DOSSIER

THE LIBERATION

On the occasion of the eightieth anniversary of the liberation of Belgium we are dedicating a theme issue of our magazine to the country's liberation.

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80 years since the liberation. A Belgian perspective on the liberation for Holocaust survivors

Getuigen/Témoigner wishes to mark the 80th anniversary of the liberation with a theme issue. Engaging with recent historical scholarship, it brings together historians who study specific aspects of liberation from a Belgian perspective. It pays attention to the period from September 1944 until the end of 1945 with contributions concerning the liberation of the camps in Belgium – the Dossin barracks (Laurence Schram) and Breendonk (Richard Menkis) – encounters between Jewish allies and local survivors in Antwerp (Veerle Vanden Daelen), and Jewish life after the liberation in Liège (Thierry Rozenblum). As such, it offers a broad and balanced overview of liberation in Belgium and allows the readers to see that the liberation of Breendonk received at the time of the liberation more attention than the liberation of Dossin and Auschwitz and the return of surviving Jews and Roma.

Which interactions do we encounter and what do they tell us to advance our nuanced understanding of liberation, (local) governments and justice, the Allied presence, and local Jewish communal life in postwar Belgium? Zooming in on specific cases in and connected to Belgium allows for a more nuanced understanding and detail than overview studies in which the Belgian case and its micro-studies and their insights are often less or not incorporated.[1] As such, it also brings in a different perspective than the general one. Also, these contributions shed light on which topics received attention at the time of the liberation itself. This can differ greatly with the topics of liberation which do so today.

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The Liberation or end of the German occupation in Belgium during the Second World War took mostly place from the beginning to the end of September 1944, with some extensions until the beginning of November and with a reconquest by the Germans of part of the Ardennes in December 1944 – January 1945. The country was liberated by the

British, American, Canadian, Polish armies, including Belgian troops of the Brigade Piron. The camps in Belgium (Breendonk and Dossin) were no longer under German occupation as of 4 September 1944. However, the places where detainees from these camps had been deported to would remain under Nazi rule for months to come. Only Majdanek had been liberated earlier, by Soviet troops, on 22-23 July 1944. The next camp liberation in the East, the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau, also by Soviet troops, followed more than half a year later, on 27 January 1945. Over two months later, US forces liberated the camps Buchenwald and Dora-Mittelbau on 11 April, followed by Flossenbürg on 23 April, Dachau on 29 April, and Mauthausen on 5 May. British forces liberated camps in northern Germany, including Bergen-Belsen on 15 April and Neuengamme on 4 May. Shortly before Germany's surrender in May 1945, Soviet forces liberated the concentration camps of Stutthof, Sachsenhausen, and Ravensbrück.[2] This time-line is very important to keep in mind, as it means that while most of Belgium was liberated in September 1944, the surviving deportees would only be liberated at the earliest more than four to nine months later.[3] The earliest repatriations took place at the very end of March – beginning of April 1945. There were in general three groups of local Jews "returning" to liberated Belgium: the first were those who had lived officially or in hiding in Belgium, the second were the survivors from the camps, returning as of the Spring of 1945, and the third were those who returned from safe havens of refuge abroad (mostly the US, Cuba, the UK and Switzerland).[4]

Both in Belgium and in the camps in the East, Jews had been endangered until the very last moment before or even still in the chaos of liberation, as evidenced in Thierry Rozenblum's contribution on Liège. In Antwerp, the day before the city's liberation an elderly Jewish couple that had been arrested by Flemish SS, a member of the Black Brigade (Zwarte Brigade) and a German on 31 August, after three days in custody and without food, was brought to a secluded area and shot, killing the man and severely wounding the woman.[5] Laurence Schram's article indicates how in June, July and August newly arrested Jews were still being brought into the Dossin barracks, with the last deportation train leaving on 31 July 1944 with 563 deportees on board of whom only 189 would survive.[6]

But then early in September 1944, Belgium's liberation started. On 3 September 1944, the Brigade Piron, the Belgian military which operated under the command of the British 6th Airborne Division, which was part of the First Canadian Army, participated in the liberation of Brussels. This division counted quite a few Belgian Jews, the most famous being baron Jean Bloch. Among these troops was Antwerp-born David Isboutsky, who had entered the Belgian army on 3 January 1939. He escaped during the war and made his way to Cuba, via Spain and Portugal, where he arrived on 17 December 1941. Together with nine other young Jewish men from Belgium, he had reported to the Belgian embassy in Cuba and was brought to a military training in Canada and subsequently put into action with the Allied armies. He belonged to the Antwerp Orthodoxy, and since 1933 had been a member of Bne Akiva. When he came back to Belgium, he was fortunate to hear that his parents had survived in a retirement home outside of Antwerp, a city which the Nazis had left as officially "judenrein". David had an emotional reunion with his parents.[7]

However, not all were as fortunate. The Dutch-language Antwerp Socialist newspaper *Volksgazet* reported in its issue of 7 September 1944 on the story of an anonymous soldier. The headline forebodes the tragic account in the article: "A Belgian Soldier is coming home – He doesn't find his Jewish parents." The soldier in question had immediately rushed to his parents' house: "For four years he had seen the living room, the kitchen, his bedroom in his imagination. When he appeared before the house, it was closed. No one came to answer his calls. Neighbours rushed outside and recognized him. Their greetings were warm, but their faces were serious: they had to inform him that his parents had been taken away, that the furniture

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had been taken away. A soldier came home. Will he see his parents again?"[8] Thanks to the research of Jan Ouvry, we now know that this soldier most likely was Herbert Stellman.[9] The encounters of Jews arriving with the Allied forces in liberated Europe, and most specifically Antwerp, and their encounters with local Jewish survivors is the focus of Veerle Vanden Daelen's contribution and sheds light on the mutual help they offered each other.

Also for Jews who had survived the war in Belgium, the liberation was not joyful or heroic. Léon Gronowski, who was without news about his wife and daughter, wrote in his diary:

> Sunday 3 September 1944 [...] The country has been liberated. People flock into the streets wild with joy. They are crying, laughing, singing, embracing each other, really celebrating [...] For me, the liberation has not yet come. I am unhappy and depressed [...] My loved ones are still in the camps [...] I'm wandering through the streets, don't know where to go; my heart is bleeding; the liberation is not meant for me.[10]

While multiple newspapers in Belgium reported about the liberation of the Breendonk concentration camp in September 1944 (*Volksgazet*, *Le Peuple*, *Het Laatste Nieuws*, *La Dernière Heure*, *La Libre Belgique*, *Gazet van Antwerpen*, and *Drapeau Rouge*), the liberation of the Dossin barracks was only reported in *La Libre Belgique*.[11] The liberation of the camp was also far from heroic or glorious: the occupier left the barracks, where arrested Jews and Roma had awaited their deportation, left behind unattended in the night of 3 to 4 September. At least 549 remaining Jews and three non-Jews detained in the barracks were left unattended.[12] There was no witnessing of Allies marching in, but it did mean refound freedom, even if there were in most cases no "homes" to return to, nor family members to be reunited with, as would become painfully clear quite quickly. "Where to go?" was a very relevant but difficult to answer question for Jewish survivors.

JEWS (RE-)SETTLING IN LIBERATED BELGIUM

As before the war, a large group chose to settle in Brussels, joining the about 4,000 Jews who were still legally residing in the city at its liberation and where the synagogue and Jewish organisations, including the *Association des Juifs de Belgique* (the so-called Jewish Council) were still operating. Brussels was also the point of arrival for repatriates and the place where the *Œuvre Centrale Israélite de Secours* (OCIS) and international Jewish aid organisations operated.[13] The capital of the country was and would remain for the remainder of the twentieth century the city with the highest number of Jewish inhabitants in Belgium. However, with an estimated 12,000 Jews in Brussels in 1945, this was only a fraction of the pre-war number. Antwerp, which held this position at the eve of the Second World War, would not soon regain its position as the largest Jewish community in the country. With the city under V-bomb attacks from 13 October 1944 until 29 March 1945, the several hun-

dred Jews who had survived the war in hiding in the city would only be slowly joined by returning survivors and newcomers from abroad.[14] With only 1,200 Jews living in Antwerp a few months after the liberation, and this number only rising to about 2,000 in 1945, Antwerp counted a dramatically low number of Jews, especially considering that an estimated 35,500 Jews had lived in the city at the eve of the war.[15]

Other cities with Jewish communities in Belgium were Ghent, Charleroi, Ostend and Liège, the latter also having to deal with the consequences of V-bombs in 1944, as is evidenced in Thierry Rozenblum's contribution. In total, approximately 30,000 Jews lived in Belgium by the end of 1945, of which about 18,000 survived the war in Belgium, 8,000 had returned from safe havens abroad, about 1,500 survived various camps in the East and the others were so-called "Displaced Persons" or DPs, Jews who could not return to their pre-war homes and who had not lived in Belgium before the war. Only about ten percent of Jews living in Belgium held Belgian nationality, even though many of the others had legally resided in Belgium before the war. The majority held Polish nationality, followed by German and Austrian Jews.[16]

The needs of the surviving Jews were high, as we read in both Vanden Daelen and Rozenblum's contributions. The witness account of Romi Goldmuntz, one of Antwerp's most important diamond dealers, who survived the war in London and who visited Antwerp by the end of 1944, was reported by the *Belgian Jewish Committee* in the UK to the *Belgian Jewish Representative Committee* in the US and includes the following: "On [his] arrival he immediately got in touch with the Jewish Defense Committee there; the Antwerp Committee address is: 313, Lange Leemstraat, where the Jewish School [Tachkemoni] used to be, and a large number of Jews are glad to sleep on the straw provided for that purpose there. [...] The members of the Antwerp Committee are not known to him personally. They are working hard and well and he is very satisfied with this organization. It is heartbreaking to see our friends there and one can still see the fear in their faces after years of hiding and hardship. They all look old and decrepit and are completely demoralized; middle-aged women look like old women of 80; in fact they are 'levende leiken' [sic]".[17]

And all this time, there was no news yet of those who had been deported. The liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau on 27 January 1945, followed by other camps in April and early May 1945, was yet to come. The first repatriated survivors arrived in Belgium by the end of March and at the beginning of April 1945. There were very few of them and their condition and stories were horrifying. This diminished the hopes of the return of the others tremendously. On 31 May 1945 a report of the Belgian mission of the *Supreme Headquarters of the Allied Expeditionary Forces* (SHAEF) read: "Of [the] Jews deported from Belgium, only 540 have returned. The whereabouts of the others is not known."[18] Only by the end of 1945, would the awful fact that only five percent of those deported from the Dossin barracks survived the war sink in.

In the meantime, those who survived the war and had already returned to Belgium went to the shelters, organised by the Jewish community, where they could register, receive information, food, clothes, a place for the night, etc. An American GI, David Stein, 29 years old at that moment (extensively quoted in Vanden Daelen's contribution), described the return of survivors from the camps. It is not clear whether his description relates to Antwerp or Brussels:

> "The returnees arrive barely dressed, some only with German military overcoats thrown over their bare backs. Some are still wearing the striped pyjamas which they wore in the concentration camps. Nothing is being done towards giving them a special diet or any kind of individual care which they most urgently need. They are just being put into makeshift rooms provided by the Jewish community in their building. They originally slept on burlap beds of straw. Now they sleep on wooden beds with no springs or mattresses.

> There is only one doctor to give them medical care. Some of them have been subjected to Nazi experimentation and have only a few months to live. Young people are thrust together with men and women and they hear all kinds of sadistic tales. Many of those who returned remained alive because of their collaboration with the Nazis. They told details of the burning of thousands of their fellow Jews. One even boasted that he burned his own father."[19]

Chil Elberg and Nathan Stern were among the few surviving deportees repatriated to Belgium. Chil survived no fewer than twelve camps and a death march. At a certain moment he had been able to hide in a farm, and as such escaped the rest of the death march he was on. On 25 April 1945 he met his American liberators. He first had to recover in hospital before being able to be repatriated to Belgium on 22 May 1945. Almost all his friends had been deported and would not return. He later described being deposited in front of his home in Brussels: "I could barely walk, and had to use crutches. I only weighed 35 kilograms. I looked at the door and did not see my own doorbell. I chose another bell. Nobody opened. There is not a single Elberg who still lives here... I still dream of my mother."[20] Later that year, in November, Chil's sister, Perla, returned from Switzerland: "I cannot describe what the reunion meant to me and to her. I suddenly did not feel so alone in the world anymore."[21] When Nathan Stern returned from Dachau and arrived in the Belgian capital on 26 June 1945, he only found his mother. Decades later, he remembered his return to Brussels, still celebrating the liberation and the armistice, as follows: "I went to my room, climbed into my bed and slept. Outside, the streets of Brussels were packed with people."[22]

THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE GENOCIDE SINKING IN

Even though there was information on the Holocaust (albeit not under that name yet) during the war and after the liberation of Belgium – see for example the series of the Flemish *Vooruit* newspaper published between 29 October and 9 November entitled "The bestial persecution of the Jews"[23] – the understanding of the genocide only came with the first and few surviving deportees returned home. Until then, the victims seemed not to be identified as possibly being deported from Belgium.[24]

On 3 June 1945 a Jewish man, who had been protected from persecution due to marriage with a non-Jewish woman, went to the Antwerp police to denounce a person who had denounced Jews to the occupier. He motivated the moment of his declaration as follows: "I did not make this declaration earlier because I thought that from the Jews deported on 5 September 1943, there would still be returnees, though I now have the assurance that this will no longer be the case."[25] We see that about a year after the liberation, the terminology changed from "not yet returned" to "not returned", which meant that the person in question had not survived the camps.[26]

From the Dossin barracks, 25,843 persons were deported: 25,490 Jews and 353 Roma. Of them 25,625, including all Roma, were deported to Auschwitz and 218 to other camps (Ravensbrück, Buchenwald, Bergen-Belsen and Vittel). Only 1,756 survived: 326 by escaping successfully from the deportation trains, 21 by not being redeported after being rearrested and 1,409 of those who arrived at a camp (1,261 of those deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau). These numbers include Jews and Roma arrested in Northern France (as part of the territory under von Falkenhausen's direction), and Jews from other countries (mostly the Netherlands) arrested in Belgium while trying to flee to unoccupied territory. However, from the Jews living in Belgium around May 1940, at least 5,970 were deported from France (mostly Drancy), of which only one successfully escaped the deportation train and 297 survived the camps.[27] But, during the occupation, not only Jews and Roma were deported. About 43,000 political prisoners were incarcerated in camps and prisons. From this group, at least 13,958 perished during the war.[28]

What is very interesting is that the liberation of Breendonk or concentration camps such as Buchenwald could count on much attention in the media, much more than the liberation of the Dossin barracks – which went almost unnoticed – and the liberation of and repatriation from camps where racially deported were sent to. Even the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau passed unmentioned in most Belgian newspapers. In Richard Menkis' article we read about Canadian reporting on the liberation of Breendonk. In the Western press, Buchenwald, together with Belsen and Dachau, were described "as the worst of the Nazi camps", even though these were not extermination centres.[29] And, as Smets notes, when reporting on Auschwitz and the genocide and massacres that took place there, the Jewish identity of the victims more often than not remained unmentioned or received very little attention.[30] This recognition would only follow much later.

In this context, it is also important to note that the camps liberated by the Western Allies were not Holocaust annihilation centres. As Dan Stone notes: "The key annihilation centres (Chełmno and the 'Operation Reinhard' camps of Bełżec, Sobibór and Treblinka) had been dismantled long before the end of the war, and the other major sites, Majdanek and Auschwitz, were liberated by the Red Army who found them almost empty of people."[31] Stone argues that if the Western Allies had little to say about the Holocaust in the immediate postwar period, that is not only because the term 'Holocaust' did not yet exist, but also "because the camps they liberated were not 'Holocaust' camps and because Jews constituted fewer than one-third of the survivors, who also included very large numbers of non-Jewish Poles and Soviet POWs. Millions of forced labourers were also liberated and for the Allies it was not always easy in the pandemonium of the end of the war to understand the difference between different categories of deportees."[32]

Immediately after the liberation, the Jewish victims blended in with countless other victims. No distinction was made yet between concentration camps and annihilation centres. The context of Majdanek and Auschwitz was also very complicated, as they were both concentration camps and annihilation centres, and because they both held racially persecuted and other prisoners. The fact that there were hardly any Jewish survivors further contributed to the fact that they received little immediate interest. Moreover, the resistance and the political world wished to emphasise the common suffering of the Belgian people, a concept in which there was no room for emphasising specific groups. The Jews and Roma formed a minority group, were relatively isolated and usually did not have Belgian nationality, hence there was no influential pressure group to point public attention to their specific and tragic fate.[33]

EMERGENCY AID, JUSTICE AND RECOGNITION

The Jewish resistance organisations from during the war were the first to organise emergency aid

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for the survivors. Already on 12 September 1944, the Antwerp Committee published the following message in the newspaper *Volksgazet*: "To the Jewish population! After many months of the most brutal persecutions, in which the black and brown riffraff did everything in their power to destroy us both morally and physically, we can finally 'betray' our existence ourselves. The committee that until now has been in touch with you in secret, will continue to exist for the time being. The social relief that has been distributed to you to date, will continue to be distributed."[34] Out of the Jewish Defence Committee (CDJ) the *Aide aux Israélites Victimes de la Guerre* (AIVG) was founded in Brussels on 11 October 1944.[35] It was set up as a national structure with local departments, such as in Brussels, Liège and Antwerp. However, even with overseas Jewish welfare and support from Jews who came in with the Allied forces, the setting up of a welfare and social aid system was not easy. The Belgian Jewish Committee and the Belgian Jewish Representative Committee in respectively London and New York could offer assistance from abroad as well, but the circumstances and cooperation were complicated. While Queen Elisabeth supported financially with 50,000 Belgian francs and offered her support to fundraisers, the Belgian government's support was very limited to non-existent.[36] Refugee aid consisted only of the most basic needs: food, clothes, a place to sleep. Homes for children and for repatriates were opened.[37]

The first priority of the returned Jews was to retrieve information on the fate and whereabouts of their dear ones. To this end, registrations were opened and all available information was gathered. Ofipresse reported on 4 May 1945 how the Minister of the Interior, Van Glabbeke, had transferred the Jewish Registers made in all communes following the occupier's decree of 28 October 1940, to the AIVG.[38] On 15 June 1945, Ofipresse reported on the situation of the deportees returning to Belgium: "A little less than a thousand Jewish deportees from Belgium have returned until today. It is feared that the number of survivors of the extermination camps does not exceed five percent. Their situation is all the more tragic as most of them find no family to welcome them, nor a home to shelter them."[39] By the end of 1945, the AIVG's Research and Repatriation Service (*Service Recherches et Rapatriement*) had information on only 1,196 repatriated Jews of the 25,441 they knew at that time to have been deported from the Dossin barracks during the war. The first 19 convoys had repatriation numbers below one percent.[40]

Apart from finding information on family and friends, another urgent priority was to report to the police or to the resistance cases of extortion and betrayal by informers during the occupation.[41] The recovery of property and the return to their homes also posed enormous problems. In most cases, as also referred to by Rozenblum in his Liège article, returning Jews found their houses emptied of their belongings as a consequence of both the *Möbelaktion* (the "Furniture Action," a Nazi looting organisation which seized furniture

from Jewish homes, see also in Rozenberg's article) and robbery by neighbours. Moreover, in most cases, especially as the majority of Jews rented their houses, these were also occupied by new inhabitants. Searches for hidden belongings were often hindered by the new inhabitants of the places. And those who had entrusted personal goods and valuables to neighbours and friends for safekeeping, were often confronted with a total denial of these parties ever having received these goods. Restitution and compensation would be very incomplete and late, if at all.[42] Practically everyone had legal challenges in one way or the other. In these most difficult circumstances, confronted with unprecedented material, legal, physical and psychological challenges, most surviving Jews were literally "surviving", their nights being haunted by nightmares full of anxiety. Chil Elberg describes them: "The camps, the deaths, the corpses, my parents, the friends gone forever"...[43] Some saw no other way out than suicide.

On top of that, and like unfortunately everywhere, surviving Jews were confronted with incomprehension to their situation and even open antisemitism.[44] This often happened in parallel with bureaucratic systems in democracies who did not wish to make distinctions within their population, while the racially persecuted obviously had been confronted during the war with a whole range of specific problems the larger population had not been confronted with. In addition, what we see after the liberation in Belgium is that the racially persecuted group of Jews and Roma was discriminated against because of their lacking Belgian citizenship. Even though initially promised by the Minister of War Victims, M. Henri Pauwels, they were excluded in most cases from receiving the recognition of "political prisoner" and the indemnifications and payments that went with this statute (see also the contribution of Thierry Rosenblum).[45] Jews from Belgium without Belgian citizenship in Buchenwald were not repatriated together with the Belgians. A group within the non-Belgian-citizen Jews who had a particularly hard time after the liberation were those Jews which held so-called "enemy nationalities", such as German and Austrian Jews. Indeed, all German nationals and all citizens of former German allies were labelled "enemies" after the liberation, and the tragedy of this was that this also included many Jews. This measure caused a range of problems for those Jews, from the sequestration of their possessions and a variety of other social restrictions, to even imprisonment.[46] We also notice how German and Austrian Jews had a very difficult time receiving temporary or permanent residence permits, even to the degree that a German-Austrian couple described by Thierry Rozenblum in his article, decided to leave the country altogether.

Between September 1944 and the end of 1949, 405,076 collaboration files were registered. While 86 percent were filed without further action or ultimately led to a dismissal of prosecution, the Military Court sentenced about 50,000 collaborators to prison, and pronounced 2,940 death sentences, of which 242 were executed, among them the "Torturers of Breendonk". The Jew hunters, however, escaped the execution squad and, there were few prosecutions in Belgium for complicity in the genocide on Jews and Roma. Only in the trial of Beeckmans and Lambrichts did the persecution of Jews play a central role. For the others this was more of a side aspect. General von Falkenhausen spent four years in prison, while Belgian SS men were jailed until the 1950s. Ten camp guards from Breendonk, having been sentenced to death, were executed opposite the Dossin barracks on 12 April 1947. No Belgian civil servants were prosecuted for their part in the persecution of the Jews. The matter was barely investigated. Only in 1980, Kurt Asche, leader of the war-time *Judenabteilung* in Brussels and organiser of the deportations of Jews from Belgium, stood trial in Germany on evidence provided by the Belgian historian Maxime Steinberg and was convicted for complicity to the murder of Jews from Belgium.[47] That so many perpetrators in the racial persecution and genocidal process in Belgium were never persecuted and tried after the war played a key role in the fact that the persecution of Jews did not appear in collective memory for decades after the war. The victims of the "Final Solution" could not count on

great interest in the immediate post-war years, including in court. While today Auschwitz is the symbol of the horrors of the Nazi camp system, in the years after the war it was Buchenwald.[48] It is also interesting to note that the case against the leaders of the Association of Jews in Belgium, the so-called "Jewish Council", submitted by Jewish representatives to the Military Court who opened a case on 17 October 1944, was also classified without further consequence.[49]

JEWISH LIFE

Just like before the war, Jewish life in Belgium did not form a homogeneous entity. As everywhere and always, different ways of being Jewish existed next to each other, with (partial) overlaps and oppositions each other. Religious versus non- and a-religious, Zionist versus anti- and a-Zionist, every position on the political spectrum, and all of this in a wide variety of languages including Yiddish and Hebrew, local languages and languages from places of (family) origin(s). In the immediate post-war period, Yiddish was still the common language of many Eastern and Central European immigrants as well as of Orthodox Jews.[50] This was less the case for the families who had lived multiple generations in Belgium or for the Jews entering Belgium with the Allied forces or overseas welfare organisations. In very many cases, the wartime persecution strengthened Jews in their convictions on their way of being Jewish. Ardent Communist, Zionist and religious life emerged while some most explicitly did not wish to associate with Judaism or Jewish life altogether. Interestingly enough, this strengthening of convictions coincided with a time of such dire circumstances and challenges in Jewish life which gave way to many attempts to unify and centralise Jewish life. On the one hand, there was the need to centralise Jewish aid to those who needed it – the local survivors, the repatriates, the search for and care of the many children hidden in non-Jewish environments or surviving the war in Jewish homes – and, on the other hand, the strong desire to stand up for one's convictions and way of being Jewish.

The largest overseas Jewish welfare organisation, the Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), wished to centralise all finances and help with the AIVG in Brussels, the capital and where most surviving Jews lived. Other Jewish communities in Belgium would be local departments of this centralised organisation. However, the differences in view, which came most prominently and painfully to the fore in the discussions on the children, made this set-up extremely difficult, even leading to the Antwerp office in the end falling directly under JDC and no longer working with JDC via the Brussels AIVG. Antwerp managed to receive this exemption partly because of the relatively quick reconstruction of pre-war social welfare infrastructure. Whereas in Antwerp even Jewish day schools reopened within weeks after the liberation, all other places in Belgium struggled much harder (see Vanden Daelen and Rozenblum).[51] Moreover, in Brussels, some structures, including the synagogue, had still been officially active by the time of

the liberation, the only Jewish organisations in other places that were still active at the time were the Jewish resistance organisations. Transitioning from resistance to post-war governance of Jewish life was not obvious or easy, and the view of wartime resistance groups did not necessarily merge well with that of other pre-war organisations. This setting did not always make for a smooth transition from pre- to wartime and post-war structures and management. The strongest clashes in social help and the so-called "children's question" were those between Communists and Zionists, and between religious and non-religious. Especially the education (in a Jewish environment or not, and, if within a Jewish environment, what type of Jewish environment) led to the most bitter and ardent debates, often leaving the most vulnerable party involved, the children themselves, without a voice.[52]

At the moment of the liberation and in months to come, it often was not a question of which type of religious service one wished to attend, but rather of finding any gathering of local survivors and Allied Jews coming together to celebrate Shabbat or Jewish holidays. These gatherings were very meaningful, both for the local survivors and for the allied Jews. In Antwerp, which had had three official Jewish religious communities with state recognition before the war, a sense of unity in the decimated religious communities led to the idea of having "unified Jewish communities". The "unified Jewish communities" led to an unofficial merging of the two Ashkenazi communities (until 1958), but it was not joined by the Sephardi community. The presence of religious infrastructures such as a Jewish religious burial society, ritual baths, study and prayer houses, schools and the provision of kosher food, was of key importance for religious and especially Orthodox Jews. But the variations within the various kinds of Jewishness would reemerge and make for further divisions and splits to an at first and at first sight post-liberation unity.[53]

Even though, economically speaking, Jews were never a separate group, the revival and organisation of Jewish life also had a strong component of ensuring economic reintegration into society. An economically very important category of returnees was the diamond business people who had found refuge in London, New York, Havana, Brazil and Palestine, to name the most important centres. Their return not only impacted Jewish life in Belgium, mostly in Antwerp, but also the economy of Antwerp and broad surroundings and the Belgian economy as a whole. Whether helping fellow Jews find a profession or a job to support themselves or providing social welfare, social services were somthing in which Jewish organisations invested highly.[54]

REMEMBERING AND HONOURING THE VICTIMS

After the liberation of Belgium, life gradually restarted. However, what has become one of the most known aspects of the Second World War, namely the Holocaust, did not receive much attention in the months or years after the liberation. The small number of survivors who had been racially persecuted during the war and their needs received little attention and were not a priority. Unlike the Breendonk or Buchenwald victims, the racial deportees did not fit into a narrative of "national martyrdom".[55] While there was already a Jewish commemorative event already on 29 October 1944 at the *Tir National*, organised by the CDJ and with an estimated 2,500 participants, this falls within what Smet calls "the Belgian paradigm of the horror", in which places of execution and the Breendonk fortress were points of reference to demonstrate the occupier's cruelty.[56]

For recognition of their victimhood, the racially persecuted would have to wait much longer. Even within the commemorations organised by Jewish groups, the core of the attention immediately after the liberation went to resistance heroes (such as Mala Zimetbaum, the executed Jews at the *Tir National*, the uprising of the Warsaw ghetto and the recognition of non-Jews who helped Jews).

