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# The Antisemitic Exhibition

## “JEWS”:

*Antisemitism in the Ustasha*

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## **Preface**

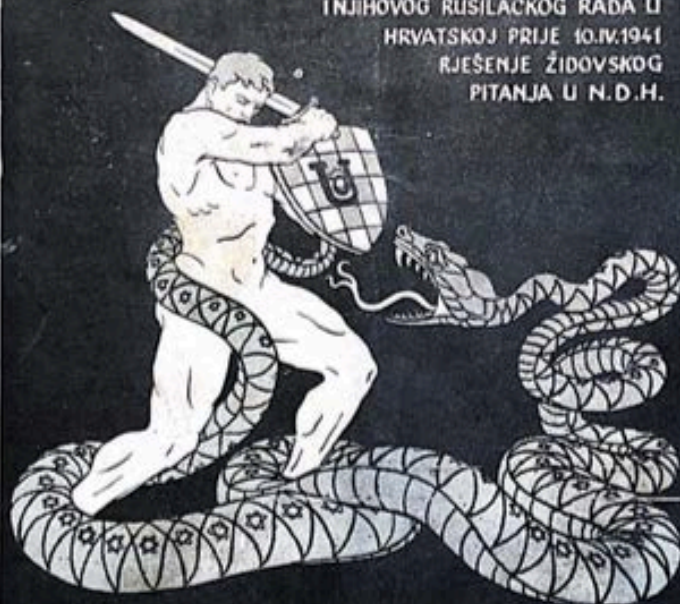
Finally, it has been done.

I want to thank my supervisor Elisabetta Cassina Wolff for her encouraging words and honest feedback. If she had not encouraged me to go to the archives, this thesis would have looked far more different than it currently does. The archivists at the Croatian State Archives in Zagreb must be thanked as well. Especially the man in the white coat who managed to dig out the exhibition catalogue for me, and the woman who very clearly saw me struggling and directed me to Lucija and Dinko at the Film Archive, who must be thanked as well. My deepest appreciation also goes to Lovro Kralj, who has patiently answered my many questions and has helped me find sources about the exhibition. I must thank Emil for using precious time of the archive's unfortunate corona-impacted opening hours to look into archival collections for me. Thanks to Rory Yeomans for pointing me toward primary sources about the subject, and to Kjetil Braut Simonsen for pointing me toward useful literature about antisemitism. Thanks to Elise for lending me her cherished Hilberg books, and to Emma for reading through my introduction. To Diana and my mother – thank you both for tolerating me.

To Dad – thanks a million times.

# ŽIDOVİ

IZLOŽBA O RAZVOJU ŽIDOVSTVA  
I NJIHOVOG RUŠILAČKOG RADA U  
HRVATSKOJ PRIJE 10.IV.1941  
RJEŠENJE ŽIDOVSKOG  
PITANJA U N.D.H.



**1.V.1942**

**1.VI.1942**

UMJETNIČKI PAVILJON NA STROSSMAYEROVOM TRGU

## Abstract

In the month of May in Zagreb 1942, in what was the *Nezavisna Država Hrvatska* – or the *Independent State of Croatia* – the NDH regime proudly presented the opening of the antisemitic exhibition “ŽIDOVI” – or “JEWS”. The exhibition, which was to be held in Zagreb at the Art Pavillion by Strossmayers square, aimed to present to its visitors, as the exhibition title explains, the “expansion of Jewry and the destructive work of Jews in Croatia before April 10<sup>th</sup>, 1941 and the solving of the Jewish question in the NDH”.<sup>1</sup> Great time and effort was put into the antisemitic exhibition which travelled across numerous cities in the NDH’s territory during the spring and summer of 1942. In many ways, the antisemitic exhibition “ŽIDOVI” was the culmination of the NDH’s antisemitic propaganda and efforts to persecute Jews across the NDH territory. Not only was the exhibition a means to spread antisemitic propaganda, and a homage to the establishment of the NDH and “Poglavnik”, or “leader”, Ante Pavelić, who they claimed through the establishment of the NDH had solved the Jewish question in Croatia. The exhibition also served to cement the extermination of the Jews in the NDH by celebrating them as a now long-gone “race”. Much of the exhibition’s contents served to justify the introduction of antisemitic laws by presenting the Jews as a destructive force throughout history not only in Croatia, but all corners of the world. The exhibition “ŽIDOVI” can then be said to be a synthesis, or a condensation, of the Ustasha antisemitism. This thesis will look at how antisemitism was expressed and its functions within the NDH and Ustasha through the creation and contents of the exhibition “ŽIDOVI”.

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<sup>1</sup> Own translation from the exhibition catalogue «Židovi – izložba o razvoju židovstva i njihovog rušilačkog rada u Hrvatskoj prije 10.IV.1941».

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## **Glossary**

**NDH or ISC** Nezavisna Država Hrvatska or The Independent State of Croatia

**Hrvatska** Croatia

**DIPU** Državni izvještajni i promidžbeni ured (State Information and Propaganda Office)

**Židovi** means «Jews» (name of the exhibition)

**Poglavnik** the «head» or «overhead», refers to Ustasha leader Ante Pavelić

**HSS** Hrvatska Seljačka Stranka or the Croatian Peasant Party

**NRS** Narodna Radikalna Stranka – the largest Serbian party in interwar Yugoslavia, also referred to as the Radical Party

**SP** Stranka Prava or Party of Rights – a Croatian nationalist political party founded by Ante Starčević

**GUS** Glavni ustaški stan or the Main Ustasha Headquarters

# Chapter 1: Introduction

## The aim of the thesis

In the month of May in Zagreb 1942, in what was the *Nezavisna Država Hrvatska* – or the *Independent State of Croatia* – the NDH-regime proudly presented the opening of the antisemitic exhibition “*ŽIDOVI*” – or “*JEWES*”. The exhibition, which was to be held in Zagreb at the Art Pavillion by Strossmayers square, aimed to present to its visitors, as the exhibition title explains, the “expansion of Jewry and the destructive work of Jews in Croatia before April 10<sup>th</sup>, 1941 and the solving of the Jewish question in the NDH”.<sup>2</sup> Great time and effort was put into the antisemitic exhibition which travelled across numerous cities in the NDH’s territory during the spring and summer of 1942.

In many ways, the antisemitic exhibition “*ŽIDOVI*” was the culmination of the NDH’s antisemitic propaganda and efforts to persecute Jews across the NDH territory. Not only was the exhibition a means to spread antisemitic propaganda, and a homage to the establishment of the NDH and “Poglavnik”, or “leader”, Ante Pavelić, which they claimed through the establishment of the NDH had solved the so-called Jewish question in Croatia, but the exhibition also served to cement the extermination of the Jews in the NDH by celebrating them as a now long-gone “race”. Much of the exhibition’s contents served to justify the introduction of antisemitic laws by presenting the Jews as a destructive force throughout history in not only Croatia, but all corners of the world.

The aim of this thesis will more broadly be to look at how antisemitism was expressed in the Croatian fascist Ustasha movement and its functions within the Independent State of Croatia. This will be done by examining the Ustasha regime’s antisemitic exhibition “*ŽIDOVI*”, or “*JEWES*”, from 1942 which can be said to be a synthesis, or a condensation, of the Ustasha antisemitism. More specifically, the thesis will discuss and attempt to answer these questions: How did the Ustasha portray the Jews? And what was the aim of the antisemitic exhibition? What can the exhibition tell us about the Holocaust in Croatia? And what can it tell us about antisemitism in the Ustasha?

Writing about antisemitism in the Ustasha movement presents several challenges. Initially, this thesis intended to deal with antisemitism in the Ustasha movement during the interwar period. However, I was met with several obstacles in the attempt. The first being that in the

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<sup>2</sup> Own translation from the exhibition catalogue «*Židovi – izložba o razvoju židovstva i njihovog rušilačkog rada u Hrvatskoj prije 10.IV.1941*».



movement's first years of existence, there were few direct expressions of antisemitism, and instead a bigger concern with defeating the main enemy at the time which was the Yugoslav state.<sup>3</sup>

The second, and perhaps biggest obstacle was finding sources from the interwar period. The Ustasha's involvement in the assassination of the Yugoslav monarch Alexander and French Foreign Minister Louis Barthou in 1934 caused the movement to dissipate and forced Ustasha leader Ante Pavelić, who had been linked to the assassination, into exile in Italy for much of the 1930s. In addition, the Yugoslav state's tolerance for any of the Ustasha's activities in the time after the assassination were low and particularly cracked down on.

There is, on the other hand, plenty of material available from the time of the Independent State of Croatia, where the Ustasha was the ruling political organization.<sup>4</sup> Some would prefer to make a sharp distinction between the Ustasha movement and what was the Independent State of Croatia. However, it is important to keep in mind that the Independent State of Croatia was the main goal of the Ustasha, and more importantly, in part, a *product* of the Ustasha movement. Moreover, many who had been active members in the Ustasha during the interwar period went on to become important figures within the Independent State of Croatia.

Leading officials within the NDH's Propaganda system, which will be addressed more thoroughly in chapter three, had been prominent members of the Ustasha movement, and their political views determined the direction that the propaganda activities took.<sup>5</sup> In addition, several Ustasha officials who were responsible for media and propaganda in the provinces were closely connected to the state media and propaganda.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, it is entirely possible to discuss antisemitism in the Ustasha through materials from the time of the Independent State of Croatia.

## **Methodology and primary sources**

The study of the antisemitic exhibition will consist of an interpretation of the Ustasha's antisemitic ideas. In order to understand the mental universe of the Ustasha, these viewpoints will need to be placed within a larger historical context.<sup>7</sup> The primary sources used to study the antisemitic exhibition are mainly obtained from the Croatian State Archives in Zagreb. In October 2020, I traveled to the Croatian State Archives where I within the span of a week

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<sup>3</sup> Goldsteins, *The Holocaust in Croatia*, 92.

<sup>4</sup> Jareb, *Mediji i promidžba u NDH*, 946.

<sup>5</sup> Jareb, *Mediji i promidžba u NDH*, 119.

<sup>6</sup> Jareb, *Mediji i promidžba u NDH*, 945.

<sup>7</sup> Kjeldstadli, *Fortida er ikke hva den en gang var*, 183-34.

attempted to find any material connected to the Ustasha regime's antisemitic exhibition. The research proved itself to be rather challenging due to the material's scattered and fragmented nature, but there was luckily much to be discovered.

The most important archival collection for the study of the exhibition is perhaps the HR-HDA 237 GRP collection.<sup>8</sup> This collection contains documents from the time between 1941 and 1945 from what was the regime's main directorate for propaganda, that is the *Državni izvještajni i promidžbeni ured* (DIPU), or the *State Information and Propaganda Office*. The collection contains, among other things, personal notes, receipts, various writings and administrative orders from the DIPU. A more detailed explanation of the Propaganda Office's structure is included in chapter three in order to understand how the directorate functioned and oversaw the antisemitic propaganda in the NDH. This archive collection provides good insight into the regime's enormous efforts to vilify and defame Croatia's Jewish population. Numerous documents shed light on the regime's efforts to spread antisemitic propaganda to the Croatian people - ranging from receipts for orders of propaganda material, the collecting of information on Jewish businesses in Croatia that were used to claim that Jews were starting to control the country, to the actual organization of the antisemitic exhibition in Zagreb.

Other crucial documents for the study of the exhibition is the exhibition catalogue, whose front page is included at the start of this thesis. It was handed out to the visitors of the exhibition and was created to support its contents. The 31-page-long catalogue explains the structure and reasoning behind all six parts of the exhibition, and also includes several illustrations that were displayed at the exhibition – even coupons that the visitors could use to watch discounted antisemitic films at the Zagreb cinema. Because it was created to function in compliance with the exhibition, it is a particularly useful source for understanding what the exhibition actually showed.

However, the catalogue can only reiterate what the exhibition showed to a certain extent, and the contents are made clear to us in fragments through various documents. Film sources from the Film Archive in Zagreb have been particularly important. *Hrvatski Slikopis* or *Croatia Film*, which was the regime's film institute, produced a film-documentary about the exhibition in 1942 called *Kako se stvaraju izložbe*, or *How Exhibitions are Made*. It was a twelve-minute-long documentary in which the DIPU explained how they had created and organized the exhibition. News footage produced by *Hrvatski Slikopis* from the opening day of the exhibition

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<sup>8</sup> The full name of the archival collection is HR-HDA 237 *Predjedništvo vlade NDH glavno ravnateljstvo za Promidžbu*.

has also been used to discuss certain aspects of the opening ceremony, including people's attendance of the exhibition.

In addition, newspapers have been important in order to account for the course of events surrounding the organization of the exhibition, and to provide insight into what the Ustasha regime wanted to convey to the general public about the exhibition. Material from newspapers like *Hrvatski Narod*, which was the regime's main paper, and *Nova Hrvatska* in the period between January and May 1942 have been particularly useful.

Other sources in the thesis are based on documents from the HR-HDA 306 ZKRZ collection.<sup>9</sup> It was created between 1944 and 1947 by the so-called *National Committee for the Treatment of the Occupiers' Crimes and their Accomplices in Croatia* and provides an insight into the NDH regime's antisemitic policies. Not only does it include anti-Jewish laws that the regime introduced between 1941 and 1945, but also writings, instructions, testimonies and other information related to the persecution and killings of the Yugoslav Jews.

In addition, the HR-HDA 1561 RSU collection has been used to write about Dr. Vilko Rieger, who was Head of the State Information and Propaganda Office (DIPU).<sup>10</sup> The collection was organized by the Yugoslav secret service during and after wartime. Several interrogations of Ustasha prisoners were conducted, as well as the collecting of various files and evidence from members of the Ustasha movement and the NDH state.

I comprehend the Croatian language and am responsible for all translations of the primary sources in the Croatian language, and thus for any potential errors made along the way. The bureaucratic language of the NDH regime has challenged my vocabulary, and finding corresponding words to odd state-institutions, positions, and district, has at times been demanding. I have nonetheless done my best to find appropriate English translations to the very expressive Croatian language.

## **State of Research: Antisemitism in the Ustasha**

Historians working on fascism have increasingly been criticized for treating antisemitism as a parenthesis in fascism. By mentioning antisemitism in brief words only when completely necessary, they have neglected the significance antisemitism has had within certain fascist groups and movements.<sup>11</sup> Although there are numerous studies of antisemitism in certain

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<sup>9</sup> The full name of the archival collection is HR-HDA 306 *Zemaljska komisija za utvrđivanje zločina*.

<sup>10</sup> The full name of the archival collection is HR-HDA 1561 *Republičkog sekretarijata za unutrašnje poslove Socijalističke Republike Hrvatske*.

<sup>11</sup> Kralj, «Paving the Road to Death», 238.

Eastern-European states, there has been a lack of research on antisemitism in the Balkans within the English-speaking part of the world, not to mention a lack of research on antisemitism in fascist movements like the Ustasha.<sup>12</sup>

Another, immediate limitation in the studies of fascism, has been the treatment of Italian fascism and Nazism as the only authentic expressions of fascism.<sup>13</sup> Thus, the outcome has been that other peripheral manifestations of fascism, such as the Ustasha in Croatia, have at best received little attention, and at worst been considered less important. Although movements like the Ustasha have not been at the very core of fascism, by for instance seizing their power independently, studying such movements may help to enrich our understanding of the role that antisemitism, racism, and eugenics, among other things, have played in these particular expressions of fascism.<sup>14</sup>

Much of the literature on the Ustasha movement has focused on the movement's brutality and propensity to commit ethnic violence. This comes as no surprise as the movement, only a few weeks after coming to power in 1941, introduced ruthless antisemitic laws, and initiated mass killings of the Orthodox Serbian population, the country's Jews, Roma, and political opponents. The Ustasha initiated the "Final Solution" without any particular encouragement from the German Nazi authorities, operated as many as 24 concentration camps and murdered almost the entire Jewish population in Croatia with the exception of a few thousand who managed to escape the country.<sup>15</sup>

This is quite remarkable when taking into consideration that, in its earliest days, the topic of Jews was not the movement's main focus.<sup>16</sup> The brutality and sadism that prevailed in the Ustasha's concentration camps hardened and shocked even the highest-ranking Nazi officers.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, it is all the more surprising that the Ustasha movement, and its antisemitism in particular, has not been the subject of more research in the English-speaking world. It should also be mentioned that, within the German sphere of influence, the largest concentration of Jews was in the Balkans, with about 1,600,000 Jews having lived in the southeastern portion of Europe.<sup>18</sup> For these reasons, antisemitism in the region, how it presented itself in fascist movements and aided them in the execution of the Holocaust, needs to be given even more scholarly attention.

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<sup>12</sup> Petersen & Salzborn, *Antisemitism in Eastern Europe*, 7.

<sup>13</sup> Griffin, «Decentering Comparative Fascist Studies», 103.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Payne, *A History of Fascism*, 409.

<sup>16</sup> Goldsteins, *The Holocaust in Croatia*, 92.

<sup>17</sup> Yeomans, «Eradicating "Undesired Elements"», 216.

<sup>18</sup> Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews vol. II*, 723.

## State of Research on the Antisemitic Exhibition

The antisemitic exhibition has only been briefly discussed by historians working on the Ustasha movement. The exhibition has, paradoxically, yet to be discussed with a primary focus on antisemitism. However, historians like Ivo and Slavko Goldstein and Rory Yeomans have given brief but valuable accounts of the exhibition: Yeomans for instance by bringing to light how the rigorous “science” behind the exhibition’s statistics was stressed by its creators, and the Goldstein’s by bringing to light the antisemitic propaganda-campaign that surrounded the exhibition. By far, Croatian historian Mario Jareb has made one of the most elaborate contributions to the study of how the exhibition was organized and has done so by charting the regime’s media coverage of the exhibition in his book about propaganda in the NDH.<sup>19</sup> During Jareb’s work with charting the exhibition, he explains that the documents concerning the organization of the exhibition are fragmentary and few in number,<sup>20</sup> which explains why the exhibition has not been discussed in depth. Croatian film historian Daniel Rafaelić has also provided valuable insight to the organization of the exhibition through his research on cinematography in the NDH and the regime’s film-documentary about the exhibition.<sup>21</sup>

Although these are extremely valuable contributions, none of them have discussed the exhibition within the context of antisemitism, meaning that the most elaborate studies of it have been done through the perspectives of cinematography and propaganda. The exhibition provides a valuable opportunity to examine the Ustasha’s antisemitic thinking, as it can be said to have been a synthesis of the Ustasha’s antisemitic ideas.

## Defining Fascism

The Ustasha were fascists in the sense that they, as Griffin’s fascist minimum explains, wanted a national rebirth.<sup>22</sup> This desire was guided by their extreme Croatian nationalism and disdain for the Yugoslav past. Paxton, in a similar vein, explains that Fascism may be defined as a form of political behavior marked by an obsessive preoccupation with community decline, humiliation, or victimhood.<sup>23</sup> This was certainly true for the Ustasha and how they perceived

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<sup>19</sup> See Jareb, *Mediji i promidžba u Nezavisnoj Državi Hrvatskoj*.

<sup>20</sup> Jareb, *Mediji i promidžba u Nezavisnoj Državi Hrvatskoj*, 124.

<sup>21</sup> See Daniel Rafaelić’s *Kinematografija u NDH*, in particular pages 91-96.

<sup>22</sup> Griffin, "Moderniteten under den nye orden", 53.

<sup>23</sup> Paxton, "The Five Stages of Fascism", 21-22.

their position within Yugoslavia, believing that the Croatian community was deteriorating for the benefit of the Yugoslav state.

The Ustasha were also fascists by way of abandoning democratic liberties, pursuing redemptive violence without any ethical or legal restraints, and had goals of internal cleansing and external expansion.<sup>24</sup> This was true in regard to their terrorist activity targeted at the Yugoslav state, their wish to reclaim Croatian territory, and the ambition of ethnically cleansing these territories of Serbs, Jews, Roma, and political opponents. The Ustasha were also fascists by possessing negative attitudes toward communism and liberalism, and by valuing an authoritarian state.<sup>25</sup> As fascist, they were captivated by notions of style, “liturgy” and ceremony, which they utilized in the organization of the movement. Payne’s definition explains that fascist also valued violence, youth culture, and a charismatic and authoritarian leadership, which was certainly reflected in the movement’s worship of leader Ante Pavelić, or the Poglavnik, as he also was referred to.<sup>26</sup>

## **Defining Antisemitism**

As in the case of Fascism, there exists no single standing, widely accepted definition of Antisemitism. Sociologist Helen Fein has proposed that antisemitism should be defined as “a persisting latent structure of hostile beliefs toward Jews as a collectivity manifested in individuals as attitudes, and in culture as myth, ideology, folklore, and imagery, and in actions – social or legal discrimination, political mobilization against the Jews, and collective or state violence – which results in and/or is designed to distance, displace, or destroy Jews as Jews.”<sup>27</sup>

Fein's definition has been accepted by many because it takes into account the various ways in which antisemitism can be expressed, and facilitates for the discussion of antisemitism in plural, implying that there are different types of antisemitism with different subject matters, intensity and effect.<sup>28</sup> According to Fein, antisemitism can therefore accommodate everything from individual attitudes and myths about Jews, to the political mobilization and violence against Jews. The strength of the definition is paradoxically also its greatest weakness. Some would argue that the definition includes phenomena that are related to antisemitism, but that many would be hesitant to actually label antisemitism.

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<sup>24</sup> Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism*, 218.

<sup>25</sup> Payne, *A History of Fascism*, 7.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Fein, “Dimensions of Antisemitism”, 67.

<sup>28</sup> Simonsen, *Antisemittismen i Norge*, 3.

Gavin I. Langmuir is a historian that makes a strong distinction between antisemitism and what can be characterized as a general, xenophobic hostility directed toward Jews, that can incidentally also be directed at any other group in society.<sup>29</sup> After the Holocaust, antisemitism has become a term used to refer to any hostility that has been directed at Jews. Langmuir explains that such a view implies that there must exist continuity between the most ancient antisemitism and everything that came after. However, this then also implies that there was nothing unique about the antisemitism during the Holocaust, and that the only thing that separated it from the previous kind, was its intensity and the technology that accompanied it.<sup>30</sup>

Langmuir reserves the use of the term “antisemitism” for what he calls “socially significant chimeric hostility against Jews.”<sup>31</sup> The xenophobia that has been directed at Jews because some Jews in the Middle Ages for instance engaged in money borrowing, are not the prejudices that are unique or unusual - but it is the chimeric, imagined prejudices that are unusual and deserve a special term, namely antisemitism, because they attribute to Jews characteristics and actions that have never been observed and that cannot be verified empirically.<sup>32</sup> A chimeric prejudice would then, for example, be the myth that the Jew is a non-human, evil figure who poisons wells and performs ritual murders on Christian boys.

In other words, Langmuir, proposes that antisemitism is an unusual quality of hostility toward the Jews that has been accepted by a large number of relatively normal people, that attribute to Jews characteristics and conduct that has never been observed or empirically verified.<sup>33</sup> In this way, the Jews became converted in the minds of many into a symbol that denied their empirical reality, and in turn justified their total elimination from the earth.<sup>34</sup>

There are, however, flaws with Langmuir’s definition. Chimeric and xenophobic assertions are terms that almost bleed into each other. For instance, Langmuir explains that xenophobic assertions differ from chimeric ones by way of being based on past conduct and observable reality.<sup>35</sup> However, Langmuir contradicts himself by saying that “chimeric assertions have no “kernel of truth” to them,<sup>36</sup> whilst simultaneously operating with a so-called weaker chimeric assertion that can indeed emerge from observable reality or a so-called “kernel of truth”.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Langmuir, “Toward a Definition of Antisemitism”, 116.

<sup>30</sup> Langmuir, “Toward a Definition of Antisemitism”, 89.

<sup>31</sup> Langmuir, “Toward a Definition of Antisemitism”, 104.

<sup>32</sup> Langmuir, “Toward a Definition of Antisemitism”, 126-27.

<sup>33</sup> Langmuir, «Toward a Definition of Antisemitism», 126.

<sup>34</sup> Langmuir, «Toward a Definition of Antisemitism», 127.

<sup>35</sup> Langmuir, “Toward a Definition of Antisemitism”, 112.

<sup>36</sup> Langmuir, “Toward a Definition of Antisemitism”, 110.

<sup>37</sup> Langmuir, “Toward a Definition of Antisemitism”, 112.

