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# Bulgaria as Rescuer? Film Footage of the March 1943 Deportation and Its Reception across the Iron Curtain

Nadège Ragaru

In March 1943, 11,343 Jews were arrested in those parts of the kingdoms of Yugoslavia and Greece that the Reich had entrusted, in April 1941, to the Bulgarian administration. They were later deported to Nazi-occupied Poland and exterminated.<sup>1</sup> The 1943 roundups left only a faint visual trace in the form of several minutes of silent film footage, with poorly edited rushes.<sup>2</sup> What did the anonymous camera capture? Rows of exhausted human beings, their bodies weighed down by heavy bundles; faces emerging from behind the barred windows of sealed railway wagons; figures waiting in an unidentified internment camp, and then boarding a steamboat. The extraordinary nature of this visual document, along with the mystery surrounding its making – the identity of those who commissioned it, the camera operator(s) involved, the time and location of the shooting, and even the intention behind the filming – all account for the persistent efforts of historians, archivists, museum curators and political actors since the end of World War II to make these images “speak.” During the Cold War period, the initially silent footage was set to a soundtrack; several moving images were subsequently frozen as stills. Various quoted, appropriated and transformed, the footage took multiple trips to the editing room – crossing the East European border during the Cold War and traversing the historical watershed of 1989. All the while, the range of possible interpretations of the film continued to expand.

This article aims, first, at reconstructing the social lives of this visual archive in order to explore the social, political, and geopolitical circumstances that conditioned the production of knowledge about the Holocaust in territories occupied by Bulgaria during World War II. In recent years, a growing body of literature has endeavored to address the visual history of the Holocaust. Long hampered by questions pertaining to the legitimacy of visual sources in representing and coming to terms with the

destruction of European Jewry,<sup>3</sup> forays into visual Holocaust studies have more recently benefited from a better awareness of the role of photographers and cameramen in documenting anti-Jewish persecutions both during and in the aftermath of the war.<sup>4</sup> Several studies of late have demonstrated the value of examining the photographic record of concentration and extermination camps<sup>5</sup> as well as visual photographic and film remnants of deportation procedures<sup>6</sup> and films of war crimes trials.<sup>7</sup> Methodological issues associated with the use and decoding of fragmentary footage – which was often produced by perpetrators, and repeatedly inserted in cinematic representations of the Holocaust – have also been addressed. Such research has pinpointed how the manifold uses and editing of archival films influence its reception by the audience.<sup>8</sup> Scholars have also explored the role of visual documentation in memorializing the Holocaust<sup>9</sup> and have taken a close look at representations of the extermination of the Jews in popular culture (from cinema to comic books).<sup>10</sup> Stemming from several fields of scholarship, these studies have profited from increased cross-fertilization between art history, cultural studies, and film and cinema studies, as well as the study of the Holocaust. The present article aims to contribute to this body of literature by considering the 1943 footage as both a historical source for the events it depicted and as an instrument fashioning judicial and commemorative representations of the past.<sup>11</sup>

More specifically, the 1943 visual document will serve as a prism through which to view Cold War exchanges and confrontations. Much in the same way as World War II “trophy archives” crystallized conflicts across the Iron Curtain,<sup>12</sup> the screenings, citations, and elisions of the 1943 film footage were subject to evolving public and private memory policies in Europe’s East and West. The afterlife of this archival footage thus offers a window onto the power configurations underlying shifts in scopic regimes.<sup>13</sup> Following in the footsteps of scholars who have offered a more nuanced view of East and West in place of earlier representations of two discrete blocs,<sup>14</sup> this article calls attention to the complex entanglements of shared interests, conflicting ideologies, interpersonal relationships, and rivalries that concomitantly bypassed and institutionalized Cold War divisions.

The focus of this article is three moments at which the images comprising the 1943 film footage were assigned meaning, power of persuasion, and evidentiary quality, whether by means of combining the textual and the

visual, mixing documentary material with fiction, and/or highlighting (or minimizing) certain segments of the film. Each of these moments involved different constellations of social actors as well as contrasting definitions of the nature and value of the 1943 footage (as records documenting facts, court evidence, or testimonies to a vanished past). The first moment, during which the events on film were captured, can be traced only by reading between the blurred lines of the circumstances surrounding the commissioning of the film, the choice of location, and the composition of the images. The second moment coincides with a rekindled interest in the prosecution of Nazi war criminals in the Federal Republic of Germany in the 1960s. Disregarded for almost 15 years, the visual remnant resurfaced to support West German prosecutors' indictment against the former German Minister Plenipotentiary in Sofia, Adolf-Heinz Beckerle, who had negotiated the deportation of Jews with the Bulgarian authorities. The movement of the images between Bulgaria and West Germany was part of a much wider network of international connections, one that highlights the global nature of the Cold War and serves as a reminder that East-West ideological competition did not preclude forms of cooperation. Lastly, the final moment takes place at the waning of the socialist era,<sup>15</sup> as Bulgarian authorities endeavored to elicit international praise for the "rescue of the Bulgarian Jews" (to use a conventional formulation) at a time of growing awareness of the Holocaust on a global scale.

Here, a note of caution. Seldom has the analogy developed by historian Carlo Ginzburg between clues, detective investigation, and the scientific paradigm seemed as pertinent as in the course of this research.<sup>16</sup> In addition to the archival footage being so elusive, scholarly access to other documentary material proved to be wildly variable, held hostage both to Cold War *and* to post-1989 memory disputes. In the course of my research, I confronted the disappearance of pieces of evidence, the wavering memories of witnesses, and often unreliable screening devices on which I viewed (or attempted to view) film footage. More prosaically, following the sinuous travails of the footage necessitated visits to Bulgaria (Bulgarian Central State Archives, the Bulgarian National Film Archive), Germany (Bundesarchiv, Hessisches Staatsarchiv Darmstadt), the Republic of North Macedonia (The Holocaust Memorial Center for the Jews of Macedonia, the National and University Library St. Kliment Ohridski), Israel (Yad Vashem Archives, Beit Lohamei Haghetatot) and the United States (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum [USHMM], Archives of the World Jewish

Congress [WJC]). Private archives and oral history provided additional contributions to the text.

Ultimately, the story revealed by these journeys is that of a spectacular reversal of the footage's significance. In what follows, I show how film sequences most likely shot at the request of the Bulgarian bureaucracy in charge of anti-Jewish policies, depicting convoys of deported Jews escorted chiefly by Bulgarians, came to buttress a narrative centered around those Jews who were *not* deported, one that would champion the Bulgarian state as the driving force behind the "rescue of the Bulgarian Jews." As a result, the image of the crimes became blurred: the initial range of Bulgarian anti-Jewish measures (including discriminatory fiscal policies, Aryanization of Jewish properties, and forced labor) was condensed into the Law for the Defense of the Nation (promulgated in January 1941), on the one hand, and the expulsion of Bulgarian Jews from Sofia and other Bulgarian cities in May 1943, on the other – while Jewish deportations from the occupied territories gradually faded out of focus. Meanwhile, the theme of the Communist Party's leadership and, more particularly, that of the head of the Bulgarian Communist Party, Todor Zhivkov, in the "rescue of the Bulgarian Jews" took on unprecedented prominence during the late socialist era. Whereas Zhivkov has disappeared from the post-socialist historical narrative, the social and visual representations of the "rescue of the Bulgarian Jews" have remained dominant.

## **The Sounds of a Silent Film: Details of a Deportation**

### **Archival excursions and the trajectories of an iconographic document**

The 1943 unedited footage is currently featured in at least three museum film inventories: the Bulgarian National Film Archives (Bălgarska nacionalna filmoteka [BNF]) in Sofia, the Film Department of the German Federal Archives (Bundesarchiv-Filmarchiv) in Berlin, and the USHMM in Washington. The reel titles and the archive inventories – identity cards for these archived images – are a powerful reminder that the act of seeing is always filtered through previous knowledge. The most enigmatic source by far can be found in the Bulgarian inventory, where not one but two visual archives are mentioned. The first mention is laconic, undated, and devoid of description ("Deportation of Jews," No 12002, 1 reel, 300 m,

positive).<sup>17</sup> The second inventory, which, oddly, places the film in 1940 (when there were no deportations),<sup>18</sup> describes a two-part visual document. The first, it says, depicts “people carrying luggage, walking in the street. They are boarding trucks, trains, and steamboats. A hamlet – with laundry drying on strings. Rows of train carriages, a steamboat. People behind bars on trains (several images are repeated).” The second part, according to the catalog entry, shows “Jews behind bars on a freight train. Inside the carriage. Stepping out of the carriage. Jews walking down the streets. Embarking into a steamboat. Policemen hitting people already on the ground.” There is no indication regarding the commissioning of the film, the identity of the camera operators, the location where the images were shot, the context for and destination of the convoys, or the nationality of the civilians and policemen escorting the deportees. The Jewish identity of the people filmed is explicitly referenced only in the latter part of the inventory notes.<sup>19</sup>

By examining the German Federal Film Archives <sup>20</sup> and the USHMM’s inventories,<sup>21</sup> we can make some headway in identifying the locations of the four main sequences of this footage: the street that the deportees crossed in a line; the trucks and trains they boarded; the internment camps where they waited; and the steamboat on which they embarked. The inventory descriptions at the German Federal Film Archives and at the USHMM point to Lom (on the Bulgarian side of the Danube) for the embarkation scene and Bulgaria for the sequences shot at the camps (Gorna Džumaja and Dupnica, according to the USHMM; Dupnica at the German archives). The exact location of the frames featuring Jews being marched through a street remains a point of discussion: German archives place them in Kavala or Drama (Greece); whereas USHMM archivists, after initially identifying the site as either Kavala, Serrès, or Drama (Greece), more recently edited their inventory notes and opted for the designation of Dupnica (Bulgaria).<sup>22</sup> However, the plot thickens upon scrutinizing two other sources, Macedonian and Bulgarian, respectively. In March 2011, the Holocaust Memorial Center for the Jews of Macedonia (Memorialen centar na holokaustot na Evreite od Makedonija) opened in Skopje. Its permanent collection included a collage that featured a still of the line of deportees. The caption located the event in Skopje (then in Vardar Macedonia; today, the Republic of North Macedonia) rather than in Greece.<sup>23</sup> And in 2013, the Central State Archives of Bulgaria (Centralen Dăržaven Arhiv [CDA]) dedicated an exhibition to the 70th anniversary of the “rescue of the

Bulgarian Jews." The same picture of Jews crossing a street is presented in the Bulgarian catalog, with the caption: "Jews deported from Skopje."<sup>24</sup>

## **The making of a visual document: a film with no filmmaker or stage directions?**

Who filmed and commissioned the footage? What kinds of instructions were provided for the shots? Were they intended to demonstrate the efficiency of state bureaucracy, as propaganda, and/or as a record of the final moments of a vanishing population? The inventory of the German Federal Archives provides an initial clue: under the "Produktionsfirma" entry, one can read "Bălgarsko selo, Sofia." The hand of the copyist offers an inadvertently humorous mistake – *selo* means "village" in Bulgarian.<sup>25</sup> Most likely, this is a reference to Bălgarsko delo (Bulgarian Action), a privately owned foundation established on March 31, 1941 under the umbrella of the National Propaganda Directorate of the Ministry of Interior. The foundation fulfilled its mandate to "contribute to the propaganda on actions and undertakings of the Bulgarian state and nation" via its film and publishing departments.<sup>26</sup>

