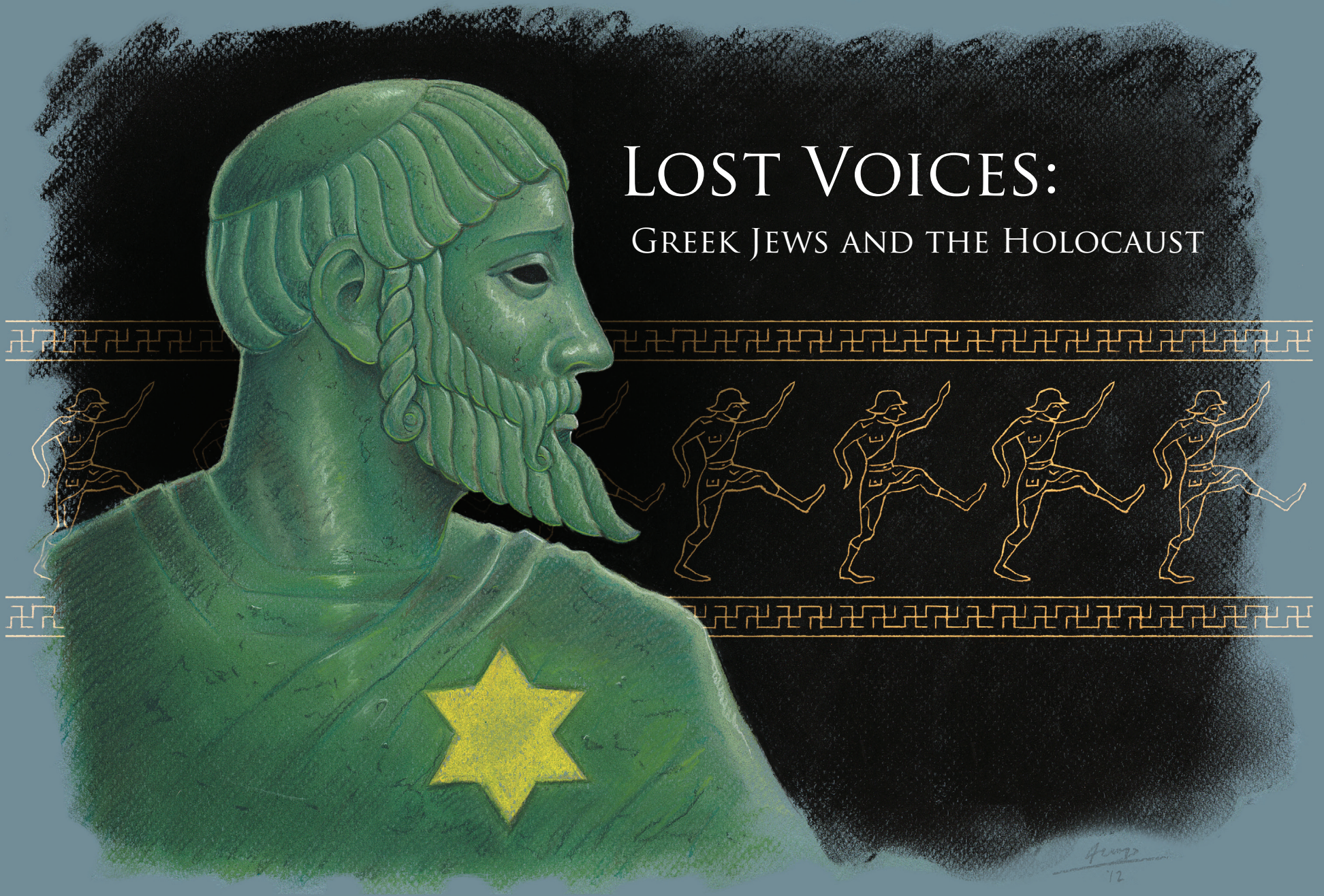


# LOST VOICES:

## GREEK JEWS AND THE HOLOCAUST









# LOST VOICES: GREEK JEWS AND THE HOLOCAUST

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“I have written you a letter to calm you a little in spite of the agony of the days and nights waiting, like the condemned, for the death sentence. For a moment there is an illusion of escaping this bad time... The fatal moment can arrive in days or hours for me too. Dear children, in spite of my trying not to upset you I see that the last hour is near... God, who sees my tears, should pity you and keep you alive... Even God could not endure the tragedy that is happening here. I leave with a sack on my back for the unknown, without a protector.  
—Your unfortunate mother, Neama”

Adapted from *El Avenir-The Future*, Jewish Community of Thessaloniki, Issue 7, January 2011, p. 12

**T**HIS IS AN EXCERPT of a letter written by an unknown Jewish woman in Salonika, Greece, to her sons in Athens, dated March 3-5, 1943. How the letter made it to Athens is not clear. The German Nazi forces entered Salonika in April 1941. Following two years of punishing measures directed at the 56,000 Jews in the city, such as the wearing of the Yellow Star and the robbing of all their belongings, the Jewish population was finally restricted to specific areas of Salonika. On March 15, 1943, the first deportation took place when 2,800 Jews were packed into forty cattle cars. It was precisely during these harrowing weeks that Neama wrote her despairing letter.

