

SHORT HISTORY

OF THE

JEWISH COMMUNITIES IN GREECE

The first evidence of the settlement of Jews in Greece is a third century B.C. inscription, which refers to a Jew from Voiotia in the name of Moschos Moschionos. The inscription was found in Oropos (near Athens) and has been dated from between 300 – 250 B.C.

It would appear that the first Jews, or at least some of them, were slaves who were sold in Greece by neighbouring populations that had occupied Judea. Initially, they came to Greece via Cyprus, Minor Asia and the Aegean islands. It is reported that among these Jews was the high priest Jason the Third, who came to Sparta at the time of Antiochus the Fourth the Eminent (175 – 164 B.C.).

The Book of Maccabees contains a list of the Jewish Communities that were spread out in the most significant Greek cities (Maccabees, A' 15:23). This list, which has been dated to 142 B.C., as well as a similar list that was prepared by the historian Filon the Judean, mentions the existence of Jews in Sparta, Delos, Sikion, Samos, Kos, Crete, Thessaly, Voiotia, Macedonia, Aitolia, Attica, Argos, Corinth, and in Cyprus.

During the first century B.C. there was Jewish presence in Delos. This has been evidenced by the existence of the remains of an ancient Synagogue as well as from the many Jewish inscriptions that were found in Delos. The Jewish element in Rhodes is of considerable interest. Herod, the king of Judea, maintained friendly relations with the Jews of Rhodes. Finally, the Jews of Crete have been mentioned by Flavius Josephus.

The Jewish population in Greece increased at the time of the Judaic Wars (66 – 70 B.C.). Josephus mentions that 6,000 Jews were sent by Vespasian to Nero in order to be employed in the Isthmus of Corinth. The ancient Jewish nucleus that existed in Greece formed the basis of Jewish pockets during the Byzantine era (from 330 A.D. onwards) when the capital of the Roman Empire was transferred to Constantinople.

The Romaniote Jewish community derived from the Jews living in the Byzantine Empire, who settled in Greece and came into contact with the Greek civilization and the Greek language. The Romaniotes created a separate cultural amalgam. They maintained the characteristics of the Jewish faith but adopted

elements of the Greek language, which led to the creation of the so-called Greco-Judaic dialect. The influence of the Greek civilization has been particularly evident in Jewish art and apparel. This unique Romaniote Greco-Judaic community has survived until today mainly in the city of Ioannina.

During excavations in the Ancient Market of Athens both the Menorah (the seven candle lamp) and the Loulav (a religious ceremonial symbol) were found engraved on marble. They date from 500 A.D. and they demonstrate the existence of a Jewish community in Athens and possibly the existence of a Synagogue in the region.

During the 12th century A.D., Benjamin of Tudela, the renowned Jewish traveller, reported that he encountered Jews in Corfu, Arta, Patras, Nafpaktos, Corinth, Thebes, Chalkis, Thessaloniki, Drama as well as in other Greek cities. Moreover, he reported that Jews were also living in the islands of Lesbos, Chios, Samos, Rhodes and Cyprus. The largest Jewish Community that Benjamin visited was that of Thebes, which numbered 2,000 members. On the contrary, only 500 Jews were living in Thessaloniki. In the remaining cities the number of Jews ranged between 20 and 400. They were mainly employed or engaged in dye-works, the textile industry and the silk industry.

From the end of the 14th century A.D. onwards, Jewish refugees from Spain and Portugal settled in the Greek peninsula and the neighbouring islands. These Jews settled primarily in Thessaloniki but also in other cities, for example Trikala, Larissa and Volos. These Jews, known as Sephardim, brought their own language (the Jewish-Spanish language – Ladino) as well as their own traditions, manners and customs.

During the 14th century and at the time of the reign of Sultan Mourat, a large number of Jews from Hungary settled in Kavala and Sidirokastro, following the occupation of their country by the Ottomans. A second exodus of Hungarian Jews followed in 1546 at the time of the reign of Suleiman the Magnificent.

Yet another massive settlement of Jews in Greece, this time in Corfu, took place when the Italian speaking Jews of Apulia (southern Italy) were expelled.

From the 16th to the 18th century the Jewish Community of Thessaloniki was among the largest in the world. After the occupation of Rhodes by the Ottomans in 1552, a considerable number of Jews

from Thessaloniki settled in that island. In Crete, Jews played a significant role in transit commerce. Crete was also famous on account of its learned Rabbis and Jewish scholars, among others, Michael ben Shabbetai Cohen Balbo (1411 – 1484), Elias Kapsalis (1483-1555), Josef Solomon Dalmedoglou (1591-1655), etc.

20th Century –

The period before World War II

At the beginning of the 20th century there were some 10,000 Jews living in Greece. Following the Balkan wars (1912-13) and the liberation of Northern Greece, Epirus, Chios and Crete (1908), the number of Jews in Greece reached almost 100,000.

In 1940, when Italian and German forces attacked Greece, 12,898 Jews fought in the ranks of the Greek army: of them, 343 had the rank of an officer or petty officer. Among the brave fighters of the War in Albania were Colonel Mardochai Frizis, from Chalkis, who died heroically in the battle of Kalamas, officer Jean Allalouf from Thessaloniki, Major Salvador Sarfatis from Athens, officers Josef Varouch from Corfu, Leon Dostis from Ioannina and many others.

Before the Second World War, Jewish Communities were operating in 27 cities all over Greece: Didymoticho, Nea Orestiada, Alexandroupoli, Komotini, Xanthi, Kavala, Drama, Serres, Thessaloniki, Veroia, Kastoria, Florina, Trikala, Larissa, Volos, Chalkis, Athens, Patras, Agrinio, Ioannina, Preveza, Arta, Corfu, Zakynthos (Zante), Chania, Rhodes and Kos. The total number of Jews living in these Communities was 77,377.

The period of World War II – German occupation

During the Second World War, when Greece was under the occupation of Nazi Germany, 86 per cent of Greek Jews lost their lives as a result of Nazi actions, transfer to concentration camps, extermination and killings. After the Holocaust, only a few people survived in the many cities where blossoming Jewish Communities had previously existed.

The proud reply of the then Archbishop of Athens Damaskinos to the collaborator Prime Minister

Konstantinos Logothetopoulos and to Nazi General Stroop constituted a monumental text for supporting the Greek Jewry and was unique for occupied Europe. On account of his severe written protestation against the persecution of the Jews of Greece, General Stroop had threatened Archbishop Damaskinos with execution.

This protestation was written in a very sharp language. It referred to the strong bonds between Orthodox Greeks and Greek Jews that exist not only in terms of civil rights (being citizens of Greece) but mainly in terms of spirit and soul. The protestation was a monument of braveness, national pride and respect for the human ideals. Moreover, it was a manifestation of the views held by the Greek population, which at the time was gagged. The protestation was signed by 29 entities, bodies and organisations, which represented cultural and professional Greece. In addition, the Archbishop urged Greek Christians and monasteries to offer asylum to Jewish families in order to avoid their being banished.

During the Nazi occupation, many Jews participated in the National Resistance. This was recognised by the Greek State and by resistance organisation and honorary distinctions were awarded.

Participation in Greek life

The Jews of Greece had participated and continue to participate actively in the country's public life. In the past, a number of Jews served as representatives of the Greek population in the Parliament and in the Senate (when it existed). Others held high ranking positions in the public administration and in Universities. Moreover, a significant number of Jews have had a distinguished presence in arts and letters.

Contemporary Greece

Today, the Greek Jewry is mainly active in the private sector (commerce, industry, etc), in science and in the public administration. It numbers some 5,500 persons, who are organised in eight Jewish Communities. These operate in Athens, Thessaloniki, Larissa, Volos, Chalkis, Ioannina, Trikala and Corfu. Only a few Jews live in the Communities of Kavala and Rhodes, which are currently inactive.

THE DESTRUCTION OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITIES

THE PLIGHT OF THE JEWS OF THESSALONIKI

Thessaloniki, home of the largest Jewish Community in Greece and so-called Madre de Israel, came under German occupation right from the start.

It was here that the first systematic persecution of Greek Jews began. Two days after the Germans had occupied the city, the Jewish daily newspapers, *Le Progress*, *L'Independant* and *Messagero*, were forced to close down. Their printing presses were confiscated and given to organisations with German leanings, like the *Ethniki Enosi Ellados* (National Union of Greece) known as the 3Es. And it was at one of these very same Jewish printing presses that the 3Es started printing the blatantly racist "*Nea Evropi*" newspaper, which came close to being the official instrument of the city's Occupying Authorities.

Many Jewish families were turned out of their homes so that these could be used as offices for German military services and personnel. Property belonging to particularly wealthy Jews was seized. The Community's Administrative Council had been forcibly disbanded as early as 15th April 1941 and its Archives and everything of value in its offices had been confiscated.

