

Ester Baruh And Friends During The Internment



This is a photo of my wife, Ester Baruh, nee Asher, with some Jewish friends of hers. It was taken in Pazardzhik in 1943 at the time when we were interned there. The yellow stars can be seen on their coats.

I met my future wife in Pazardzhik, where she had also been interned. She was very young, 16, a high-school student. Her maiden name was Ester Leon Asher. Her father, Leon Moshe Asher, was born in the town of Samokov. He was a leatherworker. Her mother, Berta Asher, nee Illel, was from the town of Vidin. They married in 1918 and came to live in Sofia. My wife has one brother, Mois Asher, born in 1920, who was a construction engineer and married a Bulgarian, Elena. They had one son.

My mother and I were interned to Pazardzhik in June 1943. The internment was scheduled for 24th May [the day of the Slavic script and culture, one of the most important Bulgarian holidays], we received written notes from the Committee of Jewish Affairs, the body in charge of the 'settlement of the Jewish question' in Bulgaria. Following the enforcement of the Law for the Protection of the Nation in 1941 we were forced to wear the yellow star of David and to put a note on the entrance door, indicating a Jewish Dwelling - a white sheet of paper with black writing and the star of David.

On 24th May 1943 there was a spontaneous Jewish protest and the Laborers' Party came to help us. But in fact everything was spontaneous. Rabbi Daniel Zion, who was Judeo-Christian and thus wasn't liked by the other rabbis, went to Exarch Stefan and explained everything to him. At the official public prayer on the occasion of 24th May where the tsar was present, the exarch told him, or is reported to have said, 'Boris, thou shall not chase, in order to be left unchased.' These words are from the Bible. Thousands of people gathered in the yard of the Iuchbunar synagogue [a Sephardi synagogue at the corner of Klementina boulevard and Osogovo street, demolished during

the Communist rule]. The Rabbi came, made a speech to calm down the crowd and the people went on a march along Osogovo Street and Klementina and finally stopped at Vazrazhdane Square. The policemen encountered us there and began to run after the protesters and beat them. A great number of protesters were arrested. We were hiding for a couple of hours next to St. Peter and Paul church and all the people who were arrested on that day were driven to a camp in Somovit on the bank of the Danube. This camp was established as a direct response to this incident. The plan was to disperse the compact Jewish population, to drive them to the Danube and then to send them to Poland and Germany. This demonstration compelled the Committee to put off the internment of the Jews from Sofia till the beginning of June. It was said that the tsar interfered.