PRESENTATION

An annual commemoration for the victims at the Dossin barracks only started in 1956.[57] Dossin as a place of commemoration with historical meaning in the racial persecution would come very late. The first commemorative plaque – for the Jewish victims – was installed at the Dossin barracks on 30 May 1948, a second plaque for the Roma victims would only follow in 1995. It was only in the latter year that a small part of the former camp would become a museum. At the time of the liberation, the murdered Jews, Roma and Sinti had no voice and remembrance. Belgian general society had little to no attention or awareness about them, and the survivors (who were not a homogeneous group) were literally "surviving". Other pressing material, physical and psychological challenges, such as the ones mentioned in this article, had priority over commemorative initiatives. At the same time, one should not dismiss the attention that was given to commemoration, even if the form and place was different than what it would evolve into later.[58]

The Jewish life that emerged after the liberation restarted with the help of Jews arriving in the liberated areas with the Allied forces and overseas Jewish welfare organisations, such as the Joint Distribution Committee. While certain structures of Jewish life had survived the war or would be restored shortly thereafter, some would not reappear or would only briefly restart and others were totally new. Jewish life after the war was only a decimated fraction of the pre-war and would never fully reconstruct itself. Many aspects of the immediate liberation period already gave an idea of the direction in which Jewish life would evolve, such as the Orthodox Jewish life in Antwerp. Jewish survivors were confronted with a wide range of practical and emotional challenges and dealt with them as best as possible in dire circumstances, with limited to no government support or support from the broader society. This combined with the devastation on so many innocent lives lost and ruined, leads us to agree with the title – "The Sorrows of Liberation" – of the concluding section of Dan Stone's *The Liberation of the camps. The end of the Holocaust and its aftermath*.[59] We hope with this theme issue to raise awareness of various aspects of liberation for the victims, which indeed are in many ways a story of reorganisation amidst a backdrop of death and destruction, one that was generally unnoticed by the larger society.

Veerle Vanden Daelen and Frédéric Crahay

(1) Wasserstein, Bernard, *Vanishing Diaspora: The Jews in Europe since 1945,* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996; Weinberg, David, *Recovering a voice. West European Jewish Communities after the Holocaust*, Oxford: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2015.

(2) United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (ed.), "Liberation of Nazi camps," *Holocaust Encyclopedia*, https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/liberation-of-nazi-camps (accessed on 5 April 2024).

(3) Stone, Dan, *The liberation of the camps. The end of the Holocaust and its aftermath,* New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2015.

(4) Vanden Daelen, Veerle, "Returning: Jewish life in Antwerp in the aftermath of the Second World War (1944-1945)," *European Judaism*, 38(2), issue 75, 2005, p. 29; Saerens, Lieven, *Onwillig Brussel. Een verhaal over Jodenvervolging en verzet,* Leuven: Davidsfonds Uitgeverij, 2014, p. 183.

(5) Felixarchief (City Archives Antwerp), Police archives, Processen-verbaal 6e wijk, MA 28 156/2669.

(6) Kazerne Dossin, "Transporten", https://kazernedossin.eu/onderzoeksproject/transporten/ (accessed on 5 April 2024).

(7) See: Brachfeld, Sylvain, "David Istoubsky, http://www.brigade-piron.be/temoignages_fichiers/tem_Isboutsky.David.html (consulted on 2 June 2024). David Isboutsky further participated in the Allied liberation in the Netherlands and in Germany. In August 1945, he was demobilised and returned to Antwerp. He made aliyah in 1946.

(8) S.n., "Een Belgisch Soldaat komt thuis – Hij vindt zijne joodsche ouders niet", *Volksgazet*, 7 September 1944, 2.

(9) Vanden Daelen, Veerle, "75 jaar geleden: een lichtje in de duisternis, de heropleving van het Joods leven in Antwerpen", https://www.vrt.be/vrtnws/nl/2020/06/01/75-jaar-geleden-het-joodse-leven-herneemt/ (consulted on 5 April 2024).

(10) Kazerne Dossin, KD_00846 - Simon Gronowski. Collection, Notebook of Léon Gronowski (Kazerne Dossin, Mechelen).

(11) Smets, Eva, *De collectieve herinnering aan nazi-genocide in het joods en Belgisch-nationaal discours, 1944-1951*, Brussel, VUB, unpublished dissertation, 2001, p. 56-57 (on the liberation of Dossin: 'Cinq cent vingt-sept Juifs internés à Malines ont échappé à la déportation', *La Libre Belgique*, 8 September 1944).

(12) Schram, Laurence, De 'bevrijding' van de Dossinkazerne, this issue, p. 45.]

(13) Vanden Daelen, Veerle, "Het leven moet doorgaan. De joden in Antwerpen na de bevrijding (1944-1945)," *Bijdragen tot de Eigentijdse Geschiedenis/Cahiers d'Histoire du Temps Présent (Brussel/Bruxelles)*, 13-14, 2004, 145 (zie: https://www.journalbelgianhistory.be/nl/system/files/article_pdf/chtp13_14_008_Dossier2_VandenDaelen.pdf)

(14) On the V-bombs, see Palinckx, Koen, "België onder de V-bommen: Antwerpen-1944-1945," in: Wannes Devos en Kevin Gony (eds.), *Oorlog. Bezetting. Bevrijding. België 1940-1945,* Tielt: Lannoo, 2019, p. 261-269.

(15) Vanden Daelen, Veerle, *Laten we hun lied verder zingen. De heropbouw van de joodse gemeenschap in Antwerpen na de Tweede Wereldoorlog (1944-1960),* Amsterdam: Aksant, 2008, p. 29-31.

(16) *Ibid*., p. 31-32; American Jewish Archives, World Jewish Congress-files (further abbreviated as AJA, WJC-files), C19/12, Belgium, 1945-1946, note sur la situation de la population juive en Belgique; United States National Archives (Washington DC), Record Group 331, SHAEF-files Belgium, Memorandum: Situation of Jews in Belgium, 10 November 1944.

(17) AJA, WJC-files (coll. 361), H59/18, Belgian Jewish Committee (Londen) to Belgian Jewish Representative Committee (New York), 20 December 1944.

(18) United States National Archives, RG 331 (SHAEF-files Belgium), report 31 May 1945 'Repatriation of Belgians from Germany'.

(19) AJA, WJC-files (coll. 361), H61/8, Miss Hilb citeert aan Dr. Tartakower, 12 July 1945.

(20) Saerens, *Onwillig Brussel*, 168.

(21) *Ibid*.

(22) *Ibid*.

(23) Smets, *De collectieve herinnering*, 52.

(24) *Ibid*., p. 53-54.

(25) Vanden Daelen, *Laten we hun lied verder zingen*, 50, based on City archives Antwerp, Modern Archief, Politiearchief, Processen-verbaal 7e wijk, MA 29.934/2150.

(26) Vanden Daelen, "Het leven moet doorgaan," 152-156.

(27) Kazerne Dossin, research databases on deportees from the Dossin barracks and deportees living in Belgium deported from Drancy (France).

(28) Saerens, *Onwillig Brusssel*, 169.

(29) Stone, *The liberation of the camps*, 69 (specifically on Buchenwald, see pp. 71-76).

(30) Smets, *De collectieve herinnering*, 61.

(31) Stone, *The liberation of the camps*, 18.

(32) *Ibid*.

(33) Saerens, *Onwillig Brussel*, 185-186.

(34) S.n., "Mededeelingen - Aan de Joodsche Bevolking!", *Volksgazet*, 12 September 1944, p. 2.

(35) For a history of the AIVG, see Massange, Catherine, *Bâtir le lendemain: L'Aide aux Israélites victimes de la guerre et le Service Social Juif de 1944 à nos jours.* Brussels: Didier Devillez, 2002.

(36) Hobson Faure, Laura en Vanden Daelen, Veerle, "Imported from the United States? The Centralization of Private Jewish Welfare after the Holocaust: The Cases of Belgium and France," in: Avinoam Patt, Atina Grossmann, Lindag G. Levi and Maud S. Mandel (eds)., *The JDC at 100: A century of humanitarianism*, Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2019, p. 279-313; Saerens, *Onwillig Brusssel*, 178-179.

(37) See, for example: s.n., "Inauguration d'un home pour rapatriés," *Ofipresse*, 28 September 1945, 21, p. 5 (the inauguration of a home for young abandoned girls). S.n., 'Un Home Yvonne Nevejan', *Ofipresse,* 16 November 1945, 26, p. 9.

(38) S.n., "Le registre des Juifs," *Ofipresse*, 4 May 1945, 2, p. 3.

(39) S.n., "La situation des déportés rentrant en Belgique," *Ofipresse*, 15 June 1945, 7, p. 6.

(40) S.n., "Déportés et rapatriés de Malines," *Ofipresse*, 14 December 1945, 28, p. 5-7.

(41) Vanden Daelen, "Het leven moet doorgaan," 151-152.

(42) Vanden Daelen, *Laten we hun lied verder zingen*, 51-60.

(43) Saerens, *Onwillig Brusssel*, 180.

(44) See for example for the Netherlands, Hondius, Dienke, *Terugkeer. Antisemitisme in Nederland rond de bevrijding*, Den Haag: Sdu Uitgevers, 1998 and Citroen, Michal, *U wordt door niemand verwacht. Nederlandse joden na kampen en onderduik*, Utrecht: Uitgeverij Het Spectrum, 1999.

(45) "M. Pauwels, ministre des Victimes de la guerre, a décidé d'octroyer le bénéfice des avantages accordés aux prisonniers politiques aux Juifs rentrant des camps allemands. Cette disposition s'applique aux Juifs belges et aux Juifs étrangers, domiciliés en Belgique au 10 mai 1940" (S.n., "La situation des déportés rentrant en Belgique," *Ofipresse*, 15 June 1945, 7, p. 6).

(46) Vanden Daelen, 'Het leven moet doorgaan', 170-176.

(47) Kazerne Dossin (ed.), *Kazerne Dossin: Holocaust en Mensenrechten,* Gent: Tijdsbeeld en Pièce Montée, 2019, p. 460-461.

(48) Saerens, *Onwillig Brusssel*, 169-179, 185-186, 194-195.

(49) Vanden Daelen, Veerle and Wouters, Nico, "'The Lesser Evil' of Jewish Collaboration? The Absence of a Jewish Honor Court in Postwar Belgium," in: Laura Jockusch and Gabriel N. Finder (eds.), *Jewish Honor Courts. Revenge, Retribution, and Reconciliation in Europe and Israel after the Holocaust,* Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2015, p. 197-224.

(50) Vanden Daelen, "Returning," 27.

(51) Hobson Faure, Laura and Vanden Daelen, Veerle, "Imported from the United States? The centralization of private Jewish welfare after the Holocaust: the cases of Belgium and France," in: Atina Grossmann, Linda Levi, Maud Mandel and Avinoam Patt (eds.), *The Joint Distribution Committee: 100 Years of Jewish History*, Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2019, p. 279-313.

(52) Hellemans, Hanne, *Schimmen met een ster, Het bewogen verhaal van joodse ondergedoken kinderen tijdens de Tweede Wereldoorlog in België,* Antwerpen: Manteau, 2007; Vanden Daelen, "Returning," 36-37. See on Jewish children survivors, their life out of the ruins of conflict and through their adulthood: Clifford, Rebecca, *Survivors. Children's Lives After the Holocaust*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2020.

(53) Vanden Daelen, "Returning," p. 35-36.

(54) Jewish life, in all its flavours, as well as the provision of vocational training was also organised in the Displaced Persons camps (Stone, *The liberation of the camps*, 147-175).

(55) Smets, *De collectieve herinnering*, 56.

(56) *Ibid*., 148.

(57) *Ibid*., 148 ff., multiple articles in *Ofipresse*. There was, however a tribute to the "former ones from the Dossin barracks" ('les anciens de la Caserne Dossin'), with a procession parade in the streets of Brussels, flowers at the unknown soldier, receiving a medal from Brussels mayor Van de Meulenbroeck, reported in S.n., "Un hommage des 'anciens de la Caserne Dossin'," *Ofipresse*, 15 June 1945, 7, p. 6.

(58) The study of Simon Perego on the commemoration of the Shoah by Jews in Paris gives evidence to the fact that one cannot consider the immediate post-war period as a period of non-commemoration. See: Perego, Simon, *Pleurons-les. Les Juifs de Paris et la commémoration de la Shoah (1944-1967),* Ceyzérieu: Champ Vallon, 2020.

(59) Stone, *The liberation of the camps*, 216.

The "liberation" of the Dossin Barracks

→ **Laurence Schram**
Kazerne Dossin

The Dossin barracks are difficult to consign to the dustbin of history, given the important role they played in racial deportations. Between 27 July 1942 and 4 September 1944, 25,490 Jews and 353 Roma and Sinti were deported from the site. Except for 218 of them, the destination was the Auschwitz-Birkenau complex, with its concentration camps, *Kommandos* and labor camps, and its killing center on the outskirts of Birkenau.

It is estimated that 15,725 of the deported Jews were murdered in the Birkenau gas chambers as soon as they deboarded the trains. These were mainly children, women, the elderly and the sick, all deemed unfit for work and therefore useless in the concentration-camp environment. Only 1,261 of them returned from deportation. The others were registered before being exterminated through labor. The Roma and Sinti, of whom there were only 33 survivors, were tattooed before being crammed into the "Gypsy family camp".[1]

This 5% survival rate is a clear indication of why the Dossin barracks earned its epithets as the "waiting room of Auschwitz-Birkenau" and the "antechamber of death". The human toll of the deportation from this assembly camp was much higher than that of the Breendonk camp. It is estimated that some 4,000 deportees of very different statuses passed through Breendonk, half of whom survived. Breendonk was already well known during the Occupation, having gained an international reputation as a terror camp, while the Dossin barracks remained shrouded in mystery and obscurity.

THE LIBERATION OF THE DOSSIN BARRACKS IN PRACTICE

On the night of 12-13 April 1944, Allied aircraft began a long series of bombing raids on the city of Mechelen. Their targets were the network and infrastructure of the SNCB (National Railway Company of Belgium), and factories that produced military equipment for the occupying forces[2]. The daily lives of the inhabitants fluctuated between rushing to shelters, witnessing the desolate destruction, evacuating and identifying bodies, and clearing the ruins. Some Jewish prisoners were

The "liberation" of the Dossin barracks (continuation)

employed to clear rubble or as handymen at the SS training camp in Schoten. Some of them took advantage of the inattention of the guards to escape. The Dossin barracks escaped these bombardments. The SS imposed a stricter curfew on the inmates and the windows were blacked out to avoid attracting the attention of Allied pilots.

On 19 May, the 25th transport took 507 Jewish deportees and a young Roma man to Auschwitz-Birkenau. Fear and despair reigned supreme. But three weeks later, news of the Allied landings in Normandy on 6 June 1944 spread through the camp. Gilda Franco, then aged 13, later remembered that "after the announcement of the Allied landings in Normandy, the Allied planes flew over the town of Mechelen more and more often and lower and lower. The inmates of the Dossin barracks were overjoyed, even though they regularly had to take refuge in the shelters."[3] In his war diary, Dr Franz Parnes, a volunteer doctor at the camp, wrote:

> Mr Frank's Jewish butler has occasion to listen to the BBC, so we know that the Allies have been victorious in North Africa and are now fighting in Italy. And today, 6 June, we learn that the Allies have landed in Normandy. Our hearts beat faster and the joy is hard to hide. The end is drawing near – will it be ours too? [4]

The internees already saw themselves as free and hoped that Transport 25, which had just left, would be the last. The atmosphere inside the barracks fluctuated between joy and anxiety, depending on the news and rumors currently circulating.

On 6 June, Salomon Vanden Berg noted in his diary that "in the streets and everywhere, people were smiling", but on 8 June, he was worried: "Many young people in town are being rounded up, including men aged 50".[5] From the beginning of June, the Association des Juifs en Belgique (AJB) stepped up its efforts to obtain the transfer to its homes of the children being held at the Dossin barracks with their parents[6]. The AJB was also concerned about Zionist militants on the German-Palestinian exchange lists and about Jews with certificates of nationality (Latin and Central America)[7].

The Sipo-SD made the same observation: "As might be expected, the Anglo-American landings caused great joy among the Jews. They believe in an Anglo-American victory".[8] As a result, the hunt intensified and now targeted Jewish spouses from mixed marriages and Jews who had remained within the law. The Sipo-SD even boasted about its results: "Despite considerable difficulties, an average of 80 to 100 Jews continued to be arrested every week."[9] The bonuses granted to informers proved their worth. In June 1944, at least 317 Jews were taken to the Dossin barracks. The Sipo-SD and its auxiliaries continued their efforts the following month, delivering 333 Jews to the assembly camp, almost all of whom had been arrested in Brussels.

Dates	Entrants to Mechelen	Deportees	Non-deported
Indeterminate	3	1	2
03/07/1944	32	26	6
04/07/1944	12	10	2
05/07/1944	2	2	0
06/07/1944	15	11	4
07/07/1944	1	1	0
08/07/1944	24	20	4
10/07/1944	3	1	2
11/07/1944	12	10	2
12/07/1944	1	1	0
13/07/1944	21	17	4
14/07/1944	1	1	0
15/07/1944	11	10	1
17/07/1944	1	0	1
18/07/1944	1	0	1
19/07/1944	23	21	2
20/07/1944	13	10	3
21/07/1944	22	19	3
22/07/1944	21	17	4
25/07/1944	19	13	6
26/07/1944	71	55	16
27/07/1944	1	0	1
28/07/1944	4	1	3
29/07/1944	19	19	0
	333	**266**	**67**

_ Daily entries to the Mechelen camp in July 1944[10].

Between 19 and 29 July, registrations of new arrivals at Dossin seemed to indicate that the liquidation of the "Jewish question in Belgium" was indeed underway. On 20 July 1944, in his war diary, Salomon Vanden Berg expressed concern about "the announcement of the replacement of the military government by a civilian government. We know from experience in Holland what this means: [... the] intensification of measures against the Jews".[11] The next day, he learned that the attempt on Hitler's life the previous day had failed and that a Jewish transport was about to leave. This news also spread to the Mechelen camp. The internees fell back into despondency and fear of another transport. Destroying all hopes, on 31 July 1944, transport XXVI, which was to be the last, left Malines for Auschwitz-Birkenau.

The "liberation" of the Dossin barracks (continuation)

The next day, the Sipo-SD planned to seize the few thousand Jews who had remained within the law: employees of the AJB, residents of orphanages and of old people's homes and all other structures under the supervision of the Jewish Association, workers from firms employed in the Reich's war effort, holders of German-Palestinian exchange certificates, nationals of protected nationalities, and all the Dossin internees. No one was to be spared.

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_ The identification card of Nahim (alias Norbert) Manelewitsch, registered on the list of the XXVIIth transport, which did not leave, with a photo of the boy in 1946

Nahim (known as Norbert) Manelewitsch, aged 5, and his parents entered the camp on 5 August, a few days after the 563 deportees from the last convoy XXVI, of 31 July 1944, had been sent to Auschwitz. The child was struck by the almost empty building, although it was above all the ill-treatment inflicted on his mother in Avenue Louise that left an indelible impression on him[12]. While he and his father were housed together in the *Flitser* room – a room for recaptured escapees – his mother was immediately sent to the infirmary.

Chaskiel Israel Kapelusnik, aged 22, who had been locked up in the assembly camp since 29 April 1944, remembered learning of the Allied advance on Paris and the liberation of the city. He recounts that from mid-August 1944, "the Allied planes were flying lower and lower over the camp. We were happy to see the liberation approaching, but also desperate, not knowing what they were thinking about us."[13]

On 24 or 25 August, Anton Burger, Adolf Eichmann's special emissary and a specialist in the liquidation of Jewish populations, returned to Brussels to complete the Final Solution in Belgium. His arrival caused panic both within the AJB and among Jewish resistance fighters[14]. The underground Yiddish newspaper *Unzer Vort* called on all Jews to be vigilant against the arrival of this "Nazi executioner [...] whose hands are soaked in Jewish blood".[15]

Dates	Entrants to Mechelen
Indeterminate	5
01/08/1944	3
02/08/1944	1
03/08/1944	17
04/08/1944	1
05/08/1944	26
08/08/1944	4
10/08/1944	23
12/08/1944	10
14/08/1944	1
15/08/1944	2
16/08/1944	2
17/08/1944	8
18/08/1944	2
19/08/1944	24
21/08/1944	3
23/08/1944	3
24/08/1944	18
25/08/1944	2
26/08/1944	2
28/08/1944	3
	160

_ Daily entries to the Mechelen camp in August 1944[16]

However, the 160 arrests made in August 1944 were far fewer than those of June or July. In the midst of this apparent debacle for the occupying authority, the Sipo-SD spared no effort, while the AJB, hitherto docile, was reluctant to hand over its protégés and decided to "temporarily suspend all services, close the AJB's premises, transfer the old people's homes to the Assistance publique de la Ville de Bruxelles, and remove the 600 children from the homes"[17], with the help of the Comité de Défense des Juifs.

In the Mechelen camp at the end of August, the Germans, tense and worried, were preparing to evacuate. Uncertainty reigned. The Germans loaded their luggage onto large lorries[18], before unloading it the same day. On 24 August, lorries brought a group of 18 Jews to be deported on the next transport.

On the weekend of 26 to 27 August 1944, Burger is said to have come to the Dossin barracks to review the dubious files[19] and to have communicated to Major Frank the

The "liberation" of the Dossin barracks (continuation)

secret order for the total liquidation of the assembly camp. He planned to deport all the Jews in the Dossin barracks to Bergen-Belsen on the night of 30 to 31 August.[20] All valuables (including jewelry and money) and goods (such as supplies, desks, typewriters, radios, kitchen utensils, sewing machines, infirmary equipment) were to be loaded onto goods wagons. Frank estimated the value of the goods confiscated from the Jews at RM25 million.[21]

On 28 August, the roundup planned for the whole of occupied Belgium did not take place. The occupying forces were in full collapse. With the Allies advancing, all available trains, lorries and fuel were mobilized to evacuate the German troops[22]. The *Sipo-SD* in Brussels began its withdrawal to Hasselt. Burger persisted, however, and on 30 August he still hoped to organize this last mass operation. The rush of events prevented him from carrying it out. In the end, Burger's presence did not have the desired effect.

On 30 August, Salomon Van den Berg wrote in his diary that he had approached Léon Platteau, a senior official at the Ministry of Justice, to obtain the intervention of the Swiss and Swedish Consuls, so that the occupying forces would hand responsibility for the *SS-Sammellager* to the Red Cross or the Ministry of Justice. The AJB leader's concern was to avoid the deportation of prisoners to Dossin when the Allies were just a few dozen kilometers from the Belgian border. The next day, the secretaries-general of the Belgian ministries obtained an assurance from the occupying forces that no further measures would be taken against Jews[23].

Around 30 August, Sipo-SD vehicles from Lille entered the Dossin barracks. Chaskiel Kapelusznik, a former prisoner who had not been deported, described the event as follows:

> The porte cochere opened, but this time not for a "Transport" of Jews from the Gestapo cellar, but a transport of SS and Gestapo from Lille fleeing the Allies. Boden and Frank received guests, SS and senior SS officers. The courtyard filled up with lorries. The SS officers ordered the Belgian SS to go out in lorries and loot shops in the town. They came back with all sorts of goods that they were going to take with them when they fled[24].

The arrival of large numbers of SS men and their auxiliaries bearing weapons and riding in tanks frightened the Jewish inmates[25]. There were rumors of a general deportation, and even of a general execution, and the Jewish internees feared the worst. Several inmates armed themselves with sticks, iron bars and various tools provided by the Bacman brothers, who were in charge of the camp bursar's office[26]. Maurice Szwarc, aged 14, found a safe hiding place in the attic, under the beds that were piled there.[27]

Faced with this climate of possible insurrection, the SS introduced "a very strict guard regime in the camp and prisoners were no longer allowed to move without being accompanied by armed soldiers".[28] Witnesses agreed that the machine guns were now pointed inside the barracks[29]. The families and mistresses of the SS and their henchmen were allowed to join their loved ones in the barracks, with a view to escaping in the near future.[30]

But fear arose not only from what was inside the camp. Lotti Teplitzki, who entered Dossin on 1 August, was terrorized by the Allied bombings:

> One night, there was an alert and the Germans forced us down into the cellar. It was 1er September 1944, the day I turned 16. There was such a hubbub that I lost my aunt and the Goldbergs and found myself in the cellar, surrounded by strangers. I started crying again and a young man came to console me. We were happy that the Allies had bombed.[31]

On 2 or 3 September 1944, Major Frank called the prisoners together in the barracks courtyard and gave what witnesses agreed was a surprising speech. Chaskiel Kapelusnik sums up the situation as follows:

> I think there were about 500 Jews. He placed an SS man with a machine gun and made a speech for the Jews. What I remember, he said that "I can make it very simple and you'll be dead in a few minutes, but I won't do it because the enemy will propagate that. We are going to leave and I advise you to barricade yourselves well, because I am not responsible for what the enemy is going to do[32]."

The commandant reportedly drew the internees' attention in particular to the use of war propaganda by the Allies: "The military situation is not too good for us at the moment. We're going to leave you all alone. You see, if we'd wanted to kill you, we would have done it, and it's Anglo-American propaganda that claims we're killing the Jews."[33] Hélène Beer's account is confirmed almost word for word by the young Maurice Swarc: "The military situation no longer allows us to stay here in Belgium. We're going to leave you, we won't do anything to you. This is Allied propaganda claiming that we are killing the Jews. If I wanted to kill you, I would have done it. Stay calm, stay disciplined, we're leaving."[34] Gilda Franco, aged 13, noted that Frank would have added that "we will bear witness to the kindness he showed"[35] towards the Jews, as Frank insisted that he had treated the internees humanely, that he had not starved or tortured them. In conclusion, he did not rule out a return in the following days.

During these days, Frank informed Dr Franz Parnes, a Jewish volunteer doctor at the camp, of his decision to release certain people, including Dr Parnes himself. Frank stressed that he would accompany them personally, to prevent them from

The "liberation" of the Dossin barracks
(continuation)

being shot[36]. Erna Schelasnitzki, a Jewish employee of the *Aufnahme*, the camp's registration office, drew up and distributed certificates of release which were supposed to serve as safe-conduct passes for the occupying troops. Did she act on Frank's orders or on her own initiative to protect Jewish employees and workers from reprisals by the Jews on the deportation lists? This point remains a mystery.

On 3 September, the departure became clearer. Commandant Frank ordered all the documents, files and deportation lists at the *Aufnahme* to be burnt. However, one of the Jewish employees of the Aufnahme, Maurice Van Reeth, saved almost all the precious *Transportlisten* by carefully hiding them[37]. The SS loaded the vehicles with their belongings, their plunder and all the food they could carry. Léon "Napoléon" Moresco, in charge of the SS pigsty in Dossin, had to slaughter all the pigs, and the camp kitchens were hard at work.[38]

_ The second commander of the SS Sammellager, Johannes Gerhard Frank, in 1942 (top) and Dr Franz Parnes in 1940 (bottom)

At around 10 or 11 p.m., the bell rang for the departure. The British troops were approaching. Shots rang out. The cohort of SS men and their collaborators left in a hurry, leaving 552 internees, including three non-Jews, to their fate. A vehicle, sabotaged by the Jewish handymen, was immobilized in the barracks yard. The SS confined the Jews to their rooms and forbade them to go near the windows.

Dr Franz Parnes reported that:

> German soldiers in shirt sleeves, retreating on bicycles, others in ox-drawn carts. At one point, German soldiers are loading a lorry. One of them, standing on the roof, suddenly shot himself in the head, plunging into the void, and his comrades covered his body with wrapping paper. Men of the resistance, civilians, rifles in hand, advance from tree to tree towards the German barracks[39] .