Approaching the exhibition through so-called weaker chimeric assertions will help demonstrate how the Ustasha made outlandish antisemitic assertions that were attempted empirically verified through a deceptive scientific and intellectual foundation. It is my contention that chimeric assertions, which ascribe Jews unobservable characteristic, can indeed emerge on the basis of what Langmuir calls a “kernel of truth”, however remote it may be. Langmuir's definition, for the most part, provides clear lines for what one can label antisemitism, and illustrates how Jews have been the subject of an unusual hostility that has transcended generic xenophobia.

## **Antisemitism in Croatia**

Ivo and Slavko Goldstein have in *The Holocaust in Croatia* mapped the history of the Jewish community in Croatia, with a main focus on Zagreb during wartime. Although the book mainly concentrates on the history of the Jews in Zagreb, the developments that took place in the capital were mirrored in several other Croatian cities.<sup>38</sup> During the mid-15th century, Jews were not allowed to settle in Zagreb or the northern parts of Croatia. Only a few Jewish communities existed in the Dalmatia region which was under Venetian rule. The developments that took place in Croatia followed the general characteristics of Central-European Jewish history. It was not until the second half of the 18th century during the time of emancipation that Jews were able to take part in civic life, no longer pushed aside to the periphery of society.

In 1782, Emperor Joseph II of the German-Roman Empire declared the Edict of Tolerance and subsequently broadened the religious freedom within the Empire and removed many discriminatory restrictions that had been aimed toward the Jews.<sup>39</sup> The Jews were now allowed to settle in all the lands of the Habsburg Empire, including Croatia, which had become part of the Habsburg monarchy in 1527.<sup>40</sup> Although the Jews were now "tolerated", they did not possess equal rights with the non-Jewish population. Among other things, the Jews were for instance not allowed to own their own property, nor were they allowed to engage in agriculture. Thus, in the middle of the 19th century, some Jewish communities in Croatia sent requests to the Croatian parliament for full social and economic rights but did not receive them until 1873.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Goldsteins, *The Holocaust in Croatia*, 10.

<sup>39</sup> Britannica, “Edict of Toleration”.

<sup>40</sup> Goldsteins, *The Holocaust in Croatia*, 7.

<sup>41</sup> Goldsteins, *The Holocaust in Croatia*, 8.



The Jewish population in Croatia was relatively small, and in the early 1900s, there were only about 20,000 Jews in Croatia.<sup>42</sup> The Jewish population consisted mainly of Ashkenazi and Sephardi Jews, with many having come to Croatia from Hungary and Germany.<sup>43</sup> When the Jews gained full civil rights, they became far more visible in society, especially in the economic, social and cultural landscape, in which they made significant contributions. Therefore, the interwar period is often described as a golden age for the Jewish community not only in Zagreb, but also Croatia and Yugoslavia as a whole.<sup>44</sup>

The antisemitic conspiracies about the so-called Jewish Bolshevism that had surfaced during the First World War had calmed down during the 1920s, but one could see an increase in the antisemitic publications in the Yugoslav press in the period up to the 1930s. The antisemitism directed at the Jews in the 1920s was mainly characterized by the idea that the Jews were foreigners. Jews who had come to Croatia after the emancipation strongly associated with their original identity. For instance, many chose to keep their Jewish names and spoke German and Hungarian better than they did Croatian.<sup>45</sup> Incidentally, many Croats associated everything Hungarian and German with foreign rule and oppression, which only enforced negative attitudes toward the Jews.

The Goldstein's suggest that the gradual development of antisemitism in Croatia was the result of a social gap which existed between Jews and non-Jews in some portions of Yugoslav society.<sup>46</sup> However, as this gap was closing in the thirties, and the middle-class became increasingly aware that the Jews were equal citizens, it was at that point that Nazi propaganda was launched. The new wave of antisemitic incidents in Croatia and Yugoslavia started in about 1933, mostly under the influence of the growing Nazi propaganda, they explain.<sup>47</sup>

Although the antisemitic rhetoric in Croatia was pronounced in the interwar period, it had no organized movement behind it or a political party that fronted an antisemitic program before the establishment of the NDH.<sup>48</sup> Moreover, the antisemitic press was not as influential as the one defending the Jews in Croatia. For instance, a Jewish newspaper in Croatia wrote that antisemitism had no roots in Yugoslavia and concluded that the tolerance of the Yugoslav nation was world-renowned.<sup>49</sup> Many Croatian Jews even explained the growing antisemitism

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<sup>42</sup> Goldstein, *The Holocaust in Croatia*, 9.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Goldstein, *The Holocaust in Croatia*, 13.

<sup>45</sup> Goldstein, *The Holocaust in Croatia*, 10.

<sup>46</sup> Goldstein, *The Holocaust in Croatia*, 17.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Goldstein, *The Holocaust in Croatia*, 18.

<sup>49</sup> Goldstein, *The Holocaust in Croatia*, 44.

through the influence of National Socialism, which they believed the German minority in Croatia was helping to spread as well.<sup>50</sup>

### **Some theories and approaches to antisemitism in the Ustasha**

In *Croatia under Ante Pavelić*, historian Robert B. McCormick writes this about antisemitism in the Ustasha and the fate of the Yugoslav Jews:

Yugoslavia was not a hotbed of anti-Semitism in the inter war-years, there were few Jews of national distinction in Yugoslavia and Josip Frank, a Jew, was part of the Ustaše's ideological family tree, what could explain this genocide? The annihilation of Croatia's Jews must be seen in the context of anti-Serbian hatred and Nazi authority in the Balkans. The Ustashe wanted only a racially pure Croatian stock to occupy its lands. Likewise, attacks on the small Jewish and Roma population also served to satisfy the Nazis and solidify the NDH's relationship with the Third Reich.<sup>51</sup>

In short, antisemitism was a natural part of the Ustasha's ideology and went hand in hand with their desire for an independent Croatia reserved exclusively for Croats, as they were defined by the NDH, and must be understood in relation to the persecution of the Serbian and Roma population. In addition, McCormick suggests that the Ustasha's attitudes and persecution of Jews and Roma, in part, served the purpose of satisfying the Nazis and strengthening the NDH's relationship with the Third Reich. McCormick also explains that Pavelić understood that if he hoped to remain in power and preserve a degree of independency, Hitler had to approve of his policies.<sup>52</sup> The best way for Pavelić to achieve this goal was, according to McCormick, by "satisfying Hitler's anti-Semitic bloodlust."<sup>53</sup>

Croatian historians Ivo and Slavko Goldstein have somewhat similarly stressed the relationship with Nazi Germany as an important factor for the development of antisemitism in the Ustasha. In the *Holocaust in Croatia*, they suggest that antisemitism was initially not the focal point of the movement, and that there were few direct expressions of antisemitism in the movement's earliest days.<sup>54</sup> This, however, changed with the influence of the Nazi's, they

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<sup>50</sup> Goldstein, *The Holocaust in Croatia*, 45.

<sup>51</sup> McCormick, *Croatia Under Ante Pavelić*, 75-76.

<sup>52</sup> McCormick, *Croatia Under Ante Pavelić*, 76.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Goldsteins, *The Holocaust in Croatia*, 92.

explain. Their attitudes toward the Jews was taken directly from German Nazism when the connections between the Ustasha and the German Nazis and Italian fascists grew stronger in the 1930's.<sup>55</sup> The Goldstein's have also argued that the Ustasha ideology was a "specific synthesis of Fascist and Nazi elements, adapted to reality in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina."<sup>56</sup> The Ustashe are also explained to have taken their attitude towards the Jews directly from German Nazism because the Italian attitude toward the Jews was "considerably more temperate", and that it was from the Nazi ideology that the Ustasha also "adopted racist anti-Semitism."<sup>57</sup>

Are these, however, sufficient explanations to antisemitism in the Ustasha? The Ustasha was, for instance, not given any direct encouragement from the Nazi authorities to initiate the "Final Solution", suggesting that their antisemitic beliefs and actions were carried out at own volition. Sometimes the Ustasha's antisemitic policies even proved to be a source of irritation for the Nazi authorities.<sup>58</sup> Although the Ustasha's policies certainly did serve to strengthen their political ties with Nazi Germany and other allies, and while the influence of the Nazi's was of great influence, we should be careful with how much credit we assign the Ustasha's beliefs and actions to the ambition of satisfying or imitating the Nazi Germans. By doing so, we diminish their agency in perpetuating antisemitism, as well as their role in carrying out the Holocaust in Croatia. Instead, it is more advantageous to address the localities and realities of Croatia that historians like the Goldstein's and McCormick speak of.

When the Italian fascist regime introduced its own biological racial laws in 1938, Mussolini was accused of imitating Hitler and for being an opportunistic and submissive leader.<sup>59</sup> In "The Great Divide?" by historian Patrick Bernhard, the different perspectives on racism and antisemitism that arose between the Nazis and the Italian fascists are questioned, and whether it is advantageous to even speak of imitation. Instead, Bernhard urges historians to focus on the dialogue and interaction between the two regimes in order to understand the outcome of the perspectives. Bernhard also points out that it is just as important for historians to understand how these ideas came to be, and above else why some of them were adopted and others rejected by understanding them as bound in time and as part of a larger cultural, social and political context.<sup>60</sup> These contexts must be taken into account in order to gain a better understanding of

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<sup>55</sup> Goldsteins, *The Holocaust in Croatia*, 93.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> For examples, see Yeomans, «Eradicating "Undesired Elements"», 205.

<sup>59</sup> Bernhard, «The great divide?», 106.

<sup>60</sup> Bernhard, «The great divide?», 110.

how people in those countries understood themselves, and how concepts like “race” and antisemitism gave people a feeling of belonging and identity.<sup>61</sup> Although National Socialism became the "gold standard" that all other fascist movements measured themselves against,<sup>62</sup> it is indeed more beneficial to understand why and how some ideas were integrated, instead of exclusively focusing on imitations.

Rory Yeomans is yet another historian that has made valuable contributions to the subject of antisemitism in the Ustasha movement. Yeomans writes that the Ustasha regime considered being Jewish a matter determined by race, and not by culture or religion.<sup>63</sup> The Ustasha were particularly occupied with the idea of “race” and eugenics, and Yeomans has explained that the regime was anxious to give its antisemitic racist policy a scientific and intellectual framework. This was for instance demonstrated in 1941 when the regime’s Ministry for Education and Religion established a so-called Racial Political Commissariat that was supposed to develop plans for the legal reform of “racial biology”.<sup>64</sup> However, Yeomans also goes on to state that there existed a symbiotic relationship between what were moral and racial conceptions in the Ustasha.<sup>65</sup> Although Jews were initially the subject of racist and biological propaganda, this was later supplemented, even replaced, by ideas that the Jews were responsible for the country's economic, social, moral, and cultural decline.<sup>66</sup> In fact, racial theories were not always the driving force behind the Ustasha’s policies, and Yeomans emphasizes that racial politics were rather the tool for carrying out a social and national transformation of Croatia, where one had to get rid of everything that was foreign and destructive. This was certainly the case with the antisemitic exhibition, where Jewish history was used to make claims about their alleged destructive influence on Croatian life and culture.

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<sup>61</sup> Bernhard, «The great divide?», 109.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Yeomans, «Eradicating “Undesired Elements”», 203.

<sup>64</sup> Yeomans, «Eradicating “Undesired Elements”», 205.

<sup>65</sup> Yeomans, «Eradicating “Undesired Elements”», 208.

<sup>66</sup> Yeomans, «Eradicating “Undesired Elements”», 228.

## Chapter 2: How the Ustasha came to be

### The political and social backdrop of interwar Yugoslavia and Croatia's position within the Kingdom

To understand the emergence and flourishing of the Ustasha movement in Croatia, it is necessary to explain the political and social backdrop of interwar Yugoslavia and Croatia's position within the kingdom. As early as the 9<sup>th</sup> century, Croatia had been in a union with Hungary that lasted until 1918.<sup>67</sup> When the Habsburg Monarchy disbanded in 1918, Croatia became part of the newly established Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, although there was not an overwhelming willingness to do so from the country's political leaders and its people.<sup>68</sup> The Yugoslav state was established under the notion that Serbs, Croats and Slovenes were nothing more than three different "tribes" of one people.<sup>69</sup> The other ethnic groups living on the territory of the state, however, including Bosnian Muslims, Macedonians and Albanians, were not recognized as their own separate ethnic groups.<sup>70</sup>

To illustrate the diversity that existed in the Yugoslav kingdom, the 1921 census shows that Serbs, the kingdom's largest ethnic group, Croats and Slovenes made up almost ten million of the kingdom's twelve million inhabitants.<sup>71</sup> The rest consisted of the ethnic German population, Hungarians, Macedonians, Albanians, Romanians, Turks and others.<sup>72</sup>

By the middle of the 19th century, intellectual currents had already emerged among the various ethnic groups that expressed the desire for a Yugoslav or South Slavic state. The premise of southern pan-Slavism was based on the idea that the people who inhabited the Balkan Peninsula had so much in common that it laid the foundation for the establishment of a large and united South Slavic state. In Serbia, for example, some orthographers argued that the language of the various ethnic groups could justify the basis of a South Slavic nation, while some intellectuals in Croatia and Slovenia drew the basis of a South Slavic state all the way back to Illyria.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Goldstein, *The Holocaust in Croatia*, 3.

<sup>68</sup> Goldstein, *The Holocaust in Croatia*, 4.

<sup>69</sup> Ramet, *The Three Yugoslavias*, 36.

<sup>70</sup> Store norske leksikon, "Jugoslavia".

<sup>71</sup> Shepherd, *Terror in the Balkans*, 73.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> *Illyria* was the name given to the mountains east of the Adriatic Sea in the western part of the Balkan Peninsula, where the Illyrians lived in the first century BC when the Romans conquered the area and created the provinces of Pannonia and Dalmatia.

Although many sincerely wished for a harmonious and united South Slavic state, it was far more difficult to achieve it in practice. However, this line of thought where the different "tribes" of the kingdom all belonged to the same nation would lead to several problems that came to characterize Yugoslavia, and consequently Croatia, in the interwar period. Firstly, Serbs, Croats, Slovenes etc. did not necessarily share a common past that could bind them together as a group. Slovenia, for example, leaned toward the influence of Austria which they had been under the rule of, while Croatia had a past as part of Hungary and the Habsburg monarchy.<sup>74</sup> Montenegro, on the other hand, looked to entirely different state traditions.<sup>75</sup> In addition, Albanians in Kosovo, as well as Macedonians, identified to a greater extent with their neighboring countries than they did with for instance Slovenia or Croatia. There was in other words little historical precedent or logic in the Yugoslav combination.<sup>76</sup>

This created major challenges for the state's political system, and from the very beginning the Yugoslav state experienced major challenges characterized by internal strife between the various groups, all of which in one way or another felt their interests were being overlooked. There never existed a political party that could appeal to or satisfy the various ethnic groups enough to avoid political chaos, while each of the ethnic groups entered the kingdom with different political expectations that were in many ways conflicting. The Croats had for example entered the kingdom with expectations of being protected from territorial losses against Italy, which in 1915 had been promised large tracts of land in Istra, Friuli and Dalmatia through the Treaty of London. The Serbs, on their part, entered the kingdom with ambitions of a so-called "greater Serbia", which included parts of Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

What the various ethnic groups had in common, however, was that they perceived the Serbian dominance in the Yugoslav state as a major problem, as they felt overlooked and overruled. In the newly established Yugoslav state, the Serbs gained much of the power and dominance. There were many reasons for why the Serbian population came to dominate the newly established state. One of them being that they had emerged victorious from the First World War and ended up with an overwhelming amount of power in the state through their military, political and international influence.<sup>77</sup>

This became particularly frustrating for Croatian politicians, who at an early stage had expressed the desire for a political system that could give Croatia more autonomy within the

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<sup>74</sup> Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes*, 33.

<sup>75</sup> Ramet, *The Three Yugoslavias*, 36.

<sup>76</sup> Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes*, 33.

<sup>77</sup> Shepherd, *Terror in the Balkans*, 73.

newly established kingdom, but this was quickly dismissed by the central authorities in Belgrade. Even worse, was the fact that the state constitution in 1921 had been adopted without the participation of Croatia's most important political party, the Croatian peasant party *Hrvatska Seljačka Stranka* (HSS). The demands for an autonomous Croatia in Yugoslavia by Croatian politicians were not taken into account, which led many Croats to view the Yugoslav kingdom as illegitimate.

Moreover, not only did Serbian politicians not respect the ambitions and desires of greater autonomy expressed by Croatians and other ethnic groups, but Serbian politicians also dominated the vast majority of the political positions within the Yugoslav state. At the time of the establishment of Yugoslavia, Serbs made up about 40% of the population, but held the majority of the most powerful political positions at the time, where the prime minister post went to Serbian politicians in 264 of the 268 months the Yugoslav interwar state existed.<sup>78</sup>

The people of the Yugoslav kingdom were also urged by the Serbian regent Alexander not to think of themselves as living in either Croatia, Slovenia or Bosnia, but rather as living in Sava, Drina or Zeta, which were provinces named after rivers in the kingdom.<sup>79</sup> This encouragement from the regent, which more or less called for Yugoslavs to erase their national peculiarities in order to achieve a more harmonious state, must have had a provocative effect on many.

In 1929, Alexander went even further in his attempt to soften the tensions that existed within the kingdom by changing its name from the *Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes* to the *Kingdom of Yugoslavia*, in an attempt to create a common national identity and to reduce the ethnic divisions that so sorely characterized the country.<sup>80</sup> In these ways, the foundations for a crisis-ridden Yugoslavia was laid, which in turn had an enormous impact on the emergence of the Ustasha movement in the 1930s.

## **A Yugoslavia in crisis and faltering politicians**

As the political crisis in Yugoslavia intensified during the 1920s, politicians struggled to find solutions that could ease the pressure on the tensions that had risen between the various political groups. The government in Yugoslavia was paralyzed because its politicians primarily focused on strengthening the political power among their own voters, which in turn only strengthened

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<sup>78</sup> Ramet, *The Three Yugoslavias*, 38.

<sup>79</sup> Ramet, *The Three Yugoslavias*, 79.

<sup>80</sup> McCormick, *Croatia under Ante Pavelić*, 5.

the ethnic divisions. The political parties in the Yugoslav state were effectively ethnic parties. Every ethnic component, like Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, Bosnian Muslims, etc., for the most part all looked to their own political parties, and it was quite certain that a Croat would vote for the Croatian Peasant Party (HSS), that a Bosnian Muslim would vote for the Yugoslav Muslim organization, and that Serbs would vote for the Serbian party Narodna Radikalna Stranka (NRS) and so on.<sup>81</sup>

In 1925, the relations between the political parties in the kingdom seemed to improve somewhat, when the HSS and NRS entered into an agreement that gave the Croats more influence in the government, and were allowed to govern with, among other things, agricultural reforms, forests, mines, trade and industry.

However, the optimism surrounding the increased Croatian influence in the Yugoslav state was short-lived, because no Croatian politicians had been given any significant roles and positions within the government. By 1928, Croatian politicians had completely withdrawn from the political scene, and there was not a single Croatian politician in government.<sup>82</sup> The situation worsened that same year when Stjepan Radić, one of the founders of the Croatian Peasant Party and biggest critics of Belgrade, was shot and killed in the parliament.<sup>83</sup> This led to chaos in the government, and it also caused major unrest and demonstrations in Croatia which only heightened the urgency surrounding the issue of Croatian independence, or in any case, autonomy.

After the assassination of one of Croatia's most popular politicians, little seemed to function in the government, and chaos ensued. It became impossible for politicians to agree on a new government. King Alexander himself felt he had no choice but to dissolve the constitution from 1921. In addition, he banned all political parties, severely restricted the freedom of the press, and appointed himself as dictator. If the regent introduced the royal dictatorship in an attempt to avoid further conflicts and tensions in the Yugoslav state, his efforts were wasted. King Alexander's dictatorship only fueled the disdain many already felt for the Yugoslav kingdom – and especially the disdain of Ante Pavelić and what would become his loyal Ustasha followers.

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<sup>81</sup> Ramet, *The Three Yugoslavias*, 37.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Kralj, *The Ustashe Politics of Ethnic Cleansing*, 17.



## The emergence of the Ustasha movement and the struggle for an independent Croatia

King Alexander's actions represented for some the last step in what they believed was the plan for total Serbian dominance - including Ante Pavelić and his followers who had established themselves as the *Ustaša* during 1930 – where *Ustaša* appropriately meant “those who rise up”, or “those who resist”. The dictatorship had not had the effect that the regent had envisioned, and in reality, the royal dictatorship had only exacerbated the crisis experienced within the state, because the regime now resorted to violence in an attempt to solve its political problems.<sup>84</sup> Many people were imprisoned and tortured because of their political views, and under such circumstances Pavelić decided to emigrate to Italy in 1929 with his following of Ustasha-men, fearing for his life in the Yugoslav state.<sup>85</sup> Besides, Pavelić had been sentenced to death in 1929 by the Yugoslav kingdom for having collaborated against the state with the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (IMRO), which meant he could never return to Yugoslavia, otherwise he would have been arrested and shot for treason.<sup>86</sup>

Pavelić established the Ustasha movement with the conviction that it was necessary to use all means necessary to achieve an independent Croatian state - including terrorism. After King Alexander appointed his dictatorship, Pavelić decided that there was a need for a more militant organization, as he felt that the more moderate parties in Croatia were failing to represent the interests of their country. Moreover, Pavelić, embittered after being expelled from Yugoslavia and consequently Croatia, concluded that this was now the only realistic approach to politics.

The Ustasha movement initially emerged among radical student groups and militant youth activists from the nationalist party *Stranka Prava* (SP), or the so-called *Party of Rights*. The Ustasha movement gathered under the leadership of Gustav Perčec, a nationalist journalist, and Ante Pavelić, a lawyer and member of the SP. The Ustasha movement claimed to be the ideological successor of Ante Starčević, who had been critical of the Habsburg monarchy and a strong spokesman for Croatian independence in the late 19th century, and also highly skeptical of the idea of a Yugoslav state.<sup>87</sup> Starčević laid much of the foundations for Croatian nationalism, but most would disagree with the Ustasha-claim that Starčević was a proto-fascist.

According to the movement itself, the Ustasha was created in a moment of national struggle, and existed as a secret army that would liberate the Croatian people from Yugoslavia, which

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<sup>84</sup> Kralj, *The Ustashe politics of ethnic cleansing*, 18.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> McCormick, “The United States’ Response to Genocide in the Independent State of Croatia”, 76.

since 1918 had oppressed the Croats and turned them into slaves.<sup>88</sup> In *A History of Fascism*, historian Stanley G. Payne writes that the Ustasha movement represented the most extreme form of Croatian nationalism that had emerged as a result of Serbian royal centralization and oppression in interwar Yugoslavia.<sup>89</sup> This is particularly exemplified in Pavelić's dissertation *Hrvatsko Pitanje*, or *The Croatian Question*.

In *Hrvatsko Pitanje*, Pavelić clearly expresses the resentment he bears against the state of Yugoslavia. In 1936, he writes among other things, that "the so-called Yugoslav state is built on two fictions: the first is that Croats and Serbs are one people, and the second is that Croats desire this state".<sup>90</sup> In his dissertation, Pavelić was particularly upset with the way the Serbian authorities had explained or justified their dominance in Yugoslavia to the outside world. Serbs spread what Pavelić called untruths through the way they explained the Croats' minor position in the kingdom. He found it especially infuriating when the Serbs explained that they had "a large majority in the state" while "Croats are in the minority", and that it therefore was only natural for the minority to submit to the will of the majority.<sup>91</sup> For Pavelić, there was nothing natural about Croatia's position within Yugoslavia, nor was there anything voluntary about Croatia's participation in the state. He did not see any benefits in being part of a state like Yugoslavia either. And perhaps even more dissatisfying for Pavelić, was when the Serbian authorities spoke of themselves as an important economic and military power. Pavelić perceived this as an attack on Croatia, and as an insinuation that the Croats on their own would be unknown and unimportant.<sup>92</sup> In other words, the fight for Croatia became the fight against Yugoslavia, and came to be the driving force behind the activities of the Ustasha movement in the interwar period.

### **In ethnic turmoil lies Juda's Kingdom: Yugoslavia as a "Jew Eldorado"**

Pavelić also bore resentment against the Belgrade authorities for other reasons. One of them was that they had been the ones who had made it possible for the Jews to become so well-established in Croatia. Already in point 3 of *Hrvatsko Pitanje*, Pavelić mentions the Jews in Croatia, saying:

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<sup>88</sup> Yeomans, *Visions of Annihilation*, 5.

<sup>89</sup> Payne, *A History of Fascism*, 404.