A more systematic policy of search and ransack was carried out by the notorious *Sontercommando Rosenberg*. There was a special unit for registering Jewish Communities and distinguished figures, and collecting objects of religious significance for Jews as well as other valuable objects. This unit arrived in the city shortly after its occupation and set to work drawing up lists of prominent Jew-

ish figures and the property and chattels of Community Institutions. They also raided Jewish homes and shops as well as public and private institutions such as schools, libraries, banks, hospitals and, of course, Synagogues. Everything to do with religion, be it valuable books or rare manuscripts, archives or priceless collections of rabbinical decisions, was seized and sent to Germany. Two years later, Dr Johan Paul, director of the Frankfurt based Nazi Library for the Investigation into the Jewish Question, proudly announced that the library had over 10,000 books and manuscripts from Greece.

Although systematic anti-Jewish measures had not yet been enforced as such, Jews were already forbidden from entering coffee-houses and restaurants, Rabbis were publicly humiliated from time to time, Rabbi Haim Habbib, who was beaten in the Community offices, being a case in point. Jews were beaten and terrorised, or were denounced as communists and executed.

But worse was yet to come. On 11th July 1942 all male Jews were ordered to gather in Plateia Eleftherias (Liberty Square) in the centre of the city, supposedly to be included in labour registers. The 10,000 or so men were made to stand outdoors in the scorching hot summer sun and perform humiliating physical exercises until they reached the point of exhaustion. Those who were unable to endure it and passed out were subjected to savage beating. The majority of the Christians who saw this remained silent, but some, besides the Germans present, actually applauded. The "*Apogevmatini*" and "*Makedonia*" newspapers, already known for their anti-Semitic attitudes from pre-war times, reacted in a similar way, as did "*Nea Evropi*", of course.

Shortly after this, about 7,000 of the city's Jewish population were sent to do forced labour in places near Thessaloniki and on the railway line to Athens. They toiled to build roads and barricades for the Germans and repaired communica-

tions lines in most wretched, primitive conditions. Many died of ill-treatment, exhaustion and disease. After a while, the Jewish Community managed to secure the release of those remaining by paying the occupying forces a huge sum of money, which they had put together with the help of other Jewish Communities in Greece. Historian E. Hekimoglou has recently been instrumental in bringing the receipts for this transaction to light.

In December of that same year, 1942, with urban planning as their pretext and the complicity of Thessaloniki Corporation, the Germans started destroying the Jewish cemetery, parts of which dated back to 15th century. This was a serious blow to the Community as the cemetery had, in fact, constituted a record of its history. But the insult to the dead was even worse, as the Jewish religion does not allow exhumation under any circumstances. Few families managed to rescue relics from their family tombs. The remains of a few notable Rabbis were taken for re-interment in a different location – there where the present-day Jewish cemetery is. When they had destroyed the old cemetery, the Germans used the tombstones as building material. Consequently, very little of this old cemetery has survived. The site of the old cemetery, where there were approximately 400,000 Jewish graves, is now occupied by the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki School of Philosophy, School of Theology and other schools. Hundreds of thousands of students have studied at these schools over the years, but it is doubtful whether more than a handful are aware of the history of the site. The Jewish Community, the Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece, and private persons have repeatedly asked that a simple plaque be placed there, but so far to no avail.

In February 1943, Dieter Wisliceny, assistant to the notorious Adolf Eichmann of the SS, arrived in the city with Alois Brunner to pave the way for the

systematic removal of the city's Jewish population. Between 6 and 17 of that same month orders were issued which, in effect, meant the implementation of Nuremburg Law in Thessaloniki. Just a few examples are given below:

- As from 6 March 1943 all Jews of five years old and over were obliged to wear a distinguishing yellow star measuring 10cm x 10cm on their chest. The stars, or badges as the Jews themselves called them, were produced on a Community tin press at the Community's expense. The press can still be seen in the Jewish Museum of Thessaloniki.
- All Jews, including those who had adopted the Christian faith within the last two generations, were obliged to register and be issued with special identity cards.
- Jewish homes and shops had to be clearly identified as such.
- Jews were not allowed to buy, sell or transfer ownership of property of any kind, land or chattels. Strict penalties were in place for those who received transfer of ownership.
- Jews were banned from using any form of public transport.
- All telephone apparatus owned by Jews was confiscated.
- All Jews were obliged to move to one of the ghetto areas designated by the Germans, the main ones being "Baron Hirsch" and "Exohon". At very short notice approximately 6,000 families were ordered to leave their homes, hand the keys over to the Germans and seek accommodation elsewhere, taking only what was absolutely essential with them. In the restricted ghetto areas conditions were very cramped – as many as six families would have to share one flat or house. Initially, they were at least allowed out of the ghetto to go to work. Very soon though they were forbidden to leave the ghetto on pain of being shot. As most of their shops and businesses were located outside the ghettos, the Jews of Thessaloniki lost their livelihood.

The occupation authorities issued countless orders, such as that requiring a detailed inventory of property and chattels, as well as misleading promises designed to allay fears, such as that sug-

gesting they would be taken to live in rural areas of Poland, so as to perpetuate confusion and anxiety in the Community. No one was in a position to know what would happen from one day to the next. The few possible means of escape attracted few people, mainly because they were reluctant to leave their families or relatives behind. They were also hampered by the fact that the Resistance was not yet fully organized as it was later on in other parts of Greece where Jews were frequently saved with the help of resistance organizations.

The Germans had asked the Archrabbi of the Community, Zvi Coretz, to provide them with a list of all members of the Jewish Community, which he did, probably in the hope that this would appease them. But the stage was thus set for what was to follow. On Saturday 14th March 1943, all Jews in the "Baron Hirsch" ghetto, about 2,800 in all, were arrested and sent to Poland by train the following day, packed in wretched conditions into railway cars used to transport animals. The Nazis were particularly harsh on young children as their ultimate goal was to prevent the perpetuation of the Jewish race. Those few who survived have described conditions in those overcrowded cattle cars with 70 to 75 people packed into each one. For a journey lasting four days or more, they had nowhere to sit, only one barrel of drinking water and one barrel for calls of nature. Many died on the way and their bodies were simply left by the rails whenever the train stopped. Greek railway staff were appalled by what they saw and rumours about the extermination of Jews began to circulate. But it was already too late; the trap had snapped shut. By 2 August 1943 about 56,000 Jews had been taken from Thessaloniki in a total of 19 railway despatches. Most were destined for the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp. Only a mere 1,950 of them were ever to return. The Jewish Community of Thessaloniki was never to be the same again.

A small number of Jews of Spanish nationality were fortunate enough to be sent to Bergen-Belsen transit camp. After endless negotiations between the German and Spanish governments they were released and eventually reached Spain.

The city seemed empty without this large and particularly active part of its

population; or at least a part that had been particularly active in city business until that time. But what became of all the things they left behind? On the orders of the Military Commander of Thessaloniki, the notorious Dr Max Merten, Jewish owned property, shops, goods, bonds, deposits, real estate and chattels were either looted or confiscated and distributed among Germans or Greek collaborators.

The attempt to give this process a semblance of legality led to the establishment, under Enforced Act 205 / 1943, of the Department for the Management of Jewish Owned Property (Y.D.I.P.) whose three-member committees supposedly undertook to record and evaluate the estates and entrust their management to 'prudent heads of families'. The trustees would be answerable to the Greek state and would have to provide detailed management reports on the maintenance of the estates, which were not to be sold. But, as was only to be expected, this law was rarely fully upheld as there was insufficient time for correct records to be made and, frequently, the will to do so was also lacking, not to mention constant interference by the Germans who handed over shops and other property directly to those they favoured. And there were, sadly, those who blatantly profited from the misfortune of their Jewish fellow citizens. Some mitigating circumstances must be conceded for refugees from Bulgarian occupied territory, who found themselves in Thessaloniki with no means of making a living. But many just got what they could out of the situation.

There was, of course, another side to the coin. Some sectors reacted and protested against the way the Germans treated the Jews. Bishop Gennadios of Thessaloniki gave the city's clerics verbal instructions to advise their congregations not to show any sign of scorn or discrimination against the Jews when they were obliged to wear the yellow star. He even went as far as petitioning the German Military Commander of Thessaloniki, Dr Max Merten, to end the removal of Jews from the city.

Police stations started issuing Jews with false identity cards with Christian names on them stating their religion as Greek Orthodox. They were indistin-

guishable from genuine identity cards. Under these false names, a number of Jews managed to get into Italian occupied territory, where persecution had not yet started, and find refuge in more densely populated Athens.

The Italian Consul, Zamboni, provided valuable help by issuing Italian citizenship documents even on the flimsiest evidence of Italian descent, thus helping scores of Jews to escape.