Chaskiel Kapelusznik recounted the atmosphere in what was once the assembly camp:

> Around midnight on 3 September, the porte cochère opened and the entire SS convoy from Malines and Lille and the lorries left. Boden and Frank put helmets and machine guns on their shoulders. There are no words in any language to describe that moment. The camp without the SS, for us, that hell was at an end. Although the majority were not religious, everyone gathered in room I, we prayed [...] together and recited the "Hallel"[40] as on public holidays. Then we cried and danced around the room. We went to sleep. [41]

Norbert Manelewitsch had few memories of that day. The child recounted that "some of the guards threw their weapons into the canal"[42] and that once the SS had left, his father went to the storeroom to collect a prayer shawl. Alegrina Escojido, aged 12, saw the scene as if it were an illusion:

> The impression I get is that we were machine-gunned and that the Germans left in the lorries that were meant for us to go who-knows-where... It was the debacle, it was the debacle. I remember seeing people leaving like that, but I don't know... it's almost like a film image... moving through space like that to get to the open doors, with difficulty, running... [...] But I don't know if it's true or not.[43]

Relieved and surprised, the prisoners expressed their joy, weeping, laughing, dancing, singing and praying, but calm soon returned. That night, many Jewish prisoners stayed in the camp. They were scared. Distraught, they did not know where to go. As the nurse Gertrud Isaac pointed out, "the prisoners, although they could hardly contain their joy at the departure of their captors, had the presence of mind to barricade themselves in, as the *Wehrmacht* occupying the barracks opposite the Dossin barracks were still awaiting their orders to leave".[44]Others hurried from the building, some returning shortly later after running into *Wehrmacht* soldiers or witnessing clashes between Germans and Allied troops. The darkness made it impossible to distinguish between friendly and enemy uniforms.

A few men attacked the prison doors. At least two women from the Resistance were still locked up there. One of them was not Jewish. Véra den Boer, the wife of Hendrik Reynaers, had entered the barracks with her baby, from whom she was immediately separated. The child was taken to the infirmary, out of sight of the young mother[45]. For the SS, this was undoubtedly a means of exerting pressure to make the couple talk. The second, Régine Krochmal, an escapee from the 20th convoy, was brought back to Dossin four days before the departure of the last transport. When she was released from her cell, all she could think about was getting out: "I would have walked, even without legs. I didn't want to be there any more."[46]

Gilda Franco shared this great relief. In the carefree spirit of childhood, she momentarily forgot all those who had been deported:

> At that point, all you could think about was getting out of the barracks as quickly as possible before the Germans got the idea to come back. There was a lot of fighting going on! The soldiers were arriving and there were still Germans holding out. We didn't know if they were going to come back, if it was really definitive or not, if it was going to be taken over or what. All we could think about was getting out of the barracks as quickly as possible[47].

The rest of her account highlights the local support that former prisoners encountered: "We went out and were taken in for a few hours by some nuns in a street nearby. I can't remember where we left from, but it wasn't very far. And there we were taken in by some nuns who tried to comfort us a little and give us something to eat."[48]

The "liberation" of the Dossin barracks (continuation)

On 4 September, a small delegation from the CDJ and AJB arrived at the camp. Chaskiel Kapelusznik recounts the events in some detail:

> Early in the morning, a Jewish delegation from Brussels, including [...] Mrs Perelman, came to the camp and [distributed] money to everyone. The porte cochère opened and the prisoners began to leave. To our great surprise, there was a crowd in front of the gate with bags to loot. We had nothing but the clothes we were wearing. We no longer had a flat or any furniture, but we had life. We went out into the town. There were no Germans or Allies [...] Groups of resistance fighters or those who had become resistance fighters walked alone or holding a German prisoner or Belgian traitor. Towards the end of the morning, we were in the center of the town and [...] in the main street British tanks were passing [...]. While the girls were kissing the English, we were kissing the tank. A man accosted us in the street and asked if we had a place to stay for the night. They fed us and put us up for two nights. For about a hundred francs, a lorry took us back to Brussels.[49]

WAS THE LIBERATION OF THE DOSSIN BARRACKS A NON-EVENT?

In an interview conducted by Johannes Blum on 20 September 2001[50], Maurice Szwarc asked whether he had ever questioned other witnesses about the liberation of the site. Unsurprisingly, the answer was no. This event had gone virtually unnoticed and had occurred amidst almost general indifference. Neither the Allied troops who liberated the town, nor the population of Mechelen, nor even the Jewish population itself, really cared about this assembly camp.

The articles in the *Gazet van Mechelen* during the months of September to December 1944 mainly mention the bombings, the arrival of Allied troops, the repression, the arrests of suspected or known collaborators, the trials, and the looting, but offer not a word about the circumstances surrounding the "liberation" of the Dossin barracks. The regional image bank[51] contains no photos of this particular event. The absence of such photographs is telling. Without photographs, does the event really exist?

Even among the Jews abandoned to their fate at Dossin, very few testified about the site's liberation. This can partly be explained by the lack of interest shown by researchers and by the short duration of internment in the assembly camp. At least 160 of the 552 detainees entered the Dossin barracks after the last transport had left on 31 July 1944, and so spent only a few weeks or days there. Many of the survivors we interviewed had no precise memory of that time.

The Dossin barracks were not liberated . It could be described as a non-event. To conclude, we can refer to the analysis of the political scientist Dimokritos Kavadias on the end of the Occupation and the Second World War[52]. The residents of the Dossin

_ The liberation of Mechelen, 4 September 1944. The British armoured cars attract the attention of the population as they drive up the 'Grote Markt'

barracks were marked by the euphoria of the Liberation, the celebrations surrounding the liberators, their lorries and their tanks. Everyone, prisoners and residents alike, remembered the looting that targeted the camp, some of which occurred while former detainees were still there. Food and many other things were taken.

In an article published in the *Gazet van Mechelen* in January 1957, the municipal secretary at the time, Louis Ryckeboer, recounted that on 6 September 1944:

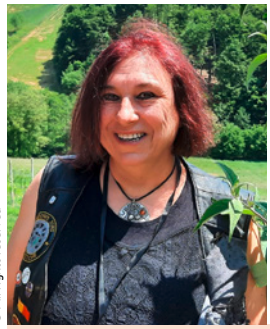
> Two Jewish lawyers, who didn't want to waste any time and who had already come to me the day before to recover items belonging to the Jewish community from the Dossin barracks, had returned to take possession of the kitchen utensils and their other belongings. In consultation with the Burgomaster, we ensured that this removal was carried out properly and in the required form, and police officer Van den Bosch and bailiff Mees were sent to the scene to issue the necessary summonses. The burgomaster winked and said that it had to be borne in mind that these were still Jews after all.[53]

This last sentence leaves no doubt about the anti-Semitism reigning in the city administration at the time.

The "liberation" of the Dossin barracks (continuation)

For the people of Mechelen, the Liberation was synonymous with the hunt for suspected collaborators. In the square between the Dossin and Lobbe barracks, women had their hair shaved and were publicly humiliated. At the same time, men suspected of being collaborators were dragged around the city and exposed to public vindictiveness before being imprisoned in the Dossin barracks.

In the days following the abandonment of the assembly camp, itself the starting point for a genocidal deportation, suspected or known collaborators were imprisoned there. In April 1946, the Belgian army returned to the building and resumed its activities there. These events erased the Dossin barracks from the collective memory. The imprisonment and deportation of Jews and Roma in the Dossin barracks were overlooked. It took decades for the site to take its place in the collective memory.



Laurence Schram holds a doctorate from the Université libre de Bruxelles. Her research concerns the persecution and deportation of Jews and Roma, with a particular focus on the Dossin barracks as an SS assembly camp. She is the author of numerous publications, notably on the history of the genocidal deportation of Jews and Roma from Belgium and northern France, and on antisemitism and Holocaust denial. She played an active part in the founding of the Jewish Museum of Deportation and Resistance (1996), the new exhibition in the Belgian pavilion at Auschwitz (2006) and the creation of the permanent exhibition (2012), and the renovation of the Kazerne Dossin Memorial (2020).

(1) *Dossin barracks deportees* database, created by Laurence Schram, as of 13 March 2024.

(2) Sabine Deboosere, *Mechelen in de tweede Wereldoorlog*, Tielt, Lannoo, 1990, p. 88.

(3) Kazerne Dossin (KD), KD_00016, Interviews by Johannes Blum (Les Compagnons de la Mémoire), *Interview with Gilda Franco*, Brussels, 3 November 2004.

(4) USHMM, 2006.245, *Around the World in Ten Years, Memoir by Dr. Frank J. Parnes*, Accession Number 2006.245, p. 41.

(5) KD, Coll. Centre National des Hautes Études juives (Martin Buber), after CNHEJ, KD_00010_A006685, *Diary of Salomon Vanden Berg* (typed copy), 8 June 1944, p. 156.

(6) KD, Coll. CNHEJ, KD_00010_A006832, *Minutes of the joint meeting of the Steering Committee of the Association of Jews in Belgium (AJB) and the Brussels local committee. Meeting of Thursday 8 June 1944*.

(7) KD, Coll. CNHEJ, KD_00010_A006830, *Minutes of the joint meeting of the AJB Steering Committee and the Brussels Local Committee. Meeting of Thursday 1er June 1944 and* KD_00010_A006833, *Meeting of Friday 16 June 1944*.

(8) *Report by the Delegate of the Head of the Security Police and the SD for the sector of the Military Commander for Belgium and Northern France*, Brussels, 15 June 1944, quoted in: Serge Klarsfeld and Maxime Steinberg, *Die Endlösung der Judenfrage, New York, The Beate Klarsfeld Foundation*, 1982, p. 86.

(9) *Ibid*.

(10) The figures come from the *Dossin Barracks deportees* and *Dossin Barracks non-deportees* databases, as at 13 March 2024.

(11) KD, Coll. CNHEJ, *Diary of Salomon Vanden Berg*, 20 July 1944, *op. cit.* p. 161-162.

(12) KD, KD_00016, Interviews by Johannes Blum (Les Compagnons de la Mémoire), *Interview with Norbert Manelewitsch*, Brussels, 16 February 2006.

(13) KD, Coll. CNHEJ, *Letter from Israël Cappell (Chaskiel Israel Kapelusnik) to Betty de Leeuw, guide to Kazerne Dossin*, 2014.

(14) KD, Coll. CNHEJ, *Diary of Salomon Vanden Berg*, *op. cit.* 25 August 1944, p. 168.

(15) *Unzer Vort*, "On our guard", late August 1944.

(16) *Non-deportees held at the Dossin barracks*, *op. cit.*

(17) KD, Coll. CNHEJ, *Diary of Salomon Vanden Berg*, *op. cit.* 30 August 1944, p. 169.

(18) KD, Coll. CNHEJ, audio cassette, *Interview with Maurice Szwarc*, conducted by Frédéric Molle, Brussels, 29 July 1997.

(19) Hélène Beer, "Le 27ième transport n'est pas parti", in *Centrale*, s.l., 1974.

(20) Maxime Steinberg private archive, *Eidesstatliche Erklärung von Kranich Lilian (Frank's mistress) (copy)*, Hamburg, 7 July 1950.

(21) Archives générales du Royaume (AGR), Auditorat militaire (AM), Procès Boden, Farde 1, Section IV-B – PV d'auditions de sujets allemands, doc. no. 17, Statement by Gerhard Johannes Frank, Zwolle, 27 October 1946.

(22) AGR/AM, doc. no. 17, *Statement by Frank Gerhard Johannes*, 27 October 1946, *op. cit.*

(23) Maxime Steinberg, *Le Dossier Bruxelles-Auschwitz. La police SS et l'extermination des Juifs de Belgique*, Brussels, Comité belge de soutien à la partie civile dans le procès des officiers SS, 1980, p. 162.

(24) KD, Coll. CNHEJ, *Letter from Israël Cappell (Chaskiel Israel Kapelusnik) to Betty de Leeuw, guide to Kazerne Dossin*, 2014.

(25) "Interview with Hélène Raszner" *in La caserne Dossin à Malines. Des témoins racontent…*, DVD produced by Stéphanie Perrin and Sarah Timperman, Brussels, Mémoire d'Auschwitz ASBL, Collection Paroles d'Archives, vol. 2, 2013.

(26) KD, Coll. CNHEJ, audio cassette, *Interview with Maurice Szwarc*, conducted by Frédéric Molle, Brussels, 29 July 1997.

(27) *Ibid*.

(28) AGR, Service Archives des Victimes de la Guerre (SAVG), R. 497/Tr. 208 337, *Report on an investigation carried out on 10 June 1966 by Mr Dumonceau de Bergendael at the Service Social Juif, 68, Avenue Ducpétiaux à Bruxelles-St-Gilles, Subject: Circumstances surrounding the liberation of the Mechelen camp – Dossin barracks*.

(29) KD, Coll. CNHEJ, *Letter from Israel Cappell (Chaskiel Israel Kapelusnik)*, *op. cit.*

(30) AGR/AM, Aelbers Albert trial, Farde 6 – Research, doc. No. 85, *Verhoor van Lande Anna*, Mechelen, 14 December 1946.

(31) Lotti Teplitzki's private archives, *Handwritten testimony by Lotti Teplitzki*.

(32) KD, Coll. CNHEJ, *Letter from Israel Cappell (Chaskiel Israel Kapelusnik)*, *op. cit.*

(33) Hélène Beer, "Le 27ième transport n'est pas parti", in *Centrale*, X, s.l., 1974, p. 14-17.

(34) KD, Coll. CNHEJ, audio cassette, *Interview with Maurice Szwarc*, conducted by Frédéric Molle, Brussels, 29 July 1997.

(35) KD, KD_00016, *Interviews by Johannes Blum* (Les Compagnons de la Mémoire), Interview with Gilda Franco, Brussels, 3 November 2004, 2e part.

(36) USHMM, *Around the World in Ten Years, Memoir by Dr. Frank J. Parnes (Franz Josef Parnes)*, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

(37) AGR/AM, Procès Boden, Farde 3, Section 3 – Affaires Vanderham Bernard et Israëls Betty (C), doc. no. 174, *Deposition of Schelasnitzki Erna*, Brussels, 24 February 1949.

(38) Laurence Schram, *Dossin, l'antichambre d'Auschwitz*, Brussels, Racine, 2017, p. 275.

(39) USHMM, *Around the World in Ten Years, Memoir by Dr. Frank J. Parnes, op. cit.*, p. 43.

(40) Set of psalms (113 to 118), recited as a prayer of praise or thanksgiving on certain feast days and on the day of the first moon.

(41) KD, Coll. CNHEJ, *Letter from Israel Cappell (Chaskiel Israel Kapelusnik)*, *op. cit.*

(42) KD, Coll. CNHEJ, *Interview with Norbert Manelewitsch*, *op. cit.*

(43) KD, KD_00016, *Interviews by Johannes Blum* (Les Compagnons

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de la Mémoire), Interview with Alegrina Escojido, Brussels, 15 October 2005.

(44) AGR/SAVG, R. 497/Tr. 208 337, *Report on an investigation carried out on 10 June 1966 by Mr Dumonceau de Bergendael at the Jewish Social Service, 68, Avenue Ducpétiaux, Brussels-St-Gilles, Subject: Circumstances surrounding the liberation of the Mechelen camp – Dossin barracks*.

(45) KD, KD_00016, *Interviews by Johannes Blum* (Les Compagnons de la Mémoire), Interview with Marc Reynaers, Brussels, 4 November 2004.

(46) KD, KD_00016, *Interviews by Johannes Blum* (Les Compagnons de la Mémoire), Interview with Régine Krochmal, Brussels, 7 February 1995.

(47) KD, *Interview with Gilda Franco*, *op. cit.*

(48) KD, *Interview with Gilda Franco*, *op. cit.*

(49) KD, *Letter from Israel Cappell (Chaskiel Israel Kapelusnik)*, *op. cit.*

(50) KD, Coll. CNHEJ, Interview with Maurice Szwarc, *op. cit.*

(51) https://www.regionalebeeldbank.be.

(52) Dimokritos Kavadias, *Bulletin trimestriel de la Fondation Auschwitz, Histoire et mémoire des Crimes et génocides nazis*, Colloque international, Bruxelles, novembre 1992, Actes I, n° spécial 36-37, avril-septembre 1993, De Dossinkazerne te Mechelen : een exploratief onderzoek naar de orale geschiedenis van de sociale ruimte rond een nazi-verzamelkamp voor Joden. Het collectieve geheugen van de "Paroche"-buurt, Éditions du Centre d'Études et de Documentation, p. 182-183.

(53) Louis Ryckeboer, "Uit mijn Oorlogsdagboek", in *Gazet van Mechelen*, 7 January 1957, p. 4.

‘There in that place of evil memory’. Early Anglo-Canadian responses to the ‘discovery’ of *Auffanglager* Breendonk

→ Richard Menkis

On 30 September 1944, Matthew Halton of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) recorded his response to a visit to Breendonk, the infamous *Auffanglager* (Reception Camp) in Belgium. Less than a month earlier, British forces had discovered the abandoned camp. In his 9.5 minute report,[1] Halton described the evidence of the atrocities committed there. However, much of the broadcast was also an occasion to reflect on why telling these stories was difficult and necessary. Halton’s report on Breendonk, broadcast in Canada several days after its recording, and the other reports about the camp that appeared in the Canadian press in the Fall of 1944, remind us that the historical understanding of the discovery of the camps is a work-in-progress. Dan Stone, in his volume on the liberation of the camps, begins his chapter on the Western Allies with the discovery of the Natzweiler-Struthof camp in Alsace in November of 1944, because it was the “only such site of horror that the Western Allies had uncovered at that point.” [2] The evidence from the Canadian media suggests otherwise.

INTRODUCTION

Although Breendonk is well-known in Belgian history and memory culture,[3] the camp is scarcely remembered outside its borders,[4] and thus its place in the history of the confrontation of the Allies with evidence of Nazi atrocities largely unknown. While it may be of some interest for the historians to see how some Belgians interacted with Canadian soldiers and media**,** this paper is largely a contribution to the study of allied reactions to the Third Reich and to the historiography of liberation. In order to do so, we can apply questions raised on those topics, [5] and show that the discovery of Breendonk led to a negotiation of these issues month before the liberation of the more famous camps. These questions include: Why and how should atrocities be reported? Did observation of these atrocities foster thoughts about

'There in that place of evil memory'. Early Anglo-Canadian responses to the 'discovery' of *Auffanglager* Breendonk
(continuation)

postwar reconstruction? As we now study liberation as an encounter which must include the agency of the victims, how should we understand the entangled relations between the "liberators" and the "liberated" at Breendonk? And finally, because historians have pointed out how media subsumed the specific plight of the Jews to the larger tragedy of war: Did a narrative specifically about Jews and Breendonk emerge from the coverage?

OVERCOMING INCREDULITY

Shortly after the Nazis conquered Belgium, they re-purposed the old fortress at Breendonk into a place of incarceration. Officially, it was an "Auffanglager," and was placed under the command of SS. The guards were both German and Belgian. The first prisoners arrived in September 1940, and in its first two years, most of the prisoners were Jews without Belgian citizenship. As of the end of the summer of 1942, most of the Jews were transferred to the new transit camp at Mechelen (Malines), from where they were sent to Auschwitz.[6] Thereafter, the inmates of Breendonk were largely political prisoners. In its four years of operation, it is estimated that there were 3500 prisoners in Breendonk. About 1,800 were sent to camps in the east, and in the summer of 1944 a number were sent to transit camps, such as Vught in the Netherlands. Only 40 percent of Breendonk's prisoners survived the war.[7] Few died in Breendonk, but the torture and hunger had certainly weakened them before being sent elsewhere.

_ Matthew Halton, War Correspondent for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation

Image courtesy of David Halton

The Canadian reports on Breendonk came soon after gruesome revelations of Nazi atrocities from the east. In July, the Red Army had liberated the concentration camp and extermination center Majdanek, and Canadian papers and magazines included a number of stories. Some of those stories appeared on the first page, but then receded into the inside pages of the newspapers. The discovery of Majdanek did not get much more coverage, at least in the Anglo-Canadian press, [8] than Breendonk. Given the difference in scope, how could that be? Some historians have suggested that there was a general distrust in the mainstream western media of stories emanating from the Eastern Front. While others have countered that the distrust has been exaggerated,[9] there is still evidence that suspicion existed even in the liberal newspapers. It was only after the discovery of the camps in April 1945 by Western Allies that an editorial in the *Winnipeg Free Press* admitted "The file of these official Russian stories contains nothing more frightful

than the file we are collecting ourselves. There has been no exaggeration in the Russian claims."[10] In other words, the editor acknowledged that they should have been listening all along to the developments in the East with less suspicion.

For the western media, telling the story of Breendonk was less fraught. It was discovered by the Western Allies, it was in an area under the control of the Western Allies, and many of the reporters were very familiar names to audiences in Canada. Matthew Halton, according to his biographer, was at the time at the "pinnacle" of his fame, and "[as] his growing fan mail indicated, many thought of him as a trusted friend, almost a member of the family."[11] Lionel Shapiro, who wrote two articles[12] that appeared in multiple newspapers, was originally from Montreal and another popular "warco", or war correspondent. Even so, editors wanted to highlight the credibility of their reporters in the face of skepticism of atrocity stories. One editorial, published alongside a Shapiro article, emphasized the journalist's trustworthiness: "If they [the details of German atrocities] had not been told by a reliable witness they would be unbelievable. Lionel Shapiro, writer of this article, is reliable. He is a reputable Canadian journalist, formerly with the Montreal *Gazette* and now

– View of the moat and barbed wire surrounding the Breendonck concentration camp. 1944-1945

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Photo archives #11284. Courtesy of Paul Hartman. Copyright of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

correspondent for the North American Newspaper Alliance."[13] Also in the *Gazette* was an article by Arthur Blakely, who, again in the words of the editorial, is "a staff member of the Gazette who is now on active service overseas with the RCAF [Royal Canadian Air Force]"[14]

The reporters described, to varying degrees, the methods of torture practiced in Breendonk. but they also drew out why it was important to convince dubious audiences of these atrocities. Halton began his radio broadcast with with an anecdote to demonstrate the power of the witnessing on a soldier, specifically how the experience reminded him of why he was fighting:

> At the village of Breendonk, a few miles north of Brussels, the Germans had a concentration camp for political prisoners. Many Canadian soldiers are visiting it these days. As I entered the prison yesterday, I met a Canadian who had been with a Maquis guide, and he said 'Once or twice in this war, when things were tough, I wondered what I was fighting for. Now I know'.[15]

The journalist/soldier Arthur Blakeley wished that soldiers would see the atrocities, but he was not convinced they would:

> It is unfortunate, perhaps, that the bulk of the troops fighting for us in this war will see little more of this side of the German occupation than their families and friends whom they have left behind in Montreal, Chicago or Birmingham. They will meet, and deal with, enemy resistance in the field, but when they return only will a handful have seen what lies on the other side of the thick curtain which now hides the atrocities committed by Germany in the name of culture in Western Europe.[16]

EXPLORING THE SIGNIFICANCE

But Halton, Blakeley and the other reporters were, above all, writing for the home front. Halton signed off his radio broadcast with "That's a bit of the story of Breendonk, *part of the story of what we are fighting.*"[17] A number of articles, including those that drew from Halton's broadcast, only gave details of the methods of torture used at Breendonk, and the suffering of the prisoners.[18] Discounting sensationalism, the only purpose could be to remind Canadians of the vicious enemy they faced. These stories about Breendonk came at time when the issue of conscription in Canada was incendiary. The Canadian military establishment called for support for its exhausted fighting forces in Europe. At the time, it specifically looked to send conscripted men from the home front to the warfront after they had been promised that it would not happen. Even fearful of the political consequences, the Prime Minister resisted sending more Canadians overseas as long as he could.[19] Reports from Breendonk could leave no doubt as to the viciousness of the enemy, and the need for Canada, with the Allies, to end Nazi Germany's terror.

In addition to the justification for the war, the atrocities of Breendonk led some to reflect on the postwar world. A few were adamant that the suffering inflicted there should lead to postwar prosecutions. Shapiro ended one of his articles arguing that: "There is enough evidence here to make a ghastly re-enactment one day in the Allied tribunals for war criminals."[20] Some were imagining postwar re-education of the Germans, even while recognizing it would not be an easy task. An editorial in the Ottawa *Evening Citizen* called for a "visible education" of Breendonk, and suggested that "[it]should include a documentary film of Breendonk with the crimes of Gestapo cruelty reconstructed. Hollywood cannot make this film. It has to be actual evidence. It should be shown in Germany, too, where many people will want to forget the nation's guilt."[21] Another editorial wholeheartedly agreed with the decision to turn Breendonk into a site of memory: "That museum in Breendonk should serve as an object lesson far into the future, showing not only what is possible in a war, but chiefly what the Germans are, and have been, capable of doing."[22]

Other articles and editorials focused on what non-Germans could learn from Breendonk. The *Windsor Daily Star* used Breendonk to warn that war is not glamorous, but also cautioned that isolationism is not the answer. Perhaps in response to the debates in Canada over sending more Canadian men overseas, or perhaps a retroactive attack against the appeasement mentality of governments in the 1930s, the editorial declared that

> Isolationism fattens on the theory that the people in one country are not concerned with the killing of soldiers in other parts of the world. Even if this were so, humanity cannot remain impervious to brutalities that shame its very name.[23]

Yet another editorial hoped that the suffering of those at Breendonk, and elsewhere, would command not just a measure of justice, but could be a call for a new humanitarianism:

> [The sufferings] of the victims could be saved futility and made of infinite value to the world's future. For the obligation they place on us is not merely to remember their pain in order that we might pursue and punish tormentors. It is the deeper and more enduring obligation to remember their suffering in order that we may save others from experiencing what they went through.[24]

SURVIVORS, REPORTERS AND SOLDIERS

These were the views expressed by Canadians, but the responses were, in fact, the product of an interaction. Liberation studies no longer treat the survivors as passive recipients of "freedom," but rather as complex agents who worked to shape their own destinies. What this historiography has not, perhaps, acknowledged is how different settings could lead to different experiences of liberation. It may seem that the story

of Breendonk cannot be compared to these other camps, as it was empty when discovered by the British. However, Canadian stories recorded with some amazement, and with general approval, how quickly prisoners and others returned to Breendonk to begin commemorations and plans to establish a permanent memorial. More specifically, some of the reporters spoke of personalized tours. A Canadian soldier mentioned by Halton at the beginning of his broadcast had been through Breendonk with Maquis guide. Halton also describes going through Breendonk, with a guide, "a girl of the resistance." L.S.B Shapiro, a Canadian soldier, wrote of how he walked through Breendonk "with a man who spent six excruciating months in this prison." [25]

These encounters served both sides. For the Canadians, and especially for the journalists, the guides were eyewitnesses who gave legitimacy and immediacy to the stories of the atrocities of Breendonk. But the survivors clearly wanted to tell their stories and organize commemorations. The Canadian reporters document an issue discussed by Bruno Benvindo in a detailed and insightful article on the memory history of Breendonk.[26] Already on 22 September 1944, less than three weeks after the discovery of the camp, a "National association of survivors (*rescapés*) of Breendonk" organized a service at the site of Breendonk.[27] When the survivors of Breendonk were telling their stories, occurring at the same time as they were identifying Belgian traitors, they were purging the enemy and honouring their dead. Moreover, by working with Canadian soldiers and the press, there could be additional benefits. Especially in those early days after the liberation of Belgium, it was known that the Western Allies would have some input into the transition back to Belgian civilian government. But would they try to limit the pursuit and prosecution of war criminals? Tours to Breendonk, and reporting on them, could be a way to harden the resolve of the Allies.