Following texts and photos offering a summary of Greek Jewish history from antiquity and up to the late 1930s, this exhibit will focus on how the Shoah affected the Jews of Greece, one of the oldest Jewish communities, going back to the third century BCE. Given that most people, Jews included, associate the Shoah with Central European Jewry, these photos will illustrate that, sadly, Greek Jews were not exempt from the same horrors, although the circumstances and timetable of their annihilation varied from the better known scenarios. As historian Michael Matsas points out, the combination of the Italian zone of occupation of Greece,

the territories controlled by the Greek partisans, easy access to Turkey, and the lateness in Jewish deportations, “made the history of the Holocaust in Greece entirely different from that of all other countries. In fact, the deportation of the Greek Jews began in March 1943, over a year later than most of the rest of Europe, and did not end until July, 1944.” (*The Illusion of Safety: The Story of the Greek Jews During the Second World War*, p. 20.)

Our photos will not only look at the Jews of Salonika, the largest Jewish community in prewar Greece but also at the smaller communities of Ioannina and the islands of Rhodes and Corfu, and at the 5,000 Jews who perished in northeastern Greece under the Bulgarian (pro-German) zone of occupation.

Between 60,000 and 70,000 Greek Jews perished, most of them in Auschwitz-Birkenau. Some 8,000 to 10,000 survived, partly due to the unwillingness of many Greeks and even some leaders of the Greek Orthodox Church, to cooperate with the Nazi deportations.

About 5,000 Jews presently live in Greece, mostly in Athens and Salonika.





**T**HE CELEBRATION of the Jewish festival of Hannukah recalls the confrontation of the Syrian-Greeks who ruled over Palestine during the second century BCE and the Jews who rose up against them under the leadership of the Maccabean rebels. While this is the most widely known encounter of Palestinian Jews with the Greek empire, it was not the first. In fact, Palestine came under Greek rule in 332 BCE when Alexander the Great passed through the land coming from his conquests of Phoenicia in the north on his way to Egypt. The Greeks then ruled Palestine until the Roman conquest of the territory in 73 CE. The influence of Hellenic culture on Jewish culture was a fact of life. The Babylonian Talmud records that Rabbi Simeon, son of Rabbi Gamaliel, said, “There were a thousand young men in my father’s academy, five hundred of whom studied the Law, while the other five hundred studied Greek Wisdom.” (Sota 49b). The Greek language became so widespread among Jews of the time that the Jewish Bible had to be translated into Greek. Thus the Septuagint became the first translation of the Jewish Bible into another language. The New Testament records that, by the middle of the first century, Paul encountered flourishing Jewish communities throughout the Greek-speaking world.

◀ **TOP: HASMONEAN COIN FROM THE TIME OF ALEXANDER JANNAEUS (103-76 BCE) LEFT: WHEEL ON STAR, INSCRIBED “JONATHAN THE KING;” RIGHT: ANCHOR. THE INSCRIPTION BEARS THE NAME OF THE RULER AS WELL AS HIS GREEK TITLE *BASILEUS* (KING)**

◀ **BOTTOM: SEVERAL BURIAL MONUMENTS WITH A STRONG GREEK ACCENT WERE DISCOVERED IN JERUSALEM. ONE IS JASON’S TOMB FOUND IN WHAT IS TODAY THE REHAVIA NEIGHBORHOOD. IT DISPLAYS A SINGLE DORIC COLUMN AND PYRAMID-TYPE MONUMENT. GREEK AND ARAMAIC INSCRIPTIONS ARE ALSO ENGRAVED ON THE STONE. (LEE I. LEVINE, *JUDAISM & HELLENISM IN ANTIQUITY*, P. 42-43)**





**T**HE COLLAPSE of the Roman Empire led to the rise of the Byzantine Empire. Under its rule, Jewish communities in the cities and towns of Greece multiplied. Benjamin of Tudela (second half of the 12th century), the greatest medieval Jewish traveler wrote in his *Book of Travels* about his encounters with Greek Jewish silk weavers and the agricultural colony at Crissa on Mt. Parnassus. In 1376 there was an Ashkenazi immigration to Greece with Jews coming from Hungary and Germany avoiding persecution. By the year 1500 larger numbers of Spanish Jews began arriving, following their expulsion from Spain by Ferdinand and Isabella in 1492. It was this immigration that set the foundation for Ladino to be spoken for generations to come in and around Salonika. In 1648 more Jewish refugees fleeing the Cossack massacres in Poland found their way to Greece.

◀ BYZANTINE JEWS, MT. ATHOS, TENTH CENTURY. "JEWS APPEAR FREQUENTLY IN BYZANTINE ILLUSTRATIONS, AND MOST PROBABLY THEY APPEAR IN CONTEMPORARY DRESS. THE HEADS OF MALES ARE COVERED BY A *SODARION* (HEAD SCARF) AND OVER THEIR TUNICS THEY WEAR A GARMENT KNOWN AS *PAENULA* WHICH WAS CUT IN AN OVAL OR ROUND FORM TO AVOID THE CORNERS THAT WOULD HAVE REQUIRED *TZITZIYOT* (RITUAL FRINGES). (*THE JEWS OF GREECE*, TALOS PRESS, P. 66)





**A**BOUT FIFTEEN to twenty thousand Sephardim fleeing Spain settled in Salonika, the city that became the center of Jewish life in the Balkans. The Ottomans, who ruled Greece from the mid-fifteenth century until the conclusion of the first Greek War of Independence in 1832, welcomed the Jews because they were seen as contributing to the economy. Jews went on to occupy administrative positions and played a predominant role in the intellectual and commercial life of the empire. By supporting the Ottoman Empire, the Jews carried disfavor with the Christian Orthodox Greeks. During the war years, 1821-1829, thousands of Jews were massacred alongside the Ottoman Turks, not because of their Jewish condition but because they were seen as allied with the Turks.