Many others, who for one reason or another were unable to leave Thessaloniki, managed to survive by hiding as members of Christian families. Whole families frequently found refuge in the homes of their Christian fellow citizens. Those who sheltered them were ordinary people who had nothing to gain – even though some were paid for the shelter they provided. However, the dangers they and their families faced were huge. Under German orders they would be subject to capital punishment if they were found out.

THE TRAGIC DEPORTATION OF THE JEWS OF DIDYMOTICHO

In 1940 many young Jews from Didymoticho participated in the war against the Italians. Because of the war events some Jewish families left Didymoticho and settled in other communities.

In 1941 the city was invaded by the Germans and their commander reassured the leaderships of the religious minorities that they were in no danger whatsoever and that they would enjoy equal rights with no discrimination or action against them. This appeased the community. In March 1943, however, news of deportations of Jews from Thessaloniki gave rise to restlessness and confusion. After a period of superficial calm, on 4 May 1943, the Germans suddenly called upon all the Jews to show up at the Synagogue in order to make a “serious announcement” to them. Once they were all gathered there, the doors closed and the Germans an-

nounced to them that they considered them war prisoners and that they were to be deported.

On the following day, the Jews and their families, a total of 740 people with very little food, were put on cattle wagons, 80 persons on each wagon. The train started off to Thessaloniki via Alexandroupolis. Convoys from Nea Orestiada and Soufli followed. When they arrived in Thessaloniki they were led to a ghetto guarded by the Germans. On 10 May 1943, they were deported by train to the death camps Auschwitz – Birkenau. Eight Jewish families (30 people) from Didymoticho who had Spanish citizenship were amongst them, for no intervention could rescue them.

The 1945 census of the Central Board of Jewish Communities showed that out of the 900 Jews of Didymoticho, only 33 survived the camps or fled to other cities or villages. The total losses of the Community was 96%. Today no Jews live in Didymoticho and this historic Community has died out, like the ones of Nea Orestiada, Soufli and Alexandroupolis, because of the atrocious Holocaust.

ALEXANDROUPOLIS

As was only natural, Alexandroupolis (formerly Adrianoupolis) founded in 1850 as the medial transit port on the Compagnie Orientale’s railway link between Thessaloniki and Istanbul, attracted Jews who rose to the challenge of trading in goods passing through.

Before the war the town’s small Jewish Community numbered 140, most of whom were merchants dealing in textiles and glassware, but there were also some who dealt in money-changing. There was a Synagogue in present-day Mazaraki Street.

On 3 March 1943 all Jews in town were arrested and sent to extermination camps. Of the 140 arrested, only 4 survived.

Today there is absolutely nothing in Alexandroupolis to serve as a reminder of its Jewish population.

XANTHI - KOMOTINI

The fate of the Jews of Xanthi who shortly before the War numbered 550 persons, was no different from that of others of their faith in Bulgarian occupied Greek territory. After the initial measures which included the census of the Jewish population, the obligation to wear the Star of David and hang similarly distinguishing signs by the doors of their shops and homes, after the prohibitions and drafting for forced labour, came the night of 3 to 4 March 1943.

Germany’s Bulgarian allies took the Jews of Xanthi by surprise in the middle of the night, arrested them and took them to an empty tobacco warehouse where they remained for a few days. Then they were piled onto trains in wretched conditions and taken to the town of Lom by the River Danube. There they were put onto riverboats and taken up-river to Vienna. There followed an even more difficult, longer journey by train through Poland – bound for Treblinka and death. Only 6 survived.

The same tragedy struck the Jews of Komotini: the same night of 3 to 4 March 1943, the 819 members of the Jewish Community of Komotini followed their correligionists of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace to the martyrdom. Only 28 Jews of Komotini survived.

KAVALA: THE BULGARIAN ACCOMPLISHES TO NAZI CRIMES

Bulgarian forces came down in Greece as Hitler’s mandatory. They aimed at releasing and making available German troops which, in a different scenario, would have to be stationed in Northern Greece to control the area. The Bulgarian Government had committed itself to Germany to apply anti-Semitic measures. However, as it was afraid of poten-

tial internal and international reaction, it followed a rather mild anti-Semitic policy within its borders. On the contrary, in the foreign lands it controlled the Bulgarian Government implemented the full range of measures against Jews. As a result, the Jewish Communities of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace – regions that were controlled by the Bulgarian occupation forces – demonstrated the highest mortality rates compared to all other Jewish Communities in Greece.

Already from the summer of 1941, Bulgarian occupation forces had obliged Greek citizens of Jewish faith to wear the yellow star on their chest. At a later stage, they were not permitted to walk in central streets and to meet in public places such as squares and restaurants. Their property was confiscated and all their valuables were taken from them. Moreover, they were not allowed to pursue any employment, while young men were ordered to forced labour.

On 21 January 1943, 460 Jews living in Kavala were put into requisition and were taken away for forced labour in the railway line Sidirocastro – Simitli. Of them, 400 were delivered to the Germans, who led them to Auschwitz. The younger ones were put to the gas chambers, while the rest were used as forced labour. Only a few of them survived.

In an effort to respond to Germany's demands, the Bulgarian Government organized a surprise displacement operation for all Jews of Greek and Serbian nationality. By doing so, the Bulgarian Government managed to save and move all Jews of Bulgarian nationality to its territory.

In the night of 3 – 4 March 1943, the residents of Kavala were as always at home on account of the curfew that had been imposed. The Bulgarian forces entered forcibly the houses of the Jews, who resided not only in Kavala but also in the other cities that were under Bulgarian occupation. They dragged them out, half-naked as they were, and took them all to the empty tobacco warehouses. There they were kept for 3 – 4 days in the chilling nights of March. Thereafter, they were transferred, under inhuman conditions, in the Bulgarian interior and more specifically to the port of Lom on the Danube River. They were delivered to the Germans, who took

them to the Treblinka camp. Some of the vessels on which the Bulgarian authorities had loaded the Jews of Kavala sunk (deliberately or not) before reaching Lom. These vessels dragged their human cargo to death.

Before the War, the bloomed Jewish Community of Kavala numbered 2,100 people; of them only 42 survived and they were the ones who, one way or another, had managed to stay away from the city that fateful night. When they returned after the War, they had nothing: no home, no family, only the cloths they were wearing.

THE ELIMINATION OF THE JEWS OF DRAMA

Before World War II, there were 1,200 Jews living in Drama. Their presence dates from at least the beginning of the Turkish occupation, but became stronger during the 19th century, when production and commerce bloomed in the area. The Jews of Drama were active in the urban professions that are traditional for the Jews. However, as the 20th century gradually lowered the barriers between communities, some Jews started being involved in occupations related to the land, especially the cultivation of tobacco.

They lived in harmony with the other residents of Drama and the links between the communities were encouraged by the prelaty of the respective communities. A good example of this harmonious coexistence is that Jews and Christians worked together and set up joint companies. Despite the great upheaval of wars and the socioeconomic crisis of the years between the First and the Second World War, residents of Drama managed to live in harmony, irrespective of their religious background.

On 21 April 1941, thirteen days after the German invasion of Greece, Bulgarian forces occupied the areas of Eastern Macedonia and Western Thrace, except for a part of Evros, which remained under the German Administration.

The Bulgarian Authorities began to apply extremely suppressive measures, which aimed at altering the demograph-

ic composition of the area. The population reacted to this brutal regime and in the night of 28 September 1941 riots took place in Drama and in Doxato. The Bulgarian Authorities took the opportunity and used the riots as an excuse to proceed with mass executions of thousands of people. Many other inhabitants of Drama – not only Jews – fled to the German occupied regions. After these events, the Jewish population of Drama numbered only 592 souls. The Jews of Drama were recorded and were forced to wear the yellow star. Furthermore, signs were posted on the doors of Jewish homes and stores.

Following a special agreement between the Germans and the Bulgarians, which was signed in Sofia on 21 February 1943, the Bulgarians promised the banishment of the Jewish population from the Bulgarian occupied zones. The details of the banishment were set out in the agreement.

In pursuance of this agreement, in the night of 3 – 4 March 1943 Bulgarians launched a surprise operation and arrested all Jews living in the Bulgarian occupied zones. They were assembled in the building of the Tobacco Monopoly, where they remained for a few days. Then they were taken to the railway station in armed escort and from there to the extermination camps.