<sup>90</sup> Own translation. Pavelić, *Dr. Ante Pavelić riešio je Hrvatsko Pitanje*, 25.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

Today, almost all the money and trade in Croatia is in Jewish hands. This has only become possible through the state's concessions to the Jews, who through the concessions on the one hand saw the opportunity to strengthen the Jews' loyalty to Belgrade, and on the other hand the weakening of the Croatian people. The Jews gladly accepted the founding of the so-called Yugoslav state, because a Croatian state would never have suited them as well as Yugoslavia, a state of different peoples! In the ethnic turmoil lies Judas' kingdom ... The Jews did not like the idea of a Croatian state, because the founder of modern Croatian nationalism, Dr. Ante Starčević, was an open opponent of Judaism (an anti-Semite). Yugoslavia did indeed develop as the Jews had envisioned, that is to say as a true Eldorado for Judaism, due to the bribes [the Jews] directed at the public life in Serbia.<sup>93</sup>

The Ustasha had always been strongly anti-Serbian and skeptical to the existence of a Yugoslav state. For a long time, all their ideological vitriol had been directed at the main enemy, which was the Belgrade regime.<sup>94</sup> Now Pavelić identified both Serbs and Jews as the fundamental obstacles in the path to Croatian independence. The views that Pavelić expressed in 1936 in *Hrvatsko Pitanje*, he and his members brought with them into the establishment of the Independent State of Croatia, where all unwanted elements such as Serbs and Jews were to be permanently removed through a combination of deportations, executions and mass murders.<sup>95</sup> Initially influenced by the Nazi way of thinking, the Ustasha would come to develop their own sense of anti-Jewishness to accommodate their vision for an Independent State of Croatia.

### **Existing on the periphery of Yugoslav politics and interwar terrorism**

The Ustasha movement was quite small, and in reality, it existed on the periphery of the Yugoslav political scene. Paradoxically, the movement stood stronger abroad among emigrated Ustasha members, for instance in Italy and Hungary, than it did in Croatia. In 1934, only between 500 and 600 people called themselves members of the Ustasha movement.<sup>96</sup> Nevertheless, they made themselves known to Yugoslavia's politicians and peoples through a series of terrorist attacks in the interwar period.

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Goldsteis, *The Holocaust in Croatia*, 92.

<sup>95</sup> Yeomans, *Visions of Annihilation*, 13.

<sup>96</sup> McCormick, *Croatia under Ante Pavelić*, 12.

Feelings of suspicion and anxiety became commonplace in the lives of Yugoslavs during this period. In an attempt to destabilize the Yugoslav state, the Ustasha movement launched several terrorist attacks against prominent regime supporters, security personnel, police and infrastructure in the Yugoslav state.<sup>97</sup> It was also common for the movement to direct its terrorist attacks toward public places and events. However, the movement's terrorist attacks reached its peak in 1934 with the assassination of King Alexander and the French Foreign Minister Louis Barthou in Marseilles. In collaboration with the IMRO, they had staged the attack on Alexander with hopes of creating enough unrest to shake the fundamentals of the Yugoslav state, preferably to the point of its disintegration. King Alexander represented to the Ustasha movement everything they thought was wrong with Yugoslavia – that is, yet another Serb who stood in the way of Croatian independence. However, the action of assassinating King Alexander and the French Foreign Minister did not have the effect the Ustasha desired, as most Yugoslavs viewed the slayings with disgust and were saddened by the king's death.<sup>98</sup>

The international community also reacted strongly to the assassination of King Alexander and foreign minister Louis Barthou, and the Ustasha movement was consequently driven into exile, which led to the stagnation of the movement's activities and development. The Ustasha movement's training camps in Italy and Hungary, where they had previously been allowed to practice their terrorist activities, were now closed and made unavailable to them after it became known that it was the Ustasha that had been involved in the assassinations. There were few nations that wished to be associated with the movement after the assassinations, and Pavelić was not to return to Croatia until the formation of the Independent State of Croatia in 1941.

The Ustasha movement's violent clashes with the Yugoslav state had a repulsive effect on most Croats who wanted independence, and the recruitment of Ustasha members was at times, unsuccessful, and tedious at best.<sup>99</sup> Most Croats who did want independence were supporters of the HSS, which many felt had a more realistic approach to the goal of Croatian independence. By 1936, Pavelić and the Ustasha movement had completely broken with the moderate political parties in Croatia.<sup>100</sup> The HSS, on the other hand, did not want to be associated with the movement and condemned the Ustasha's violent clashes with the Yugoslav state. The Ustasha movement, on their part, felt that Croatian politicians were inadequate for the task of achieving anything for Croatia. Even when the so-called *Sporazum*, or "Compromise", was concluded

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<sup>97</sup> Yeomans, *Visions of Annihilation*, 8.

<sup>98</sup> McCormick, *Croatia under Ante Pavelić*, 18.

<sup>99</sup> McCormick, *Croatia under Ante Pavelić*, 12.

<sup>100</sup> Payne, *A History of Fascism*, 406.

between the HSS's Vladko Maček and the Serbian Prime Minister Dragiša Cvetković in 1939, which for the first time gave Croats equal rights and greater representation in Yugoslavia, the Ustasha were left unsatisfied. Instead, it was considered a capitulation toward Serbian politicians, and in return, the Ustasha movement only increased its terrorist activities.<sup>101</sup>

### **The invasion of Yugoslavia by the Axis powers: A window of opportunity**

The Yugoslav government feared the destruction of the state more than anything else in the late 1930s, and therefore it sought to develop good relations with its dangerous neighbors.<sup>102</sup> The idea was that if Yugoslavia showed inclination towards both Germany and Italy, then there would be no need for the Germans to crush an obedient Belgrade, and secondly, it would perhaps minimize Italy's support for separatist groups such as the Ustasha movement.<sup>103</sup> Yugoslavia signed the Tripartite Pact in 1941 on the premises that: 1) the Yugoslav territory and its borders would be respected, 2) that Yugoslavia would not have to provide any military assistance to the Axis powers and that the Axis powers would not be transporting troops and munitions through the Yugoslav territory, and 3) that Yugoslavia could annex Thessaloniki after the war.<sup>104</sup> However, a few days after the sitting government signed the Tripartite Act, a coup was staged in Belgrade, where a new government that refused to support the Axis powers was established. Hitler, infuriated by the betrayal of the Yugoslavs, decided on the same day to crush the state.<sup>105</sup>

The Yugoslav state's inclinations towards the Germans were to no avail, and Yugoslavia was defeated in the April 1941 Blitzkrieg, where the German end goal was the establishment of an independent Croatian state.<sup>106</sup> The position for the head of the newly established Croatian state was initially offered to Vladko Maček from the Peasant Party, but Maček refused to accept the position. Pavelić was in this way abruptly pulled out of his hibernation in Italy. There he had spent much of his time during the interwar period in a villa Mussolini had arranged for him to reside in, and had been largely unaware of the chaos that was unraveling in the last days of the Yugoslav state's existence.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Goldsteins, *The Holocaust in Croatia*, 65.

<sup>103</sup> McCormick, *Croatia under Ante Pavelić*, 51.

<sup>104</sup> Ramet, *The Three Yugoslavias*, 110.

<sup>105</sup> Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews vol. II*, 756.

<sup>106</sup> Payne, *A History of Fascism*, 406.

<sup>107</sup> McCormick, *Croatia under Ante Pavelić*, 61.

## Chapter 3: The Independent State of Croatia

### The establishment of the Independent State of Croatia

Shortly after the Axis invasion of Yugoslavia, the Ustasha regime came to power. The *Nezavisna Država Hrvatska* (NDH), or the *Independent State of Croatia*, was established on April 10, 1941, and consisted of Croatia and parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The independent state was divided into two zones of occupation, where the Dalmatia region was annexed and administered by Italian forces, while the rest of the NDH was controlled by Nazi Germany.<sup>108</sup> From early on, the regime clearly expressed its ambitions for Croatia, establishing itself as one of the most brutal satellite states by way of its extraordinary propensity for violence, and the destruction of what it considered undesirable elements in Croatia, which included Serbs, Jews, Roma and political opponents.<sup>109</sup>

The NDH regime imagined that all non-Croatian influences and elements would have to go away in order for the Croats to be truly liberated from years of foreign rule and oppression. The Ustasha regime had a strict criterion for the composition of the new state. Whom a Croat was and could be, was clearly expressed in the legislation introduced by the regime. Immediately after the Ustasha came to power, they introduced antisemitic laws that excluded Jews from the Croatian national community.<sup>110</sup> Croatian Jews had now very clearly become a center of attention. The Jews were identified as a destructive force, and one of the first anti-Jewish laws introduced by the regime was the very definition of the term "Jew".<sup>111</sup>

It was identical to the German "Jew" definition in several ways. The dates of the law's accession and retroactivity were, of course, different from the German one which came into force in 1935, but was based on the same premises, stating that a Jewish person was:

- 1) a person who had at least three Jewish grandparents, 2) a person who had two Jewish grandparents and who a) belonged to the Jewish community April 10, 1940 or later or b) was married to a Jewish person April 30, 1930, or married a Jewish or half-Jewish person at a later date, or c) was the offspring of an extramarital affair with a Jew, and was born after January 31, 1942.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Yeomans, «Eradicating "Undesired Elements"», 201.

<sup>109</sup> Payne, *A History of Fascism*, 408. Also see Yeomans, «Eradicating «Undesired Elements»», 201.

<sup>110</sup> Kralj, «Paving the Road to Death», 233.

<sup>111</sup> Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews vol. II*, 757.

<sup>112</sup> Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews vol. II*, 758.

However, the NDH regime's definition of a Jew differs from the German one in that it contains more specifications, namely points 2d) and 2e), and points 3) and 4). Point 2d) is particularly interesting, because it states that a person could also be defined as a Jew through the decision of the Croatian Minister of the Interior, which was Andrija Artuković between 1941 and 1942, and on the recommendation of the NDH's «Race Policy Commission».<sup>113</sup> People of Jewish origin that had proven themselves meritorious for the Croatian people and its liberation, especially in the time before April 10<sup>th</sup> 1941, could be exempted from the NDH's racial laws and receive status as Honorary Aryans.<sup>114</sup>

Furthermore, the law continues with point 2e), which states that a person, in addition to having two Jewish grandparents, can also be a Jew by being born outside Croatia by parents who do not reside in Croatia. The definition continues with a point 3), which states that any child of an unmarried Jewish mother is a Jew, and 4) that any person who enters into marriage with Jews after April 30, 1941, including those who were Jewish by ¼ part and those of complete Aryan offspring, were by definition, Jews.<sup>115</sup>

The discussion surrounding the Nazi influence on the NDH regime, and thus also its antisemitism, has in many ways defined the historical research and writings about the Ustasha movement. However, we should be careful not to let the Nazi influence overshadow the Ustasha's own activities and efforts. Not only because it understates their participation in the Holocaust, but also because the contention that the German influence was so strong on the Ustasha that it rendered them into puppets, devoid and incapable of making independent decisions, provides a unnuanced and poorly contextualized reflection of the Croatian situation. Such a line of thought makes the transmission and exchange of thoughts and ideas that took place unperceivable.

Without denying the blatant influence of German Nazism, it is possible to argue that the NDH-regime attempted to develop its own “brand” of antisemitism and antisemitic policies, because it served both a practical and symbolic function within the NDH. One can by example look to the regime's extension of the “Jew” definition, especially point 2d), which involved a race-political commission that allowed certain Jews the status of “Honorary Aryans”. The race-political commission raised the objection of German authorities, as they believed it to be based

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Bartulin, *Honorary Aryans*, 69.

<sup>115</sup> Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews vol. II*, 758.

on arbitrary and subjective criteria that invited corrupt practices regarding the management of the Croatian Jews.<sup>116</sup>

The anti-Jewish measures appear to have been more than an attempt to impress the Nazis, which it failed to do anyway. The NDH's racial law decrees were indeed modeled on the September 1935 Nuremberg laws, but were more than likely implemented in the NDH because they actually served the Ustasha's own political ambitions. A "Jew" in Croatia differed somewhat from a Jew in Nazi Germany, which emphasizes the importance of taking into account the Croatian context. Why did the Ustasha extend the "Jew" definition? And why was it important for a Jew in Croatia to differ from one in Germany? The regime's extension of the definition can perhaps, first of all, serve as an example of how the Ustasha regime attempted to ground their own beliefs and mission. The regime's definition was specifically tailored to a Croatia that had been buried by foreign oppression for centuries and assisted them in identifying the particular elements they believed polluted the nation. This should, however, not be confused with imitation for the *sake* of imitation.

Moreover, it is important to keep in mind that, in some respects, the Ustasha's antisemitic policies could be far more radical than those in Nazi Germany.<sup>117</sup> German officials in Croatia had complained that the NDH authorities had gone too far with the use of the Jewish star.<sup>118</sup> Jews were required by law to wear the Jewish star on the outside of their clothing in German-occupied states - often one star on the chest or front was enough. In the NDH, the Jews were for a shorter period of time forced to carry the Jewish star both front and back, while some local Ustasha members suggested that infants and children under the age of fourteen should also use the star.<sup>119</sup> The Ustasha's intense zeal toward the Jews, which was reflected in their anti-Jewish legislation, illustrates the major role they believed the Jews played in the oppression of the Croats.

### **The establishment of the State Information and Propaganda Office (DIPU)**

The structure of the NDH state was centralized in the sense that all the power was concentrated in the capital Zagreb among a few selected members.<sup>120</sup> The structure of the NDH state was also, however, regional in the sense that it was divided into several counties and regions where

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<sup>116</sup> Bartulin, *Honorary Aryans*, 4.

<sup>117</sup> Yeomans, «Eradicating "Undesired Elements"», 204.

<sup>118</sup> Yeomans, «Eradicating "Undesired Elements"», 205.

<sup>119</sup> Yeomans, «Eradicating "Undesired Elements"», 204.

<sup>120</sup> Yeomans, *Visions of Annihilation*, 9-11.



powerful, local Ustasha governors and leaders exercised considerable power. The so-called “Poglavnik” ultimately made all the decisions within the NDH-state in theory, but beyond the "leader", the real power lay within the *Glavni ustaški stan* (GUS), which was the Ustasha headquarters, and was composed of seven deputy chiefs, the corps of Adjutants and Commissioners, and a comprehensive and active propaganda department.<sup>121</sup>

As early as April 1941, the Ustasha regime established its first censorship and propaganda directorate.<sup>122</sup> It changed its name and committee often, as with many other NDH directorates, and in January 1942 it was officially named the *Državni izvještajni in promidžbeni ured*, or DIPU – the State Information and Propaganda Office. The DIPU was the highest body for all the propaganda that came from the NDH state.<sup>123</sup> It more or less functioned as the NDH state's highest representative, and its main goal was to ensure that the regime fell in good favor among its own citizens, but also among people outside the NDH.<sup>124</sup>

The DIPU's scope of work was large. Mainly the State Information and Propaganda Office was responsible for, among other things, performing intelligence services, creating guidelines for all journalism in the NDH, exercising censorship over all newspapers and publications, doing preventive work to stop the spread of banned publications and magazines, issuing permits for publishing and distributing all types of publications and printed material (except school textbooks), monitoring the import of publications from abroad and how they were exhibited in the NDH, organizing and supervising the State Film Institute, and approving the organization of all kinds of exhibitions in the NDH state territory, as well as monitoring the implementation of the exhibitions in collaboration with relevant ministries.<sup>125</sup> The DIPU was therefore the directorate involved in creating and approving the exhibition “ŽIDOVI”.

The DIPU was again organized into several departments with different areas of responsibility. Including a department that supervised domestic propaganda, one for foreign propaganda, one department for newspapers and press, one for film, one for photography, one for exhibitions and graphics and so on.<sup>126</sup> The regime also had its own public relations firm in the capital, which was responsible for disseminating and making visible the regime's propaganda campaigns to the general public.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Zuckerman, *Psihologija Holokausta*, 40.

<sup>124</sup> The information on the structure of the DIPU is taken from the catalogue of the archival collection HR-HDA 237 Predsjedništvo vlade NDH glavno ravnateljstvo za Promidžbu, 3.

<sup>125</sup> Archive catalog for HR-HDA 237, 3-4.

<sup>126</sup> Archive catalog for HR-HDA 237, 6.

<sup>127</sup> Yeomans, *Visions of Annihilation*, 11.

## The DIPU administration, Vilko Rieger and «ŽIDOVI»

The head of the DIPU was appointed by the Poglavnik. In the autumn of 1941, Pavelić appointed Vilko Rieger as the *Pročelnik*, or *Head*, of the State Information and Propaganda Office. Rieger held this position until October 1943.<sup>128</sup> As the leader of the ministry responsible for all exhibitions produced in the NDH, Rieger was directly involved in the creation of the antisemitic exhibition. He was born in Zagreb in 1911, and during his time as a student in the city, he organized several student groups for Ustasha members.<sup>129</sup> In the time between 1936 and the second half of 1941, Rieger lived in Germany where he also received his doctorate.<sup>130</sup> Rieger nonetheless continued his Ustasha activities while he was abroad in Germany, and maintained close contact with other Ustasha émigrés, particularly those residing in South America.<sup>131</sup> Exposed to the political climate in Germany in the 1930s, his stay in Germany must have had a great influence on his thinking and values. As early as 1933, the Prime Minister's Office for Public Information and Propaganda (*Reichsministerium für Volksaufklärung und Propaganda*) had been established with Josef Goebbels as head of the department. The ministry had an enormous influence on all aspects of daily life in Germany, including the press, radio, film, theater, schoolbooks and art.<sup>132</sup>

In addition, Rieger was an active writer in newspapers and publications which in interwar Yugoslavia had expressed sympathetic views toward fascism and Nazism, and which had published articles with antisemitic point of views.<sup>133</sup> The folder compiled on Rieger by the Yugoslav secret service, reveals that while he was in Berlin, he was active in the newspaper *Hrvatska Smotra*, or *The Croatian Review*, which they described to have “actively functioned on a clerical-fascist basis”.<sup>134</sup> Rieger also contributed to the Ustasha newspaper *Spremnost*, or *Readiness*,<sup>135</sup> which served as the Ustasha movements intellectual journal.<sup>136</sup>

Rieger was readily described as a "typical intellectual and academic man", and as a "theorist to a greater degree than a pragmatist" by other Ustasha men.<sup>137</sup> These characteristics served him well as head of the State Information and Propaganda Office, a state body tasked with

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<sup>128</sup> Tomasevich, *War and Revolution in Yugoslavia*, 344.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> HR-HDA 1561 SDS RSUP SRH, File “Vilko Rieger”, 3.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> USHMM Holocaust Encyclopedia, «Ministry of Propaganda and Public Enlightenment».

<sup>133</sup> Goldstein, *The Holocaust in Croatia*, 21-22.

<sup>134</sup> HR-HDA 1561 SDS RSUP SRH, File “Vilko Rieger”, 3.

<sup>135</sup> *Spremnost*, or ‘preparedness’, refers to the Ustasha expression and salute «Za dom spremni», which simply means “ready for the homeland”.

<sup>136</sup> Yeomans, *The Utopia of Terror*, 158.

<sup>137</sup> HR-HDA 1561 SDS RSUP SRH, File “Vilko Rieger”, 38.

shaping the thoughts and perceptions of the people living within the NDH territory. Despite Rieger's accolades, Pavelić did not seem to be happy with his efforts as Head of the State Information and Propaganda Office. In the Yugoslav secret service's documents on Rieger, it is said by other Ustasha men that he, in terms of propaganda, "did not give Pavelić what he expected of him", and that he for these reasons instead was "appointed professor of sociology at the Zagreb School of Economics".<sup>138</sup> However, it must be said that "ŽIDOVI" was one of the most elaborate and bombastic expressions of antisemitic propaganda, and was undoubtedly the climax of the regime's antisemitic campaigns.<sup>139</sup> Exactly why Rieger did not live up to the Poglavnik's expectations is uncertain.

Rieger published several books and texts in the period between 1934 and 1943 in which he discussed his areas of expertise, namely Marx's theories, capitalism, communism and National Socialism. There were few overbearing antisemitic expression in Rieger's earliest publications. In 1934 in Zagreb he published the pamphlet *Komunizam ili socijalni nacionalizam?*, or *Communism or National Socialism?*. In the pamphlet, he criticized communism and defended National Socialism as the only future for Croatia. He criticized communism for having taken a monopoly on socialism and refuted the belief that history was driven by class struggle. Instead Rieger argued that history was driven by the struggle of different religions, nationalities and races.<sup>140</sup>

Within the brochure's 20 pages, he mentions the Jews only once in connection with communism, and writes:

We do not want an international Jewish communism, which is foreign to the soul of [this] people. We also do not want exploitative capitalism, but we do not want to be a branch or agent of the Bolshevistic Moscow (...) The future of the Croatian people lies in National Socialism!<sup>141</sup>

Rieger portrayed the Jews as revolutionary agents and communism as a Jewish creation. The Russian Revolution had led to a marked increase in antisemitism in Europe, and because a number of prominent Bolsheviks were Jews, this was interpreted as a confirmation that the Jews controlled world politics.<sup>142</sup> A section of the exhibition was dedicated to "Jews in other

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Goldstein, *The Holocaust in Croatia*, 354.

<sup>140</sup> Rieger, *Komunizam ili socijalni nacionalizam?*, 8.

<sup>141</sup> Rieger, *Komunizam ili socijalni nacionalizam?*, 19-20.

<sup>142</sup> Eriksen et.al., *Judehatets svarta bok*, 393.

countries", where it was claimed that the Jews kept the Soviet Union in "their chains".<sup>143</sup> Whether this was a direct contribution from Rieger is difficult to say, but it does testify to the types of antisemitism that circulated among the Ustasha.

In 1943, one year after the exhibition, Rieger published *Hrvatska u borbi*, or *Croatia in Battle*. It was a book about, among other things, the Ustasha movement, its ambitions and the importance of preserving the newly established Croatian state. This time Rieger had dedicated a single standing chapter of four pages about the Jews and what he perceived to be their destructive effect on the Croatian people, writing that:

The influence of the Jews on our country was so sinister and harmful that it was necessary to expose their destructive actions towards the Croatian people. If we look to the history of Judaism, we will soon realize its history is the story of the downfall of the nations where they have managed to establish their nests and gain power (...) Judaism possesses so many destructive forces that it is quite understandable that there have been established movements that worked against the Jews ... the Jews have always been associated with all negative movements, and everything that can destroy the Aryan society. It is no wonder that Jews in all countries have been pioneers of capitalism, and the most avid promoters of Marxism ... They can be found on all political sides, in liberal capitalism and Marxism ... Moreover, they had the main word in the communist and social-democratic sides. Nor is it so strange, when everyone knows that the founder of Marxism, Karl Marx, was himself a Jew.<sup>144</sup>

Rieger's rhetoric concerning Jews had escalated. In 1943 he had clearly elaborated on what he ten years earlier meant by "international Jewish communism", claiming that present-day Bolshevism could not be recognized without its connection to Judaism.<sup>145</sup> At the same time, he had identified the Jews with other "harmful" currents such as capitalism and democracy

Much of what Rieger wrote under his own name resembled the themes of the exhibition's contents. "ŽIDOVI" was made up of six parts and focused mainly on presenting the "destructive" history of the Jews:

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<sup>143</sup> See exhibition catalogue «Židovi – izložba o razvoju židovstva i njihovog rušilačkog rada u Hrvatskoj prije 10.IV.1941».

<sup>144</sup> Rieger, *Hrvatska u borbi*, 58-59.

<sup>145</sup> Rieger, *Hrvatska u borbi*, 60.

**I. Jews in ancient times.** Examples that prove that Jews from ancient times have always behaved as they do today, and how Jews crept in among other ethnic groups.

**II. Jewish settlement in Croatian lands in the period from the destruction of Jerusalem 70 AD. until the Edict of Tolerance in 1788.**<sup>146</sup> What they did in Croatia, and how they slowly but surely turned the Croatian people into slaves.

**III. Jews in Croatia from 1782 to 1918.** The sudden strengthening of Jews in Croatia. How they crept in among the nobility, and how they Judaized the Croatian public.

**IV. Jews as allies of those who oppressed Croats from 1918 to 1941.** How and why Serbs and Jews alike oppressed the Croats. The Croatian economy in Jewish hands.

