

## **1943 - Salonica**

After 1496 and the expulsion of the Jews from Spain the Ottoman Sultan accepted the Jews in Greece. Most of the Jews settled in Salonica or Thessaloniki. They became the dominant power in commerce & culture. More than 50 synagogues and 30 Jewish Schools. They were running things for nearly 500 years in the City. 1922 after the war between Turkey & Greece exchange between Christian Orthodox and Muslim people occurred between the two countries. At that time Thessaloniki started to be part of Greece. The government banned shabbat as a holiday and replaced it with Sunday. Things started to change. Thessaloniki wasn't the same anymore. The Greek-Orthodox Christian emigrants from Asia Minor were feeling jealousy towards the dominant power of the Jewish Community.

## **Occupation**

Greece partitioned between Germans, Italians and Bulgarians:

- German occupation
- Italian occupation
- Bulgarian occupation
- Dodecanese Islands (Italian territory before the war)
- Central Macedonia, including Thessaloniki, was occupied by the Germans, who entered the city on 9 April 1941.

Antisemitic measures were only gradually introduced.

Max Merten, the German civil administrator for the city, continued to repeat that the Nuremberg laws would not apply to Salonika.[27] The Jewish press was quickly banned, while two pro-Nazi Greek dailies, Nea Evropi ("New Europe") and Apogevmatini ("Evening Press"), appeared. Some homes and community buildings were requisitioned by the occupying forces, including the Baron Hirsch Hospital. In late April, signs prohibiting Jews entry to cafés appeared. Jews were forced to turn in their radios.

The Grand Rabbi of Salonica, Zvi Koretz, was arrested by the Gestapo on 17 May 1941 and sent to a concentration camp near Vienna, from where he returned in late January 1942 to resume his position as rabbi.[28] In June 1941, commissioner Alfred Rosenberg arrived. He plundered Jewish archives, sending tons of documents to his pet project, the Institut zur Erforschung der Judenfrage ("Institute for the Study of the Jewish Question") in Frankfurt.

Along with the other Greek urban communities, the Jews suffered a severe famine in the winter of 1941–42. The Nazi regime had not attached any importance to the Greek economy, food production or distribution. It is estimated that in 1941–1942 sixty Jews of the city died every day from hunger.

For a year, no further antisemitic action was taken. The momentary reprieve gave the Jews a temporary sense of security.

On a Shabbat in July 1942, all the men of the community aged 18 to 45 years were rounded up in the Plateia Eleftherias. Throughout the afternoon, they were forced to do humiliating physical exercises at gunpoint. Four thousand of them were ordered to construct a road for the Germans, linking Thessaloniki to Kateríni and Larissa, a region rife with malaria.

In less than ten weeks, 12% of them died of exhaustion and disease. In the meantime, the Thessalonikan community, with the help of Athens, managed to gather two billion drachmas towards the sum of 3.5 billion drachmas demanded by the Germans to ransom the forced labourers. The Germans agreed to release them for the lesser sum but, in return, demanded that the Greek authorities abandon the Jewish cemetery in Salonika, containing 300,000 to 500,000 graves. Its size and location, they claimed, had long hampered urban growth.

The Jews transferred land in the periphery on which there were two graves. The municipal authorities, decrying the slow pace of the transfer, took matters into their own hands. Five hundred Greek workers, paid by the municipality, began with the destruction of tombs. The cemetery was soon transformed into a vast quarry where Greeks and Germans sought gravestones for use as construction materials. Today this site is occupied by the Aristotle University and other buildings.

It is estimated that from the beginning of the occupation to the end of deportations, 3,000–5,000 Jews managed to escape from Salonika, finding temporary refuge in the Italian zone. Of these, 800 had or obtained documents proving Italian citizenship and throughout the period of Italian occupation were actively protected by consular authority. 800 Jews fled to the Macedonian mountainsides, joining the Greek Communist Resistance, ELAS. Few Jews joined its royalist counterpart.

