and invested everything in remodeling a residential building. She rented apartments and supported a family. The children graduated schools. David worked in Smederevo, where he perfected his craft, and with him was Sultana. Natalia, as a professional teacher, worked in Mladenovac, and Sofia lived with her mother in Krusevac.

During World War II, in occupied Krusevac, being a Jew meant persecution or death. Rebeka and Sophia were registered as Jewish and got yellow ribbons. Recalling an old friendship, Rebeka asked for help from Krsta Novakovic, then the mayor of the municipality. Using pre-war friendships with police, Krsta provided new IDs with the Serbian surname Andjelkovic. Rebeka was named Rosa, and Sofia kept her name. She turned again to Krsta for help. With the new ID for Natalia, Rebeka traveled to Mladenovac and the two of them returned to Krusevac. David and Sultana also returned. The family was gathered again, and Krsta provided for the two of them new identities.



From left to right Sultana, Rebeka, Natalia-Beba and Sofia kneels

Then new problems arose. The Germans took young people to work in Germany. Krsta Novakovic sent Rebeka a message that they should escape from the city, but that David should run away first.

Soon, one morning, a truck full of Jews stopped in front of their house, with a troop escort. David left the house on a side exit and found himself in a street, from which he came to the house of Kosa Petrovic. Kosa Petrovic and her husband kept a tavern with a large wine cellar. She opened the side door and invited him to hide in their house. The Germans had gone unfinished business, but David was no longer allowed to return to his house.



David Tajtacek

Mica Vasic and Kosa's cousin Zlata Veljkovic, both from Donji Krcin, a village in the Krusevac district, resided at her apartment. They advised David to go immediately to their village, to their parents; they gave him to chose in whose house he wanted to settle.



Identity card of Natalia Andjelkovic born Tajtacak

At the time when all this was happening, Milenko Veljkovic, a pupil of the second grade of the high school, also from Donji Krcin, was staying at Rebeka's boarding house. His mother Cica befriended Rebeka during his stay at the boarding house and Milenko rushed to inform his parents that David needed help. The village elder did not agree to take Jews to the village, fearing that the whole village would be burned if the occupiers discovered their presence, but Dragoljub, Milenko's father, decided to receive David. Krsta was issued by ausweis for David, who with a new identity already had a new name, Danilo. After a few days, a farmer with a car arrived and two of them, with neat documents, calmly passed the guards at the exit of Krusevac.

It wasn't long before Rebeka received a new message from Krsta Novakovic that she needed to remove her daughters, this time because the Germans were gathering Jewish girls. They all settled down with Milenko's parents, Cicea and Dragoljub Veljkovic. Their house was at the entrance to the village. Although they lived as one family with Tajtacak, there was still a fear that the Germans would suddenly appear and that there would be no time for the household to escape. That is why, after a few months, the Tajtacak family moved to the house of Mile, the postman and his wife, Cila. Miroslav Veljkovic, who was called Mile postman because of his job, was the father of Zlata Veljkovic, a student who lived in Krusevac near Kosa, married Petrovic.

The Tajtacecs welcomed freedom at the home of Vasa and Kadivka Ljubisavljevic. They were soon able to return to Krusevac, never forgetting those who saved their lives.

Rebeka died in 1954 and buried in the Old Cemetery in Krusevac. David died in Kruševac in 1987, Sultana in 1988 and Natalija (married Zivanovic, in 2006 in Belgrade). Even today, that part of the town is called by the old Krusevac citizens, Rebeka Street (today's Kumanovska Street).

During the war, Zlata was in the partisan movement, and after the liberation, she worked at the Yugoslav Embassy in Paris. She married to Dr. Tibor Stajnica. They got a son Miroslav and a daughter Katarina.

Zlata Veljkovic and parents Miroslav and Cila were declared Righteous Among the Nations in 1999. The medal was awarded by Joran Shami, at that time the Israeli ambassador to Belgrade, on November 27, 2000.

Kosa Petrovic and Krsta Novakovic were declared Righteous Among the Nations in 2003. The medal was received in 2003 by their descendants Bratislav Novakovic, Ljubica Kacanski and Dragan Petrovic.

(Materials were used from the library and archive of the town of Krusevac)