**V. Days of Freedom.** How Croatia under the Ustasha's leadership solved the Jewish question.

**VI. Jews in other countries.** The Soviet Union is in the chains of the Jews. The English nobility is mixed with Jewish blood. Jews rule the United States - their politics and economy are ruled by Jews.<sup>147</sup>

Rieger was under his own pen concerned with portraying the Jews as a destructive force throughout history. The Jews were a force that had “spoiled” the Aryan race by "establishing nests" in their societies. Incidentally, he also wrote about the English nobility's alleged affiliation with the Jews and the Jews' alleged domination of the United States. It is hard to tell how direct of a contribution Rieger had made to the exhibition. Was for instance what Rieger wrote in *Croatia in Battle*, published a year after the exhibition, thoughts and opinions he possessed beforehand? The speech that Rieger held at the exhibition's opening ceremony in 1942 might suggest so, as it carries striking resemblance to the book's contents. Rieger's ideas might have been rather important for the antisemitic tropes presented at the exhibition.

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<sup>146</sup> The DIPU made a mistake in the exhibition catalogue by writing that the Edict of Tolerance was proclaimed in 1788. The correct date is however 1782. For order's sake, I have kept the mistake as not to deviate from the original document.

<sup>147</sup> Own translation from «Židovi – izložba o razvoju židovstva i njihovog rušilačkog rada u Hrvatskoj prije 10.IV.1941». Also see Ivo and Slavko Goldstein's translation for reference, 355.

## Chapter 4: Creating the Antisemitic Exhibition

### The first steps towards the creation of the exhibition: The gathering of information on Jews

At some point in December 1941, Dr. Vilko Rieger, the head of the State Information and Propaganda Office DIPU, decided to arrange the antisemitic exhibition “Židovi”.<sup>148</sup> The preparation of the exhibition was fast paced, and had seriously begun in early January of 1942. The first step toward the creation of the antisemitic exhibition was the gathering of information on Jews, an endeavor that required the participation of the Croatian public. Consequently, the State Information and Propaganda Office took to the newspapers to announce to the citizens of the NDH, perhaps more so to those that resided in the capital Zagreb, that they were searching for any books that dealt with Jews.

In January, a special appeal was made in the newspaper *Hrvatski Narod* by the DIPU to any individuals who owned “any books on Jews”, even those who were not written in the Croatian language.<sup>149</sup> The DIPU requested “all those who own any book on Jews, which has been published in the territory of the Independent State of Croatia, from the earliest times to the present day” to put these books at their disposal.<sup>150</sup> The ad stated that the books would remain the property of the contributors, unless they wished to gift or sell their books to the Propaganda Office. The books would only be borrowed for the purpose of gathering facts about the “Jewish question”. Not only were books written in “anti-Jewish spirit” welcomed by the Propaganda Office, but also those books “defending Jews and Judaism.”<sup>151</sup> Even books that were banned by the state censorship were welcomed, and it was promised, that the delivery of such books would cause no trouble for those who possessed them.

It was not directly stated in the newspapers that the gathering of information on Jews was in preparation for an anti-Jewish exhibition. However, we know this endeavor was connected to the creation of “ŽIDOVJI” through the film *Kako se stvaraju izložbe*, or *How Exhibitions are made*. *Hrvatski slikopis* or *Croatia Film*, which was owned by the NDH state, released a short film in 1942 documenting the creation of the antisemitic exhibition. In the documentary, a copy

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<sup>148</sup> Hrvatski slikopis, *Kako se stvaraju izložbe*, Film, 1942.

<sup>149</sup> Hrvatski Narod, «Prikupljanje knjiga o židovima», 3. No. 318, January 6<sup>th</sup>, 1942.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

of *Hrvatski Narod* was referenced as the narrator explained the first steps toward the creation of the exhibition.<sup>152</sup>

The DIPU's documentary about the antisemitic exhibition is an important source for understanding the first steps toward the exhibition's creation. Among other things, it confirms that the newspaper plea was not just material meant for the production of general propaganda in the NDH state. The documentary reached cinemas on May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1942, only two days after the antisemitic exhibition had opened to the public in Zagreb.<sup>153</sup> The documentary was shown before the main program at the cinema, which would often be a foreign feature film that gathered the largest crowds.<sup>154</sup>

In the Yugoslav kingdom, cinema was under state ownership, and many of the cinemas had been run by American studio affiliates that were owned by Jews and Serbs.<sup>155</sup> When Hrvatski slikopis (Croatia Film) was founded, the NDH-regime saw it as a golden opportunity to reform and define culture in the new state, free of influence from what they viewed as the culturally degenerate Serbs and Jews. The majority of the films that were produced in the NDH were news and documentary films, as film was thought to be a powerful and efficient tool of propaganda.<sup>156</sup> Knowing that many of the exhibition's visitors would be viewing the documentary, it is not surprising that the involvement of the public was stressed as important for the creation of the exhibition.

The public's response to the newspaper-ad was very large, according to the documentary.<sup>157</sup> Women and men, old and young, one after the other, were said to have come into the main office of the State Information and Propaganda Office to hand over the books they had on Jews.<sup>158</sup> The DIPU considered this an extremely valuable deed and went through the trouble of re-creating the event in the film, with actors depicting dutiful citizens handing over books. It is important to remember that this film, although a valuable source for understanding the creative process and intentions behind the antisemitic exhibition, was a highly stylized piece of film that aimed to represent the NDH-government and all its activities in the best possible light. Whether the public's turnout was as large as they claimed is hard to tell. The NDH-state controlled and financed all films and film production. It would have been in their best interest to strengthen a narrative that made it seem like the now uniform body of the newly formed state was profoundly

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<sup>152</sup> Hrvatski slikopis, *Kako se stvaraju izložbe*, Film, 1942.

<sup>153</sup> Polimac, «Ključna povijesna otkrića». Jutarnji list.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

<sup>155</sup> Yeomans, *Visions of Annihilation*, 210.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

<sup>157</sup> Hrvatski slikopis, *Kako se stvaraju izložbe*, Film, 1942.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

aware the Jewish question in Croatia, and that they cared enough about it to provide the Propaganda Office with books on the subject.

Either way, if we are to believe the DIPU, the people listened, because the office had received plenty of what was described as “very literary valuable books.”<sup>159</sup> In less than a month, the Office had accumulated a “very rich library” on the topic of the Jewish question.<sup>160</sup> Neatly and tightly stacked bookshelves embellished the headquarters of the Information and Propaganda Office. Allegedly, there were over three thousand prayer books, and the Talmud and other books of religious content alone filled two entire shelves of the office.<sup>161</sup>

### **The Croatian public’s engagement with the creation of the exhibition**

The exhibition was a “successful co-operation” that had prevailed between the state and the general public.<sup>162</sup> There are several reasons for why the State Information and Propaganda Office decided to involve the public as one of their strategies for the gathering of information about Jews. One explanation could be that the engagement of the public was for practical reasons. If they did indeed rely on the books for the creation of the exhibition’s antisemitic contents, it is possible to imagine that it would have been beneficial for the DIPU to be familiar with the general knowledge people in Croatia possessed of Jews and Judaism. They could then center the exhibition’s contents on notions people already had about Jews, which would perhaps make the exhibition’s antisemitic contents more palatable.

More convincing, is the explanation that that the involvement of the general public was a symbolic gesture. It is hard to imagine that the DIPU did not have the resources or found it difficult to access information about Jews and Jewish history, which they either way would have contorted to fit their antisemitic narrative. The State Information and Propaganda Office explained that:

From the first hour of the preparation of this exhibition, it was felt that the Croatian people were aware of the importance of the Jewish question, and that the solution came from the Poglavnik’s and the people’s spirit – and that this connection was so strong – that it in fact represented an invisible entity. Therefore, the purpose of this exhibition is not, and should not be, to raise awareness among the Croatian people. The people have

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<sup>159</sup> Hrvatski slikopis, *Kako se stvaraju izložbe*, Film, 1942.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.



been aware of this for a long time, from the earliest of times of its history, when the Jews were just beginning to creep into its ranks. The exhibition must only acquaint all parts of Croatia with the fact that no Croatian region was an exception, that everyone suffered from Judaism and that not resolving the Jewish question would be the greatest danger for the entire future of Croatia. This exhibition must therefore help to unify the anti-Jewish vision of our newly liberated Homeland.<sup>163</sup>

The Croatian people's participation in the exhibition illustrated their awareness of the "Jewish question" and what is signified for the existence of the NDH. More importantly, their participation illustrated the long anti-Jewish spirit the Croatian people had always possessed, according to the DIPU.

The public books were given to a so-called reporter on the Jewish question, who we are introduced to as Stanko Radovanović, or S.R. Žrnovački, in the documentary. Along with his assistants, he was responsible for sorting through the anti-Jewish material. Although the DIPU did not provide much information on him, he was by the Ustasha's standards a competent antisemite. He had written the introduction to a Croatian 1942 edition of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*,<sup>164</sup> and had in the same year written an article titled "Jews are eating away at the people's way of life" in the newspaper *Hrvatski Narod*, in which he claimed that "every Jew is simply a member of the large Jewish international".<sup>165</sup>

### **Assistance from the University and the "scientific" legitimacy of the exhibition**

The DIPU were happy with the material they had received from the public as it fittingly captured what they believed to be the "Jewish spirit". However, above all, the assistance provided by the University was especially valued by the DIPU. They reported having particular difficulties with the books of religious content.<sup>166</sup> They explained that the pure concentration of religious books required special professional knowledge, and they consequently involved the *Bogoslovski fakultet*, or the Faculty of Theology from the University of Zagreb.<sup>167</sup> The exhibition's main contention was its factual legitimacy and scientific credibility, and it was

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<sup>163</sup> Own translation from exhibition catalogue, «Židovi – izložba o razvoju židovstva i njihovog rušilačkog rada u Hrvatskoj prije 10.IV.1941», 6.

<sup>164</sup> Hrvatski nacionalni skupni katalog, «Protokoli sionskih mudraca».

<sup>165</sup> Bartulin, *The Racial Idea in the Independent State of Croatia*, 219.

<sup>166</sup> Hrvatski slikopis, *Kako se stvaraju izložbe*, Film, 1942.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

thought that the Faculty of Theology would be able to contribute positively to this. The DIPU claimed in the exhibition catalogue that the majority of the exhibition's contents had been collected by racial experts, demographers and scientists.<sup>168</sup> For instance, they claimed that a professor of "Hebrewology", along with some of his best students were called in to assist the research, and that the professors and his students had spared "neither effort nor time" for the rich and intricate material.<sup>169</sup>

The Ustasha-regime had already in the autumn of 1941 expressed their visions for how higher education would look in the newly established state. Teaching and research in the NDH had to be "national, moral, and intellectual".<sup>170</sup> The Croatian University in Zagreb was no exception and had to be in harmony with the new Ustasha spirit.<sup>171</sup> Therefore the whole university was refashioned according to Ustasha principles.<sup>172</sup> The Faculty of Theology could then offer little scientific legitimacy and objectivity when tied to the Ustasha-vision and principles. Although the statistics and so-called facts of the exhibition had little credibility, the rigorous science behind the analysis of the exhibition's contents kept being heavily stressed by the DIPU.<sup>173</sup>

In particular, the DIPU believed that the "Jewish Spirit" would be best portrayed through its own teachings. For that reason, they had the Faculty of Theology diligently flip through the pages of the Talmud so its quotes could be extracted and translated.<sup>174</sup> A whole poster was dedicated to one of the translations that had been made from the Talmud. In bold, black letters painted on top of a Menorah, the exhibition poster claimed that the Talmud instructed:

All Jews are obligated to act in a manner in which Christian churches are torn down. Their [Christian] Saints must be called derogatory names, and priests killed at every opportunity.

Jore Dea 14G, 14

TALMUD.<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

<sup>170</sup> Yeomans, *Visions of Annihilation*, 42.

<sup>171</sup> Yeomans, *Visions of Annihilation*, 42-43.

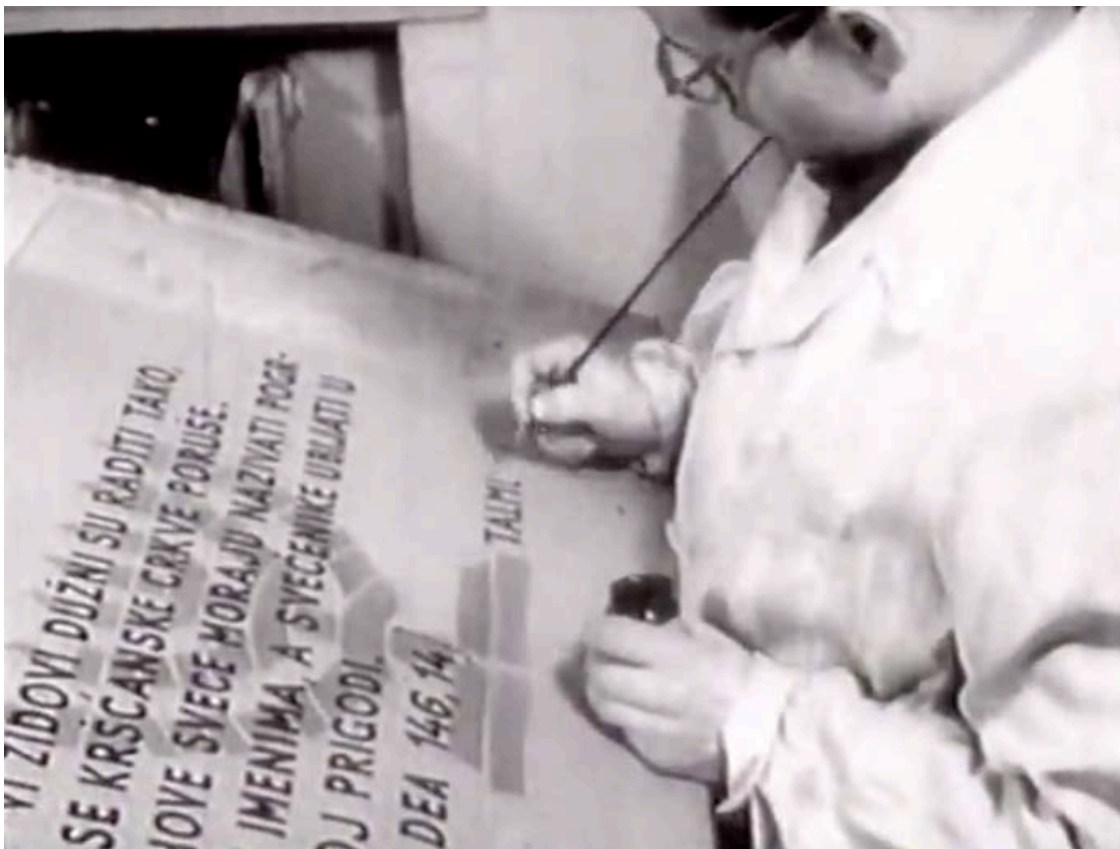
<sup>172</sup> Yeomans, *Visions of Annihilation*, 44.

<sup>173</sup> Yeomans, «Eradicating "Undesired Elements"», 207.

<sup>174</sup> Hrvatski slikopis, *Kako se stvaraju izložbe*, Film, 1942.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

The example of the Jewish holy scripture in the exhibition served the purpose of revealing to the Croatian people what “Jews thought of non-Jews”.<sup>176</sup> This was one of the ways in which they believed they were acquainting people with the so-called suffering that Judaism had brought about, and the dangers it posed to the societies it was allowed to flourish in. Although the Ustasha discussed the Jewish religion in the exhibition, it was surprisingly not its main focus. Instead, the Ustasha stressed the history of the Jews to demonstrate their alleged negative characteristics.



Artist creating a panel for the alleged translations of the Talmud in “Kako se stvaraju izložbe”. From the Croatian State Archives (Hrvatska Kinoteka).

### More information on Jews

Although the Office deemed the material from the public as valuable, in reality, they collected the main source of information about Jews and Judaism from various Ustasha-counties, cities, parishes, camps and districts. A note sent on January 12<sup>th</sup>, 1942 from the parish *Velika župa*

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<sup>176</sup> Ibid.

*Bilogora*, stated that the DIPU needed general information on Jews, as well as information on the activities of Jews who had distinguished themselves through their “anti-Croatian and socially harmful and corrupt work in general”.<sup>177</sup> To collect the necessary data, the DIPU provided various districts with written forms that would aid their research on Jews and their activities throughout Croatia. The recipients of the DIPU’s note were told to pay special attention to “the attitude of Jews towards workers” and “their destructive work in the villages”.<sup>178</sup> It was important that the general relationship between Jews and workers was unveiled through the use of specific cases and examples, as specific cases and examples would strengthen the factual legitimacy of the exhibition. They only used those numbers from the districts which they could verify with absolute certainty to create the exhibition’s graphs which were “based on a strictly scientific basis”.<sup>179</sup>

The DIPU issued the note with great seriousness and urgency. The task they had entrusted to the various Ustasha-districts, parishes, camps, cities and counties was of utmost importance, they felt. They were particularly clear about the task requiring “a lot of effort and meticulousness”.<sup>180</sup> Therefore, sending any “superficial” presentations or information would be considered as negligence and a failure to fulfill official tasks.<sup>181</sup> The DIPU expected nothing less than the full energy and attentiveness of the people responsible for collecting the information on Jews, and was something that was requested to be done immediately and thoroughly. The selection of suitable persons to fulfill the task had to be worked out within the various Ustasha-camps and were chosen on the spot, with DIPU specifying that the persons chosen to collect the information had to be serious and credible.<sup>182</sup> They expected the information from the parishes and districts back as early as February 5, 1942.<sup>183</sup>

Although the material requested in the note was not said to be for the creation of the exhibition, we can assume that it was for several reasons. First of all, the request fits within the timeframe that the DIPU started to create the exhibition, and secondly, the requested information fits with contents of the exhibition. The biggest assurance that it was meant for the creation of the exhibition, however, comes from the exhibition’s film-documentary. It was stated that an even more important source than the public’s books were the reports coming from

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<sup>177</sup> USHMM, RG-61.030, HR-DABJ 22-8, 2.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>179</sup> Exhibition catalogue, “Židovi”, 23.

<sup>180</sup> USHMM, RG-61.030, HR-DABJ 22-8, 2.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*

the provinces.<sup>184</sup> The DIPU eagerly explained that they had received what they described as a mountain of information and facts from various Ustasha camps, city governments, parishes and even law courts around the Independent State of Croatia.<sup>185</sup> The specific cases and examples that the districts had managed to uncover included footage of synagogues and lawsuits against Jews made by Croats who had been “damaged” by Jewish activities.<sup>186</sup>

Although the DIPU had stressed the urgency of returning the requested information back by February 5<sup>th</sup>, there were serious delays in the sending of information from some of the districts. In one of the exhibition’s posters that illustrated the prevalence of synagogues and Jewish cemeteries in the NDH, it was explained with small letters that “due to the difficult traffic conditions that prevailed this winter, and which are partly still prevailing in the NDH, accurate data from 8 large parishes could not be collected.”<sup>187</sup>

While the DIPU was creating the exhibition’s contents, its posters and propaganda, several Ustasha-camps and parishes were failing to deliver the requested information and consequently failing to fulfill their official tasks. This explains why there are notes from the DIPU as late as April acutely seeking material for their antisemitic propaganda. This is quite extraordinary, because they had already started advertising the antisemitic exhibition in April.<sup>188</sup>

A note from as late as April 25<sup>th</sup> illustrates how the DIPU were hastily trying to piece together the last bits of information for the exhibition. The note, which was sent to the Office for the Nationalization of Property at the State Treasury, requested “all the information about the Jewish shops in Zagreb.”<sup>189</sup> The information was needed urgently, as it would “complete the material for the anti-Jewish exhibition” which the State Information and Propaganda Office would be “opening in the Art Pavilion on May 1<sup>st</sup> this year.”<sup>190</sup>

Aside from the DIPU not receiving the information they had requested on time, it appears as if not everyone took their task as seriously as the DIPU had instructed. For instance, when the information on Jews was sent from the district of Velika Gora on March 7<sup>th</sup>, 1942, the district reported that “there were many inaccuracies and contradictions” in the material that they had obtained.<sup>191</sup> A great deal of the information they had received had to be returned for

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<sup>184</sup> Hrvatski slikopis, *Kako se stvaraju izložbe*, Film, 1942.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid.

<sup>187</sup> Own translation from the exhibition catalogue “Židovi”, 22.

<sup>188</sup> For instance, one of the first ads can be seen in *Nova Hrvatska* (Issue 78-150) Nr.97, 25. April 1942. (Br. 78-150).

<sup>189</sup> HR-HDA 237, *GRP Opći odsjek*, Box 5, Pročelnik to Ured za podržavljanje imovine kod Državne riznice, 25. April 1942. (6226/42)

<sup>190</sup> HR-HDA 237, *GRP Opći odsjek*, Box 5, Gradsko poglavarstvo u Brodu na Savi to Predsjedništvo vlade Odjel za Državnu promičbu, “Podatci o žid.bogomolji“, 6. March, 1942. (3025/42).

<sup>191</sup> HR-HDA 237, *GRP Opći odsjek*, Box 5, From Velika župa Gora Petrinja to DIPU, «Podatci o židovima na

correction, severely delaying their promised delivery of information on Jews to the DIPU.<sup>192</sup> They also explained that some areas in the district of Velika Gora, even after having been reminded a second time to produce information on Jews, did not submit any materials. The collecting of information on Jews was a rather tumultuous ordeal that put the DIPU in a great rush. Besides difficult traffic conditions causing delays in the delivery of the material, it appears that the districts throughout the NDH expressed varying degrees of enthusiasm when it came to fulfilling their duty.

Although the DIPU's gathering of material was a disjointed process, they still managed to produce what they described as a very rich catalog of information about Jews. It was allegedly a great addition to the topic of the Jewish question in Croatia. In fact, it would "forever open the eyes of those last and rare Croats who were seduced by Jewish propaganda" and who thought that Jews were "innocent lambs who wished the Croats well."<sup>193</sup> All that remained now, was for the team of artists to arrange the material.

### **Creating the antisemitic content**

The DIPU satisfied with the anti-Jewish material collected, moved on to creating the exhibition's contents. In the exhibition's film-documentary, the creative process behind the antisemitic contents was stressed just as much as the exhibition's scientific and factual credibility. Since the exhibition relied heavily on statistics, it was extremely important that the information, maps, and statistics were all drawn differently so that the eyes of the visitors did not get "tired of the monotony".<sup>194</sup> The DIPU wanted only artists that could bring to fruition the exhibition's intended anti-Jewish expression.<sup>195</sup>

They believed the Croatian artist Walter Neugebauer to possess such qualities. When Neugebauer agreed to collaborate on the antisemitic exhibition, he had already made a name for himself in Zagreb through his cartoons and comic books, but also through his illustrative work in Croatian newspapers.<sup>196</sup> Neugebauer and his team of young painters were filmed working enthusiastically among messy counters covered in spilt paint. One of Neugebauer's illustrations included a caricature of what was meant to portray a stereotypical Jewish man. In their eyes, a typical Jewish man was overweight, and he always wore a sharp-looking suit. On

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području Velike župe Gora», 7. March, 1942.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid.

<sup>196</sup> Polimac, "Ključna povijesna otkrića". Jutarnji list.

his balding head rested a bowl hat that revealed his protruding ears. His nose was big and hooked, and in-between his lips that formed a cunning smile, he had a fat cigar firmly pressed.<sup>197</sup> This kind of depiction of the Jews was frequently used in the parts of the exhibition that claimed the Jews had enslaved the Croatian population. Other posters from the exhibition similarly portrayed the Jews as big, greedy men dressed in suits riding on the backs of “innocent” Croats.<sup>198</sup>

The most harrowing piece that was created for the exhibition by the team of artists was, however, the bust of what was supposed to depict a Jewish head. The bust was given special attention in the exhibition’s documentary. As a sculptor is shown working on the bust, adding little pieces of clay that formed the man’s hair, the narrator asks bewildered: “What is this?”.<sup>199</sup> To his own question, he answers: “This clay-statue will preserve the appearance of the Jewish race for those generations that will tell their Croatian children: “That is how a parasitic breed called Jews once lived in Croatia.”<sup>200</sup> Up until then, it seemed that the DIPU’s focus was placed in presenting all the “facts” and “evils” about Jews that they could find. In all the alleged facts, information and statistics, it is easy to forget what the exhibition was celebrating more specifically. The NDH state was, as the exhibition title suggests, claiming to have solved the Jewish question in Croatia, something that the clay-statue of the “Jewish race” served to remind.