### **Deportation**

The entrance of Auschwitz II-Birkenau, a view from inside the camp  
To carry out this operation, the Nazi authorities dispatched two specialists in the field, Alois Brunner and Dieter Wisliceny, who arrived on February 6, 1943. They immediately applied the Nuremberg laws in all their rigor, imposing the display of the yellow badge and drastically restricting the Jews' freedom of movement. Toward the end of February 1943, they were rounded up in three ghettos (Kalamaria, Singrou and Vardar / Agia Paraskevi) and then transferred to a transit camp, called the Baron Hirsch ghetto or camp, which was adjacent to a train station. There, the death trains were waiting. To accomplish their mission, the SS relied on a Jewish police created for the occasion, led by Vital Hasson, which was the source of numerous abuses against the rest of the Jews.

The first convoy departed on March 15. Each train carried 1000–4000 Jews across the whole of central Europe, mainly to Auschwitz. A convoy also left for Treblinka, and it is possible that deportation to Sobibor took place, since Salonican Jews were liberated from that camp. The Jewish population of Salonika was so large that the deportation took several months until it was completed, which occurred on August 7[26] with the deportation of Chief Rabbi Tzvi Koretz and other notables to the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp, under relatively good conditions. In the same convoy were 367 Jews protected by their Spanish nationality, who had a unique destiny: they were transferred from Bergen-Belsen to Barcelona, and then Morocco, with some finally reaching the British Mandate of Palestine.

The below article from Greek-speaking newspaper shows the hatred of the Greek-Orthodox Christians against the Jews.

### **“A Happy Occasion”**

A happy occasion happened today which has been concluded after centuries of anticipation where our nation was maltreated from the Jewish community.

An area in our very Greek city, Thessaloniki, a city that at some point the “Sons of Israel” who don’t appreciate anything tried to globalize, we are free from today from the disgusting presence of the Jew.

We wish and we believe that the first step of this clean-up is a joyous start and in the next few days the Jew will be for Thessaloniki just a bad memory.

Today Thessaloniki is the second biggest city in Greece with overall with the metropolitan area more than 1 million people. It is still a cultural and an educational hub hosting one of the biggest universities on the Balkans which is still situated over the ancient Jewish cemetery. Most of the Salonicans acknowledge the fact that without the Jews, the town wouldn’t not have the culture and the history that made this town.

Someone that knows a little about the Jews and the holocaust, I am speaking on behalf of myself, can immediately understand and realize that something happened in Thessaloniki. Torah scrolls were left alone, mezuzas did not have the time to be taken apart from the doors because the new residents of this city at that point of time they were relieved that the Jews were taken to camps.

### **Today**

The Jewish Community of Salonica now is the second biggest in Greece after Athens but they still keep the flag quite high. They are trying to observe as much as they can and are able to, so the next generation will be still there alive and pass on the hurdle. It is difficult to be an observant Jew in Greece in general but if there is one place that is more possible to be one, in Greece, Thessaloniki is the place.

## ΕΝΑ ΧΑΡΜΟΣΥΝΟΝ ΓΕΓΟΝΟΣ

Ένα χαρμόσυνον γεγονός, με την προσδοκίαν του οποίου έζησε αιώνας υλοκλήρους τό τόσον δεινοπαθήσαν από την έβραϊκήν κακότητα έθνος μας, υπέπεσε σήμερα την πρωΐαν εις την αντίληψιν πολλών συμπολιτών μας.

Μία συνοικία της ελληνικωτάτης Θεσσαλονίκης μας, της πόλεως την οποίαν επεδίωξαν κάποτε να διεθνοποιήσουν οί άχάριστοι κυιοί του 'Ισραήλ», άπηλάγη όριστικώς και άμετακλήτως από την είδεχθή παρουσίαν του 'Ισραίου.

Εύχόμεθα και πιστεύομεν ότι τό σημερινόν πρώτον θήμα της εκκαθαρίσεως του τόπου μας άποτελεί μίαν εύτυχή άπαρχήν, ότι έντός των προσεχών ήμερών ό Έβραϊός θα άποτελή διά την Θεσσαλονίκην μόνον μίαν καλήν άνάμνησιν.