Halton refers specifically, as did others, to tours led by the members of the Resistance. In the turbulent months of September and October members of the Resistance wanted to assert their place in the new Belgium, even as Hubert Pierlot and others who had been in exile had no intention to hand over power. Perhaps, by controlling the narrative of Breendonk, by linking the suffering and sacrifice of the prisoners to the Resistance, these members of the resistance expected to raise their own profile in the eyes of the Western Allies and subsequent Belgian politics. [28]

The resistance would certainly have found an ally in Matthew Halton. According the Halton's biographer, "A constant echo in Matt's wartime journalism was the notion that nobility can spring out of what he called the 'ordure of war.'"[29] Matthew Halton discovered evidence of that nobility while visiting Breendonk:

> Breendonk prison is an obscene place, on the whole. But on the walls of many of the cells you can read an inspiring story of human greatness and courage. You can read the words that have been scratched on the wall by tortured and dying men. You can read

> things like this: "Long live England!" "Speed the victory!" "Russia and victory!" "Death to the Flemish traitors." "The dead will be avenged!" "I have been beaten, and bound, and my feet have been tortured. Long live the U.S.S.R.!"
>
> Here are some others: "God save us for peace and revenge!" "Pray to God and all will be given you!" "Long live the Tommies!" "God give me strength." (...). There in that place of evil memory you wonder for a moment if there's any hope for a world which can produce such monstrosities-and then you see those scrawling inscriptions on the walls, carved there by men and women-some of them are those of women-after tortures too hideous to describe-and you know, then, that while there are devils in some men there are gods in others. I have seldom been more moved by anything than by those scrawlings on the walls....[30]

Despite this sympathetic coverage, there is one group who are not featured in these stories. The Jews, who had been incarcerated there in the first two years are scarcely mentioned. Was this narrative suppressed? Matthew Halton does convey, in an almost incidental remark about a Jewish resistance fighter, that he had learned that Jews were victimized:

> The Germans had found [the Jewish prisoner's graffiti] and erased them—*and what they did to the Jew after that one can only guess*. But whatever they did, they had failed to break that Jew, because he had found a place, low down on the wall, hidden by his blanket, and he had carved the whole message again, in neat, even decorative characters.[31]

He also tells a rumoured story of Jews being buried alive at the bottom of a tree. Clearly, Halton had no difficulty emphasizing the victimization of the Jews. According to the historian Benvindo, from the perspective of Belgian memory history, the memory of the Jews was not suppressed in the immediate postwar period, but only somewhat later when it became government-driven, or "official."[32] Nevertheless, it would be unwise to suggest suppression when we do not have solid evidence of whether the reporters heard much about the Jewish phase. Whatever the case, Breendonk had raised awareness of Nazi atrocities, but not of the victimization of the Jews.

CONCLUSIONS

Contemporary historiography has gone beyond the well-known ghettos, and the well-known camps, and research projects have brought to light literally hundreds of little-known locations. It stands to reason, given the range of size, locations, and functions, that places of incarceration will have not just wartime trajectories that are both distinct and overlapping, but will also have distinct and overlapping experiences of liberation and commemoration. Although the liberated extermination camps in the east, and the well-known concentration camps in Germany such as Belsen, Buchenwald and Dachau have been examined for the impact they had on

Allied soldiers and for the ways in which journalists confronted the revelations, in this paper I argue that the dramatic site of Breendonk, discovered by Western Allies during the liberation of Belgium, already prompted evaluations and re-evaluations of the war, and human atrocities more generally. Although Breendonk was empty on its discovery, the former prisoners nevertheless quickly made Breendonk a site of memory for Belgian postwar political identities, and so it is not surprising that they worked to shape the responses of the Western Allies. Not all journalists showed the same acumen and passion of Matthew Halton, but to a greater or lesser degree the story of Breendonk became a symbol of Nazi atrocities in the two months after its discovery.

The power of that symbol lasted somewhat longer, too. In early 1945, the Supreme Headquarters of the Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF) issued a report on German atrocities against civilians in Belgium, which was largely about Breendonk.[33] It includes the recommendation: "It is suggested that readers of this report visit the camp as it is impossible to convey the real atmosphere of this place on paper."[34] In early 1945, there was another flurry of articles about Breendonk, and another broadcast by Halton. He wrote to A.E. Powley, who oversaw the CBC's war correspondents: "Yes, I should do a follow-up on Breendonk, especially as so many people at home said aren't-these-atrocity-stories-all-propaganda."[35] Film footage that was taken at Breendonk became part of the evidence used by the prosecution at the Nuremberg trials.[36] The potency of Breendonk as an indictment of Nazi atrocities was apparent at the time, but largely disappeared from non-Belgian memory as the Western Allies and media encountered Buchenwald, and Belsen, and others like them. This paper challenges that disappearance in order to add nuance to the study of the liberation of the camps and of the western reactions to the atrocities committed by the Nazis and their supporters.

Richard Menkis is associate professor at the University of British Columbia (Canada). His research focuses on migration, borderlands, transnational history, race, religion and ethnicity. His previous publications include: In a 'Land of Hope': *Documents on the Canadian Jewish Experience, 1627-1923,* Toronto: Champlain Society/University of Toronto Press, 2023; "Canadian Jewry since the Second World War,» in R. Brym and R. Schnoor (eds.), *The Ever-Dying People? Canada's Jews in Comparative Perspective,* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2023, pp. 13-28; and "'There were cries of joy, some of sorrow': Canadian Jewish soldiers and early encounters with survivors," *Canadian Jewish Studies*, 27, 2019, pp. 125-138, 2019. For his research, he received, amongst others, the Louis Rosenberg Distinguished Service Award (2018) and the Dean of Arts Award (2023).

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Photo archives #11281. Courtesy of Paul Hartman. Copyright of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

_ View of prisoner graffiti scratched on the walls of Breendonk concentration camp, 1944-1945

(1) The broadcast is accessible at https://www.cbc.ca/player/play/audio/1.3626943, accessed 10 May 2024 (hereafter: Halton, "CBC broadcast").

(2) Stone, Dan, *The liberation of the camps: the end of the Holocaust and its aftermath,* New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015, p. 65.

(3) See *Getuigen. Tussen Geschiedenis en Herinnering,* 132, 2021, for some recent literature.

(4) James Deem, for example, felt the need for an English-language volume for that reason. Deem, James, *The prisoners of Breendonk: personal histories from a World War II concentration camp,* Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2015. For an excellent summary of the history of the camp, based on a contribution entry to a German multi-volume history of the camps, see Markus, Meckl, "Le camp de transit de Breendonk," *Bulletin trimestriel de la Fondation Auschwitz,* 86(1), 2005, pp. 131-147.

(5) The questions are drawn from Stone, *Liberation* and Zeev W. Mankowitz, *The Survivors of the Holocaust in Occupied German: Life between Memory and Hope*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009; Feinstein, Margarete Myers, *Holocaust survivors in postwar Germany, 1945-1957,* New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010 and Celinscak, Mark, *Distance from the Belsen Heap: allied forces and the liberation of a Nazi concentration camp,* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015.

(6) Meckl, "Breendonk," p. 134.

(7) Meckl, "Breendonk," p. 147.

(8) The Canadian Jewish press, in English and especially Yiddish, gave more coverage to Majdanek than the non-Jewish mainstream press. See Goutor, David, "The Canadian media and the 'discovery' of the Holocaust, 1944-1945," *Canadian Jewish Studies/Études juives canandiennes* 1996-1997(4-5), 88-119; for the differences in coverage, see Margolis, Rebecca, "A review of the Yiddish media: responses of the Jewish immigrant community in Canada," in L. Ruth Klein (ed.), *Nazi Germany, Canadian responses: confronting antisemitism in the shadow of war*, Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2012.

(9) Frisse, Ulrich, "The "Bystanders' perspective": *the Toronto Daily Star* and its coverage of the persecution of Jews and the Holocaust in Canada, 1933-1945," *Yad Vashem Studies,* 39(1), 2011, p. 213-243.

(10) From 21 April 1945, as cited in Goutor, "Canadian media," p. 94.

(11) Halton, David, *Dispatches from the front: Matthew Halton, Canada's voice at war*, Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2014, p. 234.

(12) Shapiro, L.S.B., "Belgian martyrs of Gestapo rule parade to former torture scene," *The Gazette* (Montreal), 27 September 1944, p. 9 and Shapiro, L.S.B., "Camp in Belgium Nazi Sadism Proof," *The Gazette* (Montreal), 9 October 1944, p. 21.

(13) Editorial, *The Winnipeg Tribune*, 17 October 1944, p. 5.

(14) Editorial, *The Gazette* (Montreal), 18 October 1944, p. 8.

(15) Halton, "CBC broadcast".

(16) Blakely, Arthur, "Evidence found in Brussels flats of hidden tortures of Gestapo, *The Gazette* (Montreal), 17 October 1944, pp. 13-14.

(17) Halton, "CBC broadcast." Emphasis mine.

(18) Newspapers in the largest cities (Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver) and smaller centres (e.g. Carbon Alberta) summarized the Halton broadcast, focusing almost completely on his descriptions of the atrocities.

(19) For a brief summary of the issues, in its longer Canadian context, see Iarocci, Andrew and Keshen, Jeff, *A nation in conflict: Canada and the two world wars,* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015, pp. 38-40.

(20) Shapiro, "Belgian Martyrs," p. 9

(21) "Editorial," *Evening Citizen* (Ottawa), 17 November 1944, p. 24.

(22) "Editorial," *The Windsor Daily Star*, 5 October 1944, p. 4.

(23) "Editorial," *The Windsor Daily Star*, 5 October 1944, p. 4.

(24) "Editorial, *The Gazette* (Montreal), 18 October 1944, p. 8.

(25) Shapiro, "Belgian Martyrs," p. 9.

(26) Benvindo, Bruno, "Les autorités du passé: mémoires (in)disciplinées du camp de Breendonk, 1944-2010," *Journal of Belgian History* 42(2/3), 2012, p. 48-77.

(27) Benvindo, "Les autorités du passé," p. 59.

(28) Conway, Martin, "The end(s) of memory: memories of the Second World War in Belgium," *Journal of Belgian* History, 42(2/3), 2012, p. 175.

(29) Halton, *Matthew Halton*, p. 212.

(30)Halton, "CBC broadcast" .

(31) Halton, "CBC broadcast, " my emphasis.

(32) Benvindo, "Autorités," p. 57-8.

(33) Headquarters 21 Army Group, *Report on atrocities committed by the Germans against the civilian population of Belgium* (February, 1945).

(34) *Report on atrocities*, p. 11.

(35) Halton to Powley, 6 January 1945, cited in Connor Sweazey, "Broadcasting Canada's War: How the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation Reported the Second World War," M.A. thesis, University of Calgary (2017), p. 136.

(36) "Nazi Concentration Camps-Prosecution Exhibit # 230," accessed at https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn1000183, 1 July 2024.

Jewish Allies and Survivors in Liberated Antwerp, 1944–1945

→ Veerle Vanden Daelen

Eighty years after the liberation, this contribution sheds light on the encounters of Jews entering Antwerp with the Allied forces and local Jews, who had survived the war in hiding or returned to the city from a safe haven or as camp survivors. Largely based on the correspondence of Allied Jews in Antwerp, this article delves into ad-hoc established aid systems and the revival of community and religious life, and provides an account of Antwerp's Jewish life immediately after the liberation. It also sheds light on the relationships between "local" and "Allied" Jewish populations in the city and how both "local" and "Allied" Jews played crucial roles in the challenging times after the liberation and how they mutually assisted each other.

FIRST LIBERATION ENCOUNTERS

British Allied forces liberated Antwerp on 4 September 1944. American, Canadian and Polish troops followed in their wake, engaging in a battle to defend this strategic Western European port city, which fell under severe bombings from October 1944 through March 1945.[1] As the Allies entered the city, they were welcomed by the local population.[2] In Antwerp and elsewhere, Jews were among the liberating forces. In the US army, for example, the number of rabbi chaplains had grown from 29 at the outbreak of the Second World War to 329, with 147 liberal, 96 conservative and 86 orthodox rabbi chaplains.[3] The Canadian army included almost 17,000 Jews and nine chaplains, including Chaplain Samuel Cass, a Toronto-born Conservative rabbi who arrived in Belgium on 23 October 1944 and would also be in Antwerp.[4] According to Ofipresse, an estimated 1,278,000 Jews served in the Allied armies, including Belgian Jews and Jews who had lived in Belgium at the eve of the war.[5] As of July 1945, the Jewish Brigade came to Belgium and had a section stationed in Antwerp.[6]

Upon the liberation of Antwerp, a few hundred Jews who had survived the war in hiding in the city – the small remnant of the estimated 35,500 at the eve of the war – left their hiding places. The impact of the liberation and their meeting their liberators cannot be underestimated. Myriam Nebenzahl, a 13-year-old Jewish girl,

collected signatures of five military men of the liberating forces in her poetry album and wrote above them, in Dutch, "in memory of the Tommies at the liberation of 4 September 1944".[7] Other survivors, such as resistance leader Jozef Sterngold, were immediately in touch with the Allied forces to negotiate support for the Jewish survivors, trying to secure goods and buildings.[8]

While Sterngold was in touch with the Allied forces in general and young Myriam collected signatures of the liberators, the guestbook at the Tachkemoni school starts with five pages of signatures from at least 65 Allied Jews (over 25 from the UK and the US, nine Canadian, one Dutch, one Polish and two unknown nationalities). Most Americans are on the last page, dated 1 November 1944 and entitled "American forces visiting".[9] Clearly, Jewish life, which had been officially erased from the city by the Nazi regime and its collaborators, had immediately (re-)organized itself. In this transition period from war to peace, it was very often the Jewish soldiers from the Allied forces who assisted local Jewish communities. They were – often to their own surprise – much earlier and faster in contact with the survivors than were the organized overseas welfare, organized by the JDC and others.[10]

Especially those speaking Yiddish had a high chance of having a common language with the local Jewish population. Whereas communication between the Allies and the local population was not always easy, a considerable number of Jews indeed had a common language, Yiddish. Interestingly, this was essentially a given for Eastern European Jews who either had held on to their mother tongue after their migration or who had recently migrated. It meant that the "integrated" Jews from the Allied armies had less chance to find a common language than the recent immigrants or the Orthodox who had kept Yiddish as a language among themselves. Deborah Dash Moore notes the difficulties of the French Jews to speak with the Jews of the Allied forces because of their lack of a common language (the former not speaking English, the latter not speaking French), and Laura Hobson Faure observes a reversing of roles and hierarchies due to languages in France, where the French Jews saw themselves in the position to ask for translation to the "foreign" local Jews in France for what the Allied Jews said in Yiddish.[11] As Moore mentions, "conversations flourished in a babel of languages".[12] However, in a general meeting of Jews – both civilian and military – in Antwerp on 3 December 1944, Chaplain Sandhaus "spoke very well in Yiddish on the subject of unity."[13] Daniel Isaacman (born in Philadelphia on 8 October 1924, who arrived in Belgium, presumably Antwerp, in the second half of November 1944, coming from France) wrote on 6 December 1944 from Antwerp, describing how he, a 20-year-old American GI, could speak to an 18-year-old Jewish survivor girl in Antwerp in Yiddish: "I can now most certainly see the point of view held by the extreme Yiddishists – Yiddish truly is the international language".[14] For Orthodox Jews, this remains the case, and this was also true for Communist Jews in the immediate post-war period.[15] A large number of Jews in Belgium still had Yiddish as their main language and as a central part of their identity. In certain

situations, Yiddish was even used as the vehicular language to identify fellow Jews[16], and would also be a language to circumvent censorship (see later).

ALLIED JEWS REPORTING ABOUT THE SURVIVORS AND THE DIRE NEED FOR NEWS FROM RELATIVES

As Allied soldiers wrote home, they mention multiple survivor accounts. Not all are entirely accurate, but some are spot-on, or a mix of both.[17] David Heaps' letter to his father about the Jews of Antwerp, for example, mixed facts and fiction: "Apparently they are practically exterminated. The men and women were taken out and tortured and shot – and many others who escaped this were thrown into the water and drowned. A few escaped by remaining indoors, hidden for almost the entire time since 1940. Children were snatched from their mothers and shipped away with no traces left."[18] While much of what Heaps wrote is not mentioned in other sources, it is a source of what information possibly was being said, and how this information and the situation the Allies were confronted with led to strong feelings of hatred and revenge against the perpetrators, as Heaps also wrote to his father: "I would have no mercy on these swine and would kill them all. They are sub-human brutes and sadists. [...] as soon as possible they must be completely ferreted out and punished."[19]

It is important to keep in mind the time-gap between the liberation of Antwerp and the liberation of the camps: these accounts and feelings are not yet "corroborated" by their later framing into the larger picture (after the liberation of the concentration camps and annihilation centers). And they report not only about what they heard about the war years, but also about the situation as they witnessed it. David (Doov) Stein, who spent eight months (from 9 November 1944 until 10 June 1945) in Antwerp with the US Allied forces, wrote on 15 November 1944: "I went into the building of the Jewish Committee. A group of people were standing in line, waiting for the distribution of a hot meal. It was obvious that these people had not lived like this in earlier years. I went into the office with the secretary, who told me of the terrible problems they face. The people have no homes, no clothes, no food and no money."[20] Apart from the hardships, he also reports about the community-building activities, and the contacts of the Jews among the Allied forces and the local Jewish population. As such the Allied Jews provide information on Jewish life during the war (from the witness accounts they heard) and describe what they had witnessed themselves. Both Daniel Isaacman and David Stein – who left extensive correspondence – do this, but they mostly report on their own worlds of interest, Isaacman about left-wing Zionist life, the Mizrachi children's home and the diamond business, and Stein, former vice-president of Young Israel in Manhattan, about Orthodox life in all its aspects.[21]

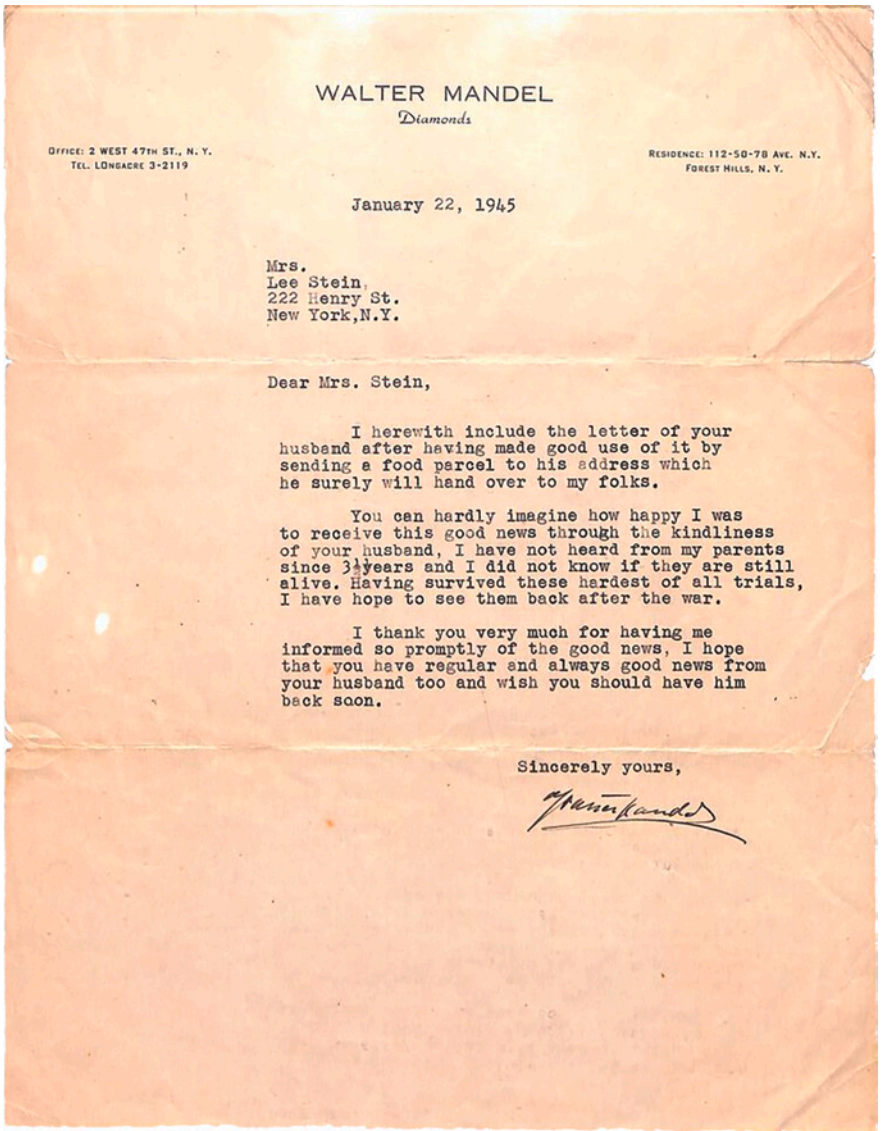
Similar reports could be found by early "returnees", Jews from Antwerp coming back from a safe haven abroad. However, I am only aware of Romi Goldmuntz's

account of his late 1944 visit.[22] In the meantime, Allied Jewish personnel encouraged the survivors to keep and spread evidence about the war years of persecution, and the publication of Stein's letters in the *Forwards*, for example, was also a source of hope for the survivors.[23]

Letters and communication networks were used to help Jewish survivors, many of whom had been left without news of relatives for months and years, reconnect with their families and launch further searches, which was especially difficult because of censorship. So far, this aspect seems to have received little to no attention by those who studied the Jewish encounters in liberated Europe. The first time I saw this explicitly addressed was in Shifra Stahl's work on her father, the previously quoted David Stein. From her father's correspondence it is clear how desperate survivors were to receive information, but also how difficult it was to transmit this crucial information because of censorship, which was mainly in place for military reasons.[24] In an interview in December 1973, Stein stated that "because there was an army regulation against giving names, I thought of the idea of writing in Yiddish. I assumed that the Yiddish censor, realizing that I'm not betraying any army secrets, would allow this mail to go through. [...] It worked very effectively."[25] Further in the interview, he returns to this topic and says: "the company censors were very busy and any mention of a name let alone a place they would cut out or call me in and tell me to cut down the letter. [...] if you write in Yiddish it goes to the base censors. I assumed that the Yiddish censors would be sympathetic to the cause, and it seemed to have worked, and every [Yiddish] letter I wrote went through."[26] The censorship is very visible in the letters of Daniel Isaacman from Philadelphia. He wrote in English and many of his 1944 letters had fragments literally cut from them.[27]

Some of Stein's letters – it is not clear in which languages, but surely English, among others – went lost, as we learn from his letter of 16 November 1944: "When I came to my boss, the Captain, I saw immediately that this wasn't going to turn out well. He was holding a stack of letters I had written. Shouting furiously, he gave me a proper mi-shebeirach [literally "to request a blessing from God", here used very ironically], saying that I had no right doing any of the things I had reported in my letter. 'This is not a charity institution, it's a military organization!' he told me, and refused to return my letters. He confiscated not only the letters that I had written to relatives of the living Jews, but also the very important letter to Young Israel in which I had asked them to send me a guarantee from a well-known American bank so that the money that had been collected from American Jews for the Belgian Jewish Committee would be released".[28] Nevertheless, Stein continued and his family in the US became engaged in helping spread the news and contact the right people: "I don't think I need tell you how thrilled some of these people were to get news of their mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, etc., especially so since this was the first word they had had in several years."[29]

Richard Menkis also refers to Chaplain Samuel Cass in regards to what Cass called "the great hunt", meaning "the overwhelming desire of liberated Jews to find relatives": "Soldiers who met survivors were inundated with desperate requests to help find relatives."[30] David Stein wrote on 13 November, in his account of the first legal meeting of the local liberated Jews in Antwerp: "The Canadian Chaplain Cass and I were bombarded with names and addresses of relatives from abroad."[31] The gratitude of those receiving good news after all years of uncertainty and fear was



WALTER MANDEL
Diamonds

OFFICE: 2 WEST 47TH ST., N. Y.
TEL. LONGACRE 3-2119

RESIDENCE: 112-50-78 AVE. N.Y.
FOREST HILLS, N. Y.

January 22, 1945

Mrs.
Lee Stein,
222 Henry St.
New York,N.Y.

Dear Mrs. Stein,

I herewith include the letter of your husband after having made good use of it by sending a food parcel to his address which he surely will hand over to my folks.

You can hardly imagine how happy I was to receive this good news through the kindliness of your husband, I have not heard from my parents since 3½ years and I did not know if they are still alive. Having survived these hardest of all trials, I have hope to see them back after the war.

I thank you very much for having me informed so promptly of the good news, I hope that you have regular and always good news from your husband too and wish you should have him back soon.