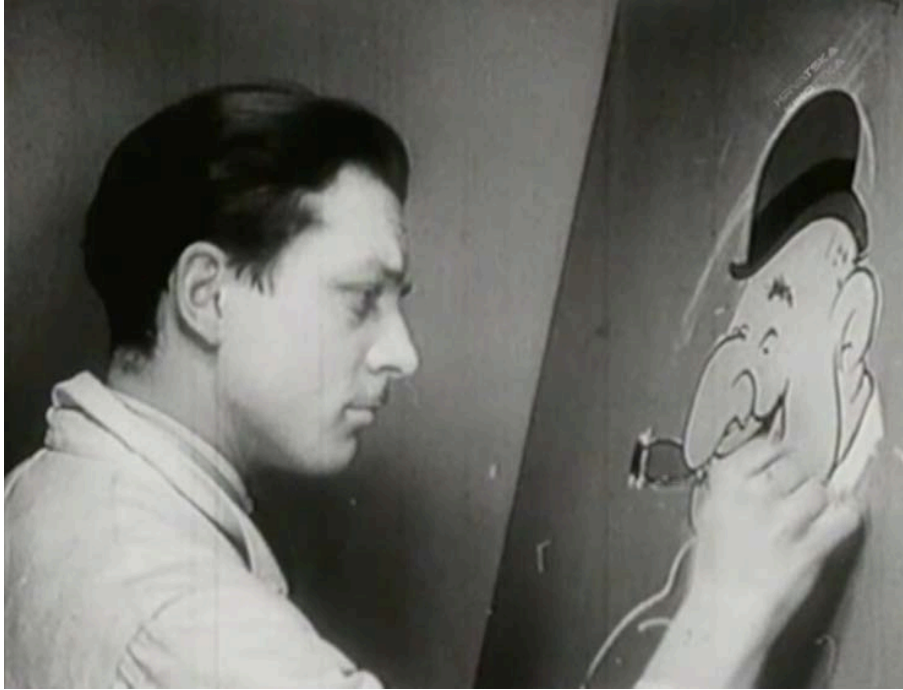
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<sup>197</sup> Ibid.

<sup>198</sup> See illustration in the exhibition catalogue, «Židovi – izložba o razvoju židovstva i njihovog rušilačkog rada u Hrvatskoj prije 10.IV.1941, 25.

<sup>199</sup> Hrvatski slikopis, *Kako se stvaraju izložbe*, Film, 1942.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid.



*Walter Neugebauer drawing a stereotypical Jew in “Kako se stvaraju izložbe”. From the Croatian State Archives (Hrvatska Kinoteka).*



*Preserving the memory of the “Jewish race” in “Kako se stvaraju izložbe”. From the Croatian State Archives (Hrvatska Kinoteka).*



The DIPU placed a large emphasis on the creative and artistic value of the exhibition's propaganda. As soon as the NDH-state had been established, it overtook several major cultural institutions that had previously been under the influence of Serbs and Jews in the Yugoslav state, which they felt had produced little of cultural or professional value.<sup>201</sup> The concentration of these young artists was an opportunity for the NDH to illustrate the cultural potency of a Croatian state governed by the Ustasha.

The production of propaganda posters in Europe was prolific during wartime.<sup>202</sup> It was common for German graphic artists to create posters and illustrations that would then be translated and adapted to the various areas in which they were distributed.<sup>203</sup> This was for instance the case with an anti-Masonic exhibition held in Serbia in 1941, where a collection of the exhibition's posters had been designed by a German painter, and then translated and adapted to Serbian local conditions.<sup>204</sup> For the most part, the Ustasha produced the antisemitic exhibition's contents independently, even though it most likely would have been easier for the regime to import German antisemitic propaganda. This suggests that the Ustasha were more independent in their antisemitic thinking than they usually are thought to have been.

Even so, there were elements of German Nazi propaganda present at the antisemitic exhibition. All those who visited the exhibition were entitled to see "excellent German-made films" free of charge and were given coupons in the exhibition catalogue which they could use at the Zagreb-cinema Danica to see films like "Der Ewige Jude", "Rotschild", and "Jud Süß".<sup>205</sup> Although the antisemitic German films were a great support to the exhibition, they were by no means the star of the show. The main body of the exhibition was the regime's own meticulously prepared material. Not only was it a point to illustrate that the NDH possessed great researchers, academics, painters, and artists, but they were making known their core values through the exhibition.

Propaganda is characterized by the deliberate manipulation of people's feelings and thoughts through powerful means in order to promote certain perceptions and patterns of action.<sup>206</sup> These means could come in the form of striking visuals that could provoke intense feelings and that would consequently stay long in the viewer's memory.<sup>207</sup> Yet the DIPU did

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<sup>201</sup> Yeomans, *Visions of Annihilation*, 210.

<sup>202</sup> Banjac, *Antimasonske plakati*, 56.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid.

<sup>205</sup> See exhibition catalogue, "Židovi – izložba o razvoju židovstva i njihovog rušilačkog rada u Hrvatskoj prije 10.IV.1941", 31.

<sup>206</sup> Skirbekk, «Propaganda». Store Norske Leksikon.

<sup>207</sup> Banjac, *Antimasonske plakati*, 55.

not exclusively appeal to feelings. They also appealed to the visitor's reason by way of the exhibition functioning as a lecture room. By studying history, graphs, and numbers that the team of artists had skillfully arranged, the Croatian people would uncover "truths" about Jews that had previously been unknown to them.

### **Advertising the exhibition and antisemitic propaganda**

Opening day was fast approaching, and not only was it important to acquaint people with the exhibition's antisemitic tropes ahead of the launch, but they also had to make sure that word of the exhibition reached as many people as possible. The DIPU issued a note demanding that the media outlets in Zagreb keep circulating advertisements of the exhibition "every day" until the end of the month.<sup>208</sup> In the ads, visitors were informed to expect to put aside at least two or three hours for a comprehensive view of the exhibition.<sup>209</sup> Even when people tuned in to the radio, they could learn about the exhibition, which was frequently advertised in between news broadcasts.<sup>210</sup>

The so-called reporter on the Jewish question, S.R. Žrnovački, provided a group of journalists with a tour of the exhibition's contents at the DIPU's headquarters ahead of the opening.<sup>211</sup> The exhibition plaques and illustrations were scattered around the headquarters, but the reporters appeared unphased by the raw state of the exhibition, who enthusiastically took notes of Žrnovački's words. The media attention that the exhibition received was performative due to the fact that the NDH-state's censorship apparatus controlled the media outlets. Nonetheless, it was a reflection of the DIPU's immense effort to create interest in the exhibition.

One of the first advertisements for the exhibition could already be seen on April 25<sup>th</sup> in the newspaper *Nova Hrvatska*.<sup>212</sup> One could see the exhibition's promotional poster, which depicted a naked, muscle-bound Aryan warrior armed with a sword and shield that had the Ustasha coat of arms.<sup>213</sup> The promotional poster showed the Ustasha-man fighting against a colossal snake that was wrapping itself around him. The snake had its jaws wide-open, which exposed its sharp teeth. Along its back, the Star of David was drawn. In the time leading up to the exhibition opening, the poster could be spotted throughout newspapers like *Nova Hrvatska*

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<sup>208</sup> HR-HDA 237, *GRP Hrvat. Dojan. Ured "Croatia"*, Box 29, "Domaća služba: Zagrebačke vijesti. Protuzidovska izložba", 6. May, 1942.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid.

<sup>211</sup> Hrvatski slikopis, *Kako se stvaraju izložbe*, Film, 1942.

<sup>212</sup> See *Nova Hrvatska* Nr.97, 25. April, 1942.

<sup>213</sup> Yeomans, «Eradicating "Undesired Elements"» 207.

and *Hrvatski Narod*. It often accompanied some sort of antisemitic article that could acquaint the reader with the exhibition's antisemitic tropes.

As the exhibition was coming together, the amount of antisemitic propaganda in the newspapers was increasing in preparation for the exhibition. Anti-Jewish propaganda in the media was the politically desirable behavior as soon as the NDH-state was established,<sup>214</sup> but it seems to have been particularly visible in the days leading up to the antisemitic exhibition. For instance, on April 28<sup>th</sup>, an article titled "European nations are rising up against the international-Jew Bolsheviks" appeared in *Nova Hrvatska*, with the exhibition's promotional poster appearing on the same page.<sup>215</sup> The article explained that "the Jews had provoked the war in 1914" and that "Jews were the bearers of the Bolshevik disease, which in its time threatened to destroy Europe".<sup>216</sup> The article was suggesting that by fighting against the International-Jew Bolsheviks, Europe was "as always in its history" raising up its "torch of knowledge" and was representing a free and better world order.<sup>217</sup>

Finally, on April 30<sup>th</sup>, *Nova Hrvatska* could report that the exhibition would open in a "grand manner" on May 1<sup>st</sup> 11:00 am by the Art Pavilion in Zagreb.<sup>218</sup> The exhibition would show the development of Judaism and the Jews destructive work in Croatia before April 10<sup>th</sup> 1941, as well as the solution to the Jewish question in the NDH. However, only a few days before thousands of visitors would enter the doors of the Art Pavilion to see the exhibition, the newspaper reported that it was still in its final stages.<sup>219</sup> They nonetheless assured the readers that it would be "fully arranged" by the time of its opening, and promised that a special booklet, or what we know to be the exhibition catalogue, would be given to the visitors.<sup>220</sup>

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<sup>214</sup> Goldstein & Goldstein, *The Holocaust in Croatia*, 107.

<sup>215</sup> *Nova Hrvatska*, «Europski naordi dižu se protiv židovsko-medjunarodnih boljševika», 4. Nr. 99. 28. April, 1942.

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>218</sup> *Nova Hrvatska*, "Svečano otvorenje protu-židovske izložbe obavit će se 1. svibnja", 5. Nr. 101. 30. April, 1942.

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.* Also see HR-HDA 237, *GRP Hrvat. Dojan. Ured "Croatia"*, Box 29, "Domaća služba: Zagrebačke vijesti. Protuzidovska izložba", 6. May, 1942.

## Chapter 5: The exhibition opens

### Friday, May 1<sup>st</sup>: Opening Ceremony

Finally, the time had come for the Head of Propaganda Vilko Rieger to reveal the DIPU's work to the public. The exhibition had been created in a relatively short time frame, especially when taking into consideration the quantity of the exhibition material, how many people were involved in making it, and all the places around the NDH state the exhibition traveled. The exhibition was still being pieced together only a few days before its opening, suggesting that there was great urgency in having it ready by May. This brings to question why the exhibition was not displayed at a later time, perhaps when the DIPU had received all the anti-Jewish information they had requested from the districts.

As Rieger would reveal in his opening speech, it was no coincidence that the DIPU chose to open the exhibition in the month of May. Only little more than a year had passed since the Independent State of Croatia had been established under the Poglavnik. The exhibition presented a great symbolic value to the NDH regime and was a celebration of the state and what its new national body could accomplish – especially in regard to the “Jewish Question”. The exhibition was opened in a grand manner as promised. The Croatian national anthem and songs from the Ustasha movement could be heard sung,<sup>221</sup> and news footage from that Friday showed decorated officials gathered outside the Art Pavilion.<sup>222</sup> To mark the occasion, a platoon of Ustasha soldiers stood neatly lined up along the entrance of the Art Pavilion as well.<sup>223</sup>

Andrija Artuković, the Minister of Interior, opened the exhibition on behalf of the Poglavnik who was not present at the opening.<sup>224</sup> Why the states most prominent anti-Jewish champion of them all was not present, or whether he was supposed to be, is unknown. Artuković was nonetheless a competent choice for the opening, who upon his arrival was met by cheering according to the newspapers.<sup>225</sup> Artuković held one of the highest positions within the NDH-government as Interior Minister, and was the man responsible for much of the NDH state's antisemitic legislation that provided the framework for the relentless persecution of the Croatian Jews.<sup>226</sup> In 1941 he had already expressed the desire for solving “the Jewish question” on behalf of the new Ustasha government, saying that they soon would “solve the Jewish question in the

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<sup>221</sup> Nova Hrvatska, «Otvorena je izložba "ŽIDOVI"», 5. Nr. 103, 3. May, 1942.

<sup>222</sup> Hrvatski slikopis, *Hrvatska u riječi*, Film, 1942.

<sup>223</sup> Nova Hrvatska, «Otvorena je izložba "ŽIDOVI"», 5. Nr. 103, 3. May, 1942.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid.

<sup>226</sup> McCormick, *Croatia under Ante Pavelić*, 179.

same way” that the German government had solved it.<sup>227</sup> In February a year later, he assured that “healthy and decisive action” was being taken to destroy the Jews, whom he described as “insatiable and poisonous parasites”.<sup>228</sup> By this point, Artuković had clearly signaled the beginning of the systematic campaign for the Jews’ mass deportation to concentration camps around the NDH state and Nazi death camps in the East that summer.<sup>229</sup>

The ceremony was also grand in the sense that it was attended by several foreign dignitaries from Italy, Germany and Slovakia. Only representatives from the Italian embassy and army were present, as the Italian Ambassador himself, Raffaele Casertano, could not make it.<sup>230</sup> The German embassy’s presence was also marked by that of representatives.<sup>231</sup> For instance, on behalf of Siegfried Kasche, the German ambassador to Croatia, Standartenführer Willy Requard stepped in. In addition, from the Croatian state government, Zagreb-mayor Ivan Werner came on behalf of the city municipality, as well as representatives of the church districts in Croatia, and numerous members from the Ustasha movement.<sup>232</sup>

Although many foreign names were present at the exhibition, the opening of the exhibition was more so characterized by the absence of many important figures who could have contributed to the prestige of the exhibition. Neither Kasche nor Casertano – nor the Poglavnik himself – were present at the opening. Siegfried Kasche was said to be a great ally to Pavelić. He often defended him and celebrated his racial policies in Berlin,<sup>233</sup> and was the same man that suggested the NDH deportation machinery take a chance and start collecting Jews in the Italian zone without asking for permission.<sup>234</sup> Kasche had even gone as far as reporting back to Berlin in 1944, that the Jewish question in Croatia had been largely resolved.<sup>235</sup>

The presence of men like Kasche and the Poglavnik would have reflected the importance the DIPU believed the exhibition carried. Why did so few make it to the opening ceremony in person? The absence of these important men suggests that, perhaps in the grand scheme of politics, diplomacy, and propaganda, the DIPU’s antisemitic exhibition fell short. More importantly, however, it appeared as if the citizens of Zagreb, which the exhibition in part was intended for, were intrigued by the exhibition. News footage from that Friday in May shows a

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<sup>227</sup> Goldsteins, *The Holocaust in Croatia*, 107.

<sup>228</sup> Yeomans, *Visions of Annihilation*, 25.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid.

<sup>230</sup> Nova Hrvatska, «Otvorena je izložba "ŽIDOVI"», 5. Nr. 103, 3. May, 1942.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid. The German embassy was represented by a Hans Zoller, Dr. Malberg and Dr. Katschinke.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid.

<sup>233</sup> McCormick, *Croatia under Ante Pavelić*, 83.

<sup>234</sup> Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews vol. II*, 762.

<sup>235</sup> Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, 765. *Mischlinge* refers to people who were part Jews.

considerable crowd of men standing shoulder to shoulder, pushing against each other as they make their way up the staircase of the Art Pavilion to enter the exhibition.<sup>236</sup>



*People outside the Art Pavilion on opening day. From "Hrvatska u riječi i slicic br.20". From the Croatian State Archives (Hrvatska Kinoteka).*

## **Rieger's speech**

However, before anyone could enter the Art Pavilion to see the long anticipated antisemitic exhibition, Rieger was to hold his opening speech. It was "no coincidence" that the State Information and Propaganda Office decided to arrange the antisemitic exhibition at this time, he began, revealing that the antisemitic exhibition had been opened in parallel with another exhibition that presented the successes of a Croatia ruled by the Ustasha.<sup>237</sup>

The other exhibition, which was called *One Year of Work in the Independent State of Croatia*, would show everything that the Ustasha-movement had achieved within the NDH-state's short time of existence in general. The antisemitic exhibition, on the other hand, would show how the Ustasha had "dealt with the Jewish Hydra" and how they had "solved one of the most painful issues among the Croatian people."<sup>238</sup> The DIPU intended the two exhibitions to

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<sup>236</sup> See Hrvatski slikopis, *Hrvatska u riječi*, Film, 1942.

<sup>237</sup> HR-HDA 306, ZKRZ, Box 10 (2235/1 – 5), 288.

<sup>238</sup> HR-HDA 306, ZKRZ, Box 10 (2235/1 – 5), 288-289.

work in symbiosis to herald the NDH state's achievements, which illustrates how the regime frequently celebrated themselves and their fascist mission through cultural politics.

Yeomans has explained that the Ustasha frequently used cultural politics in order to legitimize its rule, and in particular its campaigns of mass murder against what it considered to be unwelcome populations.<sup>239</sup> Radical nationalist intellectuals, artists, and writers, all contributed to outlining the utopian vision of what the NDH state could look like.<sup>240</sup> Early on the Ustasha recognized the capacity of culture and performance, and how it could influence the new body of the NDH's perceived reality. Racial cleanliness, meaning the absence of groups like Jews, Serbs, and Gypsies, was not enough to bring about the national regeneration the Ustasha desired. Alongside their physical presence, the very essence of the unwelcome populations, including their ideas, needed to be diminished.

Rieger explained to the crowd gathered outside the Art Pavilion, that it would soon become clear to them that the history of Judaism was synonymous with destruction. Rieger warned that all those nations and societies that had failed to counter the forces of Judaism were bound to be destroyed.<sup>241</sup> It was necessary for the Croatian people to be acquainted with the Jews' destructive actions, who had throughout history always been connected to negative movements and political currents. He remarked that it was no wonder that movements had been created to combat them and their destructive influences on "Aryan" societies.<sup>242</sup>

The NDH, however, refused to suffer doom at the hands of the Jews. Rieger continued the speech by exemplifying to the crowd all the ways in which Jews composed a direct danger to societies in Europe:

In capitalism and communism, Jews are in power. Because of that, they have divided the roles in-between themselves in order to always stay in power. One of the Zionist champions, Nahum Sokolow, said the following at the 16<sup>th</sup> Zionist Congress in Zürich in 1929: "Zionism bases its words and deeds on biblical science: The whole world is mine." These words most clearly express the desire of the Jews for power over the nations who showed them their hospitality. However, in almost every nation there is a natural aversion to Judaism. It was not easy for the Jews to come to power directly, and that is why they tried indirectly. They first slipped into the economic life, and quickly

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<sup>239</sup> Yeomans, *Visions of Annihilation*, vii.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid.

<sup>241</sup> Nova Hrvatska, «Otvorena je izložba "ŽIDOVI"», 5. Nr. 103, 3. May, 1942.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid.

came to wealth and economic power through their methods of plunder and leeching. Later, they began to infiltrate journalism and the entire public life, and so in many countries until recently, almost all journalism, theater, art, radio, etc., found themselves in Jewish hands. But that was not enough for them. When they had already come so far, they then began to engage in “politics”. They could be found in all parties, in liberal-capitalistic and Marxist ones [...] And they united, all in one thought, all in one effort, to fight against the new order in Europe, against an order in which there will not and cannot be allowed Jews [...] An Ustasha-Croatia led by the Poglavnik made Jewish agitation forever impossible.<sup>243</sup>

The Jews all belonged to a bigger, organized entity of evil that collaborated to evoke demise and chaos. They had apparently agreed among themselves who would take the role of the capitalist, the Marxist, the Bolshevik, the social democrat, and the liberalist, which illustrates the flexible characteristic of antisemitism. This was how the Jews had managed to saturate every aspect of life in Croatia, or more specifically, politics, economics, journalism, theater, art, and radio. Rieger also singled out the Zionist-movement to exemplify the ways in which Jews conspired to dominate the world. Zionist ideas had spread among Zagreb Jews from the beginning of the twentieth century. They were more widespread among the middle class, whilst the poor for the most part remained apolitical.<sup>244</sup> Many Jews in Zagreb favored the idea of assimilation, which illustrates that there were many different attitudes and approaches among the Croatian Jews when it came to Zionist thinking.<sup>245</sup> This was, however, disregarded, and Croatia was thought to be no exception to the Jews’ scheming plans.

After Rieger’s speech, Interior Minister Artuković officially declared the exhibition open. The foreign dignitaries were given the privilege of seeing the exhibition before the general public. Rieger welcomed the distinguished guests into the building, where he and others from the DIPU administration explained the meaning behind each of the individual pieces from the exhibition.<sup>246</sup> The dignitaries were introduced to the numerous panels of antisemitic material, which included maps, graphs, statistics, pictures, drawings, “written evidence”, translations of the Talmud, Jewish books, and “comparative studies”.<sup>247</sup> The physical absence of the Poglavnik was substituted with his picture that decorated the entrance to the exhibition rooms. It greeted

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<sup>243</sup> Ibid.

<sup>244</sup> Goldsteins, *The Holocaust in Croatia*, 12.

<sup>245</sup> Ibid.

<sup>246</sup> Nova Hrvatska, «Otvorena je izložba "ŽIDOVI"», 5. No. 103, 3. May, 1942.

<sup>247</sup> Ibid.



the visitors with the accompanying text that stated: “Jews by race are not allowed to have any influence on the development of national and Aryan culture.”<sup>248</sup>



*Riger on opening day in the film “Hrvatska u riječi i slicic br.20” from the Croatian State Archives (Hrvatska Kinoteka).*

## **A great success?**

By the DIPU’s standards, the opening ceremony had been a great success, and was especially reflected through the general public’s interest in the exhibition. On May 4<sup>th</sup>, *Nova Hrvatska* reported that the citizens of Zagreb “showed a particularly big interest in the anti-Jewish exhibition”.<sup>249</sup> They had, after all, provided the DIPU with the “necessary material and evidence” of the Jews’ destructive work,<sup>250</sup> and Zagreb citizens were finally able to see the fruit of their labor. The sheer number of people who had visited the exhibition in the last few days was “the clearest proof” of how the citizens in Zagreb wanted to familiarize themselves with the “destructive actions” of the Jews in Croatia.<sup>251</sup> Since the exhibition opened, *Hrvatski Narod* reported that it had been visited by about a 1,000 people a day, while the number of visitors on Saturday and Sunday was even larger and averaged on 2,000 people a day.<sup>252</sup> By May 8<sup>th</sup>, that

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<sup>248</sup> Ibid.

<sup>249</sup> Nova Hrvatska, «Veliki posjet izložbe «Židovi» u Umjetničkom paviljonu», 6. Nr. 104, 5. May, 1942.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid.

<sup>251</sup> Ibid.

<sup>252</sup> Hrvatski Narod, «Veliko zanimanje za izložbu «Židovi»», 4. Nr. 421, 9. May, 1942.

is within a week of the exhibition opening, it had allegedly already been viewed by over 10,000 people.<sup>253</sup> The 10,000 visitors had not all just come from Zagreb, but also from the neighboring districts.<sup>254</sup> The exhibition was open in Zagreb until June 1<sup>st</sup>, giving thousands of people the opportunity to view the exhibition before it moved on to other cities in the NDH.

## **The Antisemitic Exhibition in Karlovac, Osijek, Vukovar, Zemun and Sarajevo**

The antisemitic exhibition's next stop was in the Croatian town Karlovac, where it was held at the *Narodni dom*, or *People's Home*. It was open in Karlovac from the 4<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> of June,<sup>255</sup> before it moved on to Osijek some time during July.<sup>256</sup> On July 28<sup>th</sup>, the papers reported that the exhibition, which had so far been in Karlovac and Osijek, would continue its journey to the Croatian town Vukovar on August 2<sup>nd</sup>, where it was held at a local high school.<sup>257</sup> Then it was moved to the Serbian town Zemun, and set up in the building of a grammar school.<sup>258</sup> The exhibition's final stop was in the Bosnian city Sarajevo, where it was open until the end of September in the building of what was formerly an Orthodox seminary.<sup>259</sup> The exhibition covered an impressive stretch of the NDH-territory, and must have been tedious and time consuming to transport.

The DIPU did encounter minor issues as the exhibition made its way across the NDH. In Sarajevo, the reporter on the Jewish Question, Stanko Radovanović, reported the theft of a typewriter from their office in the former Orthodox seminary.<sup>260</sup> In defense, Radovanović wrote to his superiors that strict measures had been taken to preserve the DIPU's belongings, by among other this having a guard in front of the entrance during the day and night.<sup>261</sup>

The exhibition was slightly adapted to the different areas it traveled. For instance, people in Zemun received different incentives that would encourage them to visit the exhibition than the ones that were given to people in Zagreb. In Zagreb citizens were "lured" to the exhibition through free entries to the cinema, while those in Zemun, on the other hand, received a discount

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<sup>253</sup> Ibid.

<sup>254</sup> Ibid.

<sup>255</sup> HR-HDA 306, ZKRZ, Box 10 (2235/1 – 5), 294. Also see Banjac, *Antimasonski plakati*, 53.

<sup>256</sup> HR-HDA 306, ZKRZ, Box 10 (2235/1 – 5), 294.