SERRES: ONLY THE THREE WHO WERE AWAY SURVIVED

Serres was in Bulgarian occupied territory right from the start. In his book "Chronicle of the Jewish Community of Serres", Haralambos Vouroutzides writes that in the summer of 1941, when the occupying Bulgarians demanded that the Jewish Community of Serres should join the city's Bulgarian Club with a view to eventually changing nationality, the city's Jewish Council answered: 'We were born in Greece. Greece is the land of our fathers. We are Greek. We will not change our nationality for any reason or for any gain.' Brave words, but they might have cost the lives of

the members of the Community. The Bulgarian government had entered a binding agreement with Germany to enforce anti-Semitic measures, but as it encountered opposition from abroad and wanted to reach a compromise with the Allies, it was both lax and slow in enforcing the measures at home. On the other hand, it wanted to comply with German demands and exercised strict anti-Semitic policy in what it called the 'new territories', in other words occupied Greek and Serbian territory. These measures culminated in sudden, swift operations to round up and deport the Jewish populations. So Bulgaria managed to save its own Jewish population almost in its entirety by sacrificing the lives of Jews living in its occupied territories in their stead.

On the night of 4 March 1943 the Jews of Serres were awoken by persistent knocking at their doors. When they opened them they were faced with Bulgarians who piled them into the rooms behind a tobacco shop. From there they were taken to an unknown destination. The town's Christian population were all in their homes because of the curfew and had no idea what the mixture of weeping and wailing and orders they could hear signified. When they came out into the street in the morning, there was not a single Jew left in the town. And neither would any of those rounded up that night ever return.

They were taken first to empty tobacco warehouses, then by train to the river Danube, by riverboat to Vienna and then by train again to Treblinka camp and the gas chambers. Of the 600 or so Jews of Serres only 3 survived – the 3 that happened to be out of town on that fateful night.

THE PERSECUTION OF THE JEWS OF VERIA

The Jewish Community of Veria, unfortunately no longer extant, was one of the earliest Romaniot Communities with references to it dating back to the

time of Saint Paul the Apostle's visit there in 53 A.D. In 1940 there were approximately 850 Jews living in Veria.

The imminent demise of the city's Jewish community first became apparent during the German Occupation. On 13 February 1943, the German governor of Thessaloniki issued an order obliging German appointed Archrabbi, Zvi Coretz, to take steps to ensure that racist laws were strictly and fully implemented in all Jewish Communities falling within the German administered district of Thessaloniki – Aigaio.

On 22 of that same February, Thessaloniki Community employees touring towns and cities in the north of Greece to supervise the implementation of the racist laws reached Veria. They quickly saw to it that the racist laws were most strictly applied. They confined the city's Jewish population to ghettos and obliged all Jews to wear distinguishing arm bands.

When the Community's president, Menahem Stroumsa, voiced his concern to Archrabbi Coretz at a slightly later date, he was given a reassuring reply. He was told that the first groups, which had already left Thessaloniki, had arrived in Krakow as expected, where they had been welcomed by other Jews who had helped them to settle in. These reassurances boosted the morale of the Veria Jews and convinced them that there was no need to take to the mountain villages as planned, despite the fact that as early as April 1943 members of EAM-ELAS Resistance groups had spoken to the Jewish Community's leadership and suggested a plan whereby members of the Community could escape to the mountains of Pieria. The plan fell through as the wealthier members of the Community were no longer willing to finance it, but also because of Jewish concerns about internecine rivalry among the various resistance groups. So only 144 Jews actually did something about trying to escape, with the altruistic help of a few of the town's Christian residents. Some attempts failed, either because of close German surveillance or, sadly, because of betrayal by informers. Those who did manage to break out survived in the mountains despite the hardship, degradation and the need to move constantly from one village to another to

avoid capture.

But the vast majority of the Jewish population of Veria vainly hoped that their fears were unfounded and met a cruel fate.

On the last day of the Jewish Pessah, the city's remaining Jews, numbering approximately 460 in all, were arrested in the Synagogue while at morning prayer. On 1 May 1943, after being held in strict confinement there for three days, they were finally led down the main street of the city to the railway station where they were bundled onto a train and transported to Baron Hirsch ghetto transit camp in Thessaloniki.

Bishop Polycarpus of Veria had, amidst great secrecy, already ensured that, if nothing else, at least the Holy Books and sacred vessels from the Synagogue were kept safe in the bishop's palace. When the storm was over he gave them to the survivors.

On the morning of 9 May all the Jews of Veria, along with others of the same faith from Thessaloniki, Florina, Didymoticho, Oresteida and Soufli, were piled into carriages of despair, to be unloaded a number of days later at the crematoria of Auschwitz-Birkenau and Treblinka. None ever returned to Veria.

Only those who had escaped to the mountains and managed to survive the hardships there returned. Horrified by the plague of death, embittered by the barbarity of the "Final Solution", disappointed in the indifference and not infrequent complicity of their Christian fellow citizens who, forgetting their common fate and common memories within the space of one night, had betrayed them and seized their property, they returned to mourn and bury the scattered remains of their tormented lives.

THE ELIMINATION OF THE JEWS OF KASTORIA

In the night of 23 – 24 March 1944, Kastoria was covered by 50 cm of snow. It was smooth and lasted less than a day. As it dawned, the local population was astonished by

two strange and unexpected events. The snow had turned slightly black, because of ashes from Vesuvius that had been carried all the way to Kastoria by the wind, and there was the unusual presence of hundreds of SS soldiers. But the air of Kastoria echoed the cries of peaceful citizens of Jewish faith who, under threats and shouting, were dragged by the Nazi beasts to the place where they were forced to assemble – the Kiazim Bei building, which had previously housed the Girls' High School, next to the house of Valala, close to the mosque.

Some 900 – 1000 Jews were ruthlessly packed to that old and abandoned building. They had committed only one 'crime': they were Jews. The conditions under which they had been gathered and led there were more than tragic. Respectable old men and women, sick people, fathers and mothers, helpless babies and handicapped persons were beaten in the streets with the rifle stocks of Hitler's beasts. Locked in this miserable prison, which was guarded night and day by unsmiling soldiers, they were sentenced to starve to death.

It was then that, despite the climate of terror, the population of Kastoria, led by the Bishop – the dear departed St. Nikiforos – took a brave step: they asked the garrison commander, a man called Hildebrandt, to allow the diocese of Kastoria to offer the prisoners at least one meager meal per day (pulses or potatoes). The beast agreed. His reaction was quite unexpected but maybe he had taken such orders by his superiors. The mess was supplied for few days, under the supervision of the unforgettable "father", now long gone, Vassilis Papamichail.

But a small quantity of pulses with almost no oil was not enough for a whole day. All prisoners were very hungry and had every reason to complain. Their complaints and begging were answered by a single word:

- Gold sovereigns!

The Germans proposed them to let them have some food from their homes on the condition that they would reveal them the place where they had hidden the gold coins. Those who had kept sovereigns accepted this black-

mail and, accompanied by soldiers of course, brought food from their homes. They shared the food with the other prisoners. During the one month imprisonment of the Jews of Kastoria, the Germans repeated the blackmail two or three times.

During these horrible last days in Kastoria, many Jews saw their wives and daughters taken away in the middle of the night to satisfy the brutal instincts of soldiers and officers ... These unfortunate creatures, torn into pieces from the night orgies they had to go through by their savage rapists, were accompanied back to the sad prison in the morning.

Tragic days ... Tragic, dramatic and inexplicable for all human beings who understood the meaning of the word "human". But how would anyone react when fear covered everything in a horrible and merciless silence? All true Christian souls were in deep pain caused by the unfair persecution of their fellow citizens and friends, whose only difference was their Jewish faith.

Then came the last tragic day when the unfortunate Jews of Kastoria were dragged to the grey lorries of the Germans to be carried to the crematoria. Of them, only 30 – 40 survived. And even the survivors, in order to avoid looking at the ruins of their once happy lives, dispersed to all parts of the world.

(Excerpts from the testimony of D. Giannoussis, published in the local newspaper "Nea Kastoria" on July 1st, 1983).

THE JEWISH COMMUNITY OF FLORINA HAS VANISHED

It seems that the memory of the Jews of Florina has been lost. Indeed, the younger generations do not even know that 50 years ago a thriving Jewish community was flourishing in Florina. It would appear

that the residents of Florina have deleted that chapter of their history that concerns their Jewish fellow citizens.

The Jews of Florina (about 400 people) were mainly merchants of textiles and shoes as well as butchers. At the 1940-41 War Memorial, which was erected in the G. Modi square (the central square of the city), the names of four Jews are mentioned alongside the names of the other residents of Florina, who were killed during the warfare.