Given the foundation's monopoly on the production of state-approved live images, it would be fair to assume that Bălgarsko delo had been commissioned to film these sequences. However, there is no mention of this footage – or, indeed, of anything with a "Jewish theme" – in the foundation's 1943 annual report.<sup>27</sup> In an interview conducted in 2016, Angel Wagenstein, a renowned screenwriter and novelist who started his career in the aftermath of World War II,<sup>28</sup> stated that, in the film world, it was believed that the footage was the handiwork of Vasil Bakărdžiev (1906–1980),<sup>29</sup> one of the pioneers of Bulgarian newsreels (1935).<sup>30</sup> Bakărdžiev's name does not feature among the Bălgarsko delo camera operators in 1943. There is, however, a French-trained cameraman with the same first name, Vasil Holiolčev (1908–1974), who joined the foundation in 1942 and whose work was in high demand in 1943.<sup>31</sup> Holiolčev himself suggested that the shots had been taken by one of his colleagues, Asen Čobanov.<sup>32</sup>

The identity of those who commissioned the filming can only be inferred. In the spring of 1945, several former Bulgarian officials were prosecuted for their role in anti-Jewish policies before a specialized chamber of the People's Courts – these had been set up after the overthrow of the regime

on September 9, 1944, with the aim of prosecuting war criminals and propelling revolutionary change in Bulgaria. Jaroslav Kalicin, the former chief of the administrative section of the Commissariat for Jewish Affairs (Komisarstvo po evrejskite vāprosi [KEV]) who had personally supervised the roundups in Northern Greece, declared that he had requested the expulsions of Bulgarian Jews from Kazanlāk and Stara Zagora (May 1943) to be photographed.<sup>33</sup> Penčo Lukov, another senior official in the Commissariat, confirmed that pictures were taken in Skopje on March 29, 1945 to document a visit from Theodor Dannecker, Eichmann's special envoy to Bulgaria, and Jewish Affairs Commissioner Aleksandār Belev, who had come to oversee the departure of the last Macedonian convoy.<sup>34</sup> During the 1945 trial in Sofia, however, there was no mention of film footage.

Four pictures of deportees boarding carriages, along with the *Saturnus* steamer in Lom, feature in Claudia Steur's biography, *Theodor Dannecker* (1997). These photographs, found in the archives of the Beckerle trial in Frankfurt-am-Main (1967–1968), are drawn from the 1943 footage. Highlighting Dannecker's role in the decision to deport the Thracian Jews by boat rather than by train, Steur suggests that the shots were taken upon Dannecker's initiative,<sup>35</sup> though she does not provide a citation for this piece of information.

Overall, a number of testimonies pinpoint the shooting of the footage by operator(s) employed by Bālgarsko delo. They also corroborate the fact that several leading Commissariat for Jewish Affairs officials were determined to record the expulsion and deportation processes. In 1968, for instance, Bulgarian witnesses who came to authenticate the footage during the Beckerle trial in West Germany claimed that the Commissariat had placed an order with the foundation.<sup>36</sup> One witness stated that three copies of the 1943 visual material (one for the Germans, two for the Commissariat) were made at the time. Print archival records, however, have not been uncovered to date. One may only surmise that the filming of the roundups was agreed upon between Dannecker, who sought to prove his efficiency to Eichmann, and Belev, the Bulgarian Commissioner for Jewish Affairs.

How the 1943 footage avoided destruction remains a mystery. In testimony given in March 1968 before the Hesse district court, Bulgarian camera operator Holiolčev declared that the visual material was found in

Beckerle's possession in September 1944 when he was arrested by the Red Army. He also indicated that the footage was later transmitted (by Soviet officials?) to the Bulgarian Jewish community for safekeeping.<sup>37</sup> The only point that can be ascertained is that, in 1957, the Bulgarian Jewish community did indeed own a copy of the footage, which was shown by scriptwriter Angel Wagenstein to the East German filmmaker Konrad Wolf – at the time, the two were working on a film project, *Zvezdi/Sterne/Stars*, whose subject was the deportation of Greek Jews.<sup>38</sup>

## **Once Document, Now Evidence**

### **The Adolf-Heinz Beckerle trial**

At the turn of the 1960s, the 1943 film footage was given a new lease on life when a West German district court opened an investigation into Beckerle's role as a Nazi diplomat stationed in Sofia during the war. The silent footage was unearthed in the archives of the Bulgarian Jewish community and sent to the cutting room in Sofia. There it was edited, supplemented with additional shots, and given a voice-over in German, before the "new" archival footage was remitted to the German prosecution as possible visual evidence in the Beckerle trial. Bulgarian cooperation with West German prosecutors was by no means a common occurrence, as trials against war criminals involved contrasting views both of World War II and of the postwar era and were thus the object of continual feuds between East and West.<sup>39</sup> Although ideological discord did not entirely preclude the collaboration of judicial authorities across the Cold War divide, such collaboration was often unpredictable and based on very different rationales. Here, in the Federal Republic of Germany, a small group of legal professionals wanted to spark a collective reflection on the inner workings of the Nazi system, beyond the role of the SS and the Wehrmacht, by putting former diplomats in the dock. For Bulgarian officials, offering evidence to the West Germans was an opportunity to contradict the narrative promoted by Bulgarian anti-Communists in exile with regard to King Boris III's purported benevolence vis-à-vis the Jews.

### **Initial West German–Bulgarian contacts: Fritz Bauer steps in**

In West Germany, by the late 1950s, an awareness of the need to delve deeper into the Nazi past was slowly emerging. In December 1958, the

justice ministers of the West German Länder had agreed to create the Central Office of the State Justice Administration for the Investigation of National Socialist Crimes (Zentrale Stelle der Landesjustizverwaltungen zur Aufklärung nationalsozialistischer Verbrechen), an agency responsible for investigating Nazi war crimes. Two years earlier, in 1956, Fritz Bauer, a 43-year-old jurist, had been named prosecutor general of the state of Hesse. A German Jew who had taken refuge in Denmark and Sweden during the war, and a social-democrat by conviction, Bauer was hoping to breathe new life into the prosecutions against Nazi war criminals. He decided to prioritize an examination of the role of the diplomatic corps under the Nazis.<sup>40</sup> That year, the Frankfurt prosecutor's office asked the West German Ministry of Foreign Affairs to forward the personal files of several former diplomats, among them Beckerle, the wartime Minister Plenipotentiary in Bulgaria; and Fritz Gebhardt von Hahn, who had worked as a deputy to Franz Rademacher, the head of the "Jewish desk" (Judenreferat) within the German Department (Abteilung Deutschland) at the German Foreign Ministry. An indictment against Beckerle was issued in September 1959, and in short order he was placed under arrest before being charged as an accessory to the deportations of Jews from the Bulgarian-controlled territories.<sup>41</sup> In December 1965, von Hahn's legal case was joined to that of Beckerle.<sup>42</sup>

The investigation proved to be a protracted process. At the time, Bauer's office was also preparing for a series of trials (1963–1965) against officials who had served at Auschwitz–Birkenau and assisting Israeli authorities in preparing the case against Adolf Eichmann, whose trial began in Jerusalem in February 1961. Furthermore, strong evidence was hard to find. At the end of 1964, the discovery of Beckerle's diary in the political archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs reinvigorated the investigation.<sup>43</sup> A few months later, the Soviet Procuracy – with whom Bauer had established contact during the Auschwitz trial<sup>44</sup> – forwarded a copy of the verdict of the 1951 trial held against Beckerle.<sup>45</sup>

## Bulgaria, Israel, West Germany, and the law: a Cold War story

In tracing the ways in which the 1943 film footage was used in the course of the Beckerle trial, we need to turn to two different directions – Israel, on the one hand, and Bulgaria, on the other. The Israeli route came at the beginning of the proceedings, whereas the Bulgarian path, pursued as

early as 1959, would deliver fruit only in 1967. Enlisting Israel's help in the Beckerle case was an obvious option: while working on the Eichmann case in 1959, Bauer had developed close partnerships with the Israeli authorities. In addition, the scope of the Bulgarian *'aliyah* in 1948–1949 suggested that witnesses and pieces of evidence were likely to be found in the new Jewish state.<sup>46</sup> Early on, the investigators' attention was drawn to a Bulgarian immigrant named Benjamin Arditi, the former leader of the (small) Zionist Revisionist movement in interwar Sofia who had authored a book in which he credited King Boris with preventing the deportation of the Bulgarian Jews.<sup>47</sup> At the time the Frankfurt prosecutor's office started its investigations, Arditi was a representative of the conservative Gahal Party in the Knesset and was working on his second book.<sup>48</sup>

During the summer of 1959, one of the prosecutors working on the case, Wilhelm Wentzke, contacted Josef Kermisz, the historian and director of the Yad Vashem archives, who recommended that he speak with Arditi.<sup>49</sup> According to Wentzke, Arditi's 1952 book offered proof that, by March 1943, no one in Bulgaria could have ignored the fate awaiting the Jews sent to the "Eastern provinces," especially not a member of the German diplomatic corps. Seven years later, several other Bulgarian Jews living in Israel testified at the Frankfurt trial (Arditi did not). Among them was Natan Grinberg, who had investigated the archives of the Bulgarian Commissariat for Jewish Affairs following the overthrow of the wartime regime and had emigrated to Israel in 1954.<sup>50</sup> In 1961, in a context of intense intra-Jewish controversies over the king, the "rescue," and the socialist regime in Bulgaria, he, too, published a volume on wartime events.<sup>51</sup>

While several Bulgarian Jews in Israel were eager to contribute to the investigation, convincing the Bulgarian authorities to cooperate proved to be a tricky matter. Following the lead of the Soviet Union, Bulgaria had launched a media campaign requesting that the statute of limitations be considered inapplicable to Nazi crimes.<sup>52</sup> The media coverage of the Auschwitz trial was used as a platform to denounce the continuity between a "fascist" and a "capitalist" Germany, the presence in the entourage of Chancellor Konrad Adenauer of Under-Secretary of State and Chief of Staff of the German Chancellery, Hans Globke (an early supporter of the Nazi regime who had coauthored the official legal commentary of one of the Nuremberg laws), and, more broadly, the reluctance of the West to effectively tackle the breadth of Nazi German crimes. Up until

1966, there was only one occasion on which very limited assistance was offered. This occurred in February 1960, when Nehemiah Robinson, the head of the Institute for Jewish Affairs (IJA) of the World Jewish Congress, asked the Central Consistory of Bulgarian Jews for any information relevant in the prosecution of Beckerle.<sup>53</sup> Three months later, to Robinson's disappointment, the Consistory forwarded two documents from the Nuremberg trial – whose contents, of course, were already known to German prosecutors – and Grinberg's 1945 compendium of documents from the Bulgarian Commissariat for Jewish Affairs.