The War of Independence only restored a small portion of “Greece” from the Ottoman Empire (Thessaly, Athens and the Peloponnese). Fighting between Greek forces and the Ottoman occupiers would continue into the twentieth century: Salonika would fall in 1912 while Ioannina remained under Ottoman rule until 1913.

Stanford J. Shaw, *The Jews of the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic*

▶ **BOTTOM: JACOB MEIR, THE GRAND RABBI OF SALONIKA (1908-1921) UNDER OTTOMAN RULE.**

▶ **TOP: AN ELDERLY SALONIKA JEW C. 1914. BEHIND HIM ARE THE OFFICES OF THE NOUVEAU CERCLE SIONISTE (NEW ZIONIST CIRCLE) DISPLAYING BOTH THE GREEK FLAG AND THE FLAG OF THE ZIONIST MOVEMENT. (THE JEWS OF THESSALONIKI THROUGH THE POSTCARDS 1886-1917, P. 22 AND 47)**





BY 1900, SALONIKA, with about 80,000 Jews, was home to the largest Greek Jewish community. It could boast of more than fifty synagogues and twenty Jewish schools. On Friday afternoons, the city came to a standstill when almost all the commercial life stopped since most of the city's workers were Jewish. A 1917 major fire in Salonika's Jewish Quarter hastened the community's decline. In the 1920s a Greek imposed 'Hellenization' policy "requiring the imposition of the Greek language, the formal establishment of Sunday instead of Saturday as a day of rest and the reorganization of traditional Jewish life according to Greek laws," led to a further decline of Salonika's Jewish community. By 1939, there were approximately sixty to seventy thousand Jews left.

The Athens Jewish community "was well established by the late 1800s. A synagogue was built in 1904. By the 1940s, the synagogue accommodated more than 3,000 people." After asserting its definitive independence from Ottoman rule, the Greek government won the support of the Jewish community. Under Greek Prime Minister Eleftherios Venizelos, Greece became one of the first countries to accept the 1917 Balfour Declaration, issued by the British Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour granting Jews the right to establish a Jewish homeland in Palestine.

Shira Schoenberg, Jewish Virtual Library, "Greece," p. 5

Michael Molho, *Traditions & Customs of the Sephardic Jews of Salonica*



▲ ABOVE: THE "MACCABEES" WAS A JEWISH BOY SCOUT TROUP IN SALONIKA. THIS POPULAR AND ACTIVE ORGANIZATION WAS AN IMPORTANT PART OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITY. THIS PICTURE WAS TAKEN IN 1937 ON A CAMPING TRIP AT THE YUGOSLAV/GREEK BORDER. ASIDE FROM THE TYPICAL CAMPING SCOUT ACTIVITIES, THIS ZIONIST ORGANIZATION HAD ORGANIZED SPORTS, ORCHESTRAL BANDS, AND REPRESENTED THE JEWISH COMMUNITY AT VARIOUS FUNCTIONS INCLUDING MARCHING IN GREEK PARADES. THE MACCABEES IN SALONIKA ALSO ORGANIZED HELPING REFUGEES FROM EASTERN EUROPE DURING THEIR MIGRATIONS TO PALESTINE. THE GREAT MAJORITY OF THE SCOUTS IN THIS PICTURE PERISHED IN THE HOLOCAUST.



▲ MAP OF GREECE.

**G**REECE ENTERED World War II on October 28, 1940, when the Italian army invaded from Albania, beginning the Greco-Italian war. The Greek army was able to stop Mussolini's expansionist goals and even pushed the Italians back into Albania. The Greek successes and the inability of the Italians to reverse the situation brought Nazi Germany to intervene in order to protect her main Axis partner's prestige. The German invasion of Greece took place on April 6, 1941.

Following Germany's invasion of Greece, it proceeded to split the country into three areas of control and administration:

- Germany took part of Macedonia, including Salonika, Crete, and three of the larger islands of the Northern Aegean.
- Bulgaria, a German ally, was entrusted with part of Thrace and part of Macedonia.
- Italy was given the balance of continental Greece and the Dodecanese Islands.





**T**HE INDIGENOUS Jewish communities of Greece represent the longest continuous Jewish presence in Europe. History records the presence of Jews in Athens since the third century BCE. The remains of an ancient synagogue were found in the Agora, at the foot of the Acropolis.

The Athens Jewish community was *Romaniote*, that is, Jews who have lived in the territories of today's Greece for more than 2,000 years. Their languages were Yevanic, a Judeo-Greek dialect, and Greek.

In 1940 the community numbered 3,500 souls. Under the Italian administration, the Jews enjoyed three years of relative security. The fall of Mussolini on July 24, 1943, led to the September 1943 German takeover of Athens. On March 25, 1944 German officials rounded up 1,690 Athenian Jews for deportation to Auschwitz-Birkenau. The Italians had contributed to the rescue of sixty-six percent of Athens' Jews.