In 1943, the German occupying forces treated the Jews of Florina the same way they treated Jews all over Europe. They eliminated them in the concentration camps and the crematoria of Poland and Germany. As regards the Jews of Florina, the German forces made them wear the yellow star of David on their arms and they assembled them in the schoolyards (mainly in the yards of the First and of the Second Primary Schools). Then, they carried them to death by train. The only ones who survived were the ones that realized the danger and hid in the mountains. The rest of the Jews of Florina, young men and women, children, elder people, rich merchants and tallymen were led to death in a climate of sorrow and loneliness from their fellow countrymen. They left as they had come in the 15th century: strangers and wanderers, with the external expectation to return to the "promised land". A woman of Christian faith who witnessed the tragedy remembers a Jew saying: "Goodbye my dear wife; they took the children by force ...".

The Germans confiscated all their possessions and property. Their homes and stores were plundered. Some residents of Florina became "custodians" of their moveable property ... The very few who survived the Holocaust emigrated to America, Israel and Buenos Aires. The only one who remained in Florina was Cohen, who also later moved to Volos and died there. After the War, all real estate belonging to Jews was sold - at very low prices.

Today, there is nothing in the city to remind residents and visitors alike that Jews used to live there. Their memory is nowhere to be found; not even in the name of a street ...

"ROUNDING UP"

THE JEWS IN LARISSA

Before the war there were 1,120 people in the Jewish Community of Larissa and it was one of the most prosperous communities in Greece. The city's Jewish population, for the most part merchants, enjoyed extremely good relations with their Christian fellow citizens and were fully integrated into local customs and traditions. Jews lived in various parts of the city, but most lived side by side with a number of Christian families in the area known as the Jewish quarter.

When the War broke out Jews were called upon to serve their country just like all other Greeks. They fought in Albania and suffered their share of losses in dead and injured.

The Jews of Larissa were not specifically targetted under Italian Occupation. Like all residents of Larissa they knew hardships and longed for freedom, but the occupying forces never singled them out for particularly harsh treatment. However, in March 1943 in German occupied Thessaloniki Jews were arrested and sent to concentration camps, so great anxiety spread among the people of Larissa. They found a measure of solace in the fact that they were in Italian occupied territory and the Italians had, as yet, shown no signs of intent to harm them. So when the initial anxiety was over, they began to feel more at ease and carried on with their lives quietly, being careful not to provoke in any way and trying to remain inconspicuous.

But when the Italians surrendered and the German Occupation began, they were truly afraid. Most left home and trade and either took to the mountains or moved to remote mountain villages. Even so, the Germans left those who remained in Larissa alone and this was enough to encourage those who had fled to return to their homes. They feared becoming refugees. They worried about their shops and their property.

Perhaps they hoped that eventually all would be well.

Alas, evil wasted no time. Dawn was breaking on 24 March 1944 when the round-up of Jews began. At about five o'clock in the morning the silence of the night was split by the sound of vehicles coming to a halt with screeching tyres. With informers helping them, the Germans surrounded the entire Jewish quarter. Jackboots echoed from the pavements and, one by one, the doors to Jewish homes gave way to the urgent pounding. The catalogue of families and names that the Germans had in their possession left no chance of escape. So all those who had been misled by Nazi tactics were driven like a herd of animals to the main square. There they were struck with coshes and whips and piled into the back of trucks. Endless moments of torture... A horrible procession took shape; a hotchpotch herd made up of children, women, old and young. The 235 terrified Jews were taken to the vehicle depot, which had been converted to serve as a concentration camp. There they remained in wretched conditions for eight days. Those who had managed to hide valuables or money on their persons were forced to hand them over to the guards. Jews arrested in Ioannina, Volos and Trikala swelled their numbers. All together they were taken to the railway station where they were piled into freight cars on the death train which had begun its journey in Athens. Their final destination, after a nine-day journey in inhuman conditions, Auschwitz station – the last stop before the gas chambers and crematoria of Birkenau.

The Germans had carefully planned every detail of Operation 24th March 1944. Not a single Christian home was disturbed – not even by mistake. Everything had been planned in advance and was most efficiently executed. Hitler's army was flawless in its planning, but above all, it was disciplined – even in crime! Only 5 or 6 of the 235 ever came home. The round-up was a complete success! Whole families were wiped out: the Cohens, the Misdrachis, the Taramboulous, the Levis, the Felous...

There remained just a few details for the Germans to take care of. They ransacked the wealth of priceless items in the Synagogue library and were then

left with the problem of what to do with the Synagogue itself. They did not trouble their heads too much over that. They turned it into a stable for their horses and mules!

HOW THE JEWS OF VOLOS ESCAPED

The Jewish Community of Volos came into being mainly through Jews moving there from other communities in Greece, particularly from Chalkis, Ioannina and Larissa. In pre-war years the community numbered approximately 1,200 people, most of whom were merchants, owners of small industries, clerks, labourers and small traders, but there were also qualified, professional people. The 1943 census – conducted shortly before the persecution began – registered 872 people. The reduction in numbers was because many members of the community, mainly the wealthier ones, had left for Athens and elsewhere in the wake of the dramatic events in Thessaloniki.

After the Italian surrender in September 1943 and the extension of German occupied territory to cover the whole of Greece, the persecution became more widespread and the Volos Community was hit. On 30 September 1943 the Germans, who had already settled in the city, asked Archrabbi Moesis Pessah for a detailed list of the names, addresses and property of the Jews of Volos. Fully aware of what had taken place in Thessaloniki and realising what their intentions were, the Archrabbi told them that he was not in a position to supply them with such a list as his duties were purely religious. When the Germans redoubled their efforts to mislead him, saying that they merely needed the list for their records, he asked for, and was given, two days to draw up the list. During this time many Jews were helped to escape from the city, while others were given false identity documents with Christian names and their religion registered as Greek Orthodox. This was done under Archrabbi Pesah's

guidance, with the full support of Bishop Joachim, the mayor and the prefect of Volos, and with the valuable help of the police, who provided the Jews with false identity cards. Leaving the town in small groups so as not to arouse suspicion, they found refuge in the mountain villages of Pelion, which were controlled by the resistance.

Having warned his flock about the imminent danger, the Archrabbi himself also left for the mountain on 1 October 1943. The Germans were enraged by his escape and ransacked his home on the night of 4 October. Shortly after this they demolished the Synagogue.

Unfortunately, not all the Jews of Volos took the Archrabbi's warnings seriously and about 100 of them stayed in the town. The Germans left them alone to appease them and persuade some of those who had fled to return. Of the 135 Jews that were arrested in March 1944 and sent to Poland, 130 were exterminated in Auschwitz. Only 5 managed to get back.

Having endured 14 months of persecution, the Jews started to return to Volos when Greece was liberated in 1944. Material losses were incalculable and the Volos Community would never have managed to get back on its feet had it not been for the support and generous contribution of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee and the Coordinating Instrument of the Jewish Communities of Greece, the Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece, which was established at that time along with the Central Welfare Committee for the Jewish Poor. The Synagogue, which had been ransacked and lay in ruins, was rebuilt, and the Central Welfare Committee distributed financial aid, medical care, food and clothing. In addition to this, the Foundation for Occupational Rehabilitation provided merchants and small manufacturers with loans on favourable terms as well as giving young people the chance to study at O. R.T. (Organization for Rehabilitation through Training) technical school.

Many of the Jews of Volos decided to emigrate, some to Palestine, and some to the United States of America. But they still keep in touch and have strong sentimental ties with the place that gave them birth.

MASTROGIANNI HID THE JEWS OF KARDITSA

In 1940, the small Jewish community of Karditsa numbered 82 persons. Some of them were merchants, retailers and peddlers; others were lamp makers, broom makers, textile workers, while their wives were embroiders. There was no Synagogue, no cemetery, and no Rabbi in the city. Joseph Joseph, a man well known for his education, was responsible for all necessary religious duties, for the memorial services, etc. To celebrate important holidays the Jews of Karditsa used to go to the Synagogue of Trikala. At Easter time the families gathered in the houses of relatives to celebrate according to the traditional manners and customs.

During the 1940 War, six young Jews were called up and one of them, Mimis Kambelis, was wounded.

The period of the German Occupation followed and several young Jews joined the National Resistance. In September 1943, the German Command asked the Municipality for a list containing the names of all citizens of Jewish faith. Mayor Dionyssios Koukourikos, acting together with the Director of the City Hall Vassilios Lappas and in cooperation with the interpreter of the Germans Vassilios Katsoulas, tried to avoid giving the list to the Nazis. At the same time, in order to save the Jews, they collaborated with the National Resistance and supplied Jews with fake identity cards showing Christian names.

When in October 1943 the Jewish persecution began, most of them fled to the village called Mastrogianni (currently known as "Amaranto") on the Agrafa mountains. The villagers offered them a safe heaven and shared with them the scarce food they had. Some other Jews coming from other cities, mainly from Thessaloniki, were also hosted in Mastrogianni.