Sincerely yours,

Walter Mandel

KD, Stein Coll., KD_00943

_ Letter from Walter Mandel to Lee Stein, 22 January, 1945, thanking her for informing him that his parents were alive in Antwerp

enormous. "You can hardly imagine how happy I was to receive this good news", wrote Walter Mandel to Lee Stein, David's sister, on 22 January 1945, after having received news that his parents were alive.[32] Like so many others, Mandel had been without any news about his parents for years. At an occasion in Antwerp where a Polish Jewish doctor, a member of the Polish forces, had assured people that they would be reunited with deported family members, Cass wished to stick to "facts and news" instead of "raising hopes which ultimately for most of them will not come true", which he considered "adding insult to injury".[33]

Whereas in the first months after the liberation there was no or very little news, this slowly changed over the coming months, when the few repatriates from the East arrived. On 26 April 1945, Reb Rottenberg wrote to Stein: "I wrote him in my last letter about my two nieces who are reported to have been put into either a convent or with non-Jewish families. In case he didn't receive my first letter I'll repeat the details here. The older girl, Ruth (Ruthie) was born June 30, 1930, and the second Lucie (Leah), was born in 1933, I believe in September. The father's name was David Klug, and the mother, my sister, was Eva. Their last address was Van Leentstraat 32, but it's possible that more recently they lived in our house at Milisstraat 49. You can check that out at the neighbors. Is it possible that they are with Goyim [non-Jews] in Heide or Kalmthout? In any case, I ask you, *lemaan Hashem* [for G-d's sake] to see to it that everything possible is done to find the children. I can't beg you enough to do this. It would at least be a small-scale rescue!"[34] However, David Stein had received the first letter in good order and had already answered on 18 April: "Tell [Rabbi Shlomo Rottenberg] that the two children that he inquired about, Ruth and Lucie Klug, are written down as deported, and are not found on the other lists which I studied all day yesterday".[35] David Klug, a diamond cleaver, was 37 years old when he was deported on transport XVII, on 31 October 1942. His wife, Chana Chava (Eva Anna Rottenberg), Rabbi Shlomo Rottenberg's sister, was 35 years old when she was deported with their two daughters, Ruth (13 years old) and Lucie (10 years old), on transport 22B on 20 September 1943. They were taken from Mechelen to Auschwitz, where they were murdered.[36]

To retrieve this kind of information Stein went to Brussels, as he "got tired of waiting for the lists and addresses that they promised to send me, and I decided to go and wake up the sleepy community leaders. First I went to the General Committee [in Brussels] and asked for some addresses. There they allowed me to search through all the records by myself. They have a special filing cabinet with all the deported Jews. If someone returns home his card is immediately removed. If the card is still there, it's not a good sign."[37]

The first stories from survivors returning to Antwerp appeared by the end of April in Stein's letters. On 30 April 1945, we read: "One of those present at the gathering was Shlomo Schick, who returned from a labor camp in Auschwitz, Poland,

this week. When the Russians were approaching the camp, the Germans took all healthy slave laborers with them. He and 22 others succeeded in jumping from the train. He told about the barbarity of the Nazis which we have all heard so much about, but which is all the more horrible when it is heard from someone who has suffered so much for so long a time and witnessed it himself. He patiently answered the thousands of questions everyone asked about family members. He looks quite normal, but his eyes are always damp. He came without anything and he still has nothing."[38]

Stein further testified: "People coming from Poland tell such horrible stories that you shake with grief and can't possibly carry on a normal conversation with them."[39] He adds a story on the still-contested stories about soap being made of the victims' remains, and news on murdered Antwerpians: "Among those who have just returned are three women. One of them brought a piece of soap, which the Nazis gave them to wash themselves. She swears that she knew the people from whom the soap was made. She says that she herself saw Einhorn's wife being thrown into the crematorium, but nobody has the heart to tell him."[40] In his letter of 17 May 1945, David writes about "a Mr. Fleischer who just arrived from Auschwitz", whom he met at Einhorn's house and who told him that he had worked at the crematoria in Auschwitz-Birkenau, "where he witnessed the incineration of four and a half million people, most of them Jews. Those who were ill were thrown in alive. The others were partially asphyxiated by gas, but were still quivering."[41] Both the numbers – historians today estimate that 1.1 million people perished in Auschwitz – and the procedures are incorrect, but it is important to be aware that this was information passed along by the returnees (see also the earlier letter by Heaps).[42]

In his letter of 21 May 1945, Stein reports: "Generally speaking, rather than improving, the situation in Antwerp is getting worse. Many people are now returning. However, they return ill, poor, and alone. They must be provided with the best and most appropriate medical care as well as all vital necessities. The funding for the others will therefore have to be decreased. The news that they bring from the various camps of the thousands who will never return is creating such despair in town that you can't look anyone in the face. Everyone remembers their own loved ones, and can't decide whether or not they should hold on to empty hopes that they will return. So [their] beds stand there, still empty. The warmth of just such a home would do so much to revive those who arrive without homes, yet they must sleep on the straw sacks at the Committee and eat in its community kitchen."[43] He further reports that the problems in Belgium were greater because of "the constant influx of survivors from concentration camps. Belgium is supposed to be the least antisemitic of all liberated countries, so many make their way here even though they're total strangers. They come with nothing more than striped rags or a German overcoat over a bare back. I can supply *some* men's underwear. No one, it seems, takes care of the women."[44]

KD, Give Them a Face portrait collection

KD, Give Them a Face portrait collection

– Ruth (top) and Lucie Klug

Herbert Weiner, an American Jewish officer, described in a letter to a friend his experiences at the relief center on the Lange Leemstraat in June 1945: "Yesterday, I sat on a little cot, one of the many set up for those who have just returned from the death camps, while a young woman wandered through with a hopeless look in her eyes, asking everyone if any children have yet come back. As you know, almost all the little Jewish children have been taken away and have been gassed. Little children, just like your son, Sachki, and your little girl, Sid, all were taken away and none of them are coming back. I know you have read all this, but you haven't seen this mother wandering through and asking if any children have yet come back. And the worst part of it all is the way they answered her. As we would tell each other that it will rain tomorrow, so did they tell her that none had yet returned. Every day a new creature resembling a human being wanders into the shelter dressed in some rags he has torn off the body of a dead German dog, but no children come back. No one comforted the mother. There was no heart to feel with her because every single heart there was broken [...]. Last night I was sitting in a circle while a man told a woman that he had last seen her husband in a hospital in the concentration camp. He visited him one day and when he came the next, they told him he had been taken away; he was ill and could not work and became a 'Muselmensch' [Muselmann is more often used as a term], that is, he was killed. Remember that word 'Muselmensch'. It is an integral part of our language now. All but a faint remnant of our people here became 'Muselmenschen'. The woman heard what she had already suspected, went into a corner and cried quietly. Nobody went to her. Nobody looked, for she had three small children alive with her. Imagine that, three small children! Few were as fortunate as that".[45]

SETTING UP AID SYSTEMS

Since their arrival, Jews within the Allied forces tried to provide ad-hoc support, not only to distribute information, but also to provide food, clothing, etc. As individual initiatives, they could not rely on steady funding or an organized network for information and supplies. Several Jewish welfare organizations, with the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee[46] as the largest, next to the World Jewish Congress and other initiatives, such as the Orthodox Vaad Hatzalah and the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS), soon followed the Allied forces to organize humanitarian aid. However, the modest Allied individual initiatives also played an important role, especially – but not only – in the beginning.[47] Moreover, the Allied Jews were in touch with the organizations and in Stein's letters we often see that he is in touch with HIAS, Vaad Hatzalah or other initiatives.[48]

For David Stein, it was key to try to receive as much help as he could get, also by asking his family to send him packages with supplies. His letters are full of the "magic words" "SEND ME A PACKAGE", which would allow his family to send him things. As an Orthodox Jewish GI, he could understand certain Orthodox needs that

others could not, and he tried to address them as much as possible. He answered the 1973 interview question "What kind of supplies did you bring?" with: "Well, for example, one liberty ship soldier sailor gave me a box of candles. Now, there were no candles whatsoever in the city of Antwerp at the time. They were plumber's candles. Nevertheless, it was a godsend to the people to receive candles. Especially to the Orthodox to whom candles meant so much. And also there were blackouts [...] when I brought those candles I was like an angel."[49]

Stein also often reports on how he tried to collect money from his fellow GIs – Jews and non-Jews – but often to no avail. It is also clearly evidenced in Daniel Isaacman's letters that Allied Jews tried to help, also alarming the US homeland about lack of means for Jewish needs.[50] This did result in support being sent overseas. As such, Jewish military personnel acted as a pressure group, trying to secure funding and other things for specific needs they witnessed first-hand. By the Spring of 1945, the connection between the Allied Jews and the local Jewish aid committees seemed to have diminished somewhat. Stein wrote on 30 April 1945: "No chaplain comes to the Sunday meetings at the Committee anymore, but the Jewish soldiers still all come and wander around like sheep without a shepherd".[51] However, both David Stein and Daniel Isaacman, and probably others too, continued providing news and support.

JEWISH HOLIDAYS AND RELIGIOUS SERVICES

Since the liberation, the Allied Jewish personnel had helped provide the most urgent basic care and were a source of information and documentation; they were also present at and helped organize the first observances of Jewish holidays after liberation.[52] Menkis states that "celebrating Jewish holidays and overseeing the repair and rededication of synagogues became important moments of renewal."[53] This was the same in Antwerp, where the first services were organized by the local Jewish community together with Allied Jews. The first services were held by Chaplain Jaffo from Manchester, who had arrived in Antwerp with the Allied forces. The general services were held in the intact Eisenman Synagogue. Services were also organized in the Beth Hamidrash of the Terliststraat, albeit only on the first floor, as the ground floor had been plundered.[54] For Yom Kippur 1944 (26-27 September), a service was organized in the synagogue of Oostenstraat 43.[55]

A Shabbat service was a common and important first type of religious experience after the war. It was part of the marking of being liberated.[56] It also contributed to Jews feeling connected to each other: local Jews and Allied Jews felt part of world Jewry, of something surpassing their own local group.[57] It all had something ritual, something surpassing religion or different religious or political convictions. Chaplain Samuel Cass of the Canadian Army was the first chairman during Mincha (afternoon prayer) on 13 November 1944: "Everyone crowded into the hall: women and

children; old and young, men with bearded faces and men with bare heads: soldiers from all nations. Altogether there were about 300 civilians and 100 soldiers, mostly from England and Canada."[58] Cass also introduced a young chaplain from the Polish Army, Rabbi Heshel Klepfish, who spoke an eloquent Yiddish.[59] The gathering also saw a Poale Zion member unexpectedly rise and make an announcement; this was "protested bitterly" by a young man from another Zionist group, upon which "Chaplain Cass called for order and for the singing of 'Hatikvah'. Everybody sang – even the Agudists."[60]

While Stein in his first month reported on the heated debate among his fellow Orthodox Jews about whether or not to cooperate with the "not-so-religious Jewish Committee", he equally reminded the local Jews of "the importance of unity", something which was hoped and strived for by many after the Shoah.[61] The call for unity sounded all the stronger in witnessing the amount of destruction: "Yesterday [14 November 1944] I actually did go into a *shul* [synagogue]. Apparently, no one had yet been in this *shul* since the Nazi hoodlums had wreaked their devastation [the "Antwerp pogrom", on 14 April 1941]. They had taken everything of any value whatsoever. Not a bench or lamp was left. The *Aron Kodesh* [Torah shrine] was burnt and the windows were smashed. Strewn about on the floor were torn remnants of prayer books [...], etc. The memorabilia I took were two pieces of a burnt *Sefer Torah* [Torah scroll], [and other religious items]. I'm sending all of the above home."[62]

The local Jewish Committee also organized services in the reception center of the Lange Leemstraat, for example between 10 and 18 December 1944: "a Chanukah Service was organized to which Jewish Officers and men of the British and American Forces were invited. This was very successful and had a good effect on the morale of the unfortunate victims of Nazi oppression."[63] Canadian forces were also present, as we know from the letters of David Stein, and the fact that Chaplain Cass had written in the Chanukah 1944 newsletter to the Jewish soldiers of the First Canadian Army to bring chocolates and sweets for parties with civilians in Antwerp, Ghent and Breda.[64] Interactions with children around Chanukah were captured by official photographers.[65]

Interestingly, the date of the liberation also mattered in the sense that for French and Belgian liberated Jews in the autumn and winter of 1944, the first high holidays were Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur and Chanukah, whereas the liberation of the concentration camps and annihilation centers took place only later, and the first Jewish holiday celebrated was Purim.[66] This led to totally different characteristics marking the first Jewish holidays after liberation, as these are very different holidays. Most likely, these first Purim celebrations after the liberation had the most "Hitler"-presence ever, even in the Orthodox children's home (Tiefenbrunner) in Brussels in March 1945. Stein writes: "A professional photographer came to the

children's home and took pictures of the costumed children. I dressed up as a [civilian] man, and Yoina Tiefenbrunner became a soldier. 'Hitler' was there too, but his name is Itche Broner, about 19 years old, who teaches the children and can do just about anything. He directed their Purim carnival and was also the main actor in Sunday's Purim play."[67]

These religious services, especially on Jewish holidays, were also, as Menkis states, the most common moments for contacts between Jewish soldiers and survivors.[68] The high holidays and other religious services were attended by both local and Allied Jews. Being in the male world of the army, the possibility to socialize with the local Jewish population also meant meeting young Jewish women. And so, indeed, some encounters led to romance and quite a few couples were formed. This was the case for Felicia Ramet in Antwerp. She met Ben Otis, a Canadian Jewish soldier who served in the air force, during the high holidays, on Yom Kippur of 1944 in the Antwerp synagogue of the Oostenstraat. They fell in love, it was a *coup de foudre*, and they stayed in touch when he moved to other places with his army unit.[69] Together with her mother Sura, Felicia was hoping for the return of her father Judka and her brother Nathan. Since the liberation on 4 September, they had waited for months to receive news of their deported loved ones. As time went by and with the terrible reports from the few returned survivors since early April, hope was scarce. Not knowing whether Judka and Nathan would ever return and if so, when, Felicia and Ben Otis married on 15 May 1945[70]. Just one week later, on 23 May 1945, Natan returned to Antwerp, having survived multiple camps and death marches. He had to bring the terrible news that his father had perished in the camps. The couple moved to Canada on 5 June 1946, on Natan's 21st birthday. Daniel (Danny) Isaacman similarly found the love of his life during his time in Antwerp. He describes in his letters home how he had fallen in love with Clara Heller, and tells his parents he is going to marry her.[71] This was hardly unusual; in Paris, at least ten Jewish marriages included an American spouse in 1945, which represented at least five percent of the Jewish weddings in the city that year.[72] Robin Judd's *Between Two Worlds. Jewish War Brides after the Holocaust* provides a record of these romances in times of liberation, grief and the start of a new life.[73]

Congregation Shaar Hashomayim Museum and Archives

_ Chanukah party, 17 December 1944, Antwerp, Belgium. This photo, taken by Canadian military, shows the Chanukah, Canadian soldiers and local Jewish child survivors, among them Regina Sluszny and her oldest brother Marcel (Max Bernard), the two children on the left

Jewish Allies and Survivors in Liberated Antwerp, 1944-1945 (continuation)

AN INSIGHT INTO ANTWERP'S JEWISH LIFE

The Allied Jewish accounts also provide descriptions of Jewish life in the city. In his 17 June 1945 letter, the previously mentioned Herbert Weiner wrote about the shelter to Jewish institutions in the United States: "But, Gentlemen of J.I.R. [Jewish Institute of Religion], you should have seen the richness of a Jewish Sabbath here. You should have seen these people, some of whom kept Kashrut throughout their captivity, praying. There is more Hebrew spoken here than in any of our seminaries. There is more pride in their Jewishness locked up in this shelter than in all of New York City".[74]

However, the letters from Daniel Isaacman also give proof of vibrant Zionist life, both religious but certainly also left-wing non-religious (Gordonia, Hashomer Hatzair, Poale Zion, etc.). On 4 December 1944 he wrote:

> That which I experienced last night can hardly be written down to express the feelings and emotions that accompanied them. The surge of emotions, the pride and the wonder of it all. Last night I sang Hatikva for the first time since I have been away from home, sang it with some 40 odd chaverim. I heard it sung, sang it myself, with

_ Antwerp (after 23 May 1945 and before 6 June 1946). From left to right: Ben Otis, Felicia Otis-Ramet, Nathan Ramet

KD, Natan Ramet Coll.

> more expression, more warmth than ever before in my life. The true meaning, and understanding of Tikva, of hope, was evident. I could see it in their faces, hear it in their voices, a marked trust and hope in Eretz. Here were 40 chaverim who knew what this hymn of ours contained and meant. Yes, last night I met the remnants of the Jewish population here, heard their stories of agony, of suffering, saw and came to understand their situation as of to-day, and most important, met the Jewish youth here, a youth devotedly Zionistic.[75]

In the same letter he describes a social gathering for soldiers at the local Jewish community center. In fact, as written in the record description of his archival collection, it was during his time in Belgium "that Isaacman developed his strong ties to the cause of Zionism".[76]

Most information we hear about, though, concerns Orthodox life, partly because of the very active writings of David Stein – by far the most active letter writer. Stein always kept kosher and tried to organize a minyan wherever he was, such as for Yom Kipur in Normandy in 1944: "I organized a minyan. We had 9 definite Jews and one half-Jew – he said his mother was Jewish, and we included him in the minyan."[77] Stein's reports point to topics considered of utmost importance and urgency for Orthodox Jews. One of these was the return of Jewish children to a Jewish environment. In April 1945, Stein went to Brussels to "to see if anyone is doing something to carry out the request for a list of names of children in *Goyishe* hands", but found that nobody was.[78] However, in the same letter he also reported about the hardships of the Orthodox homes: "I went to Tiefenbrunner in the Children's Home, and arrived just as they were eating lunch. I ate with the children, who all recognized me from Purim. Then their clothes were very funny, as it was Purim. Today, however, it was tragic. Boys wear girls' clothing because they have no other clothes to wear. Not one of them is dressed properly. Anything that can be called 'clothes' is needed."[79] The dire lack of means to receive the children within the Jewish community was indeed one of the key reasons why JDC and other organizations were reluctant to retrieve Jewish children from non-Jewish homes, an argument the Orthodox did not agree with.[80] Stein was very engaged in the "children's question", as we also read from letters in May 1945 concerning, among other things his attempts to have the Hudes brothers moved from a priest and into an Orthodox setting, and giving overviews of the number of Jewish children in non-Jewish environments, as well as the attempts and contacts with international aid organizations and individuals to organize Orthodox homes or foster families for them. The Jewish Brigade would be likewise involved in recovering Jewish war orphans from non-Jewish families and institutions. The Brigade also helped with paperwork for residency in Belgium, as well as training for and migration to Palestine.[81]

Another issue concerned the Orthodox education of the children, especially the boys. Orthodox Allied Jews engaged in organizing as much as they could for

teaching and learning: "Because of the situation in the city there is no cheider [traditional Jewish primary school] or public school for children. Two refugee soldiers of the British army, Pvt. Purley and Chaim Moishe Rosenthal, have undertaken to teach a class every day. Chaim Moishe is very very *frum*."[82] On 1 March 1945, Stein wrote: "Of all the recommendations that [Mr. Tiefenbrunner] and Mr. Bamberger gave me, I decided that the most important for our purpose is to have teachers and principals who would be able to fill positions in all the [Jewish children's] homes and bring at least a bit of *Yiddishkayt* to them. I'm sure the big organizations won't allow the over-three-thousand children to remain in the Catholic institutions and will eventually open homes for them. They would then have to come to us for teachers – if we're ready."[83] On 29 April 1945, he further informed about discussions within Antwerp Orthodoxy and that the two pre-war Jewish day-schools would restart.[84] Indeed, after a short-lived "united Jewish school" in October 1944 which had to close, like all schools in Antwerp, because of the V-bombs, two Jewish day schools, supported by the Belgian government, reopened in May 1945.[85] Jesode Hatorah, the most Orthodox one, which Stein supported, had, according to Stein, 21 teachers, but only 20 students at its start on 1 May. The first pupils included Mrs. Ringer's daughters, whom she sent there "with a heavy heart", as she knew her daughters were fine in non-Jewish schools and that the situation would be difficult in the Jewish school (both psychologically and materially), but Orthodoxy took priority.[86] They had no idea how exceptional it was to have two Jewish day schools (re-)open so shortly after the liberation in the chaos and devastation of Jewish life throughout Europe at that time.

Stein fully strived for an Orthodox education for Jewish children. When asked in the 1973 interview about the spirit of the boys and girls from the concentration camps, he responded: "They were ready to start life over again, and they were very cooperative. Except that there weren't enough of the Orthodox persuasion."[87] He also alerted the homefront about Jewish children's homes in Brussels being anti-religious, seeking to ensure that Orthodox homes were organized with the money collected for this purpose in the US, for example.[88] As Stein wrote home about a Bar Mitzvah on Shabbat of 26 May 1945, in a letter that shows not only the reviving Orthodox life, but also the various war experiences and mix of people among the about 300 attendees: "Many of them have just recently returned from Switzerland, France, Poland and Germany. You can imagine that it wasn't very quiet. The *Bar Mitzva* boy read [his portion] very nicely, and *Chazan* [cantor] Rabinovitch called him up. The *Chazan* just returned from Poland, where he was in various concentration camps together with the father of Rabbi Meyer Karlin of Yeshiva Yitzchak Elchanan. Rabbi Karlin's father is now in France. The *Chazan* is alone and sleeps at the Committee building."[89]

Another key element for Orthodoxy concerned kosher food. The key person Stein refers to on this topic was Yaakov Landau, a local survivor whom he had met

within his first week upon arrival in Antwerp on 9 November. He wrote about their acquaintance: "I introduced myself to a sad regal Jew named Yaakov Landau, with a little girl [Anna]. His life was saved by the fact that he was ill and was hospitalized for two years. With forlorn tears he pointed to his little daughter and to his old coat – all that the murderers had left him. His parents, [... three sons and one daughter] were taken away. He showed me their pictures, which pierced my heart. I tried my best to console him, and promised to write to his brother in Bridgeport, Connecticut."[90] Landau protested "about the Chilul Hashem [blasphemy] by the Jewish Committee, which distributes non-kosher food to the poor Jews while kosher food is not yet available, and he asked why they've stopped maintaining the mikveh."[91] Ten days later, on 25 November, Stein had gone to speak with the president of the Jewish Committee about "providing kosher meals instead of the *treif* [non-kosher] they serve for the poor [...] and other important issues that so urgently concern the newly reborn Jewish community."[92] Stein reported that Landau went to Brussels on 22 December 1944 to buy kosher meat supplies[93] and on Tuesday 30 January 1945 he reported on the first kosher Shabbos meal served in the Committee building the Shabbat before that Tuesday.[94] Knowing that having kosher food supplies was crucial for Orthodox Jews, the successful provision of such was crucial for Antwerp's Orthodox life.

During Purim 1945, Stein had asked Mr. Tiefenbrunner, the director of an Orthodox orphanage, to advise him as to what to request of the Jewish organizations: "He rattled off a list of various important matters that ought to be brought up, among them, transferring to a Jewish grave the bodies of the many Jews who lie buried with Gentiles."[95] This is something Stein did not engage in, to my knowledge, but which was clearly important to the local Jewish population and a matter of attention and priority for the local "United Jewish communities", already before the end of 1944.[96]

Daniel Isaacman, who was also a religious Jew, but not as Orthodox as Stein, reported in his letters on "an American soldier who is fanatically religious" and who "has been quite influential with some of the kids", further evidence of the effects of the interactions between Allied and local Jews.[97] The fact that when part of their company returned to the US, Isaacman asked Stein to telephone his parents to give them his regards, also gives evidence of the bonds within the army units.[98]

A HOME AWAY FROM HOME

The contacts with local Antwerp Orthodox Jewish religious life were like a real "home-coming" for the religious Jewish soldiers. For the Orthodox Jews in the military, finding an Orthodox Jewish community was something they had been longing for, something that created a home-like feeling they had been deprived of for such a long time. As David Stein noted in 1973, he was "always looking for a synagogue, and being invited to different homes [...] and becoming very well acquainted with quite

Jewish Allies and Survivors in Liberated Antwerp, 1944-1945 (continuation)

a number of people."[99] His letters and photos bear witness to the feeling of "being among one's own", of belonging. He often described Mincha (the afternoon prayer): "Jews who come to a regular weekday Mincha belong to a unique class that to me is more beloved and homelike than any other. The Jews with beards and gartels I met in the small shul are identical to our Shinaver Shtiebel members."[100] He also noted that he made his contacts by going to local synagogues.[101]

It is highly likely that Chaplain Samuel Cass felt more connection to the Orthodox and Eastern European Jewish population of Antwerp than to the very integrated Dutch Jews he later encountered in liberated Europe, or as Richard Menkis puts it: "There were times when he was at a loss to comprehend the behavior of Dutch Jewry. This is not altogether surprising, given the differences between Cass, who, like most Canadian Jews, was the Yiddish-speaking child of eastern European Jews, and more acculturated Dutch Jews."[102] The remnants of Jewish life in Europe afforded a feeling of community and belonging to the mobilized Jewish soldiers. Laura Hobson Faure also mentions this in her study on American Jewish military personnel and their contacts with the Jewish survivors in France.[103]

Especially around the holidays, when family and home are most missed, Allied Jewish soldiers found a "home" in Antwerp's Jewish community which they had not found in the army or anywhere else during their military service. Daniel Isaacman wrote home in March 1945 about how he would celebrate his first Passover away from home with a Jewish family.[104] David Stein mentions that the gatherings after the Shabbat service and the celebration of Chanukah "were too great to describe, and I must confess that it was hard for me to remember that I wasn't at home [...]. Yesterday there was a *Chanuka* party at the Jewish Committee, given by the Jewish people for the Jewish Allied soldiers. It was exactly like a *Chanuka* concert at home in every detail: there was a *chazan*, a choir (the youth organization), a play by Sholem Aleichem – 'Tevye the Milkman', a violin player, a pianist, a speaker, noise, an overcrowded hall, *Hatikva*, and a *Hora* dance. In addition, there was cake and liquor to eat and drink – almost enough for everyone."[105]

Stein explicitly mentions more than once how he would sneak out on Friday evening to have a proper Shabbat service and dinner and how these local Jewish Shabbat meals were so much nicer for him than "Shulman's services [at the army base] with the crosses in the chaplain's office. So I again took a chance and slipped out to town and the shul."[106] But also, less Orthodox Jews wrote about their Friday evening dinners at family houses, and the *gefillte fish* they were eating there: "An evening in a Jewish home – what more can one ask for on a Friday night", wrote Daniel Isaacman about his Shabbat meal with the Horowitz family in Antwerp on 15 December 1944.[107] Stein's favorite address was with Mrs. Ringer and her family, where he often was not the only Allied soldier as the house guest. On 4 March 1945 he wrote in his letters: "Who would believe that one could lead such a home-like

life and still be in the army? I conduct myself in *shul* exactly as I did my whole life in the *Shinaver Chevra* [...]. I'm just as familiar and at home with the local Yidn [Jews] as I am with the *Shinaver Yidn*. They don't regard me as a soldier, but as one of the members; they even offered to make me the *Gabbai* [organizer of religious services]. For meals these days I go quite regularly to the Ringer home, where the *yiddishkayt* and warm hospitality are exactly as at home. The noise, tumult, work, and the number of people constantly coming and going are also almost the same as home. I sing *zmiros* [religious songs] just as loud and 'flat' as I always did and they laugh at me like at home, only harder. But here the others are all musical, and they all sing the same song at the same time. It's actually nice! *Shabbos*, after lunch, here too I go to 'my boys' in 'the building' and learn with them."[108] By referring to the group of young people here in Antwerp as "my boys", as he always called his group in Young Israel back home, and the Committee building as "the building", Shifra Stahl notes that he was continuing his analogy of Antwerp as his current, familiar "home".

There were also connections between different armies' soldiers via their being Orthodox in Antwerp's Jewish community: "After the meal I again went to Madame Ringer's home where a soldier in British uniform was waiting to sing *zmiros* with me. His name is Gershon Katz, a refugee from Tzeilem, Austria, and is related to the Tzelimer Rov. He's religious and sings very well."[109] But it was not all home-like, and there are also notes – although these are much fewer than the positive ones – that show Stein's homesickness and a longing for the Orthodox community from home: "I have much more success with the youth group since they split from the non-religious. I play the role of leader here just as I do with the Young Israel youth. [...] but *davening* with the old *Chassidishe minyan* has become impossible. It's more like a marketplace than a *Beis Midrash* [room used for prayer services and for religious learning]."[110] He wished he could make the singing sound "exactly like Young Israel. If I had records, we would be able to teach them *nusach*. Chaim Moishe *davened* with a German *nusach* [mode], and it's not my style. Send me over Naftali [Nat[111]] Karper! You need him there?"[112]

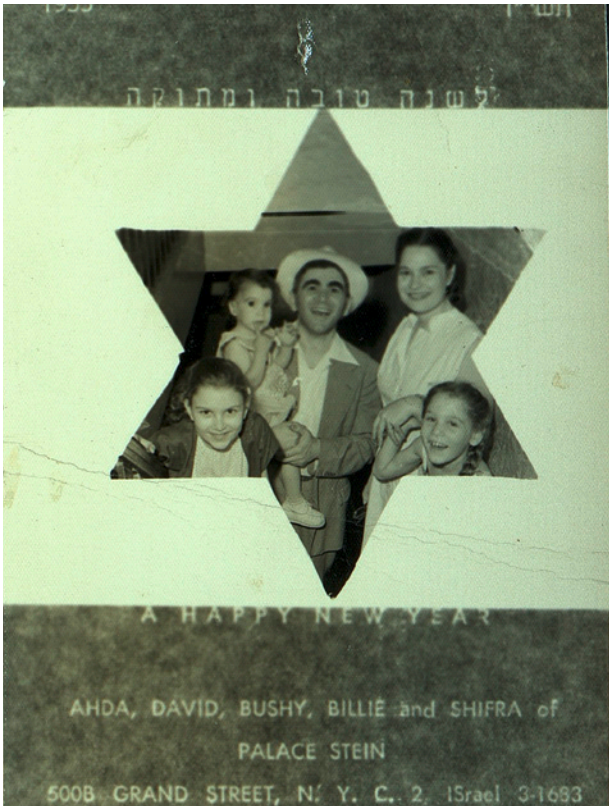
On 11 June 1945, Stein spent his last Shabbat meal in Antwerp: "The Friday evening meal at Ringers was by far the most stirring occasion I experienced since my first coming there. Not because it was my last supper, but because of the four other guests present. The three women and 13-year-old girl were observing their first

_ Photo of Eli Ringer, the youngest of the Ringer children, with David Stein

KD. Eli Ringer Collection

Jewish Allies and Survivors in Liberated Antwerp, 1944-1945 (continuation)

Shabbos since enslavement in concentration camps years ago. They didn't cry. I doubt if any of them still have any tears left. But it was very evident that every *Shabbat-like* object, action, and mouthful of food, prayer or song, cut deep into their emotional depths. They were thrilled by everything that took place, especially by the sight and sound of the tiny tots taking so active and nonchalant a part in the rituals, and most of all, they were amazed that an American too was part of this international party. Ethel Ringer Hirsch is from Poland; Mrs. Schwartz and her 20-year-old daughter from Hungary; and the 13-year-old is from Holland, but the language of *Shabbos* was understood by all of us. The food was typically Jewish, the songs were familiar and the *bentshing* was said by heart from the heart of all."[113]



KD, Eli Ringer Collection

– Jewish New Year's greetings from the Stein family to the Ringer family, 1953

The relationship between the Ringer and Stein families remained; it was a mutually interesting and beneficial one which certainly puts into perspective how important the Jewishness and community connection had been for those in the Allied forces, certainly as much so as for the survivors they encountered.[114] The archives of the Ringer family contain photographs with David Stein during his time in Antwerp as well as correspondence, birth announcements and Jewish New Year's wishes from him for years after.[115] The marriages of local survivors with Allied Jews created connections for generations.