The Bulgarian stance changed perceptibly in 1966. On June 22, the office of the prosecutor in Sofia contacted its counterpart in Frankfurt. Welcoming “the noble proceedings that intended to be tough on Nazi crimes,” the office indicated its willingness to “share new evidence” with the German magistrates.<sup>54</sup> The lead prosecutor, a jurist named Richter, immediately seized the opportunity and responded that German investigators needed a certified copy of the Dannecker–Belev agreement of February 22, 1943 regarding the deportation of 20,000 Jews from the “new territories”; witnesses willing to testify to the agreement's authenticity; and three reports mentioned in the indictment (dated April 3, 7 and 12, 1943).<sup>55</sup> Above all, they were seeking possible survivors among the 11,343 Jews deported to Nazi-occupied Poland.<sup>56</sup>

What were the reasons behind this unexpected turn of events? Were officials in Sofia reassured by the cooperation between the Soviets and Fritz Bauer on the Auschwitz case and thus felt they could now take their own initiative?<sup>57</sup> Or perhaps the root cause was an improved political climate in which Bulgaria and West Germany were considering the possibility of establishing diplomatic ties?<sup>58</sup> Alternatively, it might have been the result of lobbying efforts directed at the Communist Party on the part of members of the Bulgarian Jewish community. In any case, cooperating with the Frankfurt prosecution offered Bulgarian authorities a platform to publicize their version of World War II – in particular, their claim that King Boris was implicated in the roundups of Bulgarian Jews. Moreover, by putting high-ranking Nazi officials at the center of the legal prosecution and targeting German citizens alone, the legal proceedings in Frankfurt shifted the potential blame away from the assistance that the Bulgarian state had provided to its German ally. Since the end of World War II, claims that the deportations were the deeds of a handful of “fascists” who had renounced Bulgarian national interests, that Bulgaria

was a state occupied by the Nazis, and that a vast majority of the Bulgarian people was supportive of the Jews, were central to Bulgaria's historical policy. In all official retellings, exhibitions, and documentary films, the stress fell on the 48,000 Bulgarian Jews who had *not* been deported.

Ever since the 1950s, the history of World War II had been a political battlefield in Bulgaria. At issue was who deserved credit for having prevented the deportation of the Bulgarian Jews: the king, the religious elites, conservative political leaders, the Bulgarian Communist Party, or its leader, Todor Zhivkov. There were two dominant lines of cleavages: first, between Bulgarian Communist historians, on the one hand, and pro-monarchist members of the former elites who were exiled to the West after 1944, on the other; and, second, between Jews who had remained in Bulgaria as opposed to the "Zionists" (as they were known in Communist parlance) who had left for Israel. In the mid-1960s, the conflict was exacerbated in the wake of the publication of memoirs by former Queen Ioanna (Giovanna) that – not surprisingly – offered a rosy depiction of the monarchy. Shortly thereafter, Bulgarian authorities allowed the publication of a Jewish studies journal with multilingual abstracts: its first issues denounced the role of King Boris and praised fraternity between Jews and non-Jews in Bulgaria. The rules of ideological engagement were thus clearly laid out.

Meanwhile, the intermittent cooperation between the Bulgarian and West German procuracies continued – until, in February 1967, there was a surprising development. On February 3, the Sofia prosecutor wrote to his German colleague: "We found a short documentary film" showing

a group of Jews transported to Poland across Bulgarian territory. [...] I watched the film myself and think of it as of significant for the trial. Unfortunately, the operator who directed it passed away a few years ago. However, there are witnesses who can authenticate the film. If you are interested, I could send you a copy.<sup>59</sup>

In March 1967, Dimităr Dimitrov, head of the Bulgarian commercial legation in the state of Hesse (which, in the absence of diplomatic relations between West Germany and Bulgaria, took care of bilateral diplomatic matters), set up a meeting between Bauer and a German-speaking Bulgarian Jewish journalist, Isidor Solomonov.<sup>60</sup> The Bulgarian authorities had agreed to supply documents and testimonies, provided that Friedrich Karl Kaul, an East German lawyer who had represented civil plaintiffs living

in the GDR during the Auschwitz trial, be authorized to represent Bulgarian Jews interested in filing civil actions. They also asked that Bulgarian journalists be allowed to attend the trial and take pictures.<sup>61</sup> Through Dimitrov, two photographs of Dannecker and two certified copies of reports (one by Beckerle, dated August 18, 1943 and a report from August 31, 1943 that bore the signature of SS-Obergruppenführer Ernst Kaltenbrunner) were sent to the Frankfurt prosecutor's office.<sup>62</sup> However, there was no further mention of the mysterious film.

All of this changed on May 31, 1967, when the Sofia prosecutor wrote that he was dispatching "a documentary film on the deportation of the Western Thracian Jewish population in 1943 to the port of Lom on the Danube" and apologized for "the delay in sending the film, as it had to be translated into German and synchronized" ("er ins Deutsch übersetzt und synchronisiert werden sollte"). Three colleagues of the deceased operator were mentioned as possible authenticators for the footage. Two versions of this letter have been preserved in the Hessian state archives. The Bulgarian language variant indicates that "we had to give it a German voiceover" ("se naloži toj da bade ozvučen na nemeski ezik"). The German translator turned this into two distinct processes – "translated into German and synchronized" – thus reducing the ambiguity of the Bulgarian text, which could be understood as referring either to the addition of a German voiceover to *silent* footage or to the translation of *existing Bulgarian commentary* into another language (presumably, German).<sup>63</sup> On July 12, 1967, the Frankfurt prosecutor's office confirmed it was considering using the film as evidence, but requested supporting identifying witnesses.<sup>64</sup> After several more turns of the screw – the trial sessions started on November 8, 1967 – the president of the court accepted the footage as evidence, and it was shown in court on March 4, 1968, with audio and visual, however, once again dissociated.

### Beckerle's guilt unveiled: the screening of the 1943 footage and the art of courtroom evidence

What was the exact content of the footage entrusted to German prosecutors? To this day, no trace of the material has been uncovered in the Hessian state archives. However, three sources offer some insight into what was on the reel: testimonies from operators Vasil Holiolčev and Ivan Makedonski; a collection of stills preserved in the indictment files; and,

finally, notes from East German archivists that were made some 15 years after the trial. First, let us examine the official minutes of Holiolčev's statement before the court:

32. Witness Wassil Holioltschew—59—cameraman, Sofia.

Between 1942 and 9.9.1944, I worked for the Bulgarian weekly newsreel services. In March 1943, my colleague Tschobanov [a note in brackets indicates that this was a phonetic spelling of the name] was requested to direct a secret film. T. came back in late March 1943. At the beginning of April 1943, I saw the film. T. showed it to me, so I could examine and assess it since I was one of the best operators at the time. The film was never made public. It showed the deportation of Jews from the Belomorje area—Kavalla, Skopje, Drama. A copy was issued to the German representation and two copies to Commissariat of Jewish Affairs.

In reply to a question from the prosecutor:

T. died a year and half ago. He said he worked for the German diplomatic corps. T. was blacklisted [*zwangsverschuckt*] after 9.9.1944 for 7–8 months because he had worked for the German Legation. T. also received money from the German representation for this film.<sup>65</sup>

Even more intriguing is Ivan Makedonski's testimony, which includes a reference to Beckerle's reaction to the announcement that the footage would be shown in court:

33. Witness Iwan Makedonski—49—Film industry employee [*kinoarbeiter*] In 1943, Tschobanov [phon.] was an operator for the Bulgarian newsreel services and was ordered to film secret topics. After the change on 9.9.1944 the newsreels services came under new management following the arrest of their former head. We found a negative of the film and established that it portrayed the deportation of Jews from Drama, Seres, Kavalla and Macedonia.

In reply to the prosecutor: The film was submitted at the request of the Jewish community.

In response to a question regarding the film's content:

It shows the transportation [of Jews] in freight trains to Gorna Dzhumaja, their transfer to other trains and their journey to Lom. It shows Beleff, Beckerle, Boris and Filoff. The first part of the film is the original version, the second part comes from the newsreel.

At this point, the transcript notes that Beckerle interjected:

He objects to the screening of any of the film.<sup>66</sup>

Makedonski's testimony thus suggests that there were two parts to the film that was screened in court: the first deriving from the 1943 footage, and the second from wartime newsreels. Was the original footage creatively edited by the Bulgarian side in order to reinforce the visual evidence in the trial, through the addition of frames showing King Boris, Prime Minister Bogdan Filov, the Commissioner for Jewish Affairs, and the German diplomat? In a folder titled "Fotographien aus Bulgarischen Film" that was put together by German prosecutor Wentzke as part of the indictment files, there are 15 frames. These shots may help us identify the newsreels. The first ten pictures are stills drawn from the 1943 footage, a sample of which appears here at Figure 1.

Figure 1. First page of the photographic album compiled by the accusation, drawing on the 1943 *rushes* of 1943, Frankfurt-am-Main, 1968. Source: Hessian State Archives, HHStAW 631 a, No. 651.



The following three show King Boris standing next to Nazi and SS guests (one of these stills appears as Figure 2); in the last picture, Beckerle can be seen ratifying an agreement. The origin of these four shots remains to be identified. (The 15th frame comprises text attesting to the authenticity of the material.)



Figure 2. Seventh page of the photographic album featuring King Boris, Frankfurt-am-Main, 1967-1968. Source: Hessian State Archives, HHStAW 631 a, No. 651.

At this point of the investigation, we begin to journey into the realm of hypotheses, an act obliging us to take several rapid jumps in time and space as we explore East-East cooperation. The first stop is in Sofia in 1983, at a meeting between representatives of the State Film Archive of the GDR and the Bulgarian National Film Archives. At this meeting, the archivists from East Berlin were shown film footage of deportation – a positive – accompanied by a German soundtrack. They took detailed notes of the images, which were grouped in three sequences, described by them as follows:

1. Deportation of Jews from Kavala, etc. (Thrace, Macedonia), loading onto trucks, transport by rail (and by river steamer on the Danube), marching on foot through a Bulgarian city, temporary detention, further transport by train, Bulgarian guards, German officers' takeover.
2. King Boris III [is] received by Beckerle to visit a German exhibition in Sofia.
3. Beckerle and Prime Minister Dobri Boschilow sign an agreement.

Was this the film that was given to the prosecutor's office in July 1967 and subsequently screened at Beckerle's trial? It is a tempting assumption, even though Prime Minister Bogdan Filov does not feature on the list of

people appearing in the images, whereas Ivan Makedonski's testimony makes reference to "Filoff" when he describes the contents of the film in his trial testimony. Be that as it may, after the 1983 viewing, representatives of the State Film Archive of the GDR requested a copy of the film from their Bulgarian hosts. However, their request was granted only six years later, in January 1989. At this time, the East German archive received a *negative* of a film titled "Izselvane na evrei" (Deportation of the Jews), labeled as a "Bălgarsko Delo / Studio für Wochenschau und Dokumentarfilme" production. This reel, however, was not the film that was screened in 1983: the document is silent, and sequences #2 and #3 are missing.<sup>67</sup>

Let us turn once more to the Bulgarian National Film Archives. In the inventory of the newsreels made in 1942, a note describes one particular scene: "Tsar Boris is visiting the German exhibition on land and sea transportation. He is welcomed by German Minister Plenipotentiary Beckerle. Engineer Vasilev is attending."<sup>68</sup> This might be sequence #2 of the material shown to the East German archivists. The third part, however, is not featured in the inventory.