As far as the other Jews of Karditsa are concerned, Semah Kapetas fled to

Athens, where he was arrested and sent to the Nazi camps. A young woman, Rebecca Kapeta, daughter of Markos and Rachel, aged 20, was captured by E.A.S.A.D. (National Agricultural Federation of Anti-Communist Action), an organisation that collaborated with the Germans. She was molested and then set free.

After the liberation of Greece in October 1944, the Jewish Community of Karditsa faced serious financial problems, while the health of children was poor owing to the deprivations and hardships of war. A committee was then established, chaired by David Bonfil, which in cooperation with the Central Jewish Council of Greece, secured financial and other assistance.

However in the years that followed, the number of the Community's members kept falling on account of emigration or relocation to Athens, Thessaloniki and other cities. As a result, the Community was declared "inactive" in 1969.

In 1992, with the initiative of the Karditsa's Jews now living in Thessaloniki, the Jewish Community of Thessaloniki honoured Vassilios Lappas and Vassillios Katsoulas for their contribution in saving the Jews of Karditsa.

THE LOST JEWS OF TRIKALA

On 24 March 1944 German Nazi troops launched a savage pogrom on the Jews of this town as well as on those of other towns in Thessaly. Before dawn had broken on that horrendous day the whole area where the homes of the Jewish Community were located, known as the Jewish quarter, was cordoned off by large numbers of German troops. All roads leading into the area, G. Kondyli St., Ploutonos St., G. Karaiskaki St., Socratous St., Athanasios Diakos St., and other access roads were blocked with trucks and makeshift machine gun posts had been set up on every street corner. German soldiers with automatic weap-

ons in their hands broke down the doors of houses and dragged out as many Jews as they could find amidst savage shouts that sounded like dogs barking. They piled them into vans which were parked at various points.

Fortunately, only a few Jews were actually caught. Most had left town. Some were hiding in nearby villages disguised as villagers while others had taken to the mountains and joined resistance groups. Among those who were caught were many who had left and stayed away for a while, but had eventually returned believing that the Germans would do them no harm. Things turned out very differently and, in the event, almost all of them perished in German extermination camps and crematoria. They were, for the most part, women, children and the elderly. Seeing that the end of the Occupation was approaching, they had not expected that savage Nazi pogrom.

THE PERSECUTION OF THE JEWS IN ATHENS

On 27 April 1941, as soon as the Germans entered Athens, they claimed from their Italian allies the exclusive handling of Jewish matters. In spite of the Italian reaction, they behaved like tyrants, showed complete disregard to the Italians, and immediately took over Jewish matters.

By May 1941 the Nazis seized the archives of the Jewish Community. They confiscated the rich rabbinical library and arrested the major members of the Community Council. According to their well-known policy they hired some Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe who had fled to Athens in the service of the SS. They favored and protected these individuals in order to turn them against their Athenian fellow Jews. The chief Rabbi Elias Barzilai, in consultation with Asher Moïsis and the other leaders confronted them with a spirit of tolerance. They did not wish to irritate the Nazis but they had their plan.

On 1 September 1941 the Italians of-

ficially pronounced Rabbi Barzilai president of the Community. The clash between the two allies concerning Jewish matters, well incited by Rabbi Barzilai, broke into an obvious dispute. The Italian authorities took specific measures for the protection of the persecuted Jews. On the other hand the Nazis increased pressure. On 14 July 1942 they urged ESPO, a Greek "national socialist" organization to attack the Community. Members of the organization broke into the Community's offices, looted and vandalized. The Italians were notified, they arrested the rioters, but under the Germans' pressure they were forced to set them free. On 20 September, however, an incendiary, which members of the Resistance had dropped, burned down the building where ESPO was housed. The Germans blamed the Jews for this attack and forced the Italians to arrest the Community's leadership. After the interrogations they were found not guilty and were set free twenty days later.

The more the Germans tightened the reins the more the Jews organized themselves. They formed solidarity and support groups for the refugees from Thessaloniki as well as messes for meals. The Italian Authorities became more actively interested. So did the Greek ones. The state and city Police, under the command of Angelos Evert, were ordered to issue fake identity cards to any Jews who wished to have them. These identity cards bore Christian names and the religion of the holder was declared Greek Orthodox; they could not be distinguished from the "real" ones, since they were issued by the same police authorities. They could therefore pass through any German control.

At the same time, the Archbishop of Athens and Greece Damaskinos, working with the Director of the rolls of the municipality of Athens P. Haldezos, took care to open a special file where they entered the names of Jews "had been baptized" in order to escape. Thanks to this and to the assistance of their fellow citizens 560 Jews of Athens and of various cities who had fled to the capital survived until the end of the war pretending to be Greek Orthodox.

Enlightened and led by Archbishop Damaskinos, the Greek Orthodox Church also played an active role in fa-

vor of the Jews. He sent a confidential circular letter to all the churches, urging the priests and the faithful to offer every assistance to the persecuted Jews. The sacrifices that the Christians made in order to hide and give shelter to Jewish families are touching. Priests performed mixed marriages without being too concerned on the formalities of conversion and baptizing. So, many Jews decided to convert to Orthodoxy or Catholicism.

The Archbishop's actions reached a peak through the two famous memoranda. The first dated 23 March 1943 addressing the Prime Minister of the Greek Government under Occupation, Kon. Logothetopoulos, asking him to mediate to the German Authorities on the behalf of the Greek people, in order to stop the persecution of the Greek Jews. In this memorandum he defended the Jewish presence in the Greek social life. He also reminded the Prime Minister of the 1941 Treaty of Surrender of Greece stating that "the occupation authorities have the obligation to protect the honor and property of all Greek citizens", making no discrimination. (The complete text of the memorandum is published on another page of this issue).

The second memorandum dated 24 March 1943 and having a similar content was sent directly to the Plenipotentiary for Reich Greece, Altenburg. Both memoranda were also signed by many significant personalities of the Greek public life. Given the terrorizing conditions inflicted by the SS this action required great courage.

On 8 September 1943 Italy's surrender became known. The Italian occupation forces which had followed Marshal Pietro Badoglio were captured by the Germans. The Jews of Athens and the provinces lost a precious support. Despite the spies and informers the Nazis used, they could see that the Jews of Athens were not an easy prey. They could not arrest them overnight because they were hidden in various places. They therefore launched a perfidious propaganda. Their rumors aimed at making the Jews become more confident. But they did not succeed. Realizing their failure, on 10 August the Nazis called Dieter Wisliceny from Thessaloniki and ordered him to arrest and deport to Auschwitz all the Jews of Athens and the

provinces that had until recently been under Italian occupation.

On 21 September Chief Rabbi Barzilai was called upon to present himself to Wisliceny. The Jews considered this order the outbreak of hostilities. The members of the Community were warned to be alert. The Rabbi showed up undeterred at the appointment. Wisliceny ordered him to submit, within 24 hours, a full list of the Jews including those who had fled from Thessaloniki. A Community Board meeting was called immediately and it was decided that they should gain time at all cost. The following day the Rabbi gave the excuse to Wisliceny that the Community's documents had been destroyed by ESPO and that he could not write the list. Barzilai's statement infuriated Wisliceny who finally had to give him an extension of 48 hours. Within that time, all Jews were notified to disappear at once. At nighttime a group of the Community's employees, under the rabbi's guidance burned all the archives, documents and books of the Community. On the same night all Jewish leaders disappeared. Barzilai himself found shelter at a friends' home in Kolonaki. The lawyer Elias Kefalidis, connection to the Resistance, mediated in order to help the Rabbi escape to the mountains. By 25 September most Jews of Athens had disappeared.

Two or three days later Wisliceny saw that Barzilai had not returned and began to suspect that the Rabbi had deceived him. He went to the Community offices and found everything closed. He furiously ordered his men to break in. When he saw the disorder and burned papers he immediately realized what had happened. The torturer was enraged. He returned to his office where he dictated to General Jürgen Stroop an order in which he called upon all Jews to return to their permanent residences at once. He gave them five days to show up at the Community offices and register, declaring their addresses. He threatened to have executed anyone who did not conform, while he established a new Community Council, "The Elders' Council". He called the attention of the Greek police authorities to have the order precisely carried out, imposing severe punishment to any Athenians who dared hide Jews or help them escape.

Unfortunately, about 1,200 Jews who conformed to Stroop's orders were found in Athens. Wisliceny was watching as the anguishing Jews were coming hesitant and terrorized to register. Poverty and despair made these miserable people unable to continue hiding. They arrived with some hope for they had been promised assistance and finding employment. So, one month after the establishment of the new "Elders' Council" about 2,000 Jews had been registered in the rolls. When the registration stopped at 2,000 people Wisliceny realized that the great majority of Jews had escaped. He did however wish to complete his triumph by arresting and exterminating even these 2,000. However, the Ambassador of Germany objected, for he thought that Vislitseni's methods were obsolete. This terrible persecutor had to be moved out of the scene. A new policy was necessary in order to attract as many Jews as possible. He was replaced by Toni Burger who was in charge of carrying out Himler's extermination plans. The informers helped so that another 200 Jews were drawn out of their hiding places and turned in to the Gestapo.