◀ TOP: NAZI OFFICERS NEXT TO THE PARTHENON ON THE ATHENIAN ACROPOLIS

◀ BOTTOM: NAZI OFFICERS LOOKING OVER ATHENS AFTER THEY ENTERED THE CITY ON APRIL 27, 1941





◀ JEWISH MALES WERE FORCED TO GATHER IN SALONIKA'S LARGE LIBERATION SQUARE, ABOUT 9,000 MEN.



**F**OR CENTURIES Salonika was honored with the title “*La madre de Israel*,” that is, a mother city of the Jewish people, the most populous city of Sephardic Jewry in the world, with approximately 56,000 Jews.

On April 9, 1941, the German army entered the city and for the next twenty days proceeded to impose ever harder measures: the confiscation of Jewish homes and the arresting of most of the city’s Jewish Community Council.

On July 11, 1942, all men between the ages of eighteen and forty-five were conscripted for forced labor.





**I**TZHAK NEHAMA, a Greek Jew, gave the following testimony [regarding the July 11 event] at the Eichmann trial in Jerusalem: “They ordered us to exercise for hours. Whoever did not perform as the SS officers wanted was beaten up until he fainted.”

—*The Illusion of Safety*, p. 34



PHOTOS COURTESY USHMM

▲ A GERMAN CORPORAL IS SEEN WITH A RAISED STICK IN HIS HAND LEADING THE ASSEMBLED JEWS IN THE CALISTHENICS.

► FORCED CALISTHENICS ARE IMPOSED ON THE GATHERED JEWS IN LIBERATION SQUARE.





COURTESY KEHILA KEDOSHA JANINA

◀ SALONIKA'S MEN ARE FORCED TO STAND UNDER THE FIERCE JULY SUN. MANY TRY TO COVER THEIR HEADS, ALTHOUGH THEY WERE NOT ALLOWED TO DO SO. IN THE BACKGROUND THERE IS A BUILDING WITH BALCONIES ON WHICH STOOD WOMEN ACTRESSES OF THE MILITARY THEATER KRAFT DURCH FREUDE. THEY TOOK PICTURES OF THE EVENTS IN THE SQUARE AND APPLAUDED.

THE U.S. consul in Istanbul, Burton Berry, soon informed Washington about the July 11 events. The Germans, he wrote, “selected for forced labor those persons who, from their bearing and appearance, were thought to belong to the better classes. These victims were forced, under threat of being whipped or shot, to gaze fixedly at the hot July sun for minutes at a time, without being allowed to make the slightest movement, either of eyes or body.”

— *The Illusion of Safety*, p. 34





**T**HE GERMAN grip on Salonika's Jewish population continued to grow in intensity following the July 11 event.

By the end of 1942, Jewish owned shops and warehouses were confiscated and Jewish merchants systematically looted.

On February 8, 1943, Salonika's rabbi Zevi Koretz was summoned to the Gestapo where he was informed that the Nuremberg Laws were to be applied, resulting in the forced wearing of the yellow Star of David and ghettoization.

◀ A GREEK JEWISH COUPLE, RACHEL AND JOSEPH CHASID, WEARING THE YELLOW STAR OF DAVID

COURTESY USHMM





◀ PHOTO OF AN AQUARELLE BY THE NOTABLE GREEK PAINTER KENAN MESSARÉ REFLECTING THE DEPORTATION OF SALONIKA'S JEWS.

COURTESY OF YAKOV SCHIBY IN MEMORY OF HIS FATHER BARUCH SCHIBY WHO PERISHED IN THE SHOAH, AND OF HIS MOTHER RACHEL SCHIBY

THE CLOUDS over Salonika's Jews continued to thicken. All of them were forced into an area of the city known as the Baron Hirsch neighborhood. From March 15 to May 9, 1943, the entire Hirsch population was placed in railway cars to Auschwitz-Birkenau. 42,300 Jews were deported on board these trains. By the end of July 1943 there were no more than 500 Jews in Salonika.





WHEN THE Germans entered Salonika, “a few people in the streets applauded the invading troops... The leader of the Greek anti-Semites, Laskaris Papanauom, placed notices at the entrances to cafes, restaurants, pastry shops and other public gathering places announcing ‘Jews are not welcome’... While the Jews were singled out for... inhumane treatment, some Christians showed approval, but the great majority remained silent. There was no protest from the various unions in Salonika.”

“The Jews of Salonika sent heartbreaking appeals to Athens Archbishop Damaskinos, pleading with him to intercede on their behalf.” He did so forcefully and courageously. First he “met with [German] ambassador Günther Altenburg and asked him to stop the inhumane and anti-Christian measures,” but he did not succeed in stopping the deportations. Damaskinos further spearheaded a letter of protest to the German commander in Athens against the arrest of Jews, joined by 42 deans and presidents of other Greek organizations. “It was a protest by the totality of citizens of Athens... perhaps the only one made in a German-occupied territory of Europe.”