One final avenue is worth exploring: during the war, Germany regularly provided its allies with footage from *Die Deutsche Wochenschau* or *Descheg-Monatsschau*. The *Descheg-Monatsschau* catalog includes a reference to a trade agreement between Bulgaria and Germany signed by then-Prime Minister (and Minister of Finance) Dobri Božilov in Sofia on December 18, 1943. According to the catalog, the president of the German delegation, Dr. Landwehr, and Adolf-Heinz Beckerle were also present.<sup>69</sup> The shots assembled in sequence #3 might have been patched together from this episode.

Ultimately, the photographs in the prosecution file and the testimonies of the archivists point in the same direction. The piece of evidence shown to the West German court in 1968 most likely results from a combination of the deportation footage fragment and visual material shot under different circumstances. Beckerle's adjacent presence on the screen tends to create the impression, if not of his physical presence during the Jewish roundups, then at least of his participation in the execution of the round-ups. The inclusion of newsreel images showing King Boris shaking hands with Nazi leaders had little chance of influencing the legal proceedings but was in line with the Bulgarian policy of denouncing the evils of the monarchy.

These manipulations of editing were not lost on the accused or his lawyers. The notes on record from the hearings in Frankfurt on March 4 are remarkable. They suggest that creative edits were made not only on the visuals but also on the soundtrack. As recorded by the court stenographer:

The court has ruled:

The film must be the object of a visual examination during the trial. As the film was shown with its soundtrack (the commentary), defense attorney Geis strongly objected and animatedly gesticulated to the effect that the State prosecution had agreed to concede [on the point of not including the soundtrack] –

Defense attorney Schalast [representing Von Hahn] also objected, as the sound performance brought the evidence beyond visual review [*Augenscheinseinnahme*].

The screening, which had just begun, was halted, and a recess was called in which lawyers for both sides argued the matter. Upon resumption of the session, the entire footage was screened – but with the sound turned off.<sup>70</sup>

I will leave it to German historian Annette Weinke, one of the first to have researched the trial's archives, to recount:

When Beckerle learned that these images were to be shown during the trial, he was extremely distressed since, as opposed to the written documentation provided by the Bulgarian archives whose authenticity was strongly established, the film was propaganda produced by a Bulgarian communist television channel. This film was trying to insinuate that Beckerle, Dannecker, Filov, Belev and Boris were physically present on the port of Lom to supervise the deportation of the Western Thracian Jews. Beckerle described the film as “sophisticatedly tampered with” in order to influence the impartial viewer. He reiterated that he stood against the deportation of the Western Thracian Jews and said he was only sent to Macedonia following the Tsar's orders. Furthermore, he did not think much of this trip as, on the footage of the steamboat, the Jews were waving goodbye with their white handkerchiefs.<sup>71</sup>

Beckerle was never convicted for the crimes for which he was put on trial: on June 28, 1968, the German prosecution decided to separate the Beckerle and von Hahn cases so that the former diplomat's health issues

would not jeopardize the procedure against von Hahn. In August of the same year, the Beckerle trial was suspended, never to resume. The defendant died in his bed, in Frankfurt, on April 3, 1976.

Nevertheless, the footage's ventures into the realm of justice did not stop there. In Bulgarian Jewish circles, where there had been strong support for Prosecutor Bauer's investigation, the disappointment was great. Some archival evidence indicates that this frustration was shared by a segment of the Bulgarian intelligence services. Their joint concerns gave rise to a film initiative whose linchpin was screenwriter Angel Wagenstein. At the end of August 1968, Wagenstein (who was working at the time in East Berlin, for the state-owned film company Deutsche Film-Aktiengesellschaft [DEFA]) submitted a proposal for a "documentary fiction film," under the working title "The Beckerle Case," to the Scenario Commission of the Sofia Film Studios:

[...] an agreement was signed between our two studios in order to increase bilateral relations and coproductions between Bojana and the DEFA. [...] their central editorial department suggested I submitted a few propositions and I obliged.

Here is the idea:

Before my departure [Kostadin] Kjuljumov came to see me with an interesting offer to make a film. Its topic is already a coproduction in itself. In West Germany, a lengthy, difficult and wordy trial is being held against the figure who used to be Hitler's ambassador in Bulgaria, Beckerle, a never-ending trial which will much likely result in a "draw" "for lack of evidence." And to think of the part Beckerle played in deporting the Greek Jews (an issue we addressed at the time in *Zvezdi*)!

[...]

The material provided by the German Embassy, including Beckerle's diary, remained in our custody and Kjuljumov has access to it. It runs from before this time up to our present day, which makes the issue even more timely. The DEFA is ready to work with us on this film without delay and even suggested a director, Joachim Hasler,<sup>72</sup> and also—in case it would be necessary, which I don't think—a co-author for Kjuljumov. The way we see it, it would be a crime film, encompassing filmed documentary material from the time, many written documents and filmed documentary material from the current-day trial. This would be an edgier, more modern take, something in the lines of a fictional documentary, a little-known genre in our countries.

[...]

Kjuljumov requested that the initiative come from our editorial room as he—*for professional reasons* [emphasis added] did not want to be the first to say “A.” [i.e., to greenlight]. Since I am not in Sofia, I would like to ask you, if you see potential in this project, to just call him and offer to start working on this.

[...]

I will take off for Moscow in a few days and will be back in October.

[...]

Heartfelt greetings to all my colleagues in the screenwriting editorial room.

Signed: Angel<sup>73</sup>

Alternatively calling for support and outlining a decision that had already been well assessed, in a tone both deferential and assertive, the letter supplies valuable bits of information. Wagenstein mentions Kostadin Kjuljumov’s hesitation at the prospect of associating his name with the project, “for professional reasons.” Following the declassification of the Bulgarian State Security’s archives in 2007, it appeared that former intelligence colonel Kjuljumov was one of the founders and first deputy director of the powerful Sixth Department of the secret police, in charge of “ideological diversion.”<sup>74</sup> Was this fact known to the Bulgarian artistic milieu in the 1960s? It is also noteworthy that Wagenstein suggested that Bulgaria had seized the archives of the Reich’s diplomatic delegation after the war and was holding a copy of Beckerle’s diary. The reason behind the failure to complete this documentary remains unknown. Internal dynamics at play within Bulgarian artistic circles, the change in atmosphere that followed the repression of the 1968 Prague Spring, or a drop in interest after the trial was suspended all may have accounted for this decision.<sup>75</sup>

Missing footage reappearing in a timely manner, a dreamed-for documentary that never saw the light of day: the 1960s was decidedly a decade in which creative energies, once politicized, readily used moving images as tools. Three lessons are apparent from retracing the history of such images. First, some footage initially meant to document anti-Jewish activities was transformed into judicial evidence in a process of reappropriation aimed at shifting the blame for the events shown in the footage. The burden of responsibility shifted from the figures on the screen – chiefly Bulgarian civilians and policemen, as well as several German members of the military police in Lom – to Beckerle, who, while absent from the initial 1943 footage, was a symbol of German guilt that

could be visually attested to only by means of editing the film into a new cut containing additional footage. Second, in this Cold War setting, tracing the journey of the 1943 footage opens a window onto the workings of judicial cooperation across the blocs. A relatively dense network of contacts was set up despite the fact that the West German and Bulgarian states had no diplomatic relations. Exchanges of information and other forms of aid were perceived as favors, but actually functioned with the assent of the respective state bureaucracies.

Finally, the 1960s saw the crystallization of the theme of the “rescue of the Bulgarian Jews,” as part of the struggle around the interpretation of King Boris’ legacy. Little by little, this narrative gained strength, becoming a cornerstone of Bulgarian cultural diplomacy. To study this moment once again necessitates widening the field of investigation beyond the European continent, making a few stops along the shores of memory and paying increased attention to the migrations of the reused footage between documentary and fiction.

## **The Diplomacy of the “Rescue of the Bulgarian Jews”: Deportation as Survival**

### **Documentary edits, reshuffled images: the turning point of the late 1970s**

As Holocaust memory and knowledge became the subject of ever-growing interest and concern, the 1943 Bulgarian footage resumed its westward travels, crossing the path of engaged artists in West Germany and of memory activists in the United States. Previously characterized as evidence, the film footage subsequently gained memorial status, while being intellectually recoded. The images of the roundups, which until then had been utilized in the construction of an interpretative framework depicting anti-Jewish violence and its culprits, began to be employed as a means of emphasizing the innocence of the “Bulgarian people” and the “rescue of the Bulgarian Jews.”<sup>76</sup> The victims shown on film were reappropriated to evoke not the crime but rather the survivors, with honor accorded to those who had contributed to Bulgarian Jews’ remarkable survival.

To tell the story of this new metamorphosis, one must dwell a bit on context. As was the case for other East European states in the 1970s, Bulgaria tried to revive the fading legitimacy of its 30-year-long regime through an appeal to patriotism. The past was scrutinized for its heritage status; greatness was to be achieved by digging ever deeper in history – all the way to medieval times, or even antiquity.<sup>77</sup> The political calendar, until then organized around celebrating prominent episodes from Bulgarian socialism, began to highlight heroes of pre-socialist national epics. This exaltation of national grandeur by the country's rulers reached its peak at the celebrations of the 1,300th anniversary of the foundation of the first Bulgarian state in 681.<sup>78</sup> In the Balkan space of intertwined identities, nationalization of the past soon sparked controversies with Bulgaria's neighbors, including the Socialist Republic of Macedonia in Yugoslavia.<sup>79</sup>

Gradually, the fate of the Bulgarian Jews became one of the leading themes of the narrative of Bulgarian exceptionalism. The celebration of the 35th anniversary of the March 1943 events paved the way for an array of documentary, scientific, and museum-based initiatives. In the Jewish House, the cultural center of the Jewish community, a permanent display on the "rescue of the Bulgarian Jews" summarized the official narrative, with a catalog of the exhibition circulating in several languages.<sup>80</sup> Meanwhile, the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences prepared an edited volume of archival documents.<sup>81</sup> A documentary film put a nice finishing touch on the endeavor.