The day of destruction was Friday 23 March 1944: the Gestapo suddenly rounded-up the Synagogue of Athens and arrested all those present, about 350 people, mainly men. At the same time German trucks captured women and children from their homes and brought them to the Synagogue. About 800 people were thus assembled. Foreign nationals were not distinguished. The Spanish Ambassador complained in vain. He received the bold reply that the arrests were an order from Berlin. The 800 prisoners remained in the Synagogue with no food or water until Saturday after sunset. Then, they were transported in closed trucks to Haidari where they joined the other Jews who had been arrested earlier on. Once there, the unfortunate prisoners suffered the habitual beatings, humiliation and mistreatment.

On Sunday 2 April, the Jewish prisoners including the foreign nationals were transported to Rouf station in closed trucks. In the meantime the Nazis had arrested 1,200 Jews from Preveza, Arta, Agrinio and Patra. They had locked them

up in Haidari too, so that they would include them in the same convoy. The International Red Cross had rushed to help the prisoners but they were brutally stopped by the infuriated Nazis.

The train was composed of 30 wagons. It started off at 1 p.m. bound for Poland. In Larisa the collection increased. Another 2,400 prisoners who had been arrested in Volos, Triakala and mainly Ioannina were added. When the winding train passed by the station of Thessaloniki it contained 5,200 people packed in 84 wagons. The morbid journey continued and ended up in the station of Auschwitz on 10 April. That was the place of hell: the suffocating gas chambers and the crematoria.

Only a few Jews who had Spanish citizenship was lucky to be transported to the "transit" camp of Bergen Belsen, to be liberated and arrive in Spain after endless negotiations between the governments of Germany and Spain.

After the end of the War and the return of the survivors Athens ended up having more Jews than it did before the war, for many survivors from the wiped out communities in the provinces had no other choice but to move to Athens in order to live near their fellow Jews.

THE JEWS OF CHALKIS DID NOT FALL INTO THE GERMAN TRAP

With an uninterrupted history dating back over 2000 years, the Jewish Community of Chalkis is one of the oldest in Greece.

When War was declared in October 1940, there were 325 people in the community. Their relations with the other residents of Chalkis were excellent and religious fanaticism was never a problem, especially after the arrival of Bishop Gregorios in 1923. In the 1940 war, the small Jewish Community of Chalkis had the great honour of one of its very own sons, Colonel Mordochai Frizis, being among the first Greek officers to fall in the fighting.

When the front line broke in 1941, there immediately arose concern about the fate of the town's Jewish population. News about conditions for Jews in occupied Europe was extremely bad and what fate awaited them was uncertain. The fact that Chalkis came under Italian administration bolstered their hopes, as the Italian form of facism did not seek to persecute Jews as the Nazis' did, and the Italian Military Commander of Greece, General Carlo Geloso, had declared that he would not harm them.

But when Italy capitulated in September 1943 everything changed. The threat to the Jews immediately loomed large and terrifying. The whole of Euboea, like the rest of occupied Greece, was to come under German jurisdiction.

EAM, the National Liberation Front, anticipated the danger that the Jews would be in once substantial reinforcements reached the German garrison at Chalkis. In an announcement it circulated shortly after the Italian surrender, the National Liberation Front's Prefectural Committee of Euboea called upon the people of Chalkis and Euboea to do everything they could to help their Jewish fellow citizens. National Solidarity also made an urgent appeal in its newspaper 'Matomeni Euboea', which circulated in Chalkis. Furthermore, the National Liberation Front contacted the Jewish Community with a view to coordinating efforts. The Front proposed the immediate evacuation of Jews from Chalkis and their transport to resistance controlled villages in Euboea. The Community took the proposal on board and started moving people out. Police officials, Lieutenant (at that time) Economides and a few others, helped in this by issuing Jews with false identification documents in Christian names. Even so, with informers collaborating with them, it was not too hard for the Germans to locate the few Jews that remained in the city, along with the Rabbi. They were all arrested and imprisoned, but were released shortly before liberation day.

Bishop Gregorios, whose name will never be forgotten, set a fine example with his bravery. He risked life and limb by offering to preserve the Synagogue's six Sefer Torah cylinders in the

sanctuary of his own home. When the war was over he returned them to the Community along with a gift of a rare 15th century manuscript, whose subject matter was the Jews, to help re-establish the Community's ransacked library.

A marble plaque in the wall of the Jewish Community of Chalkis' office building bears witness to the Jews' gratitude to this great Bishop.

Thus it was that the Community of Chalkis suffered the loss of only 18 members – one person was executed with other patriots on 24th March 1944 in a German act of retaliation, and 17 of the 90 who had taken refuge in surrounding villages were caught during German clean-up operations. These 17 were sent to Germany on 2 April. Some succumbed to hardships suffered; others were exterminated in camps and crematoria. A few were fortunate enough to survive and return; all of them bearing an indelible concentration camp number on their bodies.

Some of those who had fled to the villages of Euboea played an active role in the Resistance. They joined EAM (The National Liberation Front), EPON (The United Panhellenic Youth Organization) or ELAS (The Greek People's Liberation Army).

From time to time yet others left from Tsakiaioi village for Tel Aviv in the Middle East. Some of these people came back, but some stayed and settled in their new home, Israel.

THE JEWS OF PATRAS AND AGRINIO FLED TO THE MOUNTAINS

After its surrender in 1941, Agrinio came under the Italian zone of occupation. The Germans' anti-Semitic laws were not applied. It is characteristic that in 1942 the heads of the Jewish families were asked to show up at the Italian Police and give their details. The Italian sergeant in charge assured everyone that as long as the Italians were

in Agrinio nothing would happen to the Jews. This suggestive implication should make them suspicious. However no one was worried. They all obeyed and forgot about this small incident without speculating the secret meaning of these words.

Compared to other cities, by 1943 Agrinio had sent the greatest share of guerrillas to ELAS. The spirit of resistance was very vivid in the area. In April 1943 they found out about the deportation of the Jews in Thessaloniki and realized that the same fate awaited them.

• Italy surrendered in 1943. German troops entered Agrinio in order to replace the Italian garrisons. The members of the Resistance tried to collect as much ammunition as possible from the Italians, and the Germans did not prevent this. On 8 October 1943 the Greek newspapers published the following instructions:

• All Jews residing in German occupied areas must return with no delay to their permanent residence where they lived before 1 June 1943.

• Jews are forbidden to leave or change their residence.

• Within 5 days Jews who live in Athens and its suburbs must show up at the religious community of Athens and be registered. In the areas outside Athens this must be done at the Greek civil services and communities.

• Any Jews who do not comply with this order will be executed. Any non-Jews hiding Jews, provide them shelter or assist them to escape will be sent to concentration camps or will be punished even more severely.

• Jews of foreign nationality must show up at the Jewish Community of Athens on 18 October at 8:00 a.m. to submit their passports. Outside Athens this must be done at the local Greek authorities.

• The religious Jewish Community of Athens is authorized as the only representative of all Jews in Greece. It must, with no delay, appoint a committee of adults and begin its function.

• After registration all male Jews over the age of 14 must show up every other day at the above offices.

• Jews are forbidden to circulate outdoors between 5:00 p.m. until 7:00 a.m.

• The Greek Police has received or-

ders to supervise the obedience of the above orders and to arrest any Jews who do not obey or anyone helping them ignore this order.

- The above order concerns the Jews who are at least third generation of the Jewish race, regardless of what their religion is today.

When this order was published in Agrinio, the Germans found no Jew ready to obey to their orders, for they (the Jews) had fled to the mountains. Therefore, the Community of Agrinio holds a unique position of Resistance among the Jewish communities of occupied Europe. It is the only community where not even one member was registered in the Germans' lists, nor was deported to the crematoria. On 23 October 1943 the German Ambassador in Patra sent the following note to the German ambassador in Athens, concerning the Jews of Agrinio: "I have the honor to report to you submissively that, after the announcement through the press of the order on the obligatory registration of the Jews, the latter have disappeared. It is said that they fled to the mountains."

The reaction of the Jews in Patra was similar. However, in Patra, due to the fact that certain local residents collaborated, the Germans succeeded to arrest and deport 213 members of the Jewish Community, of whom 152 survived and returned to the city.