CONCLUSIONS

While the Allies' liberations of concentration camps and annihilation centers were covered by media worldwide, including reports from Allied Jewish soldiers, chaplains and other witnesses from among the Allied troops, the accounts of Jews in the Allied forces about the liberation of other places in Europe and their reports about the Jewish communities (or their remnants) they found upon their arrival are far less known. However, their writings and personal letters give very personal and human witness reports on the transition period after the liberation – in the case of this article, on Antwerp. These witness accounts are of crucial value, both for testimonies about the contemporary situations as well as about how the war period was reported on (not yet shaped by the information from the East which would follow only months later). The Allied Jewish accounts form a kind

of outsider as well as insider view on Jewish life in the immediate post-liberation period. Indeed, having been disconnected from the hardships, persecutions, plunder and genocidal regime to which fellow Jews fell victim to in Europe, their reactions were ones of shock and horror, especially when their reports preceded the liberation of the camps in the East. At the same time, Jewish members of the Allied forces were often the first to understand the needs of Jewish survivors concerning their religious and cultural traditions and were able to establish connections between the isolated survivors and the international Jewish community. Their accounts provide information not only on the dire situation of the surviving Jews, their hardships and urgent needs, but also on survivors' resilience and actions to reorganize Jewish life (see the shelter, orphanages, Jewish schools, provision of kosher food or the ritual reburial of Jews buried without them), the characteristics of Jewish life, the mixture of local and non-local religious and community leaders as well as on the longing for home and belonging of all. The Allied Jews were a source of information, provided humanitarian aid, helped organize religious services and found a home-like feeling within the small surviving Jewish community. The relationships between the local Jews and those entering the city with the liberating armies was a very special one, which recently has received more attention in Jewish Studies.[116] The impact of these encounters for all involved (not just unilaterally from the liberators to the victims, but also evidencing agency and resilience of the local Jewish survivors) is an interesting domain for further research and for integration into the larger historiography of the Second World War and the liberation.

Veerle Vanden Daelen is Curator and Coordinator Collections & Research at Kazerne Dossin. She holds a PhD from the University of Antwerp, where her research focused on the return of Jews to Antwerp and the reconstruction of daily life after World War II (period 1944-1960). She has held fellowships at the University of Michigan and at the University of Pennsylvania. She coordinates the work package 'Data Identification and Integration' and is a member of the Project Management Board of the European Holocaust Research Infrastructure (EHRI). Veerle is also affiliated to the University of Antwerp, where she has taught Migration History, Jewish History and other subjects. Since 2011, she has organized the annual 'Contact Day Jewish Studies on the Low Countries' at the university's Institute of Jewish Studies. She is part of the Belgian delegation within the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA).

(1) Numbers on the deadly casualties among the liberating armies in Antwerp are not yet known (see research project city of Antwerp, https://namenproject.antwerpenherdenkt.be/EN/faq.php, consulted 8/2/2024).

(2) Kazerne Dossin (further abbreviated as KD), "Photo series Liberation of Antwerp", KD_00345.

(3) Hobson Faure, Laura, *Un "Plan Marshall juif". La présence américaine en France après la Shoah, 1944-1954*, Paris: Armand Colin, 2013, 74.

(4) Menkis, Richard, "'But You Can't See the Fear That People Lived Through': Canadian Jewish Chaplains and Canadian Encounters with Dutch Survivors, 1944-1945", *American Jewish Archives Journal*, 60(1-2), 2008, 24-50 (here p. 26); Menkis, Richard, "'There were cries of joy, some of sorrow': Canadian Jewish Soldiers and Early Encounters with Survivors", *Canadian Jewish Studies*, 27, 2019, 125-138.

(5) S.n., "Les Juifs dans les armées alliées", *Ofipresse*, Nr. 4, 25 May 1945, 4. See for example Bloch Baron, Jean, *Épreuves et combats,1940-1945. Histoires d'hommes et de femmes issus de la collectivité juive de Belgique*. Bruxelles: Didier Devillez Editeur/Institut d'Etudes du Judaïsme, 2002.

(6) Gelber, Yoav, "The Jewish Brigade in Belgium", in Dan Michman (ed.), *Belgium and the Holocaust: Jews, Belgians, Germans*, Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1998, 478-479.

(7) KD, Collection Myriam Nebenzahl, KD_00304. She was born on 20 June 1931, so had just turned 13 in September 1944.

(8) Sterngold, Jozef, *Geleefd en beleefd*. KD, Library collection 7320, 55, 61 and 72; *Ibid*., KD, Library collection 7319, 53-54 and 63.

(9) KD, School archives Tachkemoni, Antwerp, Guldenboek (KD-01016).

(10) Menkis, "'But You Can't See the Fear", p. 30-31.

(11) Dash Moore, Deborah, *GI Jews. How World War II Changed a Generation,* Cambridge and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004, 202; Hobson Faure, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

(12) Dash Moore, *op. cit.*, p. 212.

(13) Stein Stahl, Shifra, *Dear Everybahda. The World War II Letters of Private David "Doov" Stein. Volume 3: Antwerp*. Unpublished manuscript; KD, U.S. Private David ("Doov") Stein World War II Letters from Antwerp Collection (KD_00943, further abbreviated as KD, Stein Coll.), sub-collection Museum of Jewish Heritage, KD_00943_0002 (further abbreviated as MJH), 5238.82ab), letter 4/12/1944 (all letters, except when differently mentioned are from David Stein to his family). I would like to thank Shifra Stahl wholeheartedly for putting her manuscript at our disposal. All translations from Yiddish letters into English are to the credit of Shifra Stahl.

(14) University of Pennsylvania, The University Archives and Records Center, Daniel Isaacman Papers 1940-1958 (bulk 1940-1947), UPT 50 I73, (further abbreviated as UPenn, Isaacman Papers), box 1, file 17, letter from Daniel Isaacman to his parents, 6/12/1944.

(15) Bozzini, Arnaud, 'Yiddish et "rue juive" communiste à Bruxelles au lendemain de la guerre (1944-1955)', *Les Cahiers de la Mémoire Contemporaine*, 8, 2008, 193-217.

(16) "I deliberately asked in Yiddish so that if I was mistaken he would not respond." (KD, Stein Coll., KD_00943, Interview David (Doov) Stein by Sidney Storch, New York City, December 1973).

(17) See, for example, the letters from David Stein (KD and MJH), of which 4 letters from November 1944 were also published in *The Jewish Daily Forward* on 2/12/1944 (Stahl, *Dear Everybahda*).

(18) Quoted by Richard Menkis from the Ontario Jewish Archives, Blankenstein Family Heritage Centre (Toronto – OJA), Heaps family fonds, David Heaps to A.A. Heaps, 26 October 1944, in Menkis, "There were cries of joy", 129.

(19) Idem, OJA, Heaps family fonds, David Heaps to A.A. Heaps, 26/10/1944.

(20) KD, Stein Coll., KD_00943, MJH, 5266.82 [*Forward*-6], Letter 15/11/1944.

(21) KD, Stein Coll., KD_00943; UPenn, Isaacman Papers.

(22) American Jewish Archives, World Jewish Congress-files (coll. 361) (further abbreviated as AJA, WJC-files), H59/18, Belgian Jewish Committee (Londen) to Belgian Jewish Representative Committee (New York), 20/12/1944.

(23) See for example about Sam Perl (KD, Stein Coll., KD_00943, MJH, 5297.82, letter 31/12/1944) and the effect of his publication as a source of hope (KD, Stein Coll., KD_00943, letter 3/1/1945).

(24) Stahl, *Dear Everybahda*.

(25) KD, Stein Coll., KD_00943, interview Dec. 1973.

(26) *Ibid*.

(27) UPenn, Isaacman Papers.

(28) Letter from Stein to his family, 16/11/1944. See also his letter from 22/11/1944: "Because of my recent mistake in writing to the relatives of the survivors of Nazi annihilation who are in need of sending a message through me, my mail is now especially scrutinized so that I shan't make the same mistake again. So, despite the fact that my extracurricular activity is very interesting and important, I choose not to mention anything about it."). (KD, Stein Coll., KD_00943, MJH, resp. 5270.82 and 5277.82). Censorship was definitely there during Stein's first months in Antwerp. Afterwards, followed a period without censorship and around the end of May it was again on, so he switched back to sending important info in Yiddish (see, KD, Stein Coll., KD_00943, letter 28/5/1945).

(29) Letter from Lee Stein to Irving Bunin, letter 16/1/1945 (Stahl, *Dear Everybahda*).

(30) Menkis, "There were cries of joy", 131.

(31) KD, Stein Coll., KD_00943, MJH, 5264.82 [*Forward*-4], Letter 13/11/1944 . See also in his 1973 interview: "All the people flocked around me and their first request was can I write them letters to their relatives in America." (KD, Stein Coll., KD_00943, interview Dec. 1973).

(32) KD, Stein Coll., KD_00943, Letter of Walter Mandel to Lee Stein, 22/1/1945).

(33) Menkis, "'But You Can't See the Fear", 31, based on letters from Samuel Cass to his wife Annabel, 12/11/1944, Cass fonds, 3/5, Library and Archives Canada (LAC).

(34) Letter from Rabbi S. Rotenberg to D. Stein, 26/4/1945. On 15 May 1945 Stein repeated in a letter to inform Reb Rottenberg that the entire Klug family had been deported (KD, Stein Coll., KD_00943).

(35) KD, Stein Coll., KD_00943, Letter 18/4/1945.

(36) KD, Transportlisten, KD_00013.

(37) KD, Stein Coll., KD_00943, letter 15/5/1945.

(38) KD, Stein Coll., KD_00943, letter 30/4/1945.

(39) The following has been pieced together by Shifra Stahl from the article appearing in the *Jewish Daily Forward* on 7/9/1945, which was made up of excerpted letters from Doov and Mendy Stein. Stahl puts them in May 1945 in her overview. This seems very plausible time-wise (Stahl, *Dear Everybahda*).

(40) *Ibid*.

(41) KD, Stein Coll., KD_00943, letter 17/5/1945.

(42) https://www.auschwitz.org/en/history/auschwitz-and-shoah/the-number-of-victims/, consulted on 1/3/2024.

(43) KD, Stein Coll., KD_00943, letter 21/5/1945.

(44) KD, Stein Coll., KD_00943, letter 5/6/1945.

(45) AJA, WJC-files (coll. 361), D78/15, Belgium, children, Jan-Sept 1945, 'A letter from Warrant Officer Herbert Weiner to Mr. Jacobs at the Jewish Institute of Religion, 17 June 1945'.

(46) Hobson Faure, Laura and Vanden Daelen, Veerle, "Imported from the United States? The centralization of private Jewish welfare after the Holocaust: the cases of Belgium and France", in: Avinoam Patt e.a. (eds.), *The JDC at 100: a century of humanitarianism*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2019, p. 279-313.

(47) Hobson Faure, *op. cit.*, p. 79 ("Les modestes efforts initiaux de nombreux aumôniers et soldats furent rapidement remplacés par des tentatives mieux organisées pour secourir un plus grand nombre de Juifs"). Stahl, *Dear Everybahda*, April 1945 letters.

(48) Many January 1945 letters, for example, include reference to HIAS concerning people's searches (KD, Stein Coll., KD_00943).

(49) KD, Stein Coll., KD_00943, Interview Dec. 1973.

(50) UPenn, Isaacman Papers.

(51) KD, Stein Coll., KD_00943, letter 30/4/1945.

(52) See also Dash Moore, *op. cit.* and Hobson Faure, *op. cit*.

(53) Menkis, "But You Can't See the Fear", p. 37.

(54) Sterngold, *Geleefd en Beleefd*, KD7319, 46 (KD7320, 52).

(55) 'Israëlietische godsdienst', *Volksgazet*, 26/9/1944, 2.

(56) "Cass, a Toronto-born rabbi who worked in Vancouver before joining the Canadian army in 1942, conducted Shabbat services for 500 newly liberated prisoners at Westerbork on April 20, 1945, in Yiddish and English. 'For them, my presence and my address was the final evidence of their liberation,' he wrote in a letter to his wife (Lauren Kramer, "Vancouver exhibit captures Canada's response to Shoah", *The Canadian Jewish News*, 3 November 2016, https://thecjn.ca/news/bc-exhibit-canadas-response-shoah/).

(57) Dash Moore, *op. cit.*, 210.

(58) KD, Stein Coll., KD_00943, MJH, 5263.82 [Forward-3], letter 13 November 1944.

(59) Klepfish had celebrated Yom Kippur on 26 September, together with about 2.000 Jewish Allied Jews in Ghent, which had been liberated by Polish troops. There is a photo of this ceremony in the collection of the Jewish Museum of Belgium with the honorary table, including Mayor Anseele and Rabbi Klepfish (Vanden Daelen, Veerle, "Het leven moet doorgaan. De joden in Antwerpen na de bevrijding (1944-1945)." *Bijdragen tot de Eigentijdse Geschiedenis/Cahiers d'Histoire du Temps Présent (Brussel/Bruxelles)*, 13-14, 2004, 165. (https://www.journalbelgianhistory.be/nl/system/files/article_pdf/chtp13_14_008_Dossier2_VandenDaelen.pdf).

(60) KD, Stein Coll., KD_00943, MJH, 5263.82 [Forward-3], letter 13 November 1944.

(61) *Ibidem*.

(62) KD, Stein Coll., KD_00943, MJH, 5266 [*Forward-6*], letter 15/11/1944. Of the items mentioned, Stein's family located the remnants of the burnt Torah and the covering for the *tefillin*. Ahda gave the music sheet to Seymour Silbermintz, a choir leader in New York. The other items have not been located, Stahl, *Dear Everybahda*) Scans of some of the items are part of the collection at KD, Stein Coll., KD_00943.

(63) AJA, WJC-files (coll. 361), H59/18, *op. cit*.

(64) Menkis, "But You Can't See the Fear", 32.

(65) Menkis, "There were cries of joy, some of sorrow", 132.

(66) Dash Moore, *op. cit.*, 209-210; Stone, Dan, *The Liberation of the Camps. The end of the Holocaust and its aftermath,* New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 2015, photo 11 and 12 (between p. 136 and p. 137) and p. 165-167 ("Religious celebrations were also opportunities to confront the recent past. Purim, especially, a raucous festival commemorating the deliverance of the Jews of the Persian empire from Haman's plan to destroy them, offered a chance to grapple with the Nazis in the context of long-term Jewish history," p. 165).

(67) KD, Stein Coll., KD_00943, letter 1/3/1945. We also see survivors in a Swiss sanatorium in 1946 dressed up like Hitler - for them the first Purim since their liberation (KD, Fonds Berneman-Flam family (KD_00422), Purim photos taken during Pinie Berneman's stay in a Suisse sanatorium in 1946, KD_00422_000034.tif).

(68) Menkis, "There were cries of joy, some of sorrow", 129.

(69) Vandecandelaere, Ronny, *Natan Ramet: Mens, kampnummer, getuige*. Berchem: EPO, 2015, 177.

(70) Vandecandelaere, *op. cit.*, 177 and 179.

(71) UPenn, Isaacman Papers.

(72) Hobson Faure, *op. cit.*, p. 89.

(73) Judd, Robin, *Between Two Worlds. Jewish War Brides after the* Holocaust, Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2023.

(74) AJA, WJC-files (coll. 361), D78/15, *op. cit.*

(75) UPenn, Isaacman Papers, box 1, folder 17, letter Daniel Isaacman to his parents, 4/12/1944.

(76) UPenn, Isaacman Papers, collection description.

(77) KD, Stein Coll., KD_00943, interview Dec. 1973.

(78) KD, Stein Coll., KD_00943, letter 18/4/1945.

(79) *Ibidem*.

(80) Vanden Daelen, Veerle, *Laten we hun lied verder zingen. De*

heropbouw van de joodse gemeenschap in Antwerpen na de Tweede Wereldoorlog (1944-1960), Amsterdam: Aksant, 2008, here pp. 271-287.

(81) Gelber, *op. cit.*, p. 480-482.

(82) KD, Stein Coll., KD_00943, letter 11/2/1945.

(83) KD, Stein Coll., KD_00943, letter 1/3/1945.

(84) KD, Stein Coll., KD_00943, letter 29/4/1945.

(85) Vanden Daelen, *Laten we hun lied verder zingen*, 323-325.

(86) KD, Stein Coll., KD_00943, letter 2/5/1945.

(87) KD, Stein Coll., KD_00943, interview Dec. 1973.

(88) Stahl, *Dear Everybahda*, February letters; KD, Stein Coll., KD_00943.

(89) KD, Stein Coll., KD_00943, letter 28/5/1945.

(90) KD, Stein Coll., KD_00943, MJH, 5264.82 [*Forward*-4], letter 13 November 1944. Anna's story has been recorded in Anna Grünfeld-Landau en Nuphar Nevo. *De stem van Anna. Het verhaal van een Antwerps meisje tijdens de Tweede Wereldoorlog*. Brussel: Stichting Auschwitz, 2022.

(91) KD, Stein Coll., KD_00943, MJH, 5267.82 [*Forward*-7], letter 15/11/1944.

(92) KD, Stein Coll., KD_00943, MJH, 5280.82, letter 26/11/1944.

(93) KD, Stein Coll., KD_00943, MJH, 5291.82, letter 23/12/1944 (after Shabbat).

(94) KD, Stein Coll., KD_00943, letter 30/1/1945.

(95) KD, Stein Coll., KD_00943, letter 1/3/1945.

(96) Vanden Daelen, *Laten we hun lied verder zingen*, 189, 433. AJA, WJC-files, H59/18, *op. cit.*

(97) UPenn, Isaacman Papers, box 2, folder 4, letter of Daniel Isaacman to his parents, 11/4/1945.

(98) UPenn, Isaacman Papers, box 2, folder 6, letter from Daniel Isaacman to his parents, 9/6/1945.

(99) KD, Stein Coll., KD_00943, interview Dec. 1973.

(100) Shtal, *Dear Everybahda*; KD, Stein Coll., KD_00943, MJH, 5267.82 [*Forward*-7], letter 15/11/1944.

(101) KD, Stein Coll., KD_00943, interview Dec. 1973. UPenn, Isaacman Papers, Box 16, Letter D. Isaacman to his parents 27/11/1944: "Some of the boys went to the remaining synagogue - claiming that there were a number of civilians there."

(102) Menkis, "But You Can't See the Fear", 30.

(103) Hobson Faure, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

(104) UPenn, Isaacman Papers, box 2, folder 3.

(105) KD, Stein Coll., KD_00943, MJH, 5243.82.ab, letter 11/12/1944.

(106) KD, Stein Coll., KD_00943, letter 29/1/1945.

(107) UPenn, Isaacman Papers, box 1, folder 17, letter Daniel Isaacman to his parents, 14/12/1944, quote from box 1, folder 18, letter Daniel Isaacman to his parents, 16/12/1944.

(108) KD, Stein Coll., KD_00943, letter 4/3/1945.

(109) KD, Stein Coll., KD_00943, letter 7/1/1945.

(110) KD, Stein Coll., KD_00943, letter 22/4/1945.

(111) Nat (Nahftooli) Karper was one of the local Young Israel's most accomplished *Baalei T'feela* (leaders of the prayer service), Stahl, *Dear Everybahda*.

(112) KD, Stein Coll., KD_00943, letter 29/4/1945.

(113) KD, Stein Coll., KD_00943, letter 11/6/1945.

(114) KD, Stein Coll., KD_00943, interview Dec. 1973.

(115) KD, Eli Ringer Collection (KD_00666).

(116) See also the international research workshop "The US Military and the Holocaust" at USHMM 15-26 July 2024 (https://www.ushmm.org/research/opportunities-for-academics/conferences-and-workshops/research-workshop-program/military-workshop, retrieved 8/3/2024).

A city so fiery... The Jews of Liège at the Liberation

→ **Thierry Rozenblum**
ASBL "Mémoire de Dannes-Camiers"

When the Second World War broke out, Liège-Ville counted around 1,900 Jews among its 161,073 inhabitants, with the Liège region as a whole having 2,560 Jews within a total population of 410,232, representing 0.6% of the total population. Of these Jews, 8.56% were Belgian and 60.18% Polish; the rest were mainly from Romania, Czechoslovakia, the Netherlands, Hungary and Germany, and were often now offially stateless. The final death toll from the 'Final Solution' in the Liège region was around 733, including almost 96 children under the age of 15. Among them, 35 Jews of Belgian nationality were deported.[1]

LIBERATION: FROM EUPHORIA TO CHAOS

7 September 1944 marked a critical juncture in the history of Liège, with the official organ of the Liège Federation of the Front de l'Indépendance enthusiastically announcing: "*Liège l'insoumise est libérée!*"

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_ Liege, 7-8 September 1944. The indomitable spirit of the people of Liège knows no limits... Even before the arrival of the American troops on the right bank of the city, scheduled for the 8th September, which meant that the German withdrawal would begin, engulfing the inhabitants of Liège the streets of the Fiery City, in an early burst of liberation and joy

This date marked the long-awaited liberation of the rebel city. The forces of the 3rd American armoured division, under the command of General Rose, distinguished themselves in liberating the left bank of Liège. However, the resolute spirit of the people of Liège knew no delay: on the eve of the arrival of the American troops on the city's right bank, on the day the German troops left, the people of Liège poured into the streets of the Cité ardente. The surge of joy and euphoria manifested itself in spontaneous demonstrations.

The Socialist Mayor, Joseph Bologne[2], who had been dismissed from his post on 1 November 1942 for "administrative obstruction", was welcomed back to the Town Hall to great acclaim. And the former aldermen's college, which had been ousted when "Grand-Liège" was created in November 1942[3] in favour of persons[4] more conciliatory with the occupying authority, was reinstated[5], symbolising the re-establishment of municipal authority in the post-liberation context.

At the same time, the members of the Belgian government in exile in London returned to Brussels, and three weeks later Hubert Pierlot[6] succeeded in forming a new "national union" government. In line with the pattern observed at the national level in Belgium, the liberation was characterised by the restoration of political institutions as they had existed before the war.

On 9 September, Mayor Bologna returned to his duties and, as chairman of the Conference of Mayors[7] of Greater Liège, informed the population of the disarmament directives issued by the American authorities[8]. The question of disarming the Resistance was a major concern for the municipal authorities. This concern was shared by the Allies, for whom Belgium represented an essential operational base for their advance towards Germany, and who sought to avoid at all costs any excesses, particularly by the Communists.[9]

The forces responsible for maintaining law and order at this moment were practically non-existent and were inadequately equipped to deal with the many armed groups that could seize or arrest employees and even execute them without a warrant. These armed groups exercised or imposed their authority in industrial centres, underlining the complexity of the security situation facing the population. However, to avoid exacerbating tensions with the Resistance, the Governor of the province, Joseph Leclercq, in agreement with the American authorities, authorised members of the four resistance groups (the Belgian Army, the Liberation Army, the Independence Front and the Belgian National Movement) to carry arms.[10]

For almost two years after the Liberation, food supplies were a problem and a large part of the population continued to live in precarious conditions. Economic recovery, although underway, was still in its initial stage. This stagnation was reflected in a marked increase in the number of unemployed. Strikes, which continued almost uninterrupted throughout September and October, severely affected the industrial area of Liège.

These social movements had a significant impact on coal and steel production, causing disruptions in the distribution of goods, sporadic power cuts and inconveniences to rail and road transport. The shortages also gave rise to a thriving black market, which flourished until 1946.

The demands of these social movements, fuelled by an emerging radical trade-union movement, focused on a range of issues. These included demands for higher wages, concerns about the notorious shortage of food supplies and the shortage of fuel, and a desire to punish business leaders suspected of collaboration.

While various coalition governments had failed to stabilise the country, these social tensions were gradually pushing the industrial areas of the south to the edge of a pre-revolutionary situation, revealing a deep mistrust for the existent economic and political structures.

In October 1944, a new twist in local politics in Liège added to a climate already fraught with mistrust of political figures. Mayor Joseph Bologne and Lambert Destexhe, the public prosecutor at the Liège Court of Appeal, were attacked in the newspaper *Le Monde du travail.* They were accused of having exposed around 180 members of the Communist Party to enemy searches in May 1941, and of having passed on a list of "pimps" containing around 30 names in September[11]. The Liège Federation of the Socialist Party was concerned about the possible repercussions of these compromising allegations about the burgomaster and decided to exclude Mayor Bologne. Shortly afterwards, in February 1945, he resigned as mayor and was immediately replaced by the Socialist lawyer Paul Gruselin.

A few months later, the Royal Question – concerning the controversial return of King Leopold III and the accusations of collaboration against him – shook Belgium, causing deep divisions within the country and marking a period of intense tension and debate. This latest political crisis would only come to an end five years later, on 16 July 1951, when Leopold III abdicated in favour of his son Baudouin.

Despite appearances, the war was not over. On 11 September, the last Jew in Liège was murdered. Léo Michelson was riding a motorbike with a friend near Juslenville (12 kilometres from Liège) when they were intercepted by German soldiers. Without trial or delay, Michelson was shot on the spot, while his friend managed to escape.[12]

For several months, Liège remained dangerously close to the theatre of military operations. The von Rundstedt offensive in the Ardennes in the winter of 1944-1945 even raised fears of the return of the occupying forces. Among the objectives of this battle was the capture of Antwerp and Liège, which was a crucial strategic point for the American army in terms of transporting supplies.

The Germans then launched a massive V1 and V2 bombing campaign against Liège. Although the military effects were not particularly decisive, the consequences for civilians were dramatic, as historian Bernard Wilkin notes: "Around 1,680 V1s and V2s hit the city, causing the loss of 1,269 people from Liège and more than 2,000

wounded. A particularly striking figure was that 78,000 houses were damaged or totally destroyed." The V1 and V2 attacks ceased at the end of January 1945.[13]

FROM RELIEF TO RECONSTRUCTION

Between ruins and hopes

In the first days after liberation, the Jews of the Liège region shared with their fellow citizens a sense of relief and joy. But where exactly were they? Since the round-up on 24 September 1942, no Jew in the region had been living at his or her legal address[14]. The return of the Jews to Liège occurred against a backdrop of general chaos, and eyewitness accounts reveal a wide variety of situations.

This process took place in several distinct waves. First, the majority of the survivors, who had been scattered mainly in the Liège region and the Ardennes, began to return. They were then joined by those who had found refuge abroad, in countries such as France, Switzerland, Morocco and Denmark.

This return movement was followed by the repatriation of the few survivors of the camps. The arrival of the refugees, who hoped to be reunited with their loved ones, to return home or to find refuge, marked the last phase of this process.

Material challenges, spoliation and administrative obstacles

The return of the survivors came up against concrete material issues, such as the conditions for reinstatement of one's previous legal domicile, which was often now completely emptied. At the same time as the deportations, the Germans had begun the *Möbelaktion*, an operation that involved emptying the residences that the Jews had been forced to abandon. All movable property was to be confiscated. Launched in Liège on 23 October 1942 and ending on 12 August 1944 (one month after the last roundup), this operation was intended to later redistribute the stolen goods to Germans of the Reich whose towns had been devastated by Allied bombing raids.