Haim Oliver, a former partisan and close friend of Wagenstein who was also a professional screenwriter and author, had gained recognition with his book *We Who Were Saved (Or, How Jews in Bulgaria Were Freed from the Grip of the Death Camps)*, published in 1967.<sup>82</sup> The volume's publishing house (the influential Sofia Press) and its simultaneous publication in Bulgarian, English, German, and French are telling signs of the authorities' commitment to a project presented in the author's foreword as a rebuttal of the "false" view of history presented by Queen Ioanna and Benjamin Ardití. A decade later, Oliver was approached to make a documentary version of his work. The shooting of *Transportite na smärtta ne trǎgnaha* (The Death Convoys Did Not Depart, 1977, 55 min.), which he directed, was "dedicated to those who, during these terrible years, extended a hand to their fellow Jewish citizens" and was intended to be screened during the commemorations of the 35th anniversary of the "rescue."<sup>83</sup>

The documentary film opens and ends with a shot of a young long-haired, bearded man dressed in the casual style of the 1970s. Guitar in hand, he hums a song in front of a huge mural photograph depicting a camp surrounded by barbed wire. Although the mix of registers (cheerful/ tragic) is shocking, the narration itself checks off all the expected boxes: the repressive role of King Boris, the commitment of the Bulgarian Jews to the partisan movement, and the Bulgarian social mobilizations against anti-Jewish persecutions. The main thesis of the film is made clear at minute 3:

Aside from the list [of countries that deported their Jewish populations] there remains a single and unique country, Bulgaria, where there were never any ghettos. It is a fact that numerous Jews died during those years, but none was exterminated for being a Jew. [...] How was such a miracle achieved? The answer is a complex one. Several different factors were at play in the rescue of the Bulgarian Jews. *But in the last resort, they add up to one only—the struggle of the Bulgarian people led by the Communists.*<sup>84</sup>

Against this backdrop, one might be surprised to see two segments from the 1943 film footage edited into the heart of the movie. The first shows the wait in a camp; the second, the embarkation in Lom. These inserts seem to signal a shift in Bulgarian public policy on the past. Until this moment, 1943 footage images had been kept away from the public eye in Bulgaria. What was the rationale behind their inclusion in the documentary? The frames of the deportation were encased in a carefully crafted visual and narrative vehicle. Thus, the images appear following a reference to the February 22, 1943 deportation agreement between Dannecker and Belev:

*Thanks to the tsar, the agreement was implemented. First came the deportation of the Jews from Greece, Drama, Serres, Xánthi where [first shots from the temporary detention camp appear] the Germans fully reigned as masters.*

[in the background, the voice of an elderly woman is heard in a threnody whose volume increases until it is stronger than the narrative voiceover; at this point, one discerns that the woman is singing a Judeo-Spanish lamentation]<sup>85</sup>

The trains *transited* through Bulgaria.

The superimposition of text and image functions as a powerful re-signifier of the word. Acts of persecution are attributed to the Germans who were locally supported by the king, though the use of the passive voice (for instance, “the agreement was implemented”) silences the precise identity

of those individuals who took part in the arrests and roundups of the Jews. Several minutes later, the voiceover depicts the horror of the deportations, “this unprecedented crime,” and the horrific transport: “Seeing them in such a state, all the people of Lom stood up and managed to give aid in the form of hot food and clothes.” With this, we once again hear the voice of the bereaved woman.

Although anti-Jewish crimes are not left out of the picture,<sup>86</sup> in the general economy of the film, it is the battle *against* anti-Jewish policies that occupies center stage. The emphasis placed on persecution serves to magnify the boldness and courage of those individuals – non-Jews *and* Jews – who fought against it. As with the footage presented during the Beckerle trial, the accompanying words are meant to conjure the image of those held responsible for the crimes: if previously it was Beckerle, the German diplomat, the guilty parties are now the king and his prime minister. The 1977 documentary, however, is noteworthy in that its narrative goes beyond designating culprits. The contours of innocence are drawn as well, with the voiceover calling viewers’ attention to those Jews who were *not* deported – those who are absent in the footage and thus, by implication, still alive. In consequence, each viewer is invited to reflect on his or her own absence from the screen: we are not there, that is, we were saved.

The repetition in the lyrics of the song sung by the man with the guitar conspicuously reinforces this theme:

You who are alive,  
You who, at this moment,  
Turn an eye to the screen  
Or squeeze darkness into your hands,  
*For you are alive [poneže ste živi]*  
Listen to this story  
It ends well ...  
It starts with the fact that  
The Third Reich in Nuremberg decided by a majority  
to transform earth into paradise until the end of times:  
For a single and unique race,  
One race only  
With a single racist party  
All the rest is racial trash,

All the rest must be killed.  
But all the rest is you.

[singer points with his finger in the direction of the spectator]

Picture the map with its two hemispheres

Picture the country of Bulgaria

Picture the country of Bulgaria

[the camera starts to move forward, ending in a close-up on the singer's face]

There they did not leave

No, they did not leave

There, they did not leave

To death—the transports.

Who, upon viewing this segment, would not be tempted to regard the addition of the deportation frames as a signal of the director's intention to go beyond a publicly sanctioned interpretation of the past? Was this perhaps an attempt to make previously confidential footage accessible to a wider audience? Archival records are silent regarding the making of the film. However, one additional source may be explored. In 1977, a plush English version of the catalog for the permanent exhibition of the Jewish House on *The Saving of the Bulgarian Jews, 1941-1944* was published. The following appears in its foreword:

It is hardly necessary to remind that everywhere the Hitlerite boot was set during those years the same fate waited the Jewish population—annihilation, total physical extermination, provided for by the sinister Nazi conception of “radical solution of the Jewish problem” in Europe. [...] There survived those who managed to leave the occupied territories opportunely or set out on the difficult path of partisans of the anti-fascist resistance movement [...]. There survived also a part of the sparse Jewish population in Denmark thanks to the action of the Danish people for their prompt transfer to the neutral Swedish coast.

The only Jewish population in occupied Europe who survived as a whole, and that within the territory of their own country, was that in Bulgaria.

A miracle? Beyond any dispute! But, a miracle without anything supernatural in it, because it is the result of a human struggle: the Bulgaria

people's struggle against fascism, which lasted as long as 21 years under the leadership of the heroic Bulgarian communist party. <sup>87</sup>

Beyond the familiar references to Bulgarian exceptionalism and its people's virtues under the aegis of the Party, one particular moment has acquired new salience: the expulsions of the Bulgarian Jews from Sofia and other large Bulgarian cities, as decided upon by the Bulgarian wartime government, which were regarded by the Commissariat for Jewish Affairs as a prelude to deportation beyond the confines of the state. On May 24, 1943, a demonstration took place in Sofia to oppose these expulsions. There have been different assessments as to how many participated. Also at issue is the question of who initiated the protest. During the socialist era, Bulgarian leaders insisted that the Communist Party – with Todor Zhivkov at its head – stood behind the social mobilization. This claim placed Zhivkov in a heroic narrative (from which he had previously been absent), and it also linked two key motifs: solidarity between Jews and non-Jews, and the Jewish resistance. The same foreword aptly included a statement by the Bulgarian leader:

It was a great honour to me to be charged with organisation and guidance of this demonstration by the Central Committee of the Party and I can testify personally to the feelings of internationalism in our people, to their humanism. *It is true that many Bulgarian Jews perished, but none only because of being Jewish.*<sup>88</sup>

In the end, the juxtaposition of Oliver's documentary with the catalog suggests that the 1943 footage entered a new stage of existence in the late 1970s, when it was used to provide visual proof of the "rescue of the Bulgarian Jews." From then on, the footage underwent continual public exposure to varied audiences, whether as a documentary film or as photographs. The most emblematic episode took place in West Berlin in 1984, involving the leftwing artistic milieu. On that occasion, an art museum exhibit offered viewers a narrative of events that ended up closely following the Communist Bulgarian narrative. Once again, the lines between East and West were reshuffled as the 1943 footage was made to serve intersecting goals.

### **The "rescue" on the western front: Berlin, a museum reconstructing the past (1983–1984)**

Born in Stuttgart, Dieter Ruckhaberle (1938–2018) belonged to a generation of artists driven by the urgency of understanding popular support for Nazism in Germany. In 1978, when he was appointed director of the Staatliche Kunsthalle art museum in West Berlin, he decided to take advantage of Willy Brandt's *Ost Politik* to build relationships with East European artists. In 1983, the Kunsthalle organized a major exhibition on the theme of resistance to the rise of Nazism. Angel Wagenstein attended the premiere and told Ruckhaberle that Bulgaria wished to bring the exhibition to Sofia. This was a first in the history of the Berlin institution; it approved the request. A few months later, "Antifascism 1933–1983" was hosted in the Bulgarian National Palace of Culture (Nacionalen dvorec na kulturata [NDK]). It was Wagenstein who told the Kunsthalle director about the "rescue of the Bulgarian Jews." This was "some good news for Bulgaria and very bad news for Germany," Ruckhaberle recalled in an interview, "as it [Germany] had done all that was in its power to deport these 48,000 Jews."<sup>89</sup> The West German artist was stunned by these revelations: "I went to Bulgaria at my own expense. I needed to see it with my own eyes." Following his visit, Ruckhaberle threw himself into an exhibition project titled *Die Rettung der bulgarischen Juden 1943* (The Saving of Bulgarian Jews 1943), which opened in 1984.

Today, the content of the exhibition can only be inferred from the catalog – itself a notable document, for a number of reasons. It features a timeline of almost unrivaled precision that traces the war, the adoption of anti-Jewish measures, and the planning of the "Final Solution." The events are thus embedded in the wider context of World War II and the European-wide persecution of the Jews. Yet, ultimately, the large amount of research and meticulously collected data ends up fitting into the narrative framework of the "rescue of the Bulgarian Jews." How did this come to be? The answer is depressingly simple. Such an unintended effect stems from the choice of sources: German, when establishing guilt; Bulgarian, when demonstrating innocence.

Ahead of the exhibition, Wagenstein told his German colleagues that Beckerle had been tried in 1967–1968.<sup>90</sup> With this information, Ruckhaberle's assistant, Christiane Zieseke, requested help from the Frankfurt prosecutor's office and was granted permission to consult the archives from the trial.<sup>91</sup> The exhibition curator unearthed damning evidence on the Third Reich, including the part played by German diplomats in planning the extermination of Jews in the

Balkans.<sup>92</sup> Conversely, in Bulgaria, under the guidance of Wagenstein, the curators worked closely with Interfilm, the branch of Sofia Press devoted to providing foreign partners with visual material.<sup>93</sup> They were given documents detailing the rise of fascism, gestures of solidarity toward the Jews during the war, and anti-fascist resistance.

As a result, the text of the catalog bears a striking resemblance to the writings of Haim Oliver and the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, both of which are frequently cited. The concluding sentence is an exact copy of Todor Zhivkov's statement, as quoted in Oliver: "Many Jews perished in Bulgaria between 1941 and 1943 as anti-fascist resisters, partisans and political prisoners, but none had to die simply for being Jewish."<sup>94</sup> Understandably, Bulgarian authorities responded very positively to the Kunsthalle exhibition. "The Bulgarian government was very interested," Zieseke recounted. "It was the first time an exhibition of this kind was held in the West."<sup>95</sup>

To be sure, several German documents may have raised concerns with the Bulgarian authorities, since they suggested that the Nazis had adopted a stance with their Bulgarian allies that was more reactive than proactive.<sup>96</sup> Overall, however, the selected themes, the arrangement of the iconographic sources, and the chosen titles effectively channeled the viewer's interpretative journey in line with the Bulgarian narrative. For instance, the description of preparations for the roundups in the occupied territories was inserted in a segment titled "1943 – Die Rettung der bulgarischen Juden." Such narrative framing is particularly obvious in the way the visual archives of the deportation were deployed. On page 77 of the catalog, a still from the 1943 footage has been inserted: in the upper half of the page, which bears the title "Die Deportation der Juden aus Mazedonien und Trakien" (Deportations of the Jews of Macedonia and Thrace), a photograph depicts an elderly man, wrapped in a light-colored scarf and wearing a wide-brimmed hat, with a star of David sewn on the lapel of his coat. He is huddled between two women, their frayed winter coats reminiscent of bygone elegance, and they are walking, flanked by a policeman and a civilian carrying their identity papers. The picture was taken from the sequence shot in front of the *Saturnus* steamer in Lom. The caption reads: "Deportation der Juden aus der ägäischen Trakien und aus Mazedonien in März 1943" (Deportations of the Jews from Aegian Thrace and Macedonia in March 1943).<sup>97</sup>

The element of surprise, however, stems from another graphic choice: that of the picture on the catalog's cover (see Figure 3). Jewish men are shown getting off a train, straining under their heavy luggage. In the left foreground, a young Bulgarian police officer in a double-breasted uniform is gazing straight at the camera, tight-lipped, handsome and clean-shaven. Slightly behind, to the right, a Jewish deportee faces the camera with a look tinged with uncertainty and anguish. The page is divided into two sections, title and photo, with a yellow border enclosing them – yellow, of course, is a color long associated with infamy, and a symbol, more than any other, of stigmatization for the Jews. The catalog's title is engraved in black letters over a white background: *Die Rettung der bulgarischen Juden 1943. Eine Dokumentation*. One must pause here to reflect on what is depicted: for the cover of a catalog of an exhibition that aimed to illustrate the exceptional character of “the rescue of the Bulgarian Jews,” the curator chose a photo showing Jews who were rounded up and could *not* be saved. In this exhibition, however, photos of the arrests are now deployed to invite the viewer to imagine their converse, the non-deportation of the Bulgarian Jews.