— *The Illusion of Safety*, p. 32-35, 52, 56

► DAMASKINOS' INTERVENTION WAS REPLICATED BY GREEK RESCUERS OF JEWS SUCH AS LINA CITTERICH POSING IN THE PHOTO WITH HER SON, VITTORIO, AND RENA SHAKI, THE JEWISH CHILD SHE HID DURING THE WAR. RENA WAS THE DAUGHTER OF ALBERT AND IDA SHAKI. FOLLOWING THE GERMAN TAKEOVER OF SALONIKA, ALBERT WENT TO JOIN THE PARTISANS. DURING THE SPRING OF 1943 IDA WAS ORDERED TO REPORT FOR DEPORTATION. A FRIEND OF HERS FROM THE FERNANDEZ FAMILY SNUCK INTO THE GHETTO AND TALKED IDA INTO HANDING OVER BABY RENA. SHE THEN LEFT IDA'S BABY DAUGHTER IN THE CONVENT OF THE CATHOLIC SISTERS OF SAINT VINCENT IN SALONIKA. SISTER JOSEPHE TOOK IT UPON HERSELF TO CARE FOR THE BABY. HOWEVER, SHE FEARED THAT THE NAZIS WOULD SEARCH THE CONVENT AND WANTED TO FIND A MORE SECURE HOME FOR THE BABY. THAT IS WHEN SHE BROUGHT RENA TO THE HOME OF LINA AND MARIO CITTERICH. AT THE END OF THE WAR, IDA, RENA'S MOTHER, WAS LIBERATED FROM BERGEN BELSEN AND TRANSFERRED TO PARIS BY THE RED CROSS; RENA'S FATHER CAME BACK FROM THE MOUNTAINS. THEY CONTACTED THE SISTERS OF SAINT VINCENT WHO BROUGHT THE CHILD TO PARIS TO BE REUNITED WITH HER FAMILY. IN 1987, YAD VASHEM HONORED MARIO AND LINA CITTERICH AND SISTER JOSEPHE AS RIGHTEOUS AMONG THE NATIONS.





COURTESY USHMM

**N**OT CONTENT dealing cruelly with the living, the Nazis also went about desecrating tombstones in the historic Jewish cemetery of Salonika, “once the largest burial ground in Europe, spanning 80 football fields and housing 350,000 graves dating back to the fifteenth century or even, in some instances, to the Roman era.”

— Devin E. Naar, “Fragments of Jewish Salonika,” *Stanford University Taube Center for Jewish Studies*, 2009-2011, p. 27

◀ OFFICIAL BRITISH PHOTOGRAPH SHOWING A SOLDIER STARING AT DESECRATED JEWISH TOMBSTONES IN SALONIKA. THE OFFICIAL CAPTION READS: “INDIAN UNITS ARRIVED BY SEA TO SALONIKA ON 11TH NOVEMBER 1944. A GERMAN STRONGPOINT, WITH SLIT TRENCHES LINED WITH TOMBSTONES FROM JEWISH GRAVES. IN THE BACKGROUND CAN BE SEEN THE CONCRETE EMPLACEMENT ADJOINING THE SLIT TRENCHES.”





► IOANNINA'S NAHOUM MATSAS FAMILY. THE PICTURE WAS FOUND BY A NEIGHBOR CRUMPLED IN THE STREET AFTER THE JEWISH COMMUNITY WAS DEPORTED. THE WHOLE FAMILY PERISHED EXCEPT FOR LEON, MICHAEL, AND REBECCA.



JUST AS Athens had been under Italian administration until September 1943, so was Ioannina, where 1,950 Jews (500 families) resided. Contrary to Salonika's Ladino-speaking Jews, Ioannina's Jews identified as *Romaniotes*, that is, Greek speaking Jews. These Jews had settled in the city before the influx of Sephardim in the 15th and 16th centuries. The Jews of Ioannina and their descendants preserve their Romaniote culture and distinct liturgy to this day.



◀ A GROUP OF IOANNINA'S ELDERLY POSE IN FRONT OF THE OLD AGE HOME YESHUAH V'RACHEL. THE PICTURE WAS TAKEN IN 1940. IT IS ASSUMED THAT ALL THE JEWS OF THE HOME WERE DEPORTED AND PERISHED.

**T**HE FIRST German troops, members of the Adolf Hitler division, entered Ioannina on April 20, 1943. They stayed for twenty days, leaving the city once more under the more benevolent Italian rule. The Jews did not experience any discrimination until Italy surrendered in September 1943.





**A**FTER THE Germans took over Ioannina, its Jewish leaders adopted a wait-and-see policy, hopeful that the Germans would leave them alone and unharmed. That was not to be. On March 1, 1944, the Germans arrested the president Dr. Moises Kofinas and three other members of the Jewish council, a blow to the community. The German anti-Jewish policy moved swiftly. On the morning of the Sabbath, March 25, 1944 (Greek Independence Day), Germans awakened the Jews and ordered them to gather at Mavilis Square by the Ioannina Lake. Men were separated into one group and the women and children into another.



COURTESY KEHLA MEDOSHA JANNINA

▲ IOANNINA MEN GUARDED BY GERMAN SOLDIERS.



COURTESY KEHILA KEDOSHA JANINA

**I**OANNINA'S WOMEN and children were separated from the men in preparation for their deportation.

- ◀ A HEARTRENDING PHOTO OF FANI HAIM CRYING IN THE FOREFRONT. SHE SURVIVED THE WAR.
- ▼ WOMEN, CHILDREN, AND THEIR MEAGER POSSESSIONS BEING LOADED ON A TRUCK. STELLA MIONI KOEN WITH HER BACK TO THE PHOTO, WAS THE ONLY SURVIVOR OF THIS GROUP.