In Liège, more than 257 houses and flats were emptied of their contents by local removal firms, which transferred the goods to premises requisitioned by the occupying forces before sending them by ship to Germany. A total of five ships left Liège as part of *the Möbelaktion*, the last of which was the "*Rijnbinnevaart*", which left the port of Coronmeuse four days before the Liberation. Thanks to Joachim Frenkiel, a Jewish engineer and assistant at the University of Liège who had recently emerged from hiding with his family, the boat was found a week later on the bridge at Wandre, carrying thirty tonnes of furniture bound for Berlin. The recovered furniture was then returned to school premises, in particular to the school on rue Bonne-Nouvelle and to the library on place de la Vieille Montagne, where it had been removed a few weeks earlier.[15]

On his return from hiding in November 1944, Osias Kallus sent a registered letter to the Colleges of Mayors and Aldermen of the City of Liège, describing the spoliation of his property by the German army because he was a Jew. He described

the situation in which he and his wife now found themselves, having returned to their home to find only bare walls, the result of the looting of their house and fur shop. He indicated that he had been informed that part of his furniture, in this case his bedroom, was in the rue Bonne Nouvelle at the local school: "I went to this address to repossess this part of my property and I had the unpleasant surprise of being asked to pay two thousand eight hundred francs for recovery costs".[16] The matter was brought to the attention of the Alderman for Public Education, Auguste Buisseret, who in turn called on the Alderman for Finance, Mr Depresseux, to find a solution. At the same time, stories like that of the Messerschmidt-Sirot family, who like so many others faced a never-ending series of bureaucratic obstacles, highlight the challenges of integration faced by survivors and reveal the struggle of many refugees to regain a sense of normality and dignity in a world that had irrevocably changed.

Walter Messerschmidt, who was German, and his wife, Léa Sternlieb, moved to Belgium in 1938 and married in 1939 in Antwerp, where their daughter, Yvonne, was born.

In 1941, the family moved to Liège and, faced with the growing threat, fled to Switzerland in 1942. After Walter's tragic death in 1944 in a coal-mining accident at "Kanderkohle SA" in Kandergrund, where he was working as a specialist, Léa and Yvonne returned to Brussels in 1945, supported by a small annuity from Aide aux Israélites Victimes de la Guerre (AIVG). In 1947, Léa married Walter Sirot, an Austrian Jew. Their dealings with the authorities to secure their stay in Belgium came up against an overwhelming bureaucracy and its implacable logic. Despite the support of various organisations, the relentless administrative hurdles undermined their resilience. When Walter Sirot received a deportation notice in 1948, the couple decided to leave for Vienna, in the hope of making a fresh start.[17]

Legal and social challenges

For the 48 people from Liège who survived deportation, the return to the Burning City was full of pitfalls. They had to seek help for a wide range of problems related to their physical and mental states. However, the legal provisions concerning compensation for victims of war did not apply to Jewish and Roma victims. In Belgium, no law took into account persecution on racial grounds, and the existing legislation on war victims was based on the concept of national solidarity. The benefits provided by this legislation were reserved exclusively for nationals. This

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_ Liège, 11 November 1944. Bernard Prync, surrounded by his rescuers. After his escape from the 16th Convoy, on 31 October 1942, David Prync finds his wife and their son back. The couple finds shelter with friends, while their son Bernard hides for several months, first in the sanatorium in Auderghem, then with two families from the Liège region (the Davister in Liège and the Liégeois in Battice)

had consequences for the Jewish community in Liège, where only just over 8% of its members met the nationality criteria required by the laws in force. As a result, only a small minority of deported Jews were able to obtain the status of political prisoner, which afforded them the right to a pension. These were mainly people who had received the legal status of being officially Belgian, or whose spouse or descendant had Belgian nationality, or people who had distinguished themselves through patriotic activity in Belgium[18].

Special cases of survivors or the challenges of assistance

Léon Raszkin, deported in September 1942 with his father, Benjamin, and brothers Joseph and Maurice, faced similar circumstances. He and his father were repatriated in May 1945. Although Léon Raszkin acquired Belgian nationality in October 1945, he was not entitled to political-prisoner status. His father was excluded because he was a Polish national at the time of his application. It was not until he obtained Belgian nationality, in 1956, that he became a beneficiary of the status.[19]

Ludwig Zurek and his wife, Anna Bella Helmann, were deported in January 1943. Anna died in Auschwitz. Ludwig Zurek's striking story evidences the horrors of deportation: he underwent medical experiments at Auschwitz, was assigned to the *Sonderkommando*, survived and was then put to work in an armaments factory. In January 1944, he escaped from a train bound for Germany. His final journey then began, taking him from Germany to Belgium via Kiev, Moscow, Odessa, Constantinople, Port Said and finally Marseille. He was repatriated at the beginning of June 1945, but was denied political-prisoner status on the grounds that he was a Polish national and had been racially deported.[20]

To survive, some were forced to build a personal "legend". Fradla Goldberg, a foreigner who was illiterate, was alone in Belgium with two dependent children, and faced considerable challenges.

A sympathetic neighbour who was a member of the Resistance offered to fabricate an account for her, according to which her husband, Mojzesk Ringelheim, deported on convoy XVI, had been an active member of his Resistance group, the Liberation Army.[21]

With the help of this neighbour, Fradla constructed a "mythical" story of a Resistance fighter husband which gave her access to financial aid. Despite this stratagem being discovered later, she was able to keep the benefits she had obtained. This ordeal, a mixture of adversity and solidarity, left a lasting impression on her son Foulek, who went on to become an eminent magistrate and distinguished figure in the literary world.

Leadership and organisation

Faced with the immense task of reconstruction, questions soon arose as to who had the skills and legitimacy to bring this process to a successful conclusion.

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_ Liège, the Léon Fredericq street, autumn 1944. Captured German soldiers guarded by American GI's, assist in the return of coal to the synagogue of Liège

Was it community institutions, such as the pre-war Jewish community that had dissolved in November 1941[22]? Its last president, Chaïm Peguine, had been deported with his wife and two of his children. They did not return.[23]

Was it the local committee of the Association of Jews in Belgium, set up at the end of December 1941[24]? Its president, Noé Nozyce, had been deported with his wife and two children. He was repatriated alone[25] in May 1945 and de facto deprived of any activity within Jewish institutions.[26]

Was it the representatives of religious Judaism? The officiating minister Iosif Lepkifker was taken into the care of the Bishop of Liège, Mgr Kerkhofs, and hidden for two years, apart from his family, in the Catholic institutions of the region. This period of hardship, highlighted by deportation and the tragic loss of Lepkifker's parents, was decisive for him. After the Liberation, he became fully involved in his religious responsibilities as an officiating minister, at the same time devoting himself to the Committee for the Defence of Jews (CDJ)[27].

It was in this difficult context that Albert Wolf emerged as a providential leader. From the 1930s onwards, as a Communist activist, he had been involved in the Bel-

gian League against Racism and Antisemitism (LBCRA). He was taken prisoner in 1940, during the Eighteen Days campaign, but managed to escape from the convoy taking him to Germany. He was also founder and leading member of the underground organisation Solidarité, affiliated to the Front de l'Indépendance during the war. Forced underground in June 1941 to escape an anti-Communist operation launched by the German police during the attack on the USSR, he played a leading role in the Front de l'Indépendance (FI) until the Liberation. Without ceasing to act for the Front de l'Indépendance, he became president of the Liège section, provincial leader and member of the national committee of the CDJ[28], while continuing his work as a printer, producing clandestine newspapers and false papers.

His ability to adapt even in the most perilous circumstances, to mobilise resources and to inspire those around him made Albert Wolf an undisputed leader. His career, marked by deep commitment and significant achievements, demonstrates not only his organisational skills and charisma as a leader, but also his strategic vision. He thus became an essential figure in guiding the Jewish community of Liège in its efforts to rebuild at a time when traditional leadership was lacking.

For its part, the Belgian government put in place substantial resources to ensure the repatriation of the 300,000 Belgians held in Germany, most of whom were prisoners of war, forced labourers or deportees.[29]

In Liège in September 1944, the issue of repatriating civilian and military deportees was raised at a major meeting held at the Palais Provincial and chaired by the provincial governor. It was at this meeting that the authorities decided to create a Provincial Office for Repatriation, and to set up a committee comprising, among others, district commissioners, the provincial health inspector, delegates from the city of Liège, as well as representatives from Assistance publique, the Red Cross and Œuvre nationale de l'Enfance. A decision was also made to establish reception centres in 11 towns in the region. Notably, however, no Jewish representatives were included in this committee.[30]

Jewish survivors of the death camps were only a minority of the total number of people returning to Belgium. These survivors needed emergency assistance, but for the Belgian authorities, their fate was not a priority: they were just one problem among many, and no specific measures were taken in their regard. Nor was any programme implemented to help the victims of Nazi racial policy. The old and new leaders of the community soon realised that they could not expect any help or support from the government, which was busy managing the political and social chaos.

The efforts of the AIVG and reintegration

In the face of the unprecedented persecution suffered by the Jewish population, which had left behind a shattered community, it became imperative to create dedicated communal structures. Rather than being a simple reaction to the lack of

governmental assistance, this initiative reflects a deeply rooted culture of mutual aid within Jewish communities.

At the beginning of October 1944, in Brussels, members of the Comité de Défense des Juifs founded Aide aux Israélites Victimes de la Guerre (AIVG). This organisation undertook to "come to the aid of Jewish victims of the war, in particular those who had been deported or stripped of their property, and to ensure their reintegration into economic and social life".[31]

Substantial funding from the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, a Jewish relief organization based in New York City, enabled the AIVG to set up the necessary support structures.[32]

In Liège, Albert Wolf could rely on some of the group that had formed during the war: Janchel Barbalat, Abraham Federman and Josek Pantiel, joined by Samuel Litwak, the officiating minister Iosif Lepkifker and three non-Jews: R. Philipse, Masson and Ovadis.

Idel Steinberg is missing here: he had been deported with his family on convoy XXII, on 20 September 1943. They did not return[33]. Janchel Paillouq had died in December 1942. His two children (Isabelle, aged thirteen, and Jean-Joseph, aged seven) were killed in a bombing raid and his wife, Liuba Iochpa (Hertz Iochpa's sister),[34] who was also a member of the CDJ, had left Liège for Brussels during the war, to maintain the link between the two cities.[35]

Work plan and committees

A work plan was immediately published which addressed the many challenges facing the Jews. These included meeting the primary needs of Jewish victims, reinstating their rights, property and work, obtaining war damages for losses suffered, returning stolen property to its rightful owners, and undertaking various administrative procedures such as renewing identity documents, identifying abandoned children, drawing up certificates for refugees, and facilitating repatriation procedures, visas, transport, research into the missing and the mass naturalisation of foreign Jews. Seven thematic committees were set up within the AIVG for this purpose: assistance committee, legal committee and war-damage committee, purge committee, civil-status committee, children's committee, food and stocks committee and representative committee. The conclusion of the plan was unequivocal: "Everything has to be solved, it's a big task. We made enormous efforts under the Nazi occupation. We must now move forward and achieve the various objectives we have set ourselves.[36]

An important part of the plan concerned the return of children to conditions conducive to their education and freedom. For children whose parents were unable to take them back due to insufficient means, the CDJ would continue to pay the landlords as before. For the others, who had been placed with private individuals, the principle was to ask the adoptive parents to keep the children until they could

be returned to their families, i.e. six months after the end of hostilities. An investigation would be carried out into the moral environment and lifestyle of each child before they were integrated into the programme. The same principle applied to those who had been placed in liberal or religious institutions. The Children's Commission would work closely with official and private organisations to ensure that these children would receive all necessary help. In addition, although the work plan did not explicitly mention the elderly, their specific needs and issues were taken into consideration within the broader framework of the mission [37].

At meetings of the AIVG's Board of Directors held in Brussels, the defence of Liège's interests was entrusted in turn to Albert Wolf and Abraham Federman[38]. A moving example of this representation occurred at the meeting of 14 August 1945, when Federman raised the issue of the inadequacy of the budget allocated for Liège. He referred specifically to the situation of women who were without support, whose husbands had been deported, stressing the inadequacy of the amount allocated to them.[39]

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_ Visé, 1945. Rosa Fuchs and her father, Moses Fuchs, pose amid newly repatriated deportees and two American soldiers. They are located in the quarantine station of Visé, where the deportees have been subjected to a medical examination, in order to obtain information about Salomon and Arnold, Rosa's brothers, who were deported on 4 August 1942 with the first convoy. The two brothers would not return

Rescuing and reintegrating children

The CDJ rightly claimed to have played a major role in the rescue of children during the war. 81% of Jewish children in the Liège region escaped deportation[40], and a large but difficult to estimate number of them were taken into care by the CDJ. The Children's Commission undoubtedly occupied a special place in the minds of the people in charge of the AIVG. In drawing up its plan, the Children's Commission

paid particular attention to restoring children to appropriate material and moral conditions. As the scale of the disaster became ever more apparent (for example, with the liberation of Auschwitz on 27 January 1945), and as it became clear that many parents would not return from the deportation, a series of questions arose about the fate of their children.

There was an urgent need to locate children in hiding, either through Resistance networks or through the actions of their parents. This process was of crucial importance in rebuilding the children's identity, particularly their Jewish identity. The children's future was therefore a key issue and would be the focus of bitter discussions between Zionists and Communists active within the AIVG in Liège and Brussels.

An example of this is the story of Caim Zinger, aged 10 when he escaped the roundup on 24 September 1942; his father, Fiszel, his mother, Bacha Goldstein, sister Sura and uncle Zelig Kalinski were deported on 26 September in the XIth convoy. After being taken in by the parents of a friend linked to the Resistance, he was given a new identity, "Joseph Dupont", and sent to the Saint-Hadelin college in Visé. He then had to leave the school to be placed with the Dethier family in Visé-Lierneux. Back at school, he ran away to join the Dethier family, preferring the security and affection of their home, where he stayed until the end of the conflict. After the war, the welcome and support of a couple, the Rubinsteins, gave him stability and warmth that would help in shaping his future.[41]

It should be noted that some of the children were hidden in Catholic institutions in the diocese of Liège, where many clergymen played a central role in the physical rescue of Jews. Such clergymen devoted themselves to the "spiritual rescue of Israel"[42]. This sensitive subject attracted the attention of influential figures, including Pinkus Broder, a Communist activist and administrator of the AIVG, who remarked that "The national head of this department [Childhood] will contact the ecclesiastical authorities to settle amicably all questions concerning children placed in religious institutions".[43] Between November 1944 and December 1945[44] , these children were removed from the various institutions (most of them religious) in which they had been placed. But this was far from being settled "amicably".[45]

Tensions between Communists and Zionists were exacerbated by the issue of recovering the children. For some, the future of these orphans lay in Eretz Israel[46]. To this end, the Bahad movement (*Brit Haloutzim Datiyim* - Alliance of Religious Pioneers) and the Jewish Agency for Palestine set up a reception centre for Jewish orphans. This was the Marquain Craft and Agricultural School, located in the province of Hainaut, which prepared young orphans for immigration to Palestine and gave them the opportunity to rediscover their damaged Jewish identity. The initiative was supported by the Palestinian soldiers of the Jewish Brigade, which had been integrated into the British army and stationed in Belgium from July 1945.

Many of the 270 children who passed through the Marquain farm school (or *hachshara*) came from the Liège region. Frieda Nemeth, orphaned by the deportation of her parents and two brothers, was found in a Catholic home in Banneux by a cousin who belonged to the British Army's Jewish Brigade. She stayed at the Marquain *hachshara* for a year before leaving clandestinely for Palestine in 1947 aboard the Theodore Herzl. Cécile and Renée Goldman, orphans after the war, followed the same path. First placed at the Château des Fawes (Banneux), in the Catholic-school colony for girls known as "La Vierge des Pauvres", run by the Sisters of Charity of Saint-Vincent de Paul, they were transferred towards the end of the war to a family in Liège, where they were baptised, before ending up in Marquain and then emigrating to Palestine.

Some children, like E.P., who had lost her parents and was advised to emigrate, were opposed to the idea. Baptised *at the last minute* in July 1945, she stated: "Catholics saved me twice, the first from the Germans, the second from the Zionists."[47]

The beginnings of tension

One of the objectives of the programme drawn up by the AIVG was "that justice be done", i.e. that those involved in the persecution of Jews be punished. At the Liberation, the Front de l'Indépendance (FI) firmly demanded purges against collaborators[48]. Against this backdrop, Albert Wolf, who was also involved in other responsibilities, actively fought to bring the leaders of the local committee of the Association of Jews in Belgium (AJB) to justice.

This episode began in mid-November 1944, when Grigorijs Garfinkels was arrested, without a warrant, by the Purge Commission of the Liège Jewish Defence Committee. A former chairman of the education committee, treasurer and general secretary of the Liège Local Committee, Garfinkels was subjected to an in-depth interrogation covering various aspects of his activity. Following this interrogation, the CDJ compiled an incriminating file, which it forwarded to the military auditor's office[49]. Two other similar files concerning officials of the local committee of the AJB were also compiled.[50]

However, Albert Wolf did not take action against the Liège administration in connection with the preparation, updating and transmission of the register of Jews to the occupying authority[51]. At that time, the details and scale of the deportation of Jews from the Liège region remained obscure. It took three decades and years of painstaking research to reveal that over 60% of the region's Jews had been apprehended on the basis of this register, as part of compulsory labour, house arrests or roundups, as compared to the 25% who had been apprehended through the tracking down of illegal immigrants by the anti-Jewish section (section IV B) of the *Sicherheitspolizei*.[52]

At the end of October 1944, the officiating minister, Iosif Lepkifker, a member of the Liège Committee of the AIVG, requested information from the Liège city administration about the register of Jews, which would ultimately be handed over to the Comité de Défense des Juifs (CDJ)[53] .

Punishing those responsible

The trial of Bourgmestre Joseph Bologne and Procureur général à la cour d'appel de Liège, Lambert Destexhe, began on 6 November 1945 before the Conseil de Guerre de Charleroi.

The fact that the municipal administration of Liège had, without hesitation, passed on the register of Jews to the occupying forces was not the subject of the trial[54]; nevertheless, this issue was raised at the public hearing on the same day.

_ The Bahad movement (*Brit Haloutzim Datiyim*), or the Union of Religious Pioneers, in collaboration with the Jewish Agency for Palestine, established a shelter for Jewish orphans. It is known as *The Hachshara* and is located in the craft and agricultural school of Marquain, in the province of Hainaut. The initiative came with the support of soldiers from the Jewish Brigade, a unit of the British army composed of Jewish-Palestinian volunteers and had been stationed in Belgium since July 1945. *The Hachshara* offered Hebrew language lessons and vocational training to prepare the children for migration to Palestine. Among the migration candidates were people from Liège: Cécile and Renée Goldman, Armand-Joseph and Maurice-René Gat, Fella Minski and Frieda Nemeth. For more details on the history of the Liège children, please refer to Nizkor

When questioned by the president of the court, Bologna declared, with unshakeable firmness: "Yes, I maintain that I refused to hand over the lists of Jews and Freemasons to the Germans, because the law is formal. This was in 1940. I refused, invoking the law. I was not punished in any way."[55] The testimony of the aldermen, the pillars of his administration, must have thrilled the courtroom. They forcefully evoked the patriotism and resistance of their former mayor, who, when confronted with the Nazi request for a list of Jews, had supposedly been a master of strategic evasion and *"gave a wooden sword"* as a response[56]. The question of the transmission of a list of Jews, having been quickly evaded by Bologna, received no further attention during the trial or in the following years.[57]

Paradoxically, this same burgomaster had shown, in other areas, a firm determination to oppose the instructions and requisitions of the occupying authority, as well as of the general secretaries. Bologna was acquitted and retired with dignity from the political scene, without ever mentioning his administration's collaboration in the execution of the anti-Jewish orders issued by the German forces. Destexhe was also acquitted in October 1946.

Joseph Bologne's successor at the Town Hall, Théophile Dargent, a Rexist, was accused of gross denunciations and police collaboration after Bologne had been removed from office on 1 November 1942. He was sentenced to death and executed. The issue of persecution of the Jews was not raised at his trial[58]. It is true that he had little to reproach himself for on this subject, apart from regularly updating the register and occasionally passing it on to the occupying forces until the end of June 1944. His predecessor had already done most of this, and promptly.

The directors of the Office du Travail (OT) were also prosecuted, and their involvement in the forced labour of Jews weighed heavily on the sentences handed down. Albert Carpiaux, director of the OT, was sentenced to life imprisonment. S. Meunier, head of the department, was sentenced to death. François Pirard, head of the "Placement" section, died in September 1944, thereby escaping prosecution.

SS-Sturmscharführer Willhelm Stade, head of the anti-Jewish section in Liège, was renowned for his abuses, which included arbitrary detentions, coercion and assault, murders, beatings and thefts. His case was dismissed on 21 March 1949, the prosecution having been deemed inappropriate[59]. As for his Belgian auxiliaries within the *SIPO*, Alfred Delhez was sentenced to three years in prison, Oscar Èvrard to the death penalty, Maurice Darcis was rehabilitated on 4 September 1978, Auguste Voss was sentenced to 20 years, while Pierre Telgmann, who held German nationality and was regarded as the most implacable "hunter" of Jews, was sentenced to death at the end of June 1947. He was notified of his expulsion in September 1955, and it was probably at the beginning of 1959 that he left Belgium to settle in Aachen, Germany.[60]

In April 1947, the files sent by the Comité de Défense des Juifs (CDJ) de Liège implicating the leaders of the local committee of the Association des Juifs de Belgique (AJB) were closed. The trial of the AJB therefore did not take place.[61]

The Citadel of the Resistance and the birth of the founding myth

On the first Monday in October 1944, the Municipal Council held its first public inaugural meeting at the Town Hall. On this historic day, Mayor Bologna laid the foundation stone of the post-war founding myth, which gave rise to the symbolic image of "the citadel of resistance". In his speech, he paid tribute to "the Allies, the Belgians who did their duty, the patriots and the population". He emphasised the exceptional action of the Resistance in Liège, where it "was the most valiant".

He gave this memorable speech in the same building where, a few years earlier, he had pledged his full cooperation to the occupying forces in applying measures against the Jews[62]. The contrast between the heights of official discourse and the depths of past collaboration is striking.

However, this representation responded to the need to restore legality and unity, promote reconciliation, ease tensions and rebuild a town that has been severely tested by four years of occupation and recent bombings. As a result, the impact of this work has permanently obscured the grey areas surrounding the actions of the Burgomaster and his administration during the war.

Jewish memory erased

Like other cities, Liège has shown a notable indifference towards the Jews, excluding them from the collective narrative of the Resistance and the victory against Nazism. This omission has helped to minimise in public opinion the reality of the suffering endured by the Jews solely because of their Jewish identity. It also ignores their refusal to bow to the fate that befell them, and in particular their involvement in the miliary and civilian Resistance against Nazism.

In the immediate post-war period, the regional press took no interest in the Jews. With the liberation of the camps and the revelation of the horrors uncovered by the Allies, the press slowly began to report on these atrocities. However, it concentrated on anecdotal accounts, which highlighted the heroic acts of ordinary people in saving the Jews and thus contributed to the construction of the myth of Jewish passivity. In such telling, the Jews are reduced to marginal figures, rather than citizens of Liège in their own right.

Resumption of community activities

Following the Liberation, religious activities within the community were resumed, in particular under the impetus of Iosif Lepkifker, who had returned to his position as officiating minister.[63]

Besides offering religious services at the synagogue, he accompanied Rabbi Brody of the American army to visit American Jewish soldiers in hospital and participated

in religious services for those who had died. At the end of March 1945, he organised the first post-war Passover Seder at the Jardin d'Acclimatation for several hundred American soldiers.[64]

It was not until October 1945, a year after the Liberation, that community activities officially resumed under the presidency of Elimelech Fremder[65]. This was a crucial stage in the community's reconstruction of the Burning City. However, the community, with almost non-existent resources, faced major financial challenges and relied mainly on donations from American soldiers, most of whom departed in 1946. As the community's vice-president and treasurer, Joseph Krimtschansky, pointed out, the situation was all the more precarious because the membership base was small, and most members, needing support themselves, were unable to contribute financially.[66]

Reconstruction also involved repairing Jewish cultural heritage, particularly the synagogue. The synagogue on rue de la Boverie and the adjoining *Mikvé* (ritual bath) had been damaged by looting and bombing[67]. Funding also needed to be found for staff and for the hiring of a *Shohet* (for ritual slaughter), in order to meet the needs of community life.

The arrival of refugees, and their care and integration into their new environment, also posed a challenge for the community authorities. Historian Catherine Massange highlights the obvious reluctance of both Belgian society and the authorities to integrate refugees who had no previous ties with the country.

A typical example of the efforts made to assist refugees, and one in which Elimelech Fremder's intervention was decisive, was the case of Maisy Prezerowitsch, a Polish woman living in Luxembourg who had been threatened with deportation while staying with her uncle in Liège. Fremder intervened on her behalf with the Ministry of Justice in Brussels, stressing the temporary nature of her stay and her plans to emigrate to Palestine. Prezerowitsch was allowed to stay in Liège, where she found a husband and started a family.[68]

Jewish charities in Liège did not survive the war. The Jewish school, which counted seventy pupils in 1939, never resumed its activities, nor did the "*Dovor Tov*" society for Jewish history and literature, founded in 1906. However, the Société israélite de Bienfaisance, the flagship institution of Jewish community mutual aid founded in 1882, reopened in 1947, under the aegis of Rafal Janowski. The Société de Bienfaisance, six of whose directors had disappeared[69], was run by members appointed by the Liège Jewish community, which illustrates the reciprocal links between the various bodies involved in local Jewish life. This particular institution, whose resources came solely from donations, played a critical role in providing material and spiritual support to people in precarious situations[70] .

When revolt takes hold of the synagogue

Two years after the Liberation, the extent of the hardships suffered and the situation of the Jews became clearer: they included refugees, survivors of the death camps, hidden children, converts, orphans, widows and widowers, as well as those dispossessed or economically devastated. This post-war context should normally have united the different currents within the community, which ranged from the liberal tradition to ancestral traditions and practices, in a common effort to meet the challenges ahead.

However, far from the harmony and cooperation that might have been expected, tensions soon emerged, highlighting deep divisions within the Jewish community. Joseph Ein, the temporary president of the Jewish community, highlighted the internal conflict with particular acuity[71]. He pointed to the rift between the representatives of majority Orthodox Judaism, who considered Orthodoxy to be the only legitimate form of Judaism, and their co-religionists of less strict observance. In his view, this dichotomy was the source of a growing malaise within the community.

Such growing unease, of course, was hardly new. Between the wars, the composition of Liège's Jewish community had changed drastically with the arrival of Orthodox Jews from the East, exacerbating religious tensions with the less observant Jews already there. The integration efforts of the 1930s failed to establish religious solidarity, creating a persistent division[72] . In 1939, the official Jewish community numbered 200 members, with a dissident group of 70 members, not recognised by the Consistoire Israélite de Belgique, called the "Amicale Israélite". A small place of prayer, or *shtiebel*, was set up near a neighbourhood with a large immigrant Jewish population, effectively symbolising the internal fractures of this community in the throes of change.[73]

After the war, a conflict between the burial society (*Khesed shel Emes*), a representation of Orthodoxy, and members of the community who practised a more liberal form of Judaism lasted six years. The conflict illustrated the internal dissension within the community. The refusal of the Orthodox to make concessions led to repeated failures to elect a Board of Directors representative of the Jewish community's different elements. The elections gave rise to clashes marked by allegations of fraud, scandals and insults. Finally, the burial society issued a leaflet calling on "the entire Jewish population of Liège-Seraing" to attend a protest meeting at the beginning of April 1947 "against the dictatorial operation of the synagogue administration"[74]. A June 1952 report on the turmoils of the election of the new Board of Directors even mentions police intervention. After six years of upheaval, the advent of a presidency under the aegis of Girsz Kruglanski brought a return to a precarious state of tranquillity.[75]

The construction of the memory of the Shoah in Liège

The construction of the memory of the Shoah in Liège began in April 1945 with a ceremony at the synagogue in tribute to the recently deceased American president

Theodore Roosevelt. At this commemoration, Iosif Lepkifker, the officiating minister, saluted those who had helped save Jews during the war, specifically mentioning Mgr Kerkhofs, Mgr de Gruyter and Georges de Lannoy, who (as was learned later) played a direct role in his rescue. [76]

This was the starting point for a major effort by the Jewish community of Liège to recognise those who had rescued Jews. It was mainly Catholic rescuers who were honoured, such as Mgr Kerkhofs, nicknamed "the Prince of Charity", and the lawyer Max-Albert van den Berg, known as "the third vicar of Saint-Christophe"[77]. A stele in van den Berg's memory, financed by the Jewish community, was inaugurated in Banneux in 1960[78]. This approach was extended over time, notably with the state of Israel's establishment, in 1963, of the title "Righteous Among the Nations".[79]

Vincent Genin, a historian, has studied this memorial journey, highlighting the controversies that have marked it, such as the questions of conversions, the fate of children after the liberation, and the hesitations of certain members of the Van den Berg network concerning the restitution of Jewish children to the CDJ.[80]

A controversial memory

Far from subsiding, the controversy surrounding the AJB persisted within the community. It was against this backdrop that, in 1948, Rafal Janowski, president of the Société Israélite de Bienfaisance, undertook an initiative to establish "peace in the Jewish community of Liège". He published a pamphlet announcing the creation of a committee that would represent all sections of the Jewish population of Liège[81]. The committee's aim was to put a definitive end to the accusations made against certain members of the community: this was to be done by inviting anyone with grievances to express them in writing, signed, before 10 October. After this deadline, unjustified rumours would be considered malicious and unfounded. Janowski was probably convinced that the dismissal order issued in April 1947 by the Liège public prosecutor's office, followed in June by the dismissal of the case and the dismissal orders in favour of the AJB officials, was the answer to quell the controversy. This was to misunderstand Albert Wolf's determination. The response to the initiative was scathing.