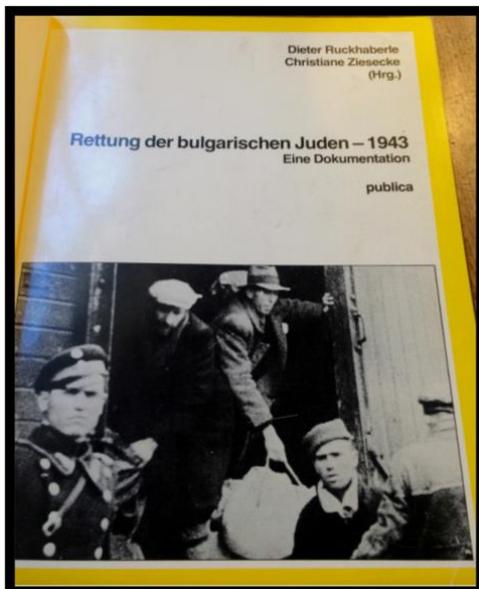


Figure 3. Cover of the exhibition catalog “Rettung der bulgarischen Juden, 1943. Eine Dokumentation,” Berlin, Staatliche Kunsthalle, 1983. Photograph taken by author.

Is there any trace of the Kunsthalle exhibition's reception in the Federal Republic of Germany? During an interview, Ruckhaberle mentioned his disappointment at the very tepid response.<sup>98</sup> One can surmise that the

exhibition of visual and print archives from Communist Bulgaria, a country whose reputation was still tarnished by its alleged connection with an assassination attempt on the life of Pope John Paul II in 1980, may have raised a few eyebrows. Yet history works in mysterious ways: the 1984 German catalog is now available in the New York Public Library's collections. This very book also served as a source to describe the 1943 footage in the inventory of the Film Department of the German Federal Archives.<sup>99</sup> Will archival, historical, artistic, and political writings ever cease intermingling and mutually reinforcing each other? The story of one last museum initiative – in the United States a few months before the fall of socialism – seems unlikely to provide an answer in the affirmative.

### **Relocating the Iron Curtain: the logic of competitive acquisition**

In 1988, as the Bulgarian socialist regime was slowly dissolving and as an aging Todor Zhivkov was reluctantly initiating a pale imitation of perestroika, the 45th anniversary of the “rescue of the Bulgarian Jews” provided the occasion for lavish celebrations in the People’s Republic. In November, an international conference took place at the National Palace of Culture in Sofia with close to 80 participants, among them political figures, members of Jewish communal organizations, and historians. One of the more noteworthy of those present was Shulamit Shamir (née Sarika Levi), the wife of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir. Born in Bulgaria in 1923, Shamir had emigrated to Palestine at the age of 17. Nonetheless, she retained an unwavering commitment toward her country of origin and was active in initiatives aimed at strengthening the ties between Israel and Bulgaria. In 1986, she had accepted a personal invitation from Zhivkov to visit Bulgaria; now she was back in an official capacity. Another particularly welcome attendee was Frederick Chary, an American historian who had authored a highly regarded work titled *The Bulgarian Jews and the Final Solution, 1940–1944*. Published in 1972, the book drew on the archives of the People’s Courts and included a full chapter on the deportations from the Greek and Yugoslav territories then under Bulgarian control.<sup>100</sup>

At the conference, the Bulgarian retelling of the war was entrusted to Ilčo Dimitrov, the then Minister of Culture and Education – a representative of a new generation of historians who wished to emancipate the writing of Bulgarian history from Soviet influence. In a gesture to his Western guests, the minister singled out the British and American pressure on King Boris

as contributing to the latter's decision not to deport Jews from the "old" kingdom.<sup>101</sup> The narrative of Bulgarian exceptionalism was highlighted most dramatically in a feature film commissioned by the state, *Ešelonite na smärtta* (Transport of Death, dir. Borislav Punčev, 1986, 118 min), for which Haim Oliver wrote the screenplay. In this film, the interpretative frame was stretched to the point that even those most closely associated with the dissemination of the mainstream socialist narrative about the war disavowed the film. "Working on this screenplay was a complete nightmare for my father," said Dik Oliver. "I don't know how many drafts there were. They kept coming back with requests for changes. Writing this script literally exhausted him. He passed away just before the film was released."<sup>102</sup> *Transport of Death* supplemented the usual pictures of the rescue with a paean of praise to Todor Zhivkov and his organizational skills in the May 24, 1943 demonstration. Did this film signify the final stage of Communist retouching of the past? Probably. Here, once again, fragments of the 1943 footage were embedded into the fictional plot about the death convoys, as if, by then, it had become impossible to mention the "rescue" without using this visual archive.

A few months prior to the international gathering, in April 1988, Punčev's film had been shown in the West at the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, D.C. The *New York Times* recounted the event:

WASHINGTON, April 15—An invited audience of members of the diplomatic corps, Congress and the Jewish community saw the American premiere of a movie Thursday night *that depicted events few knew anything about: how Bulgaria became the only Nazi-allied country in World War II to protect its entire Jewish population from the death camps. The audience was impressed. "It is fair to point out that I am not the greatest fan of Bulgaria, but we should give credit where credit is due," said Senator Larry Pressler, Republican of South Dakota. "It is a unique bit of history."*

A wider demand is merited, said Ina Ginsburg, a trustee of the Film Institute, who noted that Shulamit Shamir, the wife of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, had placed a print of the film in Yad Vashem, the Holocaust memorial in Jerusalem. [...]

The film was produced last year by Bulgaria's state-run movie agency. It is a drama, filmed in color but with captured black-and-white documentary footage spliced in. The plot concerns efforts by the Communist-led anti-Nazi underground to thwart the deportation of the

Jews and deals with the anguish of the Jews who at first hesitated to act against the Government and then did so only out of desperation. [...]

Although one scene shows Greek Jews being transported through Bulgaria on their way to death camps in Poland, that aspect does not receive full treatment in the movie. [...]

[I]t is the treatment of the Bulgarian Jews with which the movie is concerned, and it moved Representative Tom Lantos, Democrat of California, to say, "It is remarkable that Denmark is getting so much credit for saving its Jews, while Bulgaria did even more."

Mr. Lantos fought as a teen-ager in the resistance against the Nazis in his native Hungary. "I am deeply moved by what the Bulgarians did," he said, adding, "The movie was powerful and gripping."

The Bulgarian Ambassador to the United States, Stoyan I. Zhulev, said that although it was difficult to explain how Bulgaria was able to save its entire Jewish community, one possible reason might be that "My country's long history of suffering under the Ottoman Empire made Bulgarians sympathetic to others who are oppressed."<sup>103</sup>

This news report – surprising in itself given the reluctance, at the time, to praise any Communist initiatives – reveals two mechanisms through which images gained the power of affirming the truth. Even though the article carefully distances itself from the audience's shared enthusiasm at the end of the film, concentrating instead on a precise description of the 1943 footage, its title and content embrace the *topoi* of the revelation "of an exceptional historical fact," raising fiction to the rank of historical source. Was the addition of visual archives sufficient to give a feature film the capacity to establish the "truth" about the past? Or did this transformation result from the respectability of the audience who gave the film an enthusiastic reception?

Competing acquisition efforts also played a striking role in the significance given to this iconographic source. As noted by the *New York Times*, Ina Ginsburg, who worked at the American Film Institute (AFI), an offshoot of the National Endowment for the Arts (which was established in 1967 in order to safeguard American film heritage), declared that a copy of the film had been added to the Yad Vashem collection with the help of the Israeli prime minister's wife. In other words, a piece that was initially commissioned by Bulgaria's socialist regime acquired the status of a historical document thanks to the reputation of the organizations that had obtained it – in this case, the world's most renowned Holocaust museum.

Following the screening at the Kennedy Center, historian Sybil Milton, former head of the Archives of the Leo Baeck Institute in New York (1974–1984), asked for a copy of the film from the cultural attaché of the Bulgarian embassy in Washington, D.C., Čavdar Popov, and this request was met.

A deeper look at the geopolitical context sheds some light on these transactions. In the late 1980s, the rivalry between Eastern and Western blocs, as manifested in their respective historical narratives, prompted an increasing emphasis on the history of anti-Jewish persecution among members of the political elites, memory activists and the general public in the United States, Israel, and Western Europe. In a seminal study, French historian Annette Wieviorka described this mutation as the “era of the witness,” that is, a coalescence of emerging social demands for testimonies, new prominence given to the figure of the survivor, and a redefinition of Jewish and Israeli identities.<sup>104</sup> Incrementally, a diverse set of political and social actors began to devise spaces for memorializing the annihilation of European Jews, projects that until then had largely been the purview of Jewish organizations. In the United States, for instance, in response to the broad public impact of the television series *Holocaust* (1978), President Jimmy Carter established a Presidential Commission on the Holocaust, chaired by Elie Wiesel, who would later be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. In October 1980, the Senate approved the creation of the United States Holocaust Memorial Council, its task being to formulate an American project for the remembrance of the genocide of the European Jews.<sup>105</sup> In response to this initiative, German Chancellor Helmut Kohl shared his concern that “Germany’s history might be reduced to a history of the Holocaust championed by the United States.”<sup>106</sup> When the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts organized the viewing of “Transport of Death,” the future United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) had already begun to acquire documentary sources on the Holocaust. Sybil Milton was one of the driving forces behind this acquisition policy. Her efforts, however, were hampered by the scarcity of sources on Sephardic Jews, whose heritage was largely destroyed during World War II.

The splicing of archival footage into the Bulgarian fiction feature was not overlooked by Milton, one of the earliest historians who made systematic use of visual data in her work on the Holocaust.<sup>107</sup> Shortly thereafter, she learned of the existence of the 1977 documentary authored by Oliver.