► IOANNINA'S JEWISH WOMEN LINED UP BEFORE DEPORTATION. NOTE IN FRONT A WOMAN AND A CHILD CRYING IN DESPAIR. IN THE CENTER BACK IS ELDA LEVI SMILING AND WAVING, SEEMINGLY OBLIVIOUS TO WHAT WAS IN STORE. SHE SURVIVED THE WAR.



**N**INETY-ONE PERCENT of the Ioannina Jewish community, including its most prominent leaders, were deported to Aushwitz-Birkenau. Only 112 survivors returned from the concentration camps. An additional 69 members of the community, some of them fighting in the mountains, escaped capture, making the total number of Ioannina's Jews who survived the war 181, 9.28% of the 1941 population."

— Rae Dalven, *The Jews of Ioannina*



◀ BULGARIA JOINED THE AXIS. HITLER AND KING BORIS OF BULGARIA.



COURTESY KEHILA KEDOSHA JANINA

WE CAN always learn something about the destruction process in an Axis country by examining its attitude toward the war. Somehow the fate of the Jews in a German satellite state was always linked to the extent of war enthusiasm in that state. The implementation of the destructive program and the prosecution of the war show close parallels primarily because both the Jews and the war were a measure of a satellite's desire and ability to withstand German demands. In no country was this fact more evident than in Bulgaria."

— Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, Vol. II, p. 742.





**C**OMPREHENSIVE ANTI-JEWISH legislation in Bulgaria was introduced after the outbreak of World War II. The government's main motivation in its anti-Semitic policies could be explained by its determination to conform to the orientation of Nazi Germany. These policies became progressively harsher, but deportations of Bulgarian Jews were not implemented.

Contrary to the policy regarding Jews in Bulgaria proper, the Bulgarian attitude in its zone of occupation in Greece was just the opposite. "The Bulgarian commissioner for Jewish Affairs, Alexander Belev, agreed to German demands to deport the Jews of the newly acquired territories in Greece and Yugoslavia." (*The Illusion of Safety*, p. 76). "The removal of the Jews... followed a common pattern: evictions, midnight roundups, deportation, and, finally, confiscation and liquidation of property. On the evening of March 3, 1944, Jews throughout Thrace and Macedonia were dragged from their beds in their night garments. Three days later they were taken to the Greek-Bulgarian border and transported to concentration camps. They ended up in Treblinka, where they eventually perished. Of the 4,200 arrested Jews, only 216 survived."

— Joshua Eli Plaut, *Greek Jewry in the Twentieth Century, 1913-1983*, p. 56-57



▲ SEVENTY-EIGHT-YEAR-OLD RABBI YEOUDA AZOUVI FROM KAVALLA BEING LED FOR DEPORTATION FOLLOWED BY OTHER JEWS.



FOR 2,300 YEARS Jews have lived on the beautiful island of Rhodes at the southern tip of the Aegean Sea. The community became Sephardic in the sixteenth century. The synagogue, Kahal Shalom, was built in 1575 and is the oldest functioning synagogue in Greece.”

— USHMM “The Holocaust in Greece.” No date or page number.

As with other areas under Italian occupation the Jews of Rhodes residing in *La judería*, remained relatively safe until the Germans occupied the island in September 1943. The Jews were easily rounded up and deported to Auschwitz via Athens on July 20, 1944. Of a population of 1,700, 151 survived.



◀ TOP: MEMBERS OF A JEWISH BAND, IN BETTER TIMES, PERFORM AT A PICNIC IN RHODES, 1938. PICTURED LEFT TO RIGHT ARE ESTHER GALANTE, ESTRELLA GALANTE (WITH GUITAR), VICTORIA NOTRICA, JOSEPH NOTRICA (WITH MANDOLIN), GIUSEPO NOTRICA (WITH OOT), YOSEF NOTRICA (WITH KANNON), NESSIM PILOSEF (WITH VIOLIN). PICTURED IN THE FRONT ARE (LEFT TO RIGHT) UNKNOWN AND ISAAC PILOSEF. IT IS ASSUMED THAT MOST OF THEM PERISHED IN AUSCHWITZ.

◀ BOTTOM: A 1939 GROUP PORTRAIT OF THE MACCABI SPORTS CLUB OF RHODES. AMONG THOSE PICTURED IS YOSEF ALCANA (THIRD FROM LEFT), THE PRESIDENT OF THE CLUB. IN 1944 ALL SEVEN YOUNG MEN WERE DEPORTED TO AUSCHWITZ AND MURDERED.



ON JUNE 7, 1944, the Allies entered Rome. The Jews of Corfu (one of the Ionian islands off the NW coast of Greece) believed that the war was practically over. The Germans thought otherwise.”

On June 9, all the Jews were assembled in a square surrounded by German and Greek police. “The mayor of Corfu, a German appointed collaborator, gave a speech to his municipal council: ‘Our great friends, the Germans, cleaned our island of the Jews.’”

Corfu’s Jews were transported to Auschwitz where most were murdered. From a Jewish population of 2,000 souls, 187 survived.

— *The Illusion of Safety*, p. 116-117

► PORTRAIT OF JACOB MORDO AND HIS THREE CHILDREN: PERLA (THE INFANT ON HER FATHER’S KNEE), MOSES (LEFT) AND ANOTHER SON (RIGHT). DURING THE WAR PERLA WAS DEPORTED TO AUSCHWITZ AND FROM THERE SENT TO OTHER CAMPS, INCLUDING BERGEN-BELSEN AND MAUTHAUSEN. PERLA AND HER UNNAMED BROTHER SURVIVED; HER FATHER AND HER BROTHER MOSES PERISHED DURING THE HOLOCAUST.



