

(PRE)DESCRIBING HISTORICAL FACTS: CROATIAN AID TO THE JEWS IN JUNE AND JULY 1941

Vjekoslav Bakašun, *Contribution of the inhabitants of Kraljevica and Kostrena to the rescue of Jews during June and July 1941*, Naklada Kvarner i Savez antifašističkih boraca i antifašista Primorsko-goranske županije, Novi Vinodolski – Rijeka, 2021., 127 p.

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Dr. sc. Vjekoslav Bakašun was born in Kostrena, an epidemiologist and former director of today's Teaching Institute. After retirement, he continued to work in science, and in addition to the history of the health of Sušak, he began to study the history of his hometown. Since the publication of the first book and the first work after retirement, he has published a total of five books and several articles, by which he became and remained a prominent chronicler of Rijeka and its surroundings, primarily Kostrena.

Bakašun tirelessly researches smaller historical events and circumstances in the vicinity of Rijeka, and after the book *Memories of the War Years in Kostrena 1941-1945*. in which he talks about the struggle of the people of Kostrena against the occupiers through his own lived experiences, he also decides on the book *The Contribution of the Residents of Kraljevica and Kostrena to the Rescue of the Jews during June and July 1941*.

The book was created based on unknown and interesting data and facts presented at a public lecture in Kostrena in 2018, after

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which a year later, the same lecture was held in the City Hall of Rijeka, and then all the presented data and all research on Jewish history Kostrena and Kraljevica were immortalized in the midst of the Second World War with the publication in question.

The publication *The contribution of the inhabitants of Kraljevica and Kostrena in rescuing Jews during June and July 1941* contains an informal first part about the movement of Jews in Kraljevica and Kostrena during the war, citing personal statements of individuals about the passage and/or flight of Jews through various smaller locations, that is, small towns along the coast and hinterland of Rijeka, while the second part talks about the Jews who came to Kraljevica in the Crikvenica-Vinodol area during the Second World War and who remained there.

The first part mentions, for example, the Polić family, the Pollak family, the Neufeld family, and, for example, places such as Kostrena, Kraljevica, Šoići, and Sušak. The book also contains an epilogue and a summary in Croatian, English, and Italian, and at the very end, literature. In addition, the book includes original photographs dating from the Second World War, but also more recent ones, as well as some historical documents, many of which are in Italian, in addition to those in German and Croatian.

The second part is interesting because it not only talks about Jews who came to the area from Kraljevica to Vinodol but also mentions the concentration camp in Kraljevica, describing the stay of Jews in that camp, the birth of children, and the transfer of detainees to the island of Rab, as well as the journey of some camp inmates to the south of Italy, across the island of Vis.

As the book mentions, the locals helped the Jews escape the Holocaust, so from the coast of Kostrena, which was under the NDH, to the coast of Kraljevica, which was under Italian jurisdiction from only 800 meters away, 250 to 300 Jews were transferred, after which they fled through Sušak and Italy to Switzerland from the unstoppable hand of the then NDH regime. Given that there are no official records of aid to Jews, nor records of the number of rescued along the route, the book is a valuable historical document that shows that even in times of greatest trouble, there are always those who, despite all the danger, ready to do the right thing, the humane thing, and what shows the greatness of an individual - to offer help to one's neighbor, but also to a stranger in need! The book, in addition to being a (historical) document that expands knowledge about the suffering of the Jewish people during the Second World War in Croatia during the Independent State of Croatia, is also a document showing socio-political conditions and order in Croatia through describing places near Rijeka, on its eastern side.

Although several publications were published on the Jewish situation amid the Second World War, on the historical situation and assistance to Jews from the locals from the vicinity of Rijeka, which is written by Dr. sc. Bakašun has not been published much, but only traces of what happened, and are worth further research. In his new book, the author revises the historically incomplete picture of the Jewish situation in the Rijeka area in June and July 1941 through his own memories of helping the Jews who lived in his house and the memories of surviving witnesses and participants he came in contact.

I recommend the book to all historians, chroniclers, but also to all others who still intrude in history, wanting to take hold of the historical truths as an inexhaustible source of inspiration from which

we must always learn, but also historical truths as sources that serve as a reminder and/or warning to society, and the individual so that some things would never happen again.