Attending a party at the Bulgarian embassy in Washington, D.C., she, Michael Berenbaum and Sara Bloomfield requested a copy of the film. The Americans' wish was only granted in 1992, after the fall of Communism. Four years later, the USHMM launched another acquisition campaign for three documents: "Die Deportation der Juden aus dem Weissmergebiet," the fiction film *Zvezdi/Sterne/Stars*, and three newsreels dating to 1946 and 1947, for a total length of 2,673 meters.<sup>108</sup> A reference to the financial transaction is stored in the USHMM archives, though the documents themselves are nowhere to be found.

Our findings up to this point may be summarized as follows. First, the 1943 footage is a means of understanding significant shifts in the course of the 1980s with regard to the production of knowledge concerning the Holocaust and the ways in which the Holocaust was memorialized. During that decade, the institutions involved in producing knowledge and representations of the Holocaust moved, at least to some extent, from the courtroom to the museum. In addition, the memorialization of anti-Jewish persecutions began to migrate across the Atlantic, in the sense of significant new initiatives being undertaken in the American context.<sup>109</sup> Second, over the course of the decade, the mainstream Bulgarian Communist narrative of the events of March 1943 took its definite form. This account bore some resemblance to the interpretation of the past produced in 1944–1945, when several high-ranking Bulgarian officials were prosecuted for anti-Jewish crimes. Those trials had focused on the virtues of the "good Bulgarian people"; on solidarity in combat; on the sorrow shared by Jews and non-Jews; and on "fascist" responsibility.<sup>110</sup> Over time, however, the range of culprits had narrowed to one central foe – the Nazis, surrounded by Bulgarian fascist "minions." In this new chronicle of the past, King Boris personified a "fascist era," one whose beginnings could be traced to 1923.

Finally, the 1980s marked the point at which the notion of Bulgarian "national tolerance" as the driving force behind the country's compassionate behavior toward the Jews (which was already voiced in 1945) became a central theme. That this theme should have acquired such visibility may come as a surprise to those who recall Bulgaria's brutal assimilation campaign of Turkish and other Muslim minorities in the 1980s. Denying the existence of a Turkish community in the country, the authorities forced 800,000 Turks to convert their names into Bulgarian-sounding ones. They also forbade any expression of Turkish cultural

identity.<sup>111</sup> Even as information pertaining to the “rescue of the Bulgarian Jews” reached its peak of dissemination, an operation of ethnic engineering was unfolding, one that could also lay claim to a kind of “exceptionality” – though only in a negative sense.

## **Conclusion**

Any image is the result of cognitive framings and mediations. In reconstructing the social lives of the 1943 footage, we have highlighted the editing and recycling techniques through which images were imbued with fluctuating meaning. By following the visual remnant through its exhibitions, transmissions, and acquisitions, and by discussing the key protagonists involved, we have also shed new light on the politics of value.<sup>112</sup> Finally, tracing the peregrinations of the film fragment has helped us unearth the successive – or simultaneous – significance of these frames, whether documentary, judicial, or memorial.

The state-sponsored reworking of the 1943 footage was part of a Bulgarian cultural diplomacy whereby the Jewish theme gained increasing importance once it was perceived as offering a weapon to rebut the historical interpretations promoted by anti-Communist lay and professional historians in exile, as well as by certain “Zionist” Bulgarian Jews in Israel. Through its migrations – from historical document to fiction, from mobile cinematography to static glossy paper – a visual source that had most likely been produced in order to capture a turning point in the implementation of anti-Jewish policies was deployed as a means of naming some of the perpetrators of anti-Jewish crimes (in the 1960s), and of recalling the Bulgarian Jews who had managed to survive the war (during the 1970s–1980s).

As the focus moved from those who were captured on film before they disappeared to those who stayed and remained out of sight, the 1943 footage reflected shifts in publicly sponsored interpretations of the past. Initially, the emphasis was on the question of high-ranking Nazi (and Bulgarian) officials’ responsibility for the Jewish deportations; it subsequently veered to the issue of the nation’s innocence more generally.

After the fall of socialism, the “rescue of the Bulgarian Jews” remained the dominant trope in the Bulgarian public discourse up until the 75th anniversary of the Jewish deportations in March 2018. Then, for the first

time since the end of the war, the commemorative ceremonies held in the capital city of North Macedonia, Skopje, were attended by a Bulgarian Prime Minister, Bojko Borisov. Many an observer saw, in this symbolic gesture, the prelude to an official recognition of the Bulgarian state's share of responsibility for the Jewish roundups from Yugoslav and Greek territories under Bulgarian occupation during the war.<sup>113</sup> Bulgaria's full membership in the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) since October 2018 and the emergence of a new body of scholarship on the events may foster this development.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

## Additional information

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296. She is currently working on a book project dedicated to the legal reckoning with the Holocaust in Bulgaria (1944–1945).

## Notes

1 Chary, *Bulgarian Jews and the Final Solution*; Matkovski, *Tragedijata na Evreite od Makedonija*; Hilberg, *La destruction des Juifs d'Europe, 1378–1404*; Ragaru, “Les Juifs de Bulgarie et des territoires yougoslaves et grecs occupés.” Although an ally of Nazi Germany, Bulgaria ultimately refused to deport about 48,000 Jews holding Bulgarian citizenship. This event became known as the “rescue of the Bulgarian Jews.” From the mid-1990s onwards, some Bulgarian scholars have suggested that it might be preferable to use the expression “survival” rather than “rescue,” as rescue suggests a vision of the past worthy of historical investigation. See Koen, ed., *Oceljavaneto. Sbornik ot dokumenti*; Avramov, “*Spasenie*” i padenie.

2 While visual records of the roundups and deportation are scant, there is a wealth of written archival sources; see, for instance, Danova and Avramov, eds., *Deportiraneto na evreite*; Hausleitner et al., *Die Verfolgung und Ermordung der europäischen Juden*.

3 On the lively controversy between French documentarist Claude Lanzmann, who adamantly opposed resorting to visual archives, and art historian Georges Didi-Huberman, see the latter’s *Images in Spite of All*.

4 Shneer, *Through Soviet Jewish Eyes*; idem, *Grief*; Struk, *Photographing the Holocaust*; Hicks, *First Films of the Holocaust*; Pozner et al., *Filmer la guerre*.

5 Bruttman, et al., “The ‘Auschwitz Album.’”

6 During World War II, deportation films were made in Bruchsal, Dresden, Hildesheim, and Prague, as well as at Westerbork, a Dutch transit camp for Jewish and Sinti prisoners. On the cases of Stuttgart and Dresden, see Tobias Ebbrecht-Hartmann, “Filmdokumente von Deportationen. Zum Umgang mit Filmaufnahmen von Tätern der Deportationen aus Stuttgart und Dresden” (March 2012), online at: [yadvashem.org/de/education/newsletter/5/films-about-deportations.html](http://yadvashem.org/de/education/newsletter/5/films-about-deportations.html) (accessed December 30, 2020); on Westerbork, see Schmidt, “The Westerbork Film Revisited.”

7 Voisin, "Le procès de Jérusalem et la représentation de la Shoah en URSS"; Ragaru, "Justice in Mantle Coats"; Ebbrecht-Hartmann, "Three Dimensions of Archive Footage."

8 Lindeperg, "Night and Fog"; Ebbrecht-Hartmann, "Echoes from the Archive"; Baron, *Archive Effect*.

9 Hirsch, *Family Frames*; idem, *Generation of Post-Memory*.

10 Gundermann, "Holocaust Comics in Europe."

11 In a remarkable paper, Tobias Ebbrecht-Hartmann has documented the migration (from wartime trophy to judicial evidence, and to inserts in documentaries and features) of a film recorded by a German marine sergeant. The footage, which depicts mass shootings in the Latvian city of Ljepaja in July 1941, was screened during the Eichmann trial in Jerusalem. Ebbrecht-Hartmann uses his case study to engage in a "micro-history of appropriation," focusing on the evolving interpretative contexts of the visual material. In the present article, the purpose is different. The investigation into the uses and changing status of the 1943 footage serves an examination of the interplay between Cold War dynamics and the social production of knowledge about the Holocaust in Bulgarian-occupied territories. See Ebbrecht-Hartmann, "Trophy, Evidence, Document."

12 The notion of "trophy archives" is understood as documents removed from a given country in a context of war and defeat. See Moine, "La perte, le don, le butin"; Ebbrecht-Hartmann, "Trophy, Evidence, Document."

13 On scopic regimes, see Kolodii et al., "Philosophical Interpretation of the Visuality Regime."

14 See the following special issues: *Slavonica* 10, no. 2 (2005) ("Across and Beyond the East West Divide I"); *Kritika. Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 9, no. 4 (2008) ("Passing through the Iron Curtain"); Gross-Solomon, "Circulation of Knowledge and the Russian Locale."

15 "Socialism" and "socialist" are the terms used in much scholarly literature pertaining to Eastern Europe, notably in cultural studies and historical studies. I generally prefer the use of these terms rather than "Communism" and "Communist," except when the reference is to the Communist party of a given country, or in contexts where the term

“socialist” might lead to confusion (as, in cases contrasting between Communists and social democrats).

16 In this article, Ginzburg traces the emergence in the late 19th century of a new paradigm in the human sciences that emphasizes the communalities between the work of the detective and that of the scholar in their attempts at establishing proof through details: see Ginzburg, “Clues: Roots of a Scientific Paradigm,” 273–288.

17 Bălgarska nacionalna filmoteka (Sofia) (hereafter: BNF), 13.

18 Ibid., 15–16.

19 For a thorough investigation of the three versions of the visual archive, their content and the differences among them, see Ragaru and Le Noc, “Visual Clues to the Holocaust.”

20 Bundesarchiv, “Judisches Leben und Holocaust 1930–1945 im Filmdokument,” BSN 26108, 14. 1943, online at: <https://www.bundesarchiv.de/findbuecher/Filmarchiv/Holocaust/index.htm> (accessed February 15, 2021). The German Federal Film Archives’ description refers to a 177-meter-long document titled “Die Deportation des Juden aus dem Weissenmergebiet.” It is a workprint with repeats of several scenes, and a frame line visible throughout much of the first reel.

21 United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (hereafter: USHMM), Story RG 60 04 66, Film ID 246, online at: <https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn1002157> (accessed February 15, 2021). The 6:32 min. (190-meter) footage was purchased from the Bulgarian National Film Archives in February 1992. According to historian Radu Ioanid, then director of the International Archive Programs at the USHMM, the location of the shootings was established via a comparison with photographs acquired by the USHMM between 1996 and 2004. Telephone interview with Radu Ioanid, June 20, 2017. The author thanks Judith Cohen and the Department of Photographic Archives of the USHMM, which kindly made its vast collection of photographs available.

22 See the new inventory notes, online at: <https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn1002157> (accessed February 15, 2021).

23 See also the stills “Deportation of Macedonian Jews” (42), and “Captured Jews” (50) and (surprisingly) “Deportation of Tracian [sic] Jews” (40), in Berenbaum, *The Jews in Macedonia during World War II*. The permanent exhibition of the Skopje Holocaust Memorial Center was entirely redesigned in March 2018. By December 2018, an excerpt from the 1943 footage featuring the street was again situated in Skopje.