COURTESY USHMM





COURTESY USHMM



**J**UST AS most of Corfu's Jews were murdered by the Nazis, all of the 275 Jews of Zakynthos, also in the Ionian Sea, survived. The Germans occupied the island in early 1944 and ordered Mayor Lucas Karreri at gunpoint to hand over a list of the Jews residing on the island. The list that was presented to the Germans by Bishop Chrysostomos, contained only two names, that of the mayor and the bishop. Chrysostomos then instructed the Jews to flee into the hills where they were protected by local residents until the end of the war. No one informed on them and no one was arrested.

Bishop Chrysostomos and Lucas Karreri were both recognized by Yad Vashem as Righteous Among the Nations in 1978.

◀ BISHOP CHRYSOSTOMOS





THE STORY of the Jews in the Greek resistance during World War II was as much a part of the general story of the Holocaust in Greece as it is integral to the story of Greek resistance to the Axis occupiers. There is a long-standing tradition among Greeks that Jews did not fight (at least since biblical times).” But Jews “did fight during the war and during the occupation. Their contribution to Greece should be noted since otherwise the story is dominated by the terrible tragedy that included the near total destruction of the Jewish community of Greece.”

— Steven Bowman, *Jewish Resistance in Wartime Greece*, p. XIII

Greek Jews are known for having resisted even in Auschwitz itself. Their most significant act of resistance was the uprising they organized with other Polish prisoners. “The Sonderkommando unit at Auschwitz-Birkenau consisted of teams of prisoners who were responsible for emptying the gas chambers after the gassings, transporting the bodies to the crematoria, and loading the dead in the ovens. They were kept in special barracks, away from other prisoners and were replaced by new prisoners every six months. The previous Sonderkommando prisoners were gassed. In the fall of 1944, the Sonderkommando unit staged a revolt. One hundred and thirty five Jews originating from Salonica, Athens, Corfu, Arta, and Preveza, were part of the uprising. The area surrounding the crematorium turned into a battlefield.” The rebels escaped, but almost all of them were captured and killed.

— “Terra Nostra: The Auschwitz Uprising”



COURTESY THE JEWISH MUSEUM OF ATHENS AND STEVEN BOWMAN

▲ LOUIS COHEN, ALIAS ‘KRONOS’, A BRAVE RESISTANCE FIGHTER. HIS POLYGLOT SKILLS MADE HIM INVALUABLE IN INTERROGATING ITALIAN AND GERMAN PRISONERS. LOUIS RECEIVED COMMENDATIONS FROM HIS COMMANDER COLONEL DIMITRIOS DIMITRIOU.



BY 1944 SEVERAL partisan groups controlled much of the countryside. The Greeks came to consider these groups as the “Government of the Mountains.” With the exception of the cities which were German strongholds, the rest of Greece was most of the time free. Thus Greece was the only European country “whose Jewish population had a place to go and save itself. Once families moved to partisan controlled areas, they were usually safe.” No Greek villager ever betrayed a Jew.

— *The Illusion of Safety*, p. 19

So why didn't more Jews flee to the mountains? “The resistance in the mountains [around Salonika] was only formally organized by the summer of 1943 during the period of the last deportations. A mass escape to the mountains was simply not feasible at this time since there was no infrastructure there to absorb, let alone rescue them.” Only individuals found refuge and were recruited by partisan groups.

— *Jewish Resistance in Wartime Greece*, p. 8

► TOP: GROUP PORTRAIT OF THE 2ND DIVISION OF THE ELAS-EAM PARTISAN RESISTANCE MOVEMENT IN PERTHENOCHOREIA. AMONG THOSE PICTURED ARE INTO SHIMSKI, A GREEK JEW (FRONT ROW, RIGHT); CAPITAN ORESTIS (STANDING, FOURTH FROM RIGHT), AND RIGOS FERDIOS (TOP ROW).

► BOTTOM: THE “KOEN BATALLION,” SO CALLED SINCE IT WAS MOSTLY MADE UP OF JEWS FROM SALONIKA.





ATHENS JEWISH COMMUNITY  
 5: MELIDONI STR **TABLE**  
 ATHENS 113

Showing losses of Jewish population of Greece  
 after German persecution  
 on 1943 and 1944