When he discovered that Noè Nozyce, former president of the Liège committee of the AJB, had been granted the status of political prisoner for his supposed patriotic and selfless activities, Wolf mobilised around thirty Jews from Liège to oppose the decision. Their struggle bore fruit: Nozyce was stripped of his title and benefits, and the synagogue immediately banned Nozyce from the *Mitzvot*[82]. Nozyce protested. The Jewish community of Liège (CI) then asked the Consistoire Central israélite de Belgique (CCIB) for an appropriate response. The CCIB, however, opted for an evasive attitude, formulating its response in such a way as to avoid any commitment to specific measures[83]. Could anyone have expected more? Indeed, some of

Nozyce's former colleagues on the AJB Steering Committee were reappointed to their community posts after the war. For example, Salomon Van den Berg remained in his position as administrator of the Jewish hospice (rue de la Glacière in Brussels), and Salomon Ullmann retained his position as Chief Rabbi of Belgium, which he had held since 1940.[84]

The publication in 1965 of the book *Les Belges face à la persécution raciale 1940-1944* by Betty Garfinkels, wife of an official of the Liège committee of the AJB, rekindled tensions and sparked new controversy. Albert Wolf denounced the author's bias and was supported in his action by around thirty protesters from Liège, including the historian Minna Ajzenberg-Karny, the future minister Jean Gol and leading figures from Brussels[85].

The deaths of the last witnesses put an end to this long controversy in Liège.[86]

A place to remember

In 1949, the Société Israélite de Bienfaisance de Liège inaugurated a memorial in its synagogue on rue Léon Frédéricq to honour 393 Liege victims of the Shoah. On 8 May 1955, a memorial to the Resistance was erected in Liège and inaugurated by King Baudouin. Although the Jews were not mentioned at the inauguration, they were not ignored: they were represented by the officiating minister Josif Lepchivcher and Chief Rabbi Salomon Ullmann, who willingly agreed to play the role of extras in the Citadel of the Resistance celebration.


אויפרוף

צו דער יידישער באפעלקערונג
אין ליעזש־סעריין

די געזעלשאפט "חסד של אמת" רופט די
נאנצע יידישע באפעלקערונג פון ליעוש־סעריין צו א

פראטעסט־מיטינג

וועלכער קומט פאר

זונטיק דעם 6־טן אפריל 1947. 7 אינאוונם

אין קאפע »AU ROYAL«

6, Place de la République Française, Liège

קענן דער דיקטאטארישער האנדלונג פון דער פאדוואלטונג
פון דער סינאגאגע, קענן וועלן אונטערברענגען די חברה
חסד של אמת. וואס עקזיסטירט נאך פון פאר דעם קריג אין וועלכע אין
טים גרויס מי וידער אויפגעשפעלט נעווארן.

דער קאמיטעט.

CONSISTOIRE
SWS, 47, RUE DE FIENNES, BRUXELLES — TEL. 24.16.04
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_ Liège, 6 April 1947, "Appeal to the Jewish population of Liège-Seraing. The Association Khesed shel Emes (funeral home) calls on the entire Jewish population of Liège-Seraing for a demonstration to be held on Sunday 6 April 1947 and will take place at the café "Au Royal", on the square of the French Republic number 6 in Liège. Against the dictatorial operation of the administration of the synagogue, against the intention to establish the brotherhood Khesed shel Emes, which had existed existed before the war and which, with great difficulty, was was established. The committee". Translation Alain Mihàly (FMC)

The turning point in memory

The founding of the "Mémoire de Dannes-Camiers" association in the late 1990s, at the instigation of magistrate Foulek Ringelheim, marked a break with the previous commemorative approach. Composed of deportees and their descendants, the organisation undertook in-depth historical research into the wartime fate of the Jews of Liège.

Since then, the association has made a sustained effort in the field of academic research, enriching the historiographical literature with publications and articles, and stimulating intellectual debate through conferences, seminars, exhibitions and documentaries. It has also taken part in innovative research initiatives, offering unwavering support to the families of the victims, while honouring the fallen by erecting a memorial. In this way, "Mémoire de Dannes-Camiers" has become a benchmark in the historical study of the Shoah in Liège, marking the transition from a period of simple commemoration to an era of active historical engagement.

EPILOGUE

While the liberation of Liège in September 1944 was a moment of joy and relief, the reality that followed was far from straightforward. The city, like the rest of Belgium, faced a complex array of challenges on its journey towards reconstruction and reconciliation. In the immediate post-war period, Liège, like many Belgian cities, was plunged into a period of political and social unrest. Strikes and trade-union demands, symptomatic of a desire for change and social justice, testified to the energy and dynamism of society, but also revealed deep divisions within it. The Royal Question exacerbated these tensions, raising fundamental questions about the nature of the Resistance and collaboration.

For the Jewish community of Liège, the end of the war did not mean a return to normality. Survivors of the Shoah were faced with a brutal reality, including the loss of their loved ones and the need to rebuild their lives in a city scarred by conflict and despoilment. The fact that they were not officially recognised as victims made reconstruction and reintegration into the socio-economic fabric all the more difficult. At the Liberation, the Aide aux Israélites Victimes de la Guerre (AIVG), an organisation set up by the Comité de Défense des Juifs (CDJ), played a crucial role in helping survivors return to something reminiscent of normality.

The commitment of Albert Wolf and those close to him highlighted the failings of the leaders of the Liège Jewish community. The Jewish community, sundered by internal conflicts, struggled to formulate a coherent response to the problems posed by the post-war period. Despite their significant contribution to the Resistance, the Jews of Liège, like those of other regions, were largely absent from the collective narrative of the Resistance in the post-war years. This oversight helped to perpetuate the myth of Jewish passivity, ignoring the active role played by many Jews in the Resistance and their sacrifices. The emphasis placed on the rescuers, particularly those who were Catholic, to the detriment of recognition of the Jewish Resistance, fuelled this marginalisation in the collective memory for many years.

The pioneering work of historian Maxime Steinberg in the 1980s marked the beginning of the historiography of the Shoah in Belgium. A large number of works on the Shoah followed, enabling the field of research to be broadened and the scope of this unprecedented event to be better understood, even on a regional scale. In Liège, the creation of the "Mémoire de Dannes-Camiers" association illustrates this effort.

ABBREVIATIONS

AGR	Kingdom Archives - State Archives in Belgium, Brussels
AIVG	Help for Israelis who were Victims of the War
AJB	Association of Jews in Belgium
AMB	Military Auditorium in Brussels
AVLg	Archives of the City of Liège
CCIB	Consistoire central israélite de Belgique, Brussels
CDJ	Committee for the Defence of Jews
Cegesoma	Centre for Contemporary War and Society Studies, Brussels
FMC	Fondation de la Mémoire Contemporaine, Brussels
Joint	American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee
MJB	Jewish Museum of Belgium, Brussels
MCIL	Kruglanski Museum of the Jewish Community of Liège
OE	Office des Étrangers
OT	Office du Travail
OT	*Organization Todt*
SVG	Federal Public Service Social Security, War Victims Service, Brussels
SSJ	Jewish Social Services, Brussels

Thierry Rozenblum, grandson of a deportee, is a historian who has collected a wealth of documents concerning the Jews of Liège during the Occupation, between 1940 and 1944. His publications include "Une cité si ardente. L'administration communale de Liège et la persécution des Juifs, 1940-1942", *Revue d'histoire de la Shoah*, 2003; "Une illustration locale : le Comité de Liège de l'AJB", in Jean-Philippe Schreiber, Rudi Van Doorslaer (dir.), *Les curateurs du ghetto. L'Association des Juifs en Belgique sous l'occupation nazie*, 2004 and, with Bernard Suchecky, *Une cité si ardente… Les Juifs de Liège sous l'Occupation (1940-1944)*, 2010.

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(1) Thierry Rozenblum, *Nizkor, Mémorial des Juifs de la région Liégeoise assassinés par les nazis, 1940-1945,* CD-ROM, Brussels, Luc Pire, 2010. I would like to thank Barbara Dickschen and Sophie Milquet of the Fondation de la Mémoire Contemporaine for their careful review of this article.

(2) Thierry Rozenblum with the collaboration of Bernard Suchecky, *Une cité si ardente… Les Juifs de Liège sous l'Occupation (1940-1944)*, Brussels, Luc Pire, 2010 and Alain Colignon, *Bologne Joseph*: https://www.belgiumwwii.be/belgique-en-guerre/personnalites/bologne-joseph.html, accessed on 3 July 2024.

(3) The decree of 25/10/1942, published in the *Moniteur belge des arrêtés ministériels et autres arrêtés des secrétaires généraux* of 1/11/1942, created Grand Liège. The decree of 6 November appointed the mayor and aldermen of this new administrative entity, most of whom were Rexists – AMB, no. 392 L/45 – 401 L/45, dossier Albert Dargent et consorts ("Grand Liège" case).

(4) Alain Colignon, *Liège,* CegeSoma: https://www.belgiumwwii.be/belgique-en-guerre/articles/liege.html, consulted on 3 July 2024.

(5) *La Meuse*, 9 September 1944.

(6) Alain Colignon, *Hubert Pierlot,* CegeSoma: https://www.belgiumwwii.be/belgique-en-guerre/personnalites/pierlot-hubert.html, consulted on 3 July 2024.

(7) The conference of burgomasters of Greater Liège was re-established, with its thirty communes and communal councils.

(8) *La Meuse*, 9 October 1944.

(9) The situation in Greece was bound to worry the Allies that "excesses" would jeopardise regional stability.
Between 3 December 1944 and 11 January 1945, Athens was the scene of violent clashes between the Greek resistance forces, notably EAM-ELAS and KKE, and the British army.

(10) *La Meuse*, 10 October 1944; Martin Conway, *Les chagrins de la Belgique : Libération et reconstruction politique 1944-1947*, p. 86-165; Alain Colignon, *Désarmer la résistance*, CegeSoma: https://www.belgiumwwii.be/belgique-en-guerre/articles/desarmer-la-resistance.html; Gilbert Mottard, *Des administrations et des hommes dans la tourmente : Liège 1940-1945*, Brussels, Crédit communal, in-8 series, no. 75, 1987, pp. 208-220.

(11) Alain Colignon, *Bologne Joseph*, *op.cit*; Thierry Rozenblum, "Une cité si ardente. L'administration communale de Liège et la persécution des Juifs, 1940-1942", *Revue d'histoire de la Shoah*, no. 179, 2003, p. 46.

(12) *See Nizkor,* notice Michelson-Rozen.

(13) Interview with Bernard Wilkin, RTBF, 23 January 2020.

(14) Following the roundup of 24 September 1942, the majority of Jews in the Liège region went underground, marking a crucial turning point in the regional Shoah. Thierry Rozenblum, *Une cité si ardente, op. cit.* p. 120-122.

(15) On this subject, see Johanna Pezechkian, "La *Möbelaktion* en Belgique", *Cahiers d'histoire du temps présent* no. 10, 2002, pp. 153-180, which draws on Israël Shirman, "Un aspect de la "Solution finale" : La spoliation économique des Juifs de Belgique", *Cahiers d'Histoire de la Seconde Guerre mondiale* no. 3 X 1973, pp. 65-83; Une cité si ardente…

(16) Correspondence dated 6 November 1944 from Osias Kallus to the Collège des Bourgmestres et Échevins de Liège, concerning instructions from the Échevin de l'Instruction publique to the Échevin des Finances. The document includes a handwritten note specifying the opening of an order account of 50,000 francs, following a decision by the College, to be associated with the "Jews" file, source: Archives de la Ville de Liège (AVLg), BAP. For more background on this period, see also Rosita Winkler and Déborah Gol, *"Monsieur Magendavid est venu nous dire bonjour…". Une histoire liégeoise, 1908-1945*, Liège, Territoires de la Mémoire, 2023, p. 163.

(17) Sources: Archives Générales du Royaume (AGR), Walter Messerschmidt and Walter Sirot files, reference nos. 310969 and A325842, respectively; Service Archives des Victimes de la Guerre (SVG), SDR Walter Messerschmidt file, at the Swiss Federal Archives (AF-Berne). See also on Jews on the Franco-Swiss border during the years of the "Final Solution": Ruth Fivaz-Silbermann, *La fuite en Suisse. Les Juifs à la frontière franco-suisse durant les années de la "Solution finale"*, Paris, Calmann-Lévy, 2020.

(18) Commission (Buysse) to compensate members of the Jewish community. https://combuysse.fgov.be

(19) *See Nizkor,* Raszkin-Kutas notice.

(20) Ludwig Zurek gave his only testimony during the RTBF programme "Les évadés du convoi 16", produced by Robert Neys and Jean-Pierre Grombeer, on 27 October 1999. Thierry Rozenblum, *Nizkor,* notice Zurek-Helmann, *op. cit*.

(21) *See Nizkor,* notice Ringheleim-Goldberg.

(22) On 25 November 1941, a new ordinance issued by the *Militärverwaltung* required every Jew living in the country to be a member of an Association of Jews in Belgium (AJB). All existing Jewish associations, institutions and foundations were dissolved.

(23) See *Nizkor, Nizkor*, notice Peguine-Weinberg.

(24) The Association of Jews in Belgium was founded by the German order of 25 November 1941.

(25) See *Nizkor, Nizkor,* notice Nozice-Lasar.

(26) On this subject, see Jean-Philippe Schreiber and Rudi Van Doorslaer (eds.), *Les curateurs du ghetto. L'Association des Juifs en Belgique sous l'occupation nazie,* Brussels, Labor, 2004.

(27) *See Nizkor,* notice Lepkivker-Hersonsky.

(28) Albert Wolf in *Dictionnaire biographique des Juifs de Belgique, Figures du judaïsme belge XIX^e – XX^e siècles*, edited by Jean-Philippe Schreiber, Brussels, De Boeck & Larcier, 2002. p. 365; see http://www.ihoes.be/PDF/inventaires/Wolf_Albert.pdf; Thierry Rozenblum, *Une cité si ardente, op. cit.*; SVG, Dossier de statut des Résistants Civils, Wolf Albert no. 749938; SVG, Dossier statut des Résistants par la Presse Clandestine, Wolf Albert no. 609556.

(29) Auschwitz Foundation, The Liberation of the Camps and the Return of the Deportees: www.auschwitz.be/fr/activites/expositions-itinerantes/la-liberation-des-camp, accessed on 3 July 2024.

(30) *La Meuse*, 14 September 1944.

(31) Catherine Massange, *Bâtir le lendemain. L'Aide aux Israélites victimes de la guerre et le Service social juif de 1944 à nos jours*, Brussels, Didier Devillez, 2002, p. 17.

(32) Ibid; Catherine Massange, "La politique sociale", in Jean-Philippe

Schreiber, Rudi Van Doorslaer (eds.), *Les curateurs du ghetto, op. cit*, pp. 277-316; Catherine Massange, *La création de la Centrale d'œuvres Sociales Juives ou comment animer une conscience sociale*, Brussels, 2002.

(33) *See Nizkor,* Steinberg-Sudit notice.

(34) This surname is also spelt "Jospa" or "Iospa".

(35) *See Nizkor,* notice, Pailloucq-Iochpa.

(36) Four-page typed document, entitled "Le Comité de Défense des Juifs à Liège" (The Committee for the Defence of Jews in Liège), describing the history of the formation of the committee, its past activities, the events that occurred during the Liberation, as well as the new missions assigned and the work plan envisaged, source: Archives of the IHOES (Institut d'Histoire Ouvrière, Économique et Sociale), Collection Albert Wolf, Liège, dated September 1944.

(37) See Barbara Dickshen and Thierry Rozenblum, *Jusqu'à 120 ans! De l'hospice israélite à l'Heureux Séjour. Une institution juive à Bruxelles de 1875 à nos jours*, Brussels, FMC, 2020.

(38) The two delegates mandated by the President and the Administrator of the AIVG, Alfred Goldschmidt and Chaïm Perelman, were given power of attorney to manage and meet the needs of the Liège section, source: IHOES, Papiers Albert Wolf, document of power of attorney, Brussels, 18 May 1945.

(39) Minutes of the meeting of the Board of Directors of the AIVG, held on 14 August 1945 in Brussels, source: Jewish Social Service.

(40) Thierry Rozenblum*, Une cité si ardente, op. cit.* p. 154-155.

(41) Testimony of Zinger Joseph (Caïm), taken in Luxembourg on 16 October 2008 by Thierry Rozenblum. See *Nizkor,* notice Zinger – Goldstein, *op. cit*.

(42) Thierry Rozenblum, *Une cité si ardente*, *op. cit.* pp. 142-154; see also Florence Matteazzi, *L'attitude du clergé face à la Shoah dans le diocèse de Liège (1940-1945),* unpublished dissertation, Louvain-la-Neuve, UCL, 1995-1996.

(43) "Draft internal statutes and plan for the distribution of responsibilities among the members of the Board of Directors. Integration of the Jewish masses into the economic and social life of the country". Charleroi, 17 February 1945, source: IHOES, Albert Wolf Papers. See also the biographical note on Pinkus Broder in the *Dictionnaire biographique des Juifs de Belgique*, p. 68.

(44) See Katy Hazan, "Les Enfants Cachés en France et en Belgique, Essai de Comparaison", *European Review*, 2017.

(45) See Vincent Genin, "La conversion des enfants juifs cachés dans la région liégeoise (1942-2010). Mythes et réalités", *Revue d'Histoire Ecclésiastique*, 109 (3-4), p. 26-29.

(46) In her study, Catherine Massange refers to an interview with Yvonne Jospa (FMC, 1995-1996) in which she mentions "the Zionists who wanted to send orphans to Palestine at all costs", a probable allusion to Félicie Liwer (alias Fela, wife of Chaïm Perelman), who was in charge of the CDJ's children's commission. For more details, see Catherine Massange, "Les homes d'enfants juifs à la libération", *Les Cahiers de la Mémoire Contemporaine*, no. 9, 2010, pp. 59-87.

(47)Testimony of P. E., collected in Grivegnée on 20 March 1998 by Thierry Rozenblum*, cf. Nizkor,* notice P.-S.

(48) Martin Conway, *Les Chagrins, op. cit.* p. 104.

(49) Interrogation of G. Garfinkels by the Épuration Commission of the Liège CDJ, 16 November 1944, sources: IHOES, Papier Albert Wolf, CDJ Liège; see also Grégoire Garfinkel file no. 444030-N-1944, Auditorat Militaire de Belgique (AMB).

(50) AMB n° 5450-N-1946 dossier AB; AMB n° 4030-N-1944, dossier M.S.

(51) Order of 28 October 1940; see poster posted in the commune of Liège between 18 November and 9 December 1940, AVLg.

(52) Serge Klarsfeld and Maxime Steinberg, *Le Mémorial de la déportation des Juifs de Belgique*, Brussels, The Beate Klarsfeld Foundation, Union des déportés juifs en Belgique et filles et fils de la déportation, 1982. For a detailed study of the Shoah in the Liège region, see *Nizkor.*

(53) Communication from a member (potentially a cabinet secretary) to Iosif Lepkifker, officiating minister, no place specified, dated 20 October 1944. Also includes an anonymous, undated handwritten note to Iosif Lepkifker, source: AVLg, BAP.

In November 1944, the local authorities were ordered to submit their lists of Jewish populations to the Ministry of the Interior, which then handed them over to the Comité de Défense des Juifs (CDJ). Among these documents, the register of Jews in the city of Liège, whose disappearance remains unexplained, was examined in the 1960s.

(54) Alain Colignon, *Bologne Joseph*, *op. cit.*
Thierry Rozenblum, "Une cité si ardente. L'administration communale", *op. cit*. no. 179, 2003, p. 46.

(55) Minutes of the public hearing (no. 2342) of 6 November 1945 (Féron President). AMB, no. 2764/Mag. 1/44, Joseph Bologne and Lambert Destexhe file.

(56) *La Wallonie*, 15 November 1945. See also Rozenblum, "Une cité si ardente. L'administration communale", *op. cit*. p 46-47, the letter dated 16 January 1945 from the former aldermen to Burgomaster Bologna: "You have resisted as much as possible, often giving up only a shadow of what was asked of you – as a measure of lesser evil – in order to reserve the essentials that could harm the country."

(57) Thierry Rozenblum, "Une cité si ardente. L'administration communale", *op. cit*. no. 179, 2003, pp. 9-73.

(58) AMB, no. 392 L 45 – 401 L 45, "Grand Liège" case, Dargent Théophile file.

(59) Letter dated 27 December 1977, addressed to the Auditor General of the Military Court (AMB, no. 2287 N 1947, Wilhem Stade file).

(60) Pierre Telgmann, born in Belgium on 4 July 1913, is of German nationality (AMB, no. 386/L/47 Pierre Telgmann file); OE A118139

(61) André Donnet, "L'instruction par la justice militaire : un non-lieu de mémoire", in Jean-Philippe Schreiber, Rudi Van Doorslaer (eds.), *op. cit*, pp. 375-415.

(62) On this subject, see the details of the meeting between Bologna and the *Stadtkommissar* Ranze, Hôtel de Ville de Liège, 19 November 1940, Rozenblum, "Une cité si ardente. L'administration communale", *op. cit*. p. 2.

(63) Most of the existing archives of the Liège Jewish community are preserved by the Consistoire Central israélite de Belgique. It is regrettable

to note a certain lack of interest on the part of the community leaders of Liège in the history of their institution, leading to the total loss of the archives of the Jewish community of Liège.

(64) See the letter from General H.L. Peckham (Commander, US Army) dated 21 December 1948 to Iosif Lepkifker, source: CCIB, file no. 2256.

(65) Elimelech Fremder's family, protected by Vicar Boufflette of Saint-Christophe church, benefited from the support of the local community. Their son Pinkus, who joined the Secret Army, was killed in August 1943. Vicar Bouflette, who was deported to the Dora camp on 21 February 1945, died between 10 and 15 March of the same year. Reference: Claudia-Elena Nizet, *Les Justes de la Province de Liège*, dissertation, Université de Liège, 2013-2014, p. 109. For further reading, see Sébastien Belleflamme, *La croix et le glaive. Clergé séculier et résistance dans le diocèse de Liège (1940-1944*), licentiate thesis, ULg, Liège, 2007-2008. For more information on the Fremder-Wagdberg family, see their biographical note in Thierry Rozenblum, *Nizkor, op. cit.*

(66) See the letter from the Liège Jewish community to the Consistoire israélite de Belgique, dated 7 January 1946, source: CCIB, file no. 22565.

(67) The synagogue at 19 rue Léon Frédéricq was formerly known as rue de la Boverie.

(68) Sources: Archives Générales du Royaume (AGR), Prezerowitsch Maisy file, no. 2000459.

(69) See *Nizkor,* notices Pailloucq-Iochpa, Maier Fuks, Lajzer Koninski, Chia Markowicz, Chaïm Peguine, Idel Steinberg and Henriette Picard, *op. cit.*

(70) Source: IHOES, Papiers Albert Wolf, Société israélite de Bienfaisance de la communauté israélite de Liège, Activité & Bilan de l'Exercice 1947-1948.

(71) In July 1947, Joseph Ein was elected Chairman of the Liège Jewish Community Board, a position he left in February 1948.

(72) Thierry Rozenblum, *Une cité si ardente, op. cit.* p. 16-18.

(73) Report by Louis Wied, President of the Liège Jewish community, to the CCIB Board of Directors, dated Liège, 28 March 1939. CCIB, non-inventoried fonds (Russia archives – 2-2-56).

(74) Note from the Jewish community of Liège to the board of directors of the CCIB concerning disturbances at the synagogue, initiated by the *Hesed-Chel-Hemes* Society. Includes a pamphlet calling for a demonstration. Thanks to Alain Mihály (FMC) for his translation. Liège, 14 April 1947, CCIB file no. 22565.

(75) Communication from the Jewish community of Liège addressed to the CCIB Board of Directors, concerning the elections for the triennial renewal of the members of the Board of Directors, dated 27 May 1952, registered, Liège 6 June 1952, CCIB file no. 22565.

(76) Georges de Lannoy, President of Caritas and a bank director, and Mgr de Gruyter, a priest at Saint-Christophe since 1940, were honoured as Righteous Among the Nations in 1997. Mgr Kerkhofs, Bishop of Liège, received the same recognition in 1981, all hailed for their commitment to saving Jews. For more on the role of the clergy in the Liège Resistance, see Sébastien Belleflamme, *op. cit.*; Vincent Genin, *La conversion, op. cit*, 109 (3-4), pp. 815-856; Florence Matteazzi, *op. cit*, and Thierry Rozenblum, "Une cité si ardente", *op. cit,* pp. 142-154.

(77) See Thierry Rozenblum, *ibid*, note 49 p. 188.

(78) Let us recall the milestones in the tribute paid to the lawyer Max-Albert van den Berg: in 1960, his first commemorative stele was unveiled in Banneux, financed by the Liège Jewish community. Thirty-five years later, in 1995, he was honoured as Righteous Among the Nations. The city of Liège then paid tribute to him by naming a stairway after him, the Passage Albert Van den Berg. Finally, on 22 November 2010, a second stele financed by the Foyer Culturel Israélite de Liège was unveiled in the Laveu district. In fact, the process of paying tribute to Max-Albert van den Berg continues today: due to "lack of visibility", a project is underway to relocate the second stele.

(79) See Claudia-Elena Nizet, *op. cit*.

(80) See Vincent Genin, *La conversion*, *op. cit.* 109 (3-4), pp. 815-856.

(81) Source: IHOES, Albert Wolf Papers.

(82) In this context, the term *Mitzvot* refers to an obligation or good deed performed by the participants in a synagogue service. This implies active participation by the congregation, which is considered to be a fulfilment of divine commandments and an essential element of religious practice.

(83) Correspondence from the Jewish community of Liège to the Board of Directors of the CCIB concerning Noé Nozyce, Liège, 20 June 1948, CCIB file no. 22565. Followed by the CCIB's reply to the letter of 20 June 1948, Brussels, 18 February 1949, CCIB file no. 22565.

(84) Salomon Van den Berg was Treasurer of the Steering Committee and Chairman of the Brussels Local Committee. In April 1943, he was promoted to Chief Administrator of the AJB. Salomon Ullmann, who had become Grand Rabbi of Belgium in 1940, also became President of the AJB. However, he resigned in August 1942. Alongside Salomon Van den Berg and Noé Nozyce, Ullmann was one of the signatories of the summons to the assembly camp in Mechelen, August 1942.

(85) See Jacques Deom, "Vingt ans après, les crispations de la mémoire", in Jean-Philippe Schreiber, Rudi Van Doorslaer (eds.), *op. cit.* p. 417-432.

(86) For an in-depth study of the subject, see *ibid.* This book is the first comprehensive contribution to the subject.