<sup>257</sup> Ibid.

<sup>258</sup> Banjac, *Antimasonski plakati*, 53.

<sup>259</sup> Banac, *Antimasonski plakati*, 54.

<sup>260</sup> HR-HDA 237, GRP, Box 29 (1-230), 12.

<sup>261</sup> Ibid

of 50 percent on their railway tickets.<sup>262</sup> All those in Zemun who visited the exhibition could pick up a form when they purchased their train tickets, bring it to the exhibition where they would receive a certification from that gave them a free ride back home.<sup>263</sup> Assuming that rail travel was relatively expensive during wartime, a reduced ticket would certainly have made a visit worthwhile, and provided people with an opportunity to experience something outside the realm of their everyday lives.

The towns in where the antisemitic exhibition went were no coincidences either. For instance, when emancipation was granted to Jews in Croatia, the Jewish community in Osijek prospered exceptionally, becoming one of the largest ones in Croatia until 1890.<sup>264</sup> *Esseg*, as the town was referred to in German, also had a large concentration of *Volksdeutsche*, which was the ethnic German minority in Croatia. Upon the Axis invasion of Yugoslavia, Volkdeutsche, Germans, and the Ustasha, looted Jewish property in Osijek, evicted families from the town center, burned down the synagogue and decimated the Jewish cemetery.<sup>265</sup> Nearby Osijek was also the concentration camp Djakovo. Towns like Osijek where the Jews had made themselves visible became, in other words, perfect celebratory ground for the antisemitic exhibition.<sup>266</sup>

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<sup>262</sup> HR-HDA 306, ZKRZ, Box 10 (2235/1 – 5), 294.

<sup>263</sup> Ibid.

<sup>264</sup> Jewish Virtual Library, «Osijek».

<sup>265</sup> Jewish Virtual Library, «Osijek».

<sup>266</sup> It should also be mentioned that Osijek became the location for an anti-Masonic exhibition that the Croatian government made in collaboration with the German embassy in 1942, in where the German legation had asked for “effective support both with the implementation and with the holding of the exhibition in Esseg.” See HR-DAOS-1177, Letter of the German Embassy in Zagreb sent to Veliki Župan Stjepan Hefer, 24. February 1942. Stjepan Hefer, box 17, file: Njemačka Narodnosna Skupina – Razno, 1937.-1943.

## Chapter 6: Why the Antisemitic Exhibition was created

### A Salute to the Poglavnik, raising the nation and justifying anti-Jewish measures

The final chapters of the thesis will include an examination of the major antisemitic themes that were presented in the exhibition. They will not be a review or analysis of each individual part of the exhibition, as the themes of the exhibition bleed into each other, making it more useful to concentrate on the larger antisemitic themes of the exhibition.

Before we can examine the antisemitic contents, it is necessary to understand the Ustasha's reasoning behind the creation of the exhibition. The answer, which was provided in the exhibition catalogue, was not straight forward. However, as with many things in the NDH, the answer began with the Poglavnik. The catalogue opened with the expression that the "fate of the [collective Croatian] people" was similar to the fate of single individuals, who often experience that "happiness alternates with misfortune" and "joy with sorrow".<sup>267</sup> What the DIPU meant to say through this somewhat cryptic allegory, was that the Croatian people had lived few happy days, and had spent the last eight centuries of its existence in suffering, accompanied by chains and whips.<sup>268</sup> Croatian mothers had been reduced to slaves along with their children, who it seemed only lived to bury their enslaved fathers.<sup>269</sup> The offenders were thought to be none other than the Jews.

The wheel of fortune had, however, turned for the Croatian people with the arrival of the Poglavnik and the creation of the NDH. The exhibition was not only meant to be an attack on the Croatian Jews, but it was also meant to pay tribute to the Poglavnik as a father-figure for the newly established Croatian state. A man to write a new Croatian history defined by freedom and self-determination had been long anticipated.<sup>270</sup> Pavelić had risen from the "people's soul", and the duty of the state's "caring father" was not only to provide his children with food and a place to live, but his paternal duty was also to take his children on the "right path" in life.<sup>271</sup> The new nation had to be raised, and as luck would have it, Pavelić had come not rule, but to work. It was explained that people did not become free by the "mere diplomatic act" of declaring their independence.<sup>272</sup> Independence had to be exercised in all areas of national

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<sup>267</sup> Exhibition catalogue, "Židovi", 3.

<sup>268</sup> Ibid.

<sup>269</sup> Ibid.

<sup>270</sup> Ibid.

<sup>271</sup> Exhibition catalogue, "Židovi", 4.

<sup>272</sup> Exhibition catalogue, "Židovi", 3.

activity, and included internal liberation, national purification, and the strengthening of the national consciousness, alongside a complete permeation of “pure Croatian-hood” into the spiritual life of the nation.<sup>273</sup>

The Poglavnik had taken strict measures to make Croatia a happy and free nation for all centuries to come.<sup>274</sup> But what measures had the Poglavnik taken? The happy and free nation that the Poglavnik was raising excluded the Jews, and the Poglavnik’s measures had all centered around “the same subject” and the “same kind of people”: Jews.<sup>275</sup> Not only did the exhibition celebrate the Poglavnik, but it also sought to justify the introduction of anti-Jewish measures in the NDH. Because the Poglavnik had risen from the people’s soul, and he acted as their thoughts and feelings, it was implied that the anti-Jewish measures received the full support of the Croatian people.<sup>276</sup>

Was it really necessary for the Poglavnik to spend so much time and energy on a people whose total number in Croatia only made up around 40,000?, was a question posed in the catalogue.<sup>277</sup> And could these 40,000 Jews really have endangered the happiness and future of the Croatian people?<sup>278</sup> There was both a long and short answer. The short answer was that one Jew alone was a danger to his surroundings, “let alone 40,000.”<sup>279</sup> The long answer could be found in the whole cultural and political history of the world.<sup>280</sup>

The DIPU had, in line with the instructions and requests of the Poglavnik, undertaken the task of acquainting the Croatian people with all the reasons that guided him when he implemented the anti-Jewish laws and policies.<sup>281</sup> This was what the exhibition was about at its core: the Jews’ destructive work. Jewish history served as the perfect illustration for why measures had to be taken against them. It was explained that even the most ignorant people had to see clearly what Jews “were” and the devastating influence international Judaism had on the development of Croatian history.<sup>282</sup> In spite of their harmless appearance, Jews were never other than, both consciously and unconsciously, units of international Judaism.<sup>283</sup> By default, they had always been enemies of everything that was distinctly Croatian.<sup>284</sup>

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<sup>273</sup> Ibid.

<sup>274</sup> Exhibition catalogue, “Židovi”, 4.

<sup>275</sup> Ibid.

<sup>276</sup> Exhibition catalogue, “Židovi”, 3.

<sup>277</sup> Ibid.

<sup>278</sup> Ibid.

<sup>279</sup> Ibid.

<sup>280</sup> Ibid.

<sup>281</sup> Ibid.

<sup>282</sup> Ibid.

<sup>283</sup> Ibid.

<sup>284</sup> Ibid.

The exhibition's other task was, on the other hand, to account for the solving of the "Jewish question" in the NDH. The solution to the Jewish question was presented to be the implementation of anti-Jewish legislation and policies. They were immediately implemented after the establishment of the NDH, and what the German bureaucrats had toiled over eight years to accomplish, the NDH government proceeded to enact within months.<sup>285</sup> This included legal definitions of who a Jew was, the prohibition of intermarriage, the marking of Jewish stores and persons, the registration and confiscation of Jewish property, the removal of Jews from several professions and so on.<sup>286</sup>

The NDH had barely existed for a month when the *Legal Decree on Citizenship* was introduced on April 30<sup>th</sup>, 1941. It excluded Jews as citizens, as a citizen could only be a person of "Aryan origin" who by his actions had demonstrated that he did not work against the Croatian people's aspirations of liberty, and who was willing to readily and faithfully serve the Croatian people and the NDH.<sup>287</sup> Other types of measures prohibited Jews to bathe in public bath places along the Sava-river, and for instance forbade them to shop at the markets before 10 am.<sup>288</sup> It became strictly forbidden for Jews to change their surnames or use any pseudonyms that would disguise their Jewish origins, and were "by race", forbidden to wear the Croatian national colors and "Aryan emblems."<sup>289</sup>

Under the legislation that concerned the *Protection of the People's and Aryan Culture*, Jews were once again, "by race", forbidden in any way, shape, or form, to influence the development of "national and Aryan culture".<sup>290</sup> This meant that Jews were prohibited from participating in the work and organization of cultural life like social youth clubs and sports, but especially in literature, journalism, fine arts, music, theater, and film. These were just a handful of the anti-Jewish laws that Andrija Artuković, who had opened the exhibition on behalf of the Poglavnik, had been involved in introducing.

Historian Raul Hilberg has assigned the destruction of the European Jews a certain structure, describing it as a process of "sequential steps" that were taken at the initiative of countless decision makers in a fleeting bureaucratic machine.<sup>291</sup> The step-by-step operation of destruction began with first defining the concept *Jew*, then the expropriatory operations, then

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<sup>285</sup> Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews vol. II*, 757.

<sup>286</sup> Ibid.

<sup>287</sup> Bartulin, *Honorary Aryans*, 68.

<sup>288</sup> HR- HDA 306, ZKRZ (Microfilm Z-2942), 488. Dated June 26<sup>th</sup>, 1941.

<sup>289</sup> HR-HDA 306, ZKRZ (Microfilm Z-2942), 517. Dated June 4<sup>th</sup>, 1941.

<sup>290</sup> HR-HDA 306, ZKRZ (Microfilm Z-2942), 513. Dated June 4<sup>th</sup>, 1941.

<sup>291</sup> See chapter "Structure of Destruction", 49, in *The Destruction of the European Jews vol. I*.

the concentration of Jews in ghettos, and then finally the destruction of the European Jewry.<sup>292</sup> The structure of destruction presented itself as an escalating administrative development that become more and more drastic. First it began with public laws. They were announced to the public in pursuance of establishing laws and decrees until there through this process was developed a common understanding or familiarity of what the next step was, ultimately making such decrees redundant, which lead to oral directives and concealed operations.<sup>293</sup> Hilberg explains that the destruction of the Jews was not so much a product of laws and commands, as much as it was “a matter of spirit, of shared comprehension, of consonance and synchronization.”<sup>294</sup>

One can look at the case of the Jews in Croatia in similar matter. First, they were defined, made into a concept through legislation – the destruction process was after all a series of administrative measures that had to be aimed at a certain and defined group.<sup>295</sup> The immediate solution to the Jewish question was perhaps not the legislation in itself, but rather what it would culminate in, and should be considered, as Hilberg writes, steppingstones to a killing-operation.<sup>296</sup> What could possibly have justified the measures that left only about 20 percent of Croatia’s Jews alive after the war?<sup>297</sup>

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<sup>292</sup> Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews vol. I*, 50.

<sup>293</sup> Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews vol. I*, 51.

<sup>294</sup> Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews vol. I*, 52.

<sup>295</sup> Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews vol I*, 61.

<sup>296</sup> Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews vol. I*, 51.

<sup>297</sup> Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews vol.II*, 766.

## Chapter 7: What the exhibition showed

### **Jewish History: 2000 years of immorality, bloodshed, heartlessness and oppression**

Why the Ustasha had to introduce policies that would annihilate almost all of Croatia's Jewry was an integral part of the exhibition. The policies' justification lay in the Jews' history. According to the NDH, there had never been a time or place in where the Jews had existed as an honorable people. There were countless examples to be found of the Jews' devastating effect throughout history, and rarely did any people have such an old written history as the Jews.<sup>298</sup> The Jews had left the DIPU with over 2000 years of history before the birth of Christ that they could "authentically" account for through "irrefutable archeological and historical evidence".<sup>299</sup> Yet again, the DIPU were stressing the scientific legitimacy behind the information presented at the exhibition. The decision to introduce the anti-Jewish legislation was not based on an irrational foundation, but on what they deemed to be empirical evidence of the Jews' wickedness.

The DIPU unsparingly described Jewish history as 2000 years of "immorality, bloodshed, heartlessness, oppression of every weaker" and the "poisoning and destruction of all the people they came in contact with."<sup>300</sup> The essence of the "Jew" could be found in its history, and the perpetual characteristic of the "Jew" was made out to be his destructiveness. It was explained that the Jews had up until the present time remained the same as they had in ancient times.<sup>301</sup> The Jews were in 1942, just as they had been 2000 years ago, "cowards" who had crept toward the stronger ones, "ruthless oppressors" of the weaker, in eternal quarrels with each other but always ready to, in alliance, throw themselves at nearby nations like "predatory spiders" to suck every last drop of their blood.<sup>302</sup> The exhibition claimed that the Jews degenerated humanity and devastated civilizations, and that they by way of "fires, ruins and blood" worked to reach their ultimate goal, which was the "supreme authority" over all mankind.<sup>303</sup>

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<sup>298</sup> Exhibition catalogue, "Židovi", 7.

<sup>299</sup> Ibid.

<sup>300</sup> Ibid.

<sup>301</sup> Ibid.

<sup>302</sup> Ibid.

<sup>303</sup> Ibid.





Karikatura iz knjige St. Gabriela »Civut i Talmud«  
upotrijebljena za izložbu

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*An illustration borrowed from a book that was used in the exhibition to depict Jews as predatory spiders. From the exhibition catalogue, 28.*

## How the “eternal wanderers” came to Croatia

The parts of Jewish history that had directly impacted Croatia became a focal point of the exhibition. The DIPU wanted to portray the Jews as eternal wanderers and show to its visitors how the Jews had entered Croatia, and more importantly the consequences their presence had yielded on the country and its history. The Jews were explained to be, besides gypsies, the only people without roots, and nomads of “the greatest style.”<sup>304</sup> The DIPU remarked that other “stray” peoples at least had some set boundaries they moved within, but not the Jews, who’s movement always coincided with the areas of the world where civilized people resided.<sup>305</sup> The DIPU likened the Jews to jackals, who would follow other animals to gnaw on the bones it left behind.<sup>306</sup> The Jews were, however, never satisfied with just the bones, it was explained, but saw the entire collapse of the nation it followed as the ultimate goal.<sup>307</sup>

The DIPU claimed to possess archeological evidence that exemplified how not even the Balkan countries could escape the “eternal wanderers”.<sup>308</sup> They explained that the Jews had entered Croatia by way of Thessaloniki in Greece, then to Skopje in Macedonia, then Belgrade in Serbia and finally spread “left and right” to Croatia.<sup>309</sup> The other routes the Jews took were through the Danube and Sava rivers. There they had penetrated the Pannonian lowlands, a Roman province that consisted of Hungary, Austria and several Balkan countries, but also by way of sea where they had entered the Croatian coastal towns Senj and Solin near Split.<sup>310</sup> Ruins of synagogues could reveal the Jews’ presence in Macedonia, and the DIPU referenced Jewish tombstones, one of them from the Zagreb museum, to prove that Jews had settled in Senj and Solin as early as the first and fourth centuries AD.<sup>311</sup> The exhibition also explained how holiday customs in the Jewish community in Belgrade could reveal how the Jews had been there as early as 70 AD, and on the other hand, how Thessaloniki had been an important center of Judaism even before the Jerusalem Temple.<sup>312</sup>

However, the main wave of Jewish influx that affected Croatian lands and regions took place at the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century when the Jews were expelled from Spain and Portugal between 1492 and 1497, the DIPU explained.<sup>313</sup> It was at that time that the Jews began to

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<sup>304</sup> Exhibition catalogue, “Židovi”, 7.

<sup>305</sup> Ibid.

<sup>306</sup> Ibid.

<sup>307</sup> Ibid.

<sup>308</sup> Exhibition catalogue, “Židovi”, 8.

<sup>309</sup> Ibid.

<sup>310</sup> Ibid.

<sup>311</sup> Ibid.

<sup>312</sup> Ibid.

<sup>313</sup> Exhibition catalogue, “Židovi”, 8.

wander, seeking new lands in which to practice their “old craft” of exploitation.<sup>314</sup> The visitors of the exhibition could learn that it was the Ottoman sultans, who had conquered much of the Balkans by the 1400s, who had allowed the Jews to settle in the Bosnian and Dalmatian regions.<sup>315</sup>

Alongside the Ottomans, the exhibition explained Dona Gracia Mendes Nasi to have moved forward the influx of Jews into Croatian regions. Who was Dona Gracia Mendes Nasi, and why was she mentioned in the exhibition? In her, the DIPU saw the embodiment of international Judaism. Dona Gracia was a Jewish Portuguese woman from the 16<sup>th</sup> century who, distinguished by her wealth, had been an important figure among Spanish and Portuguese Sephardi Jews within the Ottoman sphere of influence.<sup>316</sup> She was born into a Jewish family whose members had been forcibly baptized into Christianity and spent parts of her life in Constantinople. She was known to aid persecuted and expelled Sephardi Jews into safety,<sup>317</sup> whose expulsion had led to a considerable Sephardic diaspora in Europe.<sup>318</sup> While possessing much wealth and influence, she was also married to Joseph Nasi, a Portuguese diplomat in the Ottoman political sphere.

An illustration from the exhibition depicted the “wealthy Jews” Don Joseph and Dona Gracia in a meeting with the Jews of Sarajevo in 1573, who were drawn huddled around Don Joseph. To exemplify the “Jewish prowess” of Dona Gracia, she was drawn overlooking the room from the corner, with her hand firmly placed on her hip. The illustration explained that it was because of her intercessions and aid, that about 20 Jewish families had managed to move to Sarajevo in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>319</sup> The case of Dona Gracia served to illustrate the international strength of Jewry, and how well-established the connections of the Jews were throughout the world. The DIPU made a conscious effort to portray the Jews as a collective and unified force that could, if it wanted to, easily slip into the nations of the “civilized” world.

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<sup>314</sup> Ibid.

<sup>315</sup> Ibid.

<sup>316</sup> Bodian, “Doña Gracia Nasi”, Jewish Women’s Archive.

<sup>317</sup> Ibid.

<sup>318</sup> Groth, «Sefarder», Store norske leksikon.

<sup>319</sup> Exhibition catalogue, “Židovi”, 9.



Illustration of Dona Gracia and her husband from the exhibition catalogue with Sarajevo-Jews in 1573, 9.

## The Edict of Tolerance and the demise of Banska Hrvatska

It had been dangerous to depend on so-called “international Judaism”. Croatian regions that had been dependent on trade with the Jews had been particularly exposed to their prowess.<sup>320</sup> It was explained that, because Jews had been the main grain traders on the Adriatic, towns that depended on overseas food import, had suffered the most in Croatia.<sup>321</sup> According to the DIPU, for the economy not to stagnate in the coastal towns, and for trade to go about properly, they would have to tolerate and appease the Jews, and “suffer” the Jews among themselves.<sup>322</sup> In the rare cases that the Croats dared to drive the Jews out of their towns, the coast would be “left without grain” and famine would ensue.”<sup>323</sup>

In contrast, *Banska Hrvatska*, a geographical region in Central Croatia, had for the most part had managed to escape the Jews. Of all the Croatian regions, “she was spared the longest”, it was explained, because she did not depend on “international Judaism” and overseas trade to provide for herself.<sup>324</sup> The “fertile plains” of Banska Hrvatska had also given the region a special position. Not only had it made it possible for the region to stay politically and economically independent, but more importantly, it had made it possible for the region to

<sup>320</sup> Exhibition catalogue, “Židovi”, 9.

<sup>321</sup> Ibid.

<sup>322</sup> Exhibition catalogue, “Židovi”, 10.

<sup>323</sup> Ibid.

<sup>324</sup> Exhibition catalogue, “Židovi”, 9.

introduce “measures of defense against the Jews”.<sup>325</sup> However, the Banska region’s supreme reign and exemption from the Jews ended with the introduction of the Tolerance of Edict in 1782, it was explained. The exhibition commented on the introduction of the Edict, along with the arrival of the Sephardic Jews, as a tragedy. Foreigners had yet again interfered and meddled with the fate of Croats, it was implied.

The emancipation has been described as the biggest milestone in the history of the European Jews, illustrating that not all Jewish history carries in its memory notions of catastrophe.<sup>326</sup> However, seen in hindsight, there exist barely any triumphs like the emancipation that concurrently warn of a major collapse.<sup>327</sup> The emancipation led to the acculturation, integration and assimilation of Jews, which in turn increased their visibility in many European nations.<sup>328</sup> As Jews were gradually granted the same social rights as rest of society, their opportunities for social mobility expanded, and many Jews became active participants in city life, cultural life, politics, media, finances and so on. However, the emancipation was a double-edged sword. Jewish visibility and assimilation into main-stream European society lead to a greater “consciousness of kind” among European Christians and the fear of downward mobility among non-Jews.<sup>329</sup> The feeling that the status of non-Jews was being threatened, and that incited a number of defensive reactions against Jews, was perfectly illustrated in the exhibition.<sup>330</sup>

The DIPU explained that the emperor’s decision “opened the doors of the whole of Croatia to the Jews”, who then imposed themselves into all “lucrative occupations”, bought land in Croatia and deceived the Croatian peasant and merchant.<sup>331</sup> It was explained that most Jews had come to Croatia as “mere poor people”, and that the Croats, a benevolent and accommodating people, had taken them in among themselves, unaware that they posed “the greatest danger” to the environments they settled.<sup>332</sup> The way in which the Jews had entered Croatia was the same as they had entered other countries, they explained. When one had Jew managed to establish himself and “come to power” in the country he was “sneaking into”, he used that power to “bring countless more of his relatives and fellow tribesmen” into the country.<sup>333</sup>

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<sup>325</sup> Exhibition catalogue, “Židovi”, 9.

<sup>326</sup> Eriksen et.al, *Judehatets svarta bok*, 157.

<sup>327</sup> Ibid.

<sup>328</sup> Fein, “Explanations of the Origin and Evolution of Antisemitism”, 17.

<sup>329</sup> Ibid.

<sup>330</sup> Fein, “Explanations of the Origin and Evolution of Antisemitism”, 18.

<sup>331</sup> Exhibition catalogue, “Židovi”, 11.

<sup>332</sup> Exhibition catalogue, “Židovi”, 13.

<sup>333</sup> Ibid.

A classic example of this could be found in the Bible through the story of Joseph, the DIPU explained.<sup>334</sup> For context, Joseph's story is perhaps one of the most dramatic ones from the Old Testament. He was betrayed by his brothers who sold him away as a slave in Egypt. Despite this, Joseph went on to become one of the most important men in Egypt after the Pharaoh.<sup>335</sup> When the same brothers who had sold Joseph came back to Egypt to buy grain, they encountered Joseph, who they did not immediately recognize, presuming him to be dead and certainly not expecting him to have become such a powerful man. Joseph, however, forgave them for what they had done to him, and consequently allowed his brothers, their father and all their relatives to move to Egypt with him.

The DIPU used the story of Joseph to prove the Jews' claimed slyness. The Jews had done similarly in Croatia, and one could discover "exactly how they infiltrated" the nation through the study of Jewish names in Croatia, the DIPU explained.<sup>336</sup> A Jew would come from Germany, settle in a village in Slavonia, a region in East Croatia, and start "cheating and robbing Slavonians".<sup>337</sup> Upon realizing the "wealth of the land" and the "benevolence of its inhabitants", the Jew would write a letter to his relatives spreading word about the opportunities in the land. Those relatives would then in turn spread word about the opportunities in the country to their own relatives.<sup>338</sup>

This is how the district of Slavonia had allegedly after a few years been invaded by "Abrahamsons" who would quickly change their name to "Abramović" to disguise their Jewish background.<sup>339</sup> This was one example used to justify the introduction of anti-Jewish legislation that denied Croatian Jews to use pseudonyms or change their surnames. As the news of the Croatian country's wealth reached the German, Galician and Polish friends of those "Abrahamsons", the consequence was that you could suddenly see people dressed in kaftans in Slavonia, the DIPU explained.<sup>340</sup> And so when the Jews arrived in Croatia, they avoided quarrels in between themselves, as they needed to stay united in order "to plunder the Croats as soon as possible and as successfully as possible."<sup>341</sup>

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<sup>334</sup> Ibid.

<sup>335</sup> Bibelskapet, "Josef".

<sup>336</sup> Exhibition catalogue, "Židovi", 13.

<sup>337</sup> Ibid.

<sup>338</sup> Ibid.

<sup>339</sup> Exhibition catalogue, "Židovi", 13. -ić is a common ending to surnames in Croatia.

<sup>340</sup> Ibid.

<sup>341</sup> Ibid.