CF

| COMMUNITIES                   | POPULATION BEFORE PERSECUTION | POPULATION AFTER PERSECUTION | PERCENTAGE OF DIMINUTION               |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------|--|
| <b>THRACE</b>                 |                               |                              |  |
| 1. Community DIDIMOTIHOU      | 900                           | 33                           | -96 <sup>0</sup> / <sub>100</sub>      |
| 2. " NEAS ORESTIADOS          | 197                           | 3                            | -98 <sup>0</sup> / <sub>100</sub>      |
| 3. " ALEXANDROUPOLEOS         | 140                           | 4                            | -97 <sup>0</sup> / <sub>100</sub>      |
| 4. " KOMOTINIS                | 819                           | 28                           | -96 <sup>0</sup> / <sub>100</sub>      |
| 5. " XANTHIS                  | 550                           | 6                            | -99 <sup>0</sup> / <sub>100</sub>      |
| <b>MACEDONIA</b>              |                               |                              |  |
| 6. Community KAVALLAS         | 2,100                         | 42                           | -98 <sup>0</sup> / <sub>100</sub>      |
| 7. " DRAMAS                   | 1,200                         | 39                           | -97 <sup>0</sup> / <sub>100</sub>      |
| 8. " SERRON                   | 600                           | 3                            | -99 <sup>0</sup> / <sub>100</sub>      |
| 9. " SALONICA                 | 56,000                        | 1,950                        | -96 <sup>0</sup> / <sub>100</sub>      |
| 10. " VERRIAS                 | 460                           | 131                          | -72 <sup>0</sup> / <sub>100</sub>      |
| 11. " CASTORIAS               | 900                           | 35                           | -96 <sup>0</sup> / <sub>100</sub>      |
| 12. " PHLORINIS               | 400                           | 64                           | -84 <sup>0</sup> / <sub>100</sub>      |
| <b>THESSALIA</b>              |                               |                              |  |
| 13. Community TRIKKALON       | 520                           | 360                          | -31 <sup>0</sup> / <sub>100</sub>      |
| 14. " LARISSIS                | 1,120                         | 726                          | -35 <sup>0</sup> / <sub>100</sub>      |
| 15. " VOLOU                   | 872                           | 645                          | -26 <sup>0</sup> / <sub>100</sub>      |
| <b>STEREA HELLAS</b>          |                               |                              |  |
| 16. Community CHALKIDOS       | 325                           | 170                          | -48 <sup>0</sup> / <sub>100</sub>      |
| 17. " ATHINON                 | 3,000                         | 4,930                        | +64 <sup>0</sup> / <sub>100</sub> (*)  |
| <b>PELOPONNISOS</b>           |                               |                              |  |
| 18. Community PATRON-AGRINIOU | 265                           | 152                          | -43 <sup>0</sup> / <sub>100</sub>      |
| <b>IPIROS</b>                 |                               |                              |  |
| 19. Community JANNINA         | 1,850                         | 163                          | -91 <sup>0</sup> / <sub>100</sub>      |
| 20. " PREVEZIS                | 250                           | 15                           | -94 <sup>0</sup> / <sub>100</sub>      |
| 21. " ARTIS                   | 384                           | 60                           | -84 <sup>0</sup> / <sub>100</sub>      |
| <b>ISLANDS</b>                |                               |                              |  |
| 22. Community CORFOU          | 2,000                         | 185                          | -91 <sup>0</sup> / <sub>100</sub>      |
| 23. " ZANTHE                  | 275                           | 275                          | -                                      |
| 24. " CANDIA                  | 350                           | 7                            | -98 <sup>0</sup> / <sub>100</sub>      |
| 25. " RODOS                   | 1,701                         | 40                           | -97 <sup>0</sup> / <sub>100</sub>      |
| <b>TOTAL</b>                  | <b>77,178</b>                 | <b>10,066</b>                | <b>-89 <sup>0</sup>/<sub>100</sub></b> |

(\*) **NOTE:** Loss in Athens Jewish Community is 1000 persons. The after war increase of members it is due to the installation in Athens of members of other Communities of the Country.

► TABLE SHOWING THE LOSSES OF THE JEWISH POPULATION OF GREECE AFTER THE GERMAN PERSECUTION.





**T**HE GREEK Jewish community was decimated by the war and Nazi atrocities. “Surviving Jews returned to their hometowns from concentration camps and hiding places in the mountains. These Jews tried to reestablish themselves and their communities. Like their cosurvivors throughout Europe, displaced Greek Jews returned to their native towns to find their homes occupied by neighbors, their businesses taken over by strangers, and their Jewish communal and private property desecrated and neglected. The life of the Greek Jews who returned is thus a story of a struggle to survive.”

The American Joint Distribution Committee played an indispensable role in extending help to the Jewish remnant, by extending financial assistance to support schooling and emigration projects.

— *Greek Jewry in the Twentieth Century, 1913-1983*, p. 19, 76



PHOTOS COURTESY AMERICAN JOINT DISTRIBUTION COMMITTEE ARCHIVE

▶ TOP: 1945 PHOTO OF AN AGRICULTURAL *HACHSHARAH* OR TRAINING CENTER IN PREPARATION FOR A FUTURE LIFE IN PALESTINE.

▶ BOTTOM: CHILDREN ENJOYING A RECESS IN THE SCHOOL YARD OF THE JEWISH SCHOOLS IN ATHENS. BEFORE THE WAR THE SCHOOL HAD 150 PUPILS. THE YEAR THE WAR ENDED ENROLLMENT WAS DOWN TO 25.





## SUGGESTED READINGS

Erika Kounio Amariglio, *From Thessaloniki to Auschwitz and Back: Memoirs of a Survivor from Thessaloniki.*

Isaac Benatar, *The Holocaust in Rhodes*

Steven Bowman, *Jewish Resistance in Wartime Greece*

Rae Dalven, *The Jews of Ioannina*

Michael Matsas, *The Illusion of Safety: The Story of the Greek Jews During the Second World War*

Michael Molho, *Traditions and Customs of the Sephardic Jews of Salonica*

Joshua Eli Plaut, *Greek Jewry in the Twentieth Century, 1913-1983*







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