24 Dържавна Agencija “Arhivi,” *Truden izbor s goljamo značenje. Sădbata na bălgarskite evrei, 1943, dokumentalna izložba* (Sofia: 2013).

25 Bundesarchiv, BSN 26 108, 14. 1943.

26 Central State Archives of Bulgaria (Centralen Dържавен Arhiv, hereafter: CDA), F 15K, o 3, ae 2, l.1–3, quoted in Piskova, “Iz dokumentalnoto,” 91, 101.

27 CDA, F 15K, o 3, ae 2, l. 1–3, quoted in *ibid.*, 119–21. Piskova believes that this report was written in 1947.

28 Andrea Simon (dir.), *Angel Wagenstein. Art is a Weapon, US/Bulgaria*, 85mn, 2017; and Vagenštajn, *Predi kraja na sveta*.

29 “Bakărdžiev, Vasil,” in Aleksandăr Janakiev, *Enciklopedija Bălgarsko kino* (Sofia: 1999), 24.

30 Interview with Angel Wagenstein (Sofia), December 12, 2016.

31 Piskova, “Iz dokumentalnoto,” 120–1.

32 Holiolčev made this statement before the district court of Hesse during the trial of Adolf-Heinz Beckerle, the wartime Nazi Minister Plenipotentiary in Sofia, on March 3, 1968: Hessisches Hauptstaatsarchiv (hereafter: HHStA), Abteilung (unit, Ab) 631a, Band (volume, B) 597, Blatt (page, Bl) 223. On the trial, see below.

33 CDA, F 190K, o 3, ae 7, l. 15.

34 CDA, F 1449, o 1, ae 180, l. 34.

35 Steur, *Theodor Dannecker*, 105.

36 See the intertitle in the opening sequence of the film presented in the district court of Hesse (Figure 1).

37 HHStA, Ab. 631a, B. 597, Bl. 226.

38 Ragaru, *“Et les Juifs bulgares furent sauvés.”*

39 Voisin, *“The Jerusalem Trial and the Representation of the Holocaust in the USSR.”*

40 Wojak, *Fritz Bauer 1903–1968.*

41 Weinke, *Die Verfolgung von NS-Tätern im geteilten Deutschland*, 259–272.

42 Von Hahn was indicted both for his role in the roundups in Thessaloniki (in the German occupation zone) and the deportation of Jews from Bulgarian-held territories: HHStA, Ab. 631a, B. 589.

43 HHStA, Ab. 631a, B. 618, Bl. 86.

44 Jasmin Söhner, *“Der heiligen Rache darf nicht ein Auschwitz-Henker entgehen! Die erste sowjetische Zeugenaussage in Westdeutschland zwischen Propaganda und Vergeltung,” Jahrbuch 2017 zu Geschichte und Wirkung des Holocaust (2017): 157–172.*

45 After his September 1944 arrest in Bulgaria, Beckerle was transferred to the USSR and kept in custody. In 1951, he was prosecuted for crimes committed against Soviet partisans. Found guilty, he was sentenced to 25 years of imprisonment but was released from prison in October 1955, following the signing of a German-Soviet amnesty agreement.

46 Šealtiel, *Ot rodina kām otečestvo.*

47 Arditi, *Rolijata na Car Boris III.*

48 Yad Vashem Archives, P. 37/17, 4–5.

49 Ibid., 6–7.

50 Centralen Partien Arhiv (Sofia) (hereafter: CPA), F 1B, o 6, ae 197, l. 6–8.

51 Grinberg, *Hitleriskijat natisk za uništožavaneto na evreite ot Bālgarija.*

52 *Evrejski vesti* (November 9, 1964), 1.

53 American Jewish Archives (Cincinnati), MSS col. N° 361, C187/10. Bulgaria, correspondence. Deportation of Jews, 1960–1968. World Jewish

Congress (New York Office). The author thanks Vanessa Voisin for sharing this document with her. On the role of the IJA in the Beckerle investigation, see Ragaru, "East-West Encounters at the Adolf-Heinz Beckerle Trial (1967-1968)."

54 HHStA, Ab. 631a, B. 612, Bl. 12.

55 Ibid., B. 590, Bl. 285-289.

56 Ibid., B. 612, Bl. 1129-1130.

57 Weinke, *Die Verfolgung von NS-Tätern*, 270.

58 In fact, diplomatic relations were established only in 1974. See Baev, "Establishment of Bulgarian-West German Diplomatic Relations."

59 HHStA, Ab. 631a, B. 612, Bl. 1256.

60 Ibid., B. 618, Bl. 166 f; *ibid.*, B. 612, Bl. 1243-1244.

61 F. Karl Kaul was eventually allowed to represent Solomon A. Levi on March 27, 1968.

62 HHStA, Ab. 631a, B. 612, Bl. 1261.

63 Ibid., Bl. 1308 (in German) and Bl. 1309 (in Bulgarian).

64 Ibid., B. 612, Bl. 1319-1320.

65 Ibid., B. 597, Bl. 223. Here, once again, the hazy origins of the filming location are brought to the fore: Skopje is in Vardar Macedonia, not in Belomorie (lit. "the white sea," that is, the Aegean Sea in Greece).

66 HHStA, Ab. 631a, B. 597, Bl. 224. Underlined in the original document.

67 This is the copy currently archived in the Film Department of the German Federal Archives. The low quality of the print suggests one possible origin for the copy given to the DDR film professionals in 1989: in the first half of the 1980s, Wagenstein worked for Interfilm, the Sofia Press branch responsible for international film exchanges. A member of the commission in charge of selecting the documents meant to be archived, he allegedly screened a copy of the 1943 footage and asked that it be preserved. Interview with Wagenstein.

68 BNF, Newsreels no. 54 (1942), 23.

69 *Descheg-Monatsschau*, no. 23 (1944), online at: [http://www.filmarchives-online.eu/viewDetailForm?FilmworkID=59411ac985c0350ad8bace86d075d1ec&content\\_tab=deu](http://www.filmarchives-online.eu/viewDetailForm?FilmworkID=59411ac985c0350ad8bace86d075d1ec&content_tab=deu) (accessed January 10, 2021). This monthly edition of newsreels was widely distributed to the allies of the Reich, often in the cinemas of smaller towns that were not equipped to broadcast newsreels in 35 mm. The author is grateful to Alexander Zöller for his valuable information on the *Descheg-Monatsschau*.

70 HHStA, Ab. 631a, B. 597, Bl. 225.

71 Weinke, *Die Verfolgung von NS-Tätern*, 269.

72 East German director Joachim Hasler (1929–1995) had recently directed “Chronik eines Mordes” (The Story of a Murder), a movie adapted from the novel by Leonhard Frank titled *Die Jünger Jesu*, which tells the story of a former Jewish deportee who seeks justice for the crimes committed during the Holocaust. Wagenstein was involved in the film as co-scriptwriter.

73 CDA, F 404, o 3, ae 21, l. 12–14.

74 Metodiev and Dermendžieva, *Dāržavna sigurnost*, 428–456.

75 In December 2016, Angel Wagenstein denied such a project ever existed. Interview with Wagenstein.

76 On the controversies surrounding the “rescue of the Bulgarian Jews” (and the deportation of the non-Bulgarian Jews), see Troebst, “Salvation, Deportation or Holocaust?” 37–52; Ragaru, “Et les Juifs bulgares furent sauvés.”

77 Marinov, “Ancient Thrace in the Modern Imagination.”

78 Elenkov, *Kulturnijat front*, 357–412.

79 Troebst, *Die bulgarisch-jugoslawische Kontroverse*.

80 Cohen and Assa, eds., *Saving of the Jews*.

81 Koen and Bozhinov, *Borbata na bālgarskija narod*.

82 Oliver, *Nie, Spasenite*.

83 The author wishes to thank Dik Oliver, Haim Oliver's son, for having made a copy of this film available to her.

84 Translation from Bulgarian into English by the author; emphasis added here and in other excerpts from the film.

85 The voice is that of Wagenstein's mother: Rumjana Uzunova, "Razgovor s Anžel Vagenstajn," Reel 262, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (November 20–24, 1989).

86 The focus is on forced labor, in particular, not on professional exclusion, discriminatory fiscal policies, or the Aryanization of Jewish properties.

87 Cohen and Assa, eds., *Saving of the Jews*. English verbatim quotations with the original's grammatical errors. The volume is available in several libraries outside Bulgaria, including the New York Public Library.

88 Ibid. (emphasis added).

89 Telephone interview with Dieter Ruckhaberle, June 24, 2017.

90 Telephone interview with Christiane Zieseke, June 21, 2017.

91 Ibid.

92 Neither Ruckhaberle nor Zieseke remember this moment. Interviews with Wagenstein, Ruckhaberle, and Zieseke.

93 Interview with Zieseke.

94 "Viele Juden sind in Bulgarian zwischen 1941 und 1943 umgekommen, als antifaschistischer Widerstandskämpfer, Partisanen, politische Gefangene, aber keine einziger musste sterben, weil er Jude war." Quoted in Ruckhaberle and Ziesecke, eds., *Rettung der bulgarischen Juden 1943*.

95 Interview with Zieseke.

96 One example is a letter dated July 9, 1942 from Beckerle to the *Auswärtiges Amt* Ministry of Foreign Affairs (*Auswärtiges Amt*) in Berlin following the granting of full authority over "the Jewish Question" to the Bulgarian government. Beckerle states that the text paves the way for the

adoption of more radical measures and asks if he needs to resume bilateral discussions on the future of the anti-Jewish program.

97 Ruckhaberle and Ziesecke, eds., *Rescue of the Bulgarian Jews*, 77. Ziesecke did not remember hearing of a film about the deportations in Frankfurt or in Bulgaria. We can posit that the picture was given to the German curators by the Bulgarians.

98 Interview with Ruckhaberle.

99 See Bundesarchiv, BSN 26 108, 14. 1943, "Details."

100 Chary, *The Bulgarian Jews*, 101–128.

101 "Predotvratjavane deportacijata na bălgarskite evrei v nacistkite konclageri," no. 8 546 (November 16, 1988) and No. 8 588 (November 17, 1988), Bălgarsko nacionalno radio (BNR).

102 Interview with Haim Oliver, December 13, 2016.

103 Molotsky, "Film Tells How Nazi Ally Saved Its 50,000 Jews," emphasis added.

104 Wieviorka, *Era of the Witness*.

105 Young, "America's Holocaust."

106 Eder, *Holocaust Angst*, 84–129 (here 84).

107 Milton, "Images of the Holocaust – Part I"; idem, "Images of the Holocaust – Part II."

108 Pregled (newsreel) 44/47; 89/46; 163/47.

109 Novick, *Holocaust in American Life*.

110 Ragaru, "The Prosecution of Anti-Jewish Crimes in Bulgaria."

111 Gruev and Kaljonski, *Văzroditelnijat process*.

112 Appardurai, ed., *The Social Life of Things*; see esp. Igor Kopytoff, "The Cultural Biography of Things" in the same volume.

113 Ministerski sávet na Republika Bálgarija, Presslužba, "Primierát Bojko Borisov se pokloni pred pametta na evreite, deportirani ot teritorijata na Republika Makedonija" (March 12, 2018).

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