## Jews in the oldest times

Although the Jews had to some extent “behaved” in Croatia, it was common for them to quarrel among themselves, it was claimed. One of the examples in the exhibition that would illustrate the Jews’ supposed vice, bloodshed, heartlessness and eternal quarreling with each other, was that of Alexander Jannaeus. The DIPU did not provide the full context of Jannaeus’ story, so for reference, Jannaeus was the ruler of Judea from 103 to 76 BCE, with his reign being most remembered for the wars he waged to expand the Judean kingdom.<sup>342</sup> Jannaeus had appointed himself High Priest of his kingdom. One day during Sukkot, a Jewish holiday, he refused to follow the tradition of pouring water in the bowl attached to the altar in the Holy Temple, but instead poured the water on to his feet.<sup>343</sup> This act incited the anger of traditionalists gathered at the temple who started throwing fruit at him. This in turn made Jannaeus angry, who ordered his troops to kill those responsible for the insult, and about 6,000 Jewish pilgrims were massacred.<sup>344</sup> This incident caused great anger among the Jews and was one of the causes for why the Judean Civil War broke out. Those who had sided against Jannaeus, mostly Pharisees – one of many Jewish religious faction – were then punished for what the king considered to be their betrayal of him.

For the exhibition, Walter Neugebauer painted what was supposed to show the execution and crucifixion of the 800 Pharisees. The painting depicted the Pharisees hung on crosses and illustrated how their wives and children were forced to watch their deaths. The illustration also showed how King Jannaeus was sat dining with his concubines, laughing at the scene unfolding in front of him. The painting was signed “W. Neugebauer” in the right-hand corner, and the illustration was accompanied by the text: “The leader of the Sadducees, Alexander Yannai, crucified 800 political opponents and slaughtered the members of their families in from of them ... Love your neighbor!”<sup>345</sup>

The story of Jannaeus served as yet another justification for why measures had to be taken against the Jews, who they believed to be fundamentally evil and devoid of all compassion and humanity. Although the Ustasha were making critical commentary on the Judean king’s slaughter of his political opponents, the same moral standards were not applied to their own actions toward political opponents in the NDH.

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<sup>342</sup> NJOP, “The Sadducee King Yannai”.

<sup>343</sup> Ibid.

<sup>344</sup> Ibid.

<sup>345</sup> Exhibition catalogue, “Židovi”, 30.



*Illustration of Jannaeus from the exhibition catalogue made by Walter Neugebauer, 30. The text reads: "The leader of the Sadducees, Alexander Yannai, crucified 800 political opponents and slaughtered the members of their families in front of them ... Love your neighbor!"*

## What the Jews did when they arrived in Croatia

A poster from the exhibition showed how the Jews had come to Croatia cloaked in the disguise of poverty. It was titled "Are poor Jews dangerous?" and showed the entire process of the Jew's attempt at "robbing" the nation where he arrived in.<sup>346</sup> Every "individual Jew" posed a danger, the poster explained. It showed how the Jew came on his own with a bundle over his shoulder, before he enriched himself and turned into a fat and greedy character. The bundle had then been replaced by what appear to be sacks of money and other material belongings, and the raggedy clothes that the Jew first arrived in had been replaced by a suit. In the last stages of the Jew's masterplan, an unceasing line of impoverished Jews with bindles on their shoulders were drawn following the example of the first Jew to join him in the "robbery" of the nation.<sup>347</sup>

The belief that the fundamental motive of the Jews had always been to exploit so-called Aryan merchants heavily saturated the contents of the exhibition.<sup>348</sup> It was explained that Jews thrived on disintegration, demoralization and economic ruin to build their "world-wide Jewish temple."<sup>349</sup> When an "Aryan" merchant failed, the Jew stood ready to exploit the legacy of the Aryan merchant, it was claimed.<sup>350</sup> One panel from the exhibition illustrated how every

<sup>346</sup> Exhibition catalogue, "Židovi", 12.

<sup>347</sup> Ibid.

<sup>348</sup> Exhibition catalogue, "Židovi", 8.

<sup>349</sup> Ibid.

<sup>350</sup> Ibid.



Croatian business had allegedly been “passed into Jewish hands”, and included several “statistics” from different Croatian industries that had been taken over by them.<sup>351</sup> The unreliable statistics were accompanied by illustrations that depicted big, greedy Jews riding on the backs of hard-working Croatian men. For instance, it was claimed that out of fifteen textile companies in Croatia, four were exclusively Jewish, and in eight of them the Jews held the majority of the stakes, and were only the minority in three of them.<sup>352</sup> Similarly, within the chemical industry, the DIPU claimed, that within 21 large companies, 34 directors were Jewish and only 13 were “Aryan”, “but not Croatian”.<sup>353</sup>

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<sup>351</sup> Exhibition catalogue, “Židovi”, 24.

<sup>352</sup> Ibid.

<sup>353</sup> Exhibition catalogue, “Židovi”, 25.



Illustration from exhibition catalogue showing how Jews had allegedly entered Croatia, 12.

## A long antisemitic tradition

Another major theme of the exhibition was the claim that the Croats had always been aware of the Jews' destructive forces. Not only that, but more importantly, Croats had "from the very first contact with the Jews tried to defend themselves against their pernicious influence."<sup>354</sup> These defenses had been successful from time to time but would "usually be thwarted by powerful Jewish allies", it was explained.<sup>355</sup> The powerful Jewish allies in question, was the aristocracy who had been "a weak barrier" to the Jews' invasion because they had let themselves be bribed by them.<sup>356</sup> It was explained that in the time before Jews had social and legal rights, they were unable to participate "directly in the political life of Croatia", so they participated "indirectly" by bribing the aristocracy when it found itself in financial distress.<sup>357</sup> The exhibition boasted that the Croat nobles had been wiser than that, and the DIPU could "proudly point out" that the Croatian nobility had been the "most resistant" to Jewish meddling.<sup>358</sup> All aristocratic families in Croatia who had been married to Jews, had been of foreign and not Croatian origin, it was emphasized.<sup>359</sup>

An example that showed how the Croats had always defended themselves against the Jews could be found in 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century Dubrovnik. A poster that depicted a banished Jewish ship at sea, explained that the "people of Dubrovnik expelled the Jews from their city several times [...]" and that "thorough expulsions" were made in the years 1502, 1515, and 1662.<sup>360</sup> What significance did these dates carry? For context, after the expulsion of the Spanish Jews in 1492, Dubrovnik became an important transit center for refugees traveling to different Balkan cities that were under Ottoman rule,<sup>361</sup> where Jews received protection because they were considered to be a dynamic and productive element in the cities.<sup>362</sup> Coincidentally, Dubrovnik, which was made out to be a hotbed for Jewish activities by the DIPU, had also been one of the places where Dona Gracia had passed through on her way to Constantinople.<sup>363</sup>

By 1502, many Jewish refugees lived in Dubrovnik. When an old woman was found murdered, allegedly with her heart taken out upon being slain, a dozen Jews in the city were accused of blood libel and of having performed ritual murder on the woman. The accused group

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<sup>354</sup> Exhibition catalogue, "Židovi", 11

<sup>355</sup> Ibid.

<sup>356</sup> Ibid.

<sup>357</sup> Ibid.

<sup>358</sup> Ibid.

<sup>359</sup> Ibid.

<sup>360</sup> Exhibition catalogue, "Židovi", 11.

<sup>361</sup> Jewish Virtual Library, "Dubrovnik".

<sup>362</sup> Birnbaum, *The Long Journey of Gracia Mendes*, 78.

<sup>363</sup> Birnbaum, *The Long Journey of Gracia Mendes*, 66.

of Jews were tortured to the point of confession for the old woman's murder.<sup>364</sup> By 1514 and 1515, even more Jewish refugees had arrived in Dubrovnik. They excelled within commerce, but their presence was perceived to be threatening and led to several expulsion decrees against them, including one in 1515.<sup>365</sup> These events illustrated the antisemitic power of action the Croats had always possessed, according to the DIPU.

## **The First Anti-Jewish legislation in Croatia**

The exhibition catalogue clearly illustrates how frustrated the NDH regime was with how history had been taught in schools prior to the existence of the state. Croats had been denied access to historic examples of the Jews' conduct, and the official school history was explained to have been concealed by the Jews. Now that the "head of the Jewish snake" had "crumbled", all Croats were to be acquainted with real history, and more specifically King Andrija II and the significance of the 'Golden Bull' legislation.<sup>366</sup>

For context, King Andrija II, or Andrew II, came from the Hungarian Árpád dynasty and was king of Hungary and Croatia between 1205 and 1235.<sup>367</sup> Before Andrew's ascension to power, the Árpád dynasty had been at the peak of its power, but Andrew's lavish land grants to the supporters of the dynasty weakened the monarchy's wealth and power.<sup>368</sup> His reckless spending made the crown dependent on feudatories, who in turn incited in Hungary a state of anarchy.<sup>369</sup> In 1217, with an army of 15,000 men, Andrew set off on an ill-fated Crusade to the Holy Land.<sup>370</sup> Upon his return home, he was forced by barons to sign the so-called 'Golden Bull' in 1222, or the 'Hungarian Magna Carta', which further weakened the monarchy by extending liberties to the nobles. The Golden Bull severely restricted royal rights and prerogatives, ensured justice for all, as well as it intended to improve the minting and coinage in the kingdom.<sup>371</sup>

The DIPU's interpretation of events was different. According to the DIPU, when Andrew had come home from his crusade, he was in such large debt that in order for him to pay it off, he had to hand over his taxes to his creditors who were Jews.<sup>372</sup> When a revolt threatened from

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<sup>364</sup> Münster, "Trial on "ritual murder" in Dubrovnik", 112.

<sup>365</sup> Jewish Virtual Library, "Dubrovnik".

<sup>366</sup> Exhibition catalogue, "Židovi", 14.

<sup>367</sup> Britannica, "Árpád dynasty".

<sup>368</sup> Ibid.

<sup>369</sup> Britannica, "Andrew II".

<sup>370</sup> Ibid.

<sup>371</sup> Ibid.

<sup>372</sup> Exhibition catalogue, "Židovi", 14.

the angry nobility, Andrew followed the advice of the Jews in an attempt to recover from his financial distress, which was to mint worthless money.<sup>373</sup> On the expense of Croats, Andrew also gave away “much of his property in Croatia” to non-Croatian nobles in order to secure his position.<sup>374</sup> This is how foreigners, “in addition to the Jews”, “rode on the backs of the Croats”, who oppressed and exploited them “in the most heartless way”, it was explained.<sup>375</sup>

Up until now, schools had always avoided teaching children the real causes of why the Golden Bull was signed, “as well as its true content.”<sup>376</sup> It was claimed that high school teachers themselves “in most cases” did not even know the true meaning of the Golden Bull, as it was not taught at the universities.<sup>377</sup> This was the “best” proof of how much power the Jews had yielded in the country, and the influence that the Jews exercised on school textbooks, the DIPU claimed.<sup>378</sup>

Instead, “Jewish plagiarists” were celebrated as great scholars.<sup>379</sup> Schools taught the so-called “Jewish science” of Karl Marx, which was how “a young guard of communists” had been created.<sup>380</sup> It had been kept a secret that Karl Marx had called the Croats “trash” and “unworthy” of managing their own state-creation.<sup>381</sup> All the “historical facts in which something evil could be revealed about the Jews” were kept secret, and the DIPU were particularly upset that lectures “against God” could be given, but not lectures “against the Jews.”<sup>382</sup>

National purification had to take place on all levels, including history and memory. Croats had not been taught that the Golden Bull had in fact been “aimed against foreigners”, the DIPU explained.<sup>383</sup> The Golden Bull was far more than a constitutional document. In fact, they claimed it to be an anti-Jewish legislation. Although the Golden Bull did initially not specify which foreigners it was aimed at, they reassured that the Croats had always felt and known “so clearly” that Jews were always, and in every environment “only foreigners”, which made it

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<sup>373</sup> Ibid.

<sup>374</sup> Exhibition catalogue, “Židovi”, 14.

<sup>375</sup> Exhibition catalogue, “Židovi”, 14-15.

<sup>376</sup> Exhibition catalogue, “Židovi”, 15.

<sup>377</sup> Ibid.

<sup>378</sup> Ibid.

<sup>379</sup> Ibid.

<sup>380</sup> Ibid.

<sup>381</sup> Ibid. I could not find any references to Marx having made this statement. Marx and Friedrich Engels did to some extent express themselves “unfavorable” in regard to the Slavs of Austria, and in particular Southern Slavs, which some have deemed an expression of “German imperialism”. See *Marxism and the Southern Slav Question* by Hermann Wendt and R.W. S. W.

<sup>382</sup> Ibid.

<sup>383</sup> Ibid.

obvious that the legislation had been aimed toward the Jews specifically.<sup>384</sup> Besides, Article 24 of the Golden Bull explicitly stated that Jews could not be mint supervisors, salts sellers nor tax collectors, they claimed.<sup>385</sup>

Even with the Golden Bull signed, the power of the Jews had not been broken, they explained. Andrew had not learned from his mistakes, who went on to live just as recklessly as he had done before, and the Jews continued to “flay” the Croats.<sup>386</sup> This in turn forced Andrew to sign a new Golden Bull in 1233 that “clearly mentioned Jews”.<sup>387</sup> The Croats had been more alert this time, they explained, and it was concluded that the whole of the Golden Bull could confidently be called “the first clearly formulated anti-Jewish law.”<sup>388</sup>

For context, the Golden Bull did contain sections that were aimed at foreigners. For instance, foreigners could not be gifted land, nor could they receive distinguished positions unless they had received the consent of the King’s court.<sup>389</sup> The Golden bull also mentioned that coinage and salt mines should not be let out to Jews or Muslims,<sup>390</sup> and later on in 1233, a section was added that prohibited Jews and Muslims from holding public office.<sup>391</sup> However, the Golden Bull does not appear to be aimed exclusively toward the Jews, as it centered more around securing the nobility rights like the opportunity for fair trials, protecting them from unjust taxes and limiting the King’s power.<sup>392</sup> The legislation affected Muslims as well, which also suggests that the legislation did not exclusively target Jews. Either way, the exhibition boasted this as one of the “necessary defensive measures” against the Jews the Croatian people had taken.<sup>393</sup>

Andrew was a Hungarian king, but the exhibition could also reference kings of so-called “Croatian blood” that had taken measures against the Jews. King Tomislav, Croatia’s first king that reigned between 910 and 928, was explained to have introduced measures that targeted slave traders in Croatia, and thus also Jews. It was obvious that the legislation had been targeted at Jews, they explained, because “in the Adriatic, only they [the Jews] and the Saracens (the Arabs)”, traded slaves.<sup>394</sup>

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<sup>384</sup> Ibid.

<sup>385</sup> Ibid.

<sup>386</sup> Ibid.

<sup>387</sup> Ibid.

<sup>388</sup> Ibid.

<sup>389</sup> Molnar and Völgyesi, “The Hungarian experience of freedom”, 40.

<sup>390</sup> Ibid.

<sup>391</sup> Britannica, “Golden Bull of 1222”.

<sup>392</sup> Molnar and Völgyesi, “The Hungarian experience of freedom”, 40.

<sup>393</sup> Exhibition catalogue, “Židovi”, 18.

<sup>394</sup> Ibid.

There were several lessons to be taken away from these examples. Not only did the regime imply that the Jews had always presented problems to Croats, but more importantly, that the Croats had been aware of this and fought against the Jews. The regime's introduction of anti-Jewish legislation was, in other words, just a natural prolongment of a deep, self-proclaimed anti-Jewish tradition in Croatia.

### **Slavery: A Jewish craft**

The measures that King Tomislav had taken against slave traders was claimed to have been yet another anti-Jewish legislation. For context, the slave trade was indeed a lucrative part of Medieval commerce, and the capture of human beings for profit was a primary aim of warfare throughout the medieval period.<sup>395</sup> Since Christians in theory were not to buy or sell other Christians, Jewish merchants often served as intermediaries in this trade.<sup>396</sup> Furthermore, East Central Europe was a major source of captives for the great slave markets of Venice, and some rulers, perhaps motivated by piety, saw fit to place restrictions on the slave trade.<sup>397</sup> King Tomislav was said to have prohibited the sales of slaves, except for those who were used as rowers for his war galleys.<sup>398</sup>

The legislation, in the regime's mind, served to illustrate that the slave trade had been "the most beloved occupation" of the Jews throughout all ages.<sup>399</sup> A panel from the exhibition would illustrate to its visitors this "disgusting craft" of theirs throughout three different centuries.<sup>400</sup> Throughout history, Jews were claimed to have pursued the craft of slavery and along the way having developed an incomparable cruelty and cynicism. When they later on became "the rulers of the world" they "distorted" historical facts so that the youth was not allowed to hear the real truth about slavery, the DIPU preached.<sup>401</sup> Yet again Croats had been wrongly taught in schoolbooks that the Venetians were the ones who had had been slave traders, and that Spaniards were the perpetrators of Black slavery.<sup>402</sup>

It was explained in the exhibition that, yes, the Venetian Republic allowed the slave trade at first, but that "the merchants were Jews".<sup>403</sup> The exhibition panel could illustrate how Jews

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<sup>395</sup> Sedlar, *East Central Europe in the Middle Ages*, 352.

<sup>396</sup> Ibid.

<sup>397</sup> Ibid.

<sup>398</sup> Ibid.

<sup>399</sup> Exhibition catalogue, "Židovi", 17.

<sup>400</sup> Ibid.

<sup>401</sup> Exhibition catalogue, "Židovi", 19.

<sup>402</sup> Ibid.

<sup>403</sup> Ibid.

had under the “guise of wretched merchants”, traveled to Croatian lands and looked for “convenient opportunities” to capture Croatian girls and boys, who were then shipped off to the East on Jewish ships.<sup>404</sup> More importantly, it was the Jews, and not the Spaniards, who had been responsible for the slave trade in America. The exhibition’s visitors could learn that the Jewish slave trade had flourished in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and it was explained that the Jews had developed their particular “ruthlessness” in the large slave plantations of America.<sup>405</sup> Slaves were allegedly also forced to produce alcohol in Jewish factories, which was then transported on Jewish ships by Spaniards to Africa.<sup>406</sup> This would lead to “brandy-bribed blacks” fighting other black tribes to accumulate that captives they could sell to the Jews.<sup>407</sup> The DIPU was, in other words, implying that the Jews’ moral influence was detrimental to all societies – not only “Aryan” ones.



*Panel from the exhibition showing how Jews had allegedly brought alcohol to the African continent. In “Kako se stvaraju izložbe” from the Croatian State Archives (Hrvatska Kinoteka). The text reads: “Jews brought blacks novelties: liquor and glass ornaments...”*

The DIPU also said that one could, from old trade records as well as from ship’s logs, see the terrible circumstances under which the slave transports took place.<sup>408</sup> The ship’s logs mentioned the number of dead, but what they did not reveal, were the reasons behind the deaths,

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<sup>404</sup> Ibid.

<sup>405</sup> Exhibition catalogue, “Židovi”, 19.

<sup>406</sup> Ibid.

<sup>407</sup> Ibid.

<sup>408</sup> Ibid.



the DIPU commented.<sup>409</sup> The real reasons could be extracted from other places and sources, like private notes of individual captains and memoirs of missionaries. Once again, the Ustasha's monopoly and access to factual and scientific truth, undefiled by the Jews, was being stressed. These sources could reveal that the slaves had been fed poorly, suffered numerous abuses, and were living in unhealthy conditions on board, which ultimately resulted in their deaths.<sup>410</sup>

The DIPU spared no effort in their attempt to portray the Jews' alleged cruelty, vividly describing what it would have been like for a slave to travel from one continent to the other. One "needs to understand exactly" what was meant by unhealthy conditions on the ships, they remarked.<sup>411</sup> The DIPU asked its visitors to "imagine" a few weeks, or even months on sea, in rooms that were so low that slaves could barely sit up straight.<sup>412</sup> Male and female – old and young – all "crammed" and "pressed" over each other.<sup>413</sup> It was impossible to even imagine what kind of diseases were appearing on the ships, and how children were perishing.<sup>414</sup> The slaves were allegedly only checked up on when Jewish servants, very reluctantly, went down the decks to whip the slaves into order when they fought among themselves for food or more space.<sup>415</sup>

It was also explained that the scars from the blows of the whip brought down the price of the slaves. The Jew, however, knew "how to help."<sup>416</sup> The exhibition claimed that the Jews, in order to conceal the scars on the slaves' bodies, would have their entire backs flayed, so new skin would grow in its place "without a trace of a whip."<sup>417</sup> The exhibition's contents were moving even further toward the absurd and questionable. The antisemitic accusations had at least, up until this point, been accompanied by "evidence", albeit unreliable and warped, and could also have been microscopically plausible for someone who was already set in believing the exhibition's allegations.

The Jews were said to have invented something unparalleled in human history when they reduced "blacks to the state of animals" by "creating" them on the spot instead of bringing them in from Africa, the exhibition explained.<sup>418</sup> The exhibition's visitors needed to understand that slavery was just one of many evils that had been created by the Jews. Yet again the regime was

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<sup>409</sup> Ibid.

<sup>410</sup> Ibid.

<sup>411</sup> Ibid.

<sup>412</sup> Ibid.

<sup>413</sup> Ibid.

<sup>414</sup> Ibid.

<sup>415</sup> Exhibition catalogue, "Židovi", 20.

<sup>416</sup> Ibid.

<sup>417</sup> Ibid.

<sup>418</sup> Ibid.

making moral commentary. While they were condemning the institution of slavery, which incidentally many different people in Europe were engaged in, they were operating with racist beliefs and committing brutal genocides.

### **Prostitution: Another Jewish craft**

The exhibition had scrutinized and dissected every aspect of the Jews' alleged history. When one thought the Jews could not possibly do anything more wrong or harmful, the DIPU could reveal even more. Following the exhibition's narrative, the slave trade had eventually halted when Christian peoples had shaken off the "Jewish influence" in an attempt to "erase the shame" that slavery had brought upon all modern and civilized people.<sup>419</sup> Although the Jews had lost "such a fruitful field of earnings", they did not stay idle for long, for they had found their new source of income through the old Jewish tradition of prostitution, or what the DIPU also referred to as "white slavery".<sup>420</sup>

The exhibition could illustrate that prostitution was an old Jewish institution through reference of temple sex workers found in the Hebrew bible. The temple sex workers, which were called "kadeshot" or "kadeshim" according to whether the prostitutes were male or female, was explained to be a Jewish plague that had spread throughout the entire Roman Empire and had grown so strong that it now "could not be exterminated."<sup>421</sup>

The exhibition also went into detail on how the so-called white slave trade had been conducted. The DIPU claimed that the Jews would lay out their trap on almost all kinds of women, but those who had to work to earn their living were particularly brought to attention. Artists, waitresses, housekeepers, were all victims of the Jews, and were slowly, but surely turning into prostitutes.<sup>422</sup> With zeal the Jews had thrown themselves onto unknowing young girls, it was claimed, and Jews only went after young people who could serve as "entertainment" for them.<sup>423</sup> The exhibition also showed how after the establishment of Yugoslavia, four out of six brothels in Zagreb were owned by Jews, and how the Jews were owners of nightclubs and managers of secret prostitution in other European cities.<sup>424</sup>

The alleged story of a young Jewish man who had reportedly raped a girl in the woods was used to illustrate the Jew's immorality and sexual zeal. The DIPU explained that the girl who

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<sup>419</sup> Ibid.

<sup>420</sup> Ibid.

<sup>421</sup> Ibid.

<sup>422</sup> Exhibition catalogue, "Židovi", 21.

<sup>423</sup> Ibid.

<sup>424</sup> Ibid.

had been sexually assaulted saw no other option than to have an abortion six months into her pregnancy. The father of the Jew then payed the father of the girl who had been raped 2.000 kuna to stay silent about it.<sup>425</sup> There is little to suggest that this was an incident that had actually taken place, as the DIPU did not corroborate the event. Nonetheless, the exhibition went on to claim that this was just one of many examples of the sort, and that in this year of the NDH's existence, "a number of such cases" had been discovered.<sup>426</sup> One could then only imagine how many such cases had been "forever forgotten", the DIPU remarked.<sup>427</sup>

The catalogue summed up the exhibition in this way: it had been no accident a Croatia ruled by the Ustasha, and spearheaded by the Poglavnik, had "immediately introduced legislation" that would prevent Jews from ruling Croatia ever again.<sup>428</sup> After eight centuries serving foreigners, Croatians had finally become independent.

### **The Ustasha's construction of history**

The Ustasha's construction of Jewish and Croatian national history was an integral part of how they expressed their antisemitism. Ultimately, history can acquire many functionalities. The historic narrative that the regime had selectively constructed by exaggerating certain aspects, making some up, and omitting others, told a tale of centuries of oppression by the hands of foreigners, and by Jews in particular. This contorted historic narrative served as the Ustasha's *magistra vitae*. Through history, and by linking the past, present, and future, the Ustasha were claiming a long antisemitic tradition among the people which served to justify their present actions and the annihilation of the Croatian Jews. Within any social structure, several forces unify and forge a common understanding between individuals who hold disparate interests, the perception of history being one of them.<sup>429</sup> Through the regime's monopoly on how and what information reached the public, they hoped to produce a common feeling of resentment toward the Jews.

The Ustasha were maddened by how the historical consciousness of the Croatian people had been shaped before the existence of the NDH, with historical consciousness referring to people's relationship to history, and how it in turn affects their understanding of the present and expectations for the future.<sup>430</sup> The Jews had controlled the historic narrative for too long, they

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<sup>425</sup> Ibid.

<sup>426</sup> Ibid.

<sup>427</sup> Ibid.

<sup>428</sup> Ibid.

<sup>429</sup> Jensen, "Power, Utopia, and the Manipulation of the Historical Consciousness", 238.

<sup>430</sup> Jensen, *Historie – livsverden og fag*, 68.

believed, and the history that had been taught to generations of Croats had made them idle to their suffering. All the negative impacts of Jews had been concealed, and one needed for instance only look to how the signing of the Golden Bull had been taught in schools. It was implied, for instance by involving the university in their research for the exhibition, that the regime possessed exclusive access to legitimate “information” about the Jews’ destructive forces.

The Ustasha were not the first to utilize history in an arbitrary way. The Nazi regime used historical myths to mobilize the German people in support of National Socialism,<sup>431</sup> while Mussolini and the Italian fascist used the Latin language to portray the Fascists as restorers and builders of the Roman Empire.<sup>432</sup> The Ustasha did similarly, and in their construction of history, they attempted to provide the myths “scientific” merit. The exhibition demonstrates how the Ustasha attempted to stay somewhat near the realm of reality when crafting their historic narrative, which is what makes their use of history particularly unsettling.

For instance, when the Ustasha were explaining the Jews’ arrival in Croatia, it is true that a Jewish community with a cemetery existed nearby Solin in the third century, and when Solin was destroyed, the Jews seem to have fled to the fortified palace of the Roman emperor Diocletian which would later become the town of Split.<sup>433</sup> In addition, it was true that there developed strong Jewish communities in coastal Croatia which the towns depended on. In Split, for instance, Jewish merchants became important figures within trade,<sup>434</sup> and Jews in Split were in the 1500s exempted from paying residence tax, which caused the free port to prosper considerably.<sup>435</sup> It was not false that that Jews had for a long time been forbidden to settle in the Northern parts of Croatia,<sup>436</sup> which was a case in point used to make the flawed claim that the region had prospered because Croatian kings had introduced anti-Jewish measures. And it was true that Jews sometimes served as intermediaries in the slave trade during the middle ages.<sup>437</sup>

This does not, however, justify or support the Ustasha’s falsely crafted narrative concerning these very general, historic events. Just because some Jews had served as middlemen in the slave trade, was not a legitimate basis to make the claim that the Jews invented slavery in order to dominate and destroy the world. The Ustasha mentioned nothing of how the Christian world

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<sup>431</sup> Jenson, “Power, Utopia, and the Manipulation of the Historical Consciousness”, 254.

<sup>432</sup> Haanæs, “Using language as a weapon”, UiO Faculty of Humanities.

<sup>433</sup> Jewish Virtual library, “Split”.

<sup>434</sup> Goldsteins, *The Holocaust in Croatia*, 7.

<sup>435</sup> Jewish Virtual Library, “Split”.

<sup>436</sup> Goldsteins, *The Holocaust in Croatia*, 7.

<sup>437</sup> Sedlar, *East Central Europe in the Middle Ages*, 352.

profited off and kept alive slavery, or how King Tomislav kept slaves as rowers for his own convenience in war galleys despite his legislation against slavery. Nor did the exhibition mention the parts of history where the Jews were being mercilessly persecuted and accused of crimes they did not commit. As the Spanish inquisition spread its power, even the Conversos, meaning the Jews who had embraced the Christian faith, remained under the constant suspicion of the Holy Office,<sup>438</sup> forcing Jews like Dona Gracia to practice the Christian faith in public in order to navigate the Inquisition's harsh realities.<sup>439</sup> Instead the exhibition presented the expulsion of the Spanish and Portuguese Jews as a catastrophe for the nations in where they had come, and was used to illustrate the allegation that there had always been a need for people to protect themselves against the Jews. The DIPU's selective and narrow, but yet arbitrary use of history, formed the basis for much of the exhibition's claims. The Ustasha were ultimately complicit in doing to history the same thing they had accused the Jews of doing to it.

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<sup>438</sup> Birnbaum, *The Long Journey of Gracia Mendes*, 6.

<sup>439</sup> Birnbaum, *The Long Journey of Gracia Mendes*, 1.

## Chapter 8: Antisemitism in the Ustasha

### Following the standard of its time

What then characterizes antisemitism in the Ustasha? In one respect, the exhibition can tell us that the Ustasha expressed an antisemitism that followed the standards of its time. The rise of ultra-nationalist and racist thinking, antisemitic social and political movements, as well as the denial of the constitutional rights of Jews, meant that antisemitism towards the end of the 19th century represented something entirely different than it had before.<sup>440</sup> This development was a turning point in the history of antisemitism, as it marked the distinction between traditional anti-Judaism, meaning the Christian hatred of the Jews, and modern antisemitism.

By contrast, anti-Judaism had its origins from the moment Christianity and Judaism became two separate monotheistic religions that competed against each other over who was the righteous people of God. The teleological conflict centered around the Jews' rejection of Jesus as their Messiah, which the Church fathers for centuries used to characterize the Jews as a people who killed their prophets.<sup>441</sup> The Jews were recognized only in the sense that they existed as proof for the triumph of Christianity, as the Jewish Messiah would never arrive, for he had already arrived in the form of Jesus – and much worse was that the Jews had executed their own savior.<sup>442</sup> Early on Jews were portrayed as deceitful figures, which has led some of those who study antisemitism through the history of ideas to emphasize the continuity of antisemitism, pointing out that modern antisemitism was merely an extension of anti-Judaism.<sup>443</sup>

However, the secular framework of the modern nation-state seriously weakened the foundations in which anti-Judaism could thrive on. Jews became subject of hostile attitudes because they were now associated with the modern processes that had dissolved traditional life.<sup>444</sup> The process of emancipation coincided with a time when traumatic changes in European society were taking place, more specifically when the old Christian secular order was dissolving in exchange for the liberal industrialized society.<sup>445</sup> Through these democratic and liberal developments, communist parties were for instance formed, and in addition enabled the upward

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<sup>440</sup> Fein, «Foreword», V.

<sup>441</sup> Ruether, «The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism», 28.

<sup>442</sup> Eriksen et.al., *Judehatets svarta bok*, 25.

<sup>443</sup> Simonsen, *Antisemittismen i Norge*, 3.

<sup>444</sup> Ruether, «The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism», 43.

<sup>445</sup> Ibid.

social mobility of the Jews, who became visible in urban, academic, political, economic, and cultural life.<sup>446</sup>

It was in this context that the Jew came to represent currents like democracy, liberalism, capitalism, and communism, and was thought to be a powerful force that sought to control the world by way of dirty tricks and through the exercise of influence in the highest levels of society.<sup>447</sup> The Jew was also now raising suspicion because he was assimilating too well. The Jew had become well-adjusted – he knew the language of the nation he lived in and knew its social codes too well.<sup>448</sup> This illustrates how antisemitism, although a flexible prejudice that has been rearticulated and reshaped in different historical, ideological and social circumstances, still has some persistent traits, namely the representation of “the Jew” as a threatening other who is well-organized, powerful and evil.<sup>449</sup>

Conspiracist antisemitism was, in other words, a major characteristic of the Ustasha’s antisemitism. In the words of Vilko Rieger, the Jews had after all “divided the roles in-between themselves in order to always stay in power”,<sup>450</sup> and one needed only to look to Dona Gracia to see the dangerous, plotting powers of the Jews – not to speak of the individual Jew that had invaded the Balkans in the disguise of poverty.

The Ustasha, like other antisemites of their time, constructed the “Jew” in any way it suited them. The Jew was, just to give a few examples, morally degenerate, rich, greedy, poor, a capitalist, revolutionary communist, pimp, brothel owner, rapist, enslaver, warmonger, abuser, and fraudster. There were no limits to what evils the “Jew” could represent.

What can, however, tell us more about antisemitism in the Ustasha, is the way in which they sought to legitimize these antisemitic tropes. In particular, what distinguishes the Ustasha’s antisemitism, was their attempt to prescribe Jews chimeric attributes through a seemingly legitimate factual ground, which was for instance built on “carefully” collected statistics and the use of history. In a way, they were creating a field of suspension between “scientific legitimacy” and what could be perceived as believable to support their antisemitic allegations. This in turn served the function of consolidating the newly established Croatian state, where the introduction of anti-Jewish legislation aided the extermination of the Jews in Croatia, ridding the nation of individuals they believed posed a threat to Croatian life and happiness.

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<sup>446</sup> Banik, “Sionisme”, HL-Senteret.

<sup>447</sup> Waage, *Konflikt og stormaktspolitikk*, 26-27.

<sup>448</sup> Eriksen et.al., *Judehatets svartabok*, 190.

<sup>449</sup> Simonsen, “Antisemitism and Conspiracism”, 17.

<sup>450</sup> Nova Hrvatska, “Otvorena je izlozba zidovi”, 5 Nr. 103, 3. May, 1942.

## **Chimeric antisemitism through a scientific and intellectual framework**

The Ustasha regime's misuse of history is closely connected to their antisemitism. Historian Gavin I. Langmuir when defining antisemitism, has argued that the term should only be reserved for "socially significant chimeric hostility against the Jews."<sup>451</sup> But how does it tie into the Ustasha's construction of Jewish history? Chimeric hostility, or rather chimeric assertions, attribute to a group and all of its members characteristics that no one has ever empirically observed.<sup>452</sup> They come in two types, according to Langmuir. The first type of chimeric assertion are the ones that are heavily characterized by their imaginative qualities.<sup>453</sup> This means that the basis for how the hostility towards the Jews is formed, only exists in the imagination, but are nevertheless qualities that make the members of the group seem subhuman.<sup>454</sup> Such a chimeric assertion is for instance how Jews in the Middle Ages were said to possess hooves or horns – that is an "easily" identifiable chimeric assertion, as it only exists in the imagination, and has never been demonstrably possessed or empirically proven.

Langmuir also speaks of another type of chimeric assertion that is more difficult to detect.<sup>455</sup> This type of weaker chimeric assertion contains a so-called "kernel of truth", however remote this kernel may be. For instance, if it was known that Jews had actually occasionally killed Christians, and if a Christian was found murdered, the assertion that some Jews could indeed have committed the crime would be plausible.<sup>456</sup> What makes the assertion chimeric, however, is that it then is used to say: if Jews are present, all brutal murders where the killers are unknown are committed by Jews.<sup>457</sup>

One can think about the Ustasha's antisemitism in a similar matter. They used general empirically observed events to serve as their "kernel of truth". This then formed the basis for their chimeric assertions toward the Jews. If they could, for instance, loosely connect the Jews to the institution of slavery by way of them being middlemen of slavery, they could then make it the basis for saying that the Jews had in fact invented slavery, however outlandish that claim was, and to say that all Jews in one way or another participated in the enslavement of not only blacks, but also whites. When the Jews were first established to be connected with the institution of slavery, they could also make stronger chimeric claims, for instance that Jews had developed

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<sup>451</sup> Langmuir, «Toward a Definition of Antisemitism», 104.

<sup>452</sup> Ibid.

<sup>453</sup> Langmuir, «Toward a Definition of Antisemitism», 112.

<sup>454</sup> Ibid.

<sup>455</sup> Ibid.

<sup>456</sup> Ibid.

<sup>457</sup> Langmuir, «Toward a Definition of Antisemitism», 113.



a particular ruthlessness by way of flaying the whole skin off the slave's backs in order to conceal their whip-marks.

Or similarly, if a Jew at some point in history indeed had raped a woman in the woods, they could then make the assertion that if a woman was found raped, all rapes where the perpetrators were unknown were in fact committed by Jews.

The Ustasha were careful not to, for the most part, make claims about Jews that were not, at the very best, loosely and microscopically plausible, and were careful to support their claims with "evidence", however questionable this was. From the beginning, the Ustasha made it their goal that the exhibition would be formed on the basis of statistics, university expertise, and diligent research. It was one thing to claim scientific legitimacy in the newspapers, but the DIPU were also conditioning their own men and officials to provide legitimate facts from the districts and were adamant that the information be fact checked.

Let us reassess some more of the exhibition's "kernels of truth". As we have seen so far, general historical events functioned as so-called kernels of truth that were warped in order to ascribed Jews unrealistic characteristics. The Golden Bull legislation, along with references to the expulsion of the Dubrovnik-Jews, served to prove the assertion that all Jews have throughout the ages been aggressors and creators of disorder, which then implied this was the perpetual characteristic of all Jews, and that there did exist legitimate grounds for the persecution and total elimination of Jews today. This notion is not feasible outside the imagination, and it cannot be said that every Jew that has ever existed, has been an aggressor and creator of disorder.

By referencing Archeological tombstones, or the Edict of Tolerance and the arrival of Jews in Croatia, they made the unrealistic assertion that all Jews to ever exist have always plotted to enter "Aryan" societies in order to establish their "world-wide Jewish temple". The assertion was accompanied by extremely questionable statistics of synagogues in the NDH that would illustrate how Jews had started to dominate the nation. On a similar note, by referencing 16<sup>th</sup> century Jewish merchants from coastal Croatia, and by using "statistics" from Croatian businesses, they could make the unrealistic assertion that Jews control, and have always controlled, the economy.

The antisemitic exhibition exemplifies the Ustasha's desire to place their antisemitism within what they considered to be a scientific and intellectual framework. The exhibition's contents were an ambivalent mix of claims that could, on the one hand be perceived as plausible, and on the other hand, ones that were completely preposterous. The Ustasha had little grounds

to suggest that all Jews were rapists, but if the other allegations were microscopically plausible, perhaps these accusations would be easier to accept as well?

## **Consolidating the NDH**

On one hand, the antisemitic exhibition boasted the capacity and potential that existed within the NDH. It was important to show that the Ustasha were able to create an elaborate exhibition like the antisemitic one, which assisted the movement in the shaping of their fascist mission. Like other fascist groups, the employment of ceremonial and liturgic rituals, visuals and symbols, served a central function in their activities.<sup>458</sup> By enveloping participants in the mystique and community of ritual, like the Ustasha for instance did by involving the public in the creation of the exhibition, they appealed to the theatrics of politics,<sup>459</sup> and turned the people into active participants of the national project.<sup>460</sup>

Jews were an integral part of the Ustasha epos, and it was no coincidence that antisemitism became the focal point of this liturgy. The Ustasha's interpretation of Croatian history was that of an oppressed and tormented nation that had been denied its freedom by various people throughout its history – Jews being one of the main perpetrators. The exhibition's main contention was that Jews had posed a threat to Croatian life and independence, not only because they were believed to be fundamentally evil, but because they “thrived” on living in a multi-ethnic society like Yugoslavia. The Jews were believed to be a foreign remnant from the monstrous Yugoslav state, which Pavelić had incidentally coined a “Jew Eldorado”.

In order for the NDH to not remain mere diplomacy on a piece of paper, antisemitism in the Ustasha also served the principal role of conserving the NDH. The existence of an independent Croatian state was not granted. Croatia had become independent in the full sense of the word only by the grace of the Ustasha. When handed the opportunity to shape their ideal Croatian existence, all remnants of oppressive foreign influence had to disappear, with exception of the German and Italian presence, it seems. Only pure “Croatian-hood”, as they explained, could permeate the nation. The Jews were yet another hurdle that the Ustasha had successfully overcome. The Jews were in the exhibition consistently discussed within the context of what effect their presence had yielded on Croatians and their opportunity to live in an independent

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<sup>458</sup> Payne, *A History of Fascism*, 12.

<sup>459</sup> Payne, *A History of Fascism*, 12.

<sup>460</sup> Italian Fascists had already done this in 1932 through the *Mostra della Rivoluzione fascista* exhibition. The exhibition narrated the history of Fascism through a mixture of art, documentation, relics and historical simulations. See Paul, *Fascist Directive*, 104.

Croatian state. In the same way, Jews were discussed within a context of what effect their absence, on the other hand, would have for the “happiness” of the state. The introduction of measures against the “harmful” Jewish minority in Croatia was just one of many ways the Ustasha had taken action to ensure the independence of Croats who had been mistreated for centuries. It was no coincidence that the Ustasha were the ones to break the chains that had inhibited the freedom of the Croatian people, and not the HSS and Vladko Maček. The exhibition was after all a celebration of the Ustasha’s self-proclaimed solving of the “Jewish Question”.

The Ustasha’s extreme nationalism made no room for the physical or spiritual presence of Jews. Nationalism, xenophobia and racism pervaded all aspects of historic fascist practice, and fascist like the Ustasha did not treat all inhabitants of its territory as citizens.<sup>461</sup> This had catastrophic consequences for those who fell outside the boundaries of the state, including the Serbian, Jewish, and Roma population, along with the regime’s political opponents.<sup>462</sup> Political antisemitism within fascist movements was after all closely linked to the modern nation-building, which was very ethnocentric.<sup>463</sup> Antisemitism became a political tool that assisted the construction of new political identities in Europe and was a very effective driving force in the attempt to achieve political mobilization by way of Jews becoming the negative reference point for the construction of exclusive national identities.<sup>464</sup>

Although fascism generally represented the most extreme form of modern European nationalism, fascist ideology was not necessarily racist in the Nazi sense, nor even necessarily antisemitic.<sup>465</sup> In addition, the Jews were a minority in Croatia – why did the Ustasha then construct a national identity with Jews as the Croatian antithesis?

Even though the Jews were persecuted in tandem with the Serbian and Roma population, the hatred directed toward the Jews differentiated in several aspects. In terms of legislation, Jews could not convert to Catholicism like the Serbs for instance could in order to try to avoid the repercussions of the rigid NDH-legislation.<sup>466</sup> And although the Ustasha’s anti-Serb propaganda was heavily rooted in racism, it was not as racially “scientific” as the regime’s antisemitism, and the Ustasha incidentally never introduced any racial legislation against the Serbs.<sup>467</sup> What does this suggest then? It suggests that, while antisemitism became an integral

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<sup>461</sup> Passmore, *Fascism: A Very Short Introduction*, 108.

<sup>462</sup> Ibid.

<sup>463</sup> Weil, “The Extent and Structure of Anti-Semitism in Western Populations”, 164.

<sup>464</sup> Marzec, “What Bears Witness of the Failed Revolution?”, 195.

<sup>465</sup> Payne, *A History of Fascism*, 11.

<sup>466</sup> Goldsteins, *The Holocaust in Croatia*, 117.

<sup>467</sup> Yeomans, «Erradicating “Undesired Elements”», 211.

tool for the Ustasha's self-expression, and Jews became the Croatian antithesis by association of Yugoslavia and foreign oppression, we are reminded that the Ustasha's antisemitism must also be viewed as a product of its time and as belonging to the entire antisemitic milieu of 20<sup>th</sup> century Europe, and that antisemitism in this sense, indeed has been an unusual hostility directed toward Jews.

## **Conclusion**

The Ustasha portrayed the Jews as an evil and destructive force that had enveloped the Croatian nation and inhibited its people the opportunity to live independently and free of foreign oppression. From the very first moment Croats had come in contact with the Jews, they had fought a violent struggle against their pernicious influence. History was full of examples of how the Jews had, not only in Croatia, but everywhere in the world, sucked the life out of the people they had wandered to in order to establish their so-called world-wide Jewish temple. The Jews had conspired and divided roles among themselves to do so, and consequently the Jews' influence had seeped into all areas of national life. They could be found in politics as communists, in society as dangerous individuals, and as zealous conjurers of the economy, just to give a few examples. The Jews had, at least throughout the 2000 years of history that the DIPU could account for, illustrated that their perpetual characteristic had been that of ruthlessness, immorality, heartlessness and oppression. The arrival of the Jews into Croatia had been nothing less than a catastrophe.

The Ustasha expressed their antisemitism through a deceitful "scientific" and intellectual framework, for instance by way of referencing history or "carefully" collected statistics. Research and statistics that had been collected from various parishes in the NDH became the foundation for the antisemitism expressed in the exhibition. The DIPU also involved the University in the evaluation of the books about Jews the public had donated in order to give their antisemitism "credibility". The arbitrary use of history became a key tool in the expression of their antisemitism. It provided their antisemitism with a seemingly legitimate factual basis, which they then used to make chimeric claims about the Jews that assigned them characteristics and conduct that had never been empirically observed.

The self-proclaimed aim of the exhibition was to show the expansion of Jewry in Croatia and the Jews' destructive work in the country before April 10<sup>th</sup>, 1941, as well as the solving of the "Jewish question" in the NDH. The more specific aim of the exhibition, however, appears to have centered around justifying the introduction of anti-Jewish measures in the NDH. On

one hand, the exhibition's recital of 2000 years' worth of Jewish history was used to illustrate the alleged negative characteristics of Jews. More importantly, however, it was used to illustrate *why* the Ustasha had to introduce anti-Jewish measures in the NDH.

What this can tell us about the Holocaust in Croatia, is that the introduction of anti-Jewish legislation was considered integral to the Ustasha's solving of the "Jewish question". The exhibition's celebration of the Jews as a "parasitic breed" of the past would not have been possible without the Poglavnik's swift and many anti-Jewish measures, which were also claimed to have been desired by the Croatian people who allegedly possessed a long anti-Jewish tradition. The Ustasha extended the Nazi's "Jew" definition, which was something that guided them in the destruction process that depended on the measures being aimed at a certain group – the Croatian Jews.

Ultimately, what this tells us about antisemitism in the Ustasha, is that antisemitism was important for the consolidation of the NDH and the movement's fascist mission. Antisemitism consolidated the NDH and the Ustasha's fascist mission in several ways. It was important for the regime to showcase the capacity and potential that existed within the regime through the antisemitic exhibition. However, more important, was their ambition of making the exhibition's visitors into active participants of the national project, which left no space for Jews to exist.

It was no coincidence that Jews, and essentially antisemitism, became the focal point of the Ustasha's theatrical politics. In the Ustasha epos, the Jews were an enemy that carried connotations to centuries of foreign oppression, which also included the oppressive Yugoslav state. Excluding every foreign element from Croatia, including the Jews, would make the state Independent in the full sense of the word.

However, although Jews were persecuted in tandem with other groups the Ustasha believed had denied Croats their long overdue freedom, like for instance Serbs, the hatred directed toward Jews was different in several aspects. This illustrates that, while the Ustasha's antisemitism was shaped by a specific local context and was a "useful" tool for the movement to achieve its political goals in the NDH, it must also be understood as belonging to a broader, European, antisemitic context, in where the Jews were recipients of an unusual hostility.

This thesis has identified some characteristics of the antisemitism expressed within the Ustasha by studying the antisemitic exhibition "JEWS". In order to do so, there has been made a strict selection of which parts of the exhibition to study. There could, however, be said more about the exhibition and its many different themes. Future studies about the exhibition could more comprehensively address the themes of, for instance, anti-communism, how Jews were portrayed during Biblical times, or how the Ustasha interpreted the Soviet, English and

American roles in international politics and so-called “international Judaism”. Future studies should also, if possible, address more comprehensively the circumstances concerning the organization of the exhibition. Can there be said even more about the individuals involved in the creation of the exhibition? Whose idea exactly was it to arrange an antisemitic exhibition? And where did they get the inspiration to do so from? Can there be said more about the University’s assistance? And is it possible to find out why Pavelić was not present at the opening ceremony? These are difficult tasks, as the sources concerning the exhibition are few and scattered, but this does not, however, exclude the possibility that there might be more to be discovered in the Croatian State Archives about the exhibition. Besides this, the NDH had an aptitude for creating exhibitions. The exhibitions were essentially a display of ideas and can be valuable sources for discussing the Ustasha ideology. One of them was for instance made in collaboration with the German embassy and could provide an opportunity to examine the Ustasha’s exchange of ideas with other fascist regimes. Comparative studies of the Ustasha’s exhibitions with those of other fascist regimes could also be valuable in the discussions of the movement.

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