IOANNINA, 25 MARCH 1944: THE DAY OF THE ELIMINATION OF THE ROMANIOT JEWISH COMMUNITY OF IOANNINA

The 25th of March 1944 was the fatal day for the Romaniot Jewish Community of Ioannina. Even before dawn, the Germans had spread out in the Jewish neighbourhoods of the city, in the so called "ovraika" and the castle, where many Jewish families lived. They were bagging at the front doors, ask-

ing the barely awakened and scared to death Jews to take one bag with them containing whatever was necessary and their jewelery. The ones living outside the castle were ordered to gather at the pier, in Mavili square, while the ones living within the castle were ordered to assemble in a specific place. The German lorries were ready; their engines were on.

When the first light came out, it was a snowy morning, the German gathered all Jews, put them on the lorries and drove them through the market. At that time, the people of Ioannina, who were going to church to celebrate Evangelismos, witnessed the horrible scenes. They stood speechless on the pavements, questions and pain in their eyes. They were looking at their fellow Jewish neighbours standing on the lorries, one very close to the other to protect themselves from the cold. And when the Jews were spotting a Christian friend of theirs, they had one thing to ask for: "Brother, take care of my house".

The lorries departed for the trip with no return, to the crematoria of Auschwitz and Birkenau.

The events in Thessaloniki, where Jews were also gathered by the Nazis, had taken place a year earlier (1943). It is surprising how the Jews of Ioannina had not been informed of the fate of the Jews of Thessaloniki. Or, if it had been known, why they did nothing. They made no effort to leave the city and hide. Which force drugged them?

The tragic elimination of the Jews of Ioannina was the result of the two-faced attitude shown by the Germans as well as of some members of the Community's leadership, who would believe in anything. They had persuaded their fellow Jews that they were not at risk for as long as they did not provoke the Germans and they were satisfying their demands for money and other valuables.

A young boy, who was only six at the time and lived outside the castle, watched from the balcony of his house (it had a view at the pier) the Jews who had been assembled in the Mavili square. He recounted the following that had forever registered in his memory: "If a Jew set his foot down from the pavement, the guard would rush towards him and break it with his rifle stock. And when

a Christian woman tried to comfort a Jewish friend of hers, she was immediately arrested and would not be set free unless she showed the Germans her cross, in other words the evidence that she was a Christian." The young boy also spoke about three of his Jewish playmates: "When the lorries passed in front of my house, my friends saw me standing on the balcony and started shouting 'You can be jealous now – we are going for a long car ride ...'. These carefree souls could have never imagined that they would pay for the ride with their own lives and that they would never see again their homes, their neighbourhoods and their friends.

The first stop was Larissa. Only a few – ten to be exact – managed to escape and take refuge in the Resistance groups. In Larissa, the Germans shaved the heads of Jews and took all their jewelery. Then they boarded them on trains having the concentration camps as their destination. Barbarism at its full extent. 1850 people perished in the German camps including old people, young people and children. Only 163 of them returned - having a number on their hand as the sign of identification. Auschwitz and Birkenau were forever engraved in their souls.

Today, only few Romaniot Jews live in "our small town". They are less than fifty. The large and prosperous (before the Holocaust) Jewish Community of Ioannina has been decimated.

PREVEZA

The history of the Jewish Community of Preveza is relatively short. The Community was founded in 1881 and consisted mainly of Jewish merchants from Arta. Most of them carried on their occupation as merchants in Preveza too and traded primarily in textiles and haberdashery. The Community had its own school and Synagogue, and the Jewish cemetery lay just a short distance outside town.

Most of the town's Jewish population lived in one particular area, but

there were also a number of Jewish homes here and there in other parts of town. Relations with the Christian residents of the town were always good; Jews and Christians traded with one another and when Jewish children had completed their studies at the Jewish primary school, they went to Preveza Secondary School which served the whole population.

Alas, their fate was not to be any different from that of others of their faith in Ipirus. As in Ioannina, so in Preveza. The 25 March 1944 marked the end of the small but flourishing community. It was shortly before dawn when the Germans woke the Jews up by banging loudly on their doors and windows. They told them to get dressed, pack a few basic necessities and come out into the street. As they stood in the street, day was just breaking. The German trucks stood outside the Court Building waiting for their human cargo. The weeping Jews climbed onto the trucks to begin their long journey – a journey which, for most, had no return. Of those 250 souls, 235 met a horrible end in Nazi extermination camps. A mere 15 survived.

After the War, when there was no Community left to defend the Jewish cemetery, the land was appropriated and a large part of the cemetery totally destroyed. The small part that remained intact was eventually given to Preveza Municipality who, in turn, gave it to IKA (Social Security Organization) to be used as the site of their new office and services building. As part of the commemoration of the town's Jewish population on 10 and 11 November 2001, a marble plaque was unveiled on the wall of the IKA building as a reminder of the erstwhile Jewish Community and its tragic end.

ONLY THE MEMORY REMAINS IN ARTA

The Jews of Arta were mainly merchants. Before 1940 (1939 census) about 500 Jews lived in Arta at the center of the

city, in Tourkopazaro next to the Citadel, in the "Jewish Quarter".

In 1941, however, the Italian Occupation began. As long as it lasted, its relations with the authorities were good and the Jews' lives continued almost normally. When Italy surrendered in September 1943 Arta also came under the German occupation. The fate of the Jews of the city was now to follow that of their other fellow Jews who had been arrested. A special delegation of the Gestapo arrived to the city and obtained from the Municipality a list of the names of the Jewish residents and their addresses.

On the night of 24 March 1944 they besieged the Jewish quarter of Arta and arrested most of the members of the Jewish Community, which at the time numbered 384 persons.

All those arrested were led naked and barefoot, not even allowed to take money or food with them, to the movie theater "Orpheus". On the following day they were deported by train to the concentration camps of Poland and Germany, mainly to Auschwitz. Once there, the selection took place and those considered able to work were sent to various work camps, while the remaining were massively exterminated in gas chambers on 11 April 1944. Out of the 380 members of the Community who were deported to Germany only 30 returned. These and a few more people who had escaped formed the new Jewish Community of Arta.

In Kanari Konstandines' report, immediately after the Holocaust, as far as the Jewish Community of Arta was concerned, it is mentioned that the post war population was 58 people, 24 of whom had returned from the camps. In addition, "Poulieza" Synagogue which contained a significant library was completely destroyed, while "Greca" Synagogue was in a bad condition. In the cemetery, in Peranthi hill, no grave remained standing. The remains of a semi-destroyed grave were the only sign that the Jewish cemetery was once there.

The new conditions that prevailed after the war and the establishment of the State of Israel contributed to the departure of the remaining Jewish families from the city of Arta and ever

since nothing but memories have remained of the once flourishing Jewish Community.

On 4 July 2004 the Municipality of Arta constructed and unveiled a Memorial for the victims of the Holocaust in the memory of its lost citizens.

NAZI PERSECUTION OF JEWS FROM CORFU

On the eve of the war the Jewish Community of Corfu numbered approximately two thousand souls. For the most part they lived in the narrow streets of a real ghetto dating back over five hundred years. In this area there were four synagogues for the faithful to attend. Known as Little Palestine on account of its ideal climate, Corfu had become home to many Jews fleeing from mainland Greece.

Germans occupied the island on 27 September 1943. Since then the island's Jews suffered every form of vicissitude – the whole horror of oppression. They were subjected to every form of humiliation, every insult, every degradation. The Germans schemed this way and that to humiliate the most respected figures. Archrabbi Jacob Nahamia was forced to stand at the door of the bathroom while the German commanding officer took his daily bath. He had to respectfully hold the commander's shoes and pipe and give them to him when he had finished his ostentatious routine. The Nazis were very fond of humiliating people this way.

Even so, the annihilation of the Jews of Corfu did not take place at the same time as that of others of their faith in mainland Greece. It came two months later. The two Rekanati traitors arrived on the island and served as the Germans' guides. On 7 June 1944, although the Allies were entering Rome in triumph, the Gestapo showed no intention of laying down their arms. So the killing machine went to work on Corfu. Notices went

up everywhere saying, 'All Jews who are out of town must return to their homes by 8 June.'

At 5 o'clock in the morning on Friday 9 June SS personnel knocked vehemently on every Jewish door. Everyone – men, women, children, the old, the disabled, the sick and even the dying – was told to go to Plateia Stratou. No exceptions. They were all quick to obey. At 6 o'clock in the morning SS personnel and Greek police surrounded the crowd of Jews that had been violently forced to gather in the vast square.

At 9 o'clock the air raid sirens went off. Allied planes were flying over the town. Acting on their instincts the Jews asked to be taken to shelter. The guards fired over their heads and told them to stay where they were. When the danger was over a German officer assisted by an interpreter read the roll call of families. Immediately after this the prisoners were locked up in the old castle by the square, in most squalid, cramped conditions. One by one they were called, on pain of death, to deposit whatever they had on their persons, i.e. bank notes, gold, scissors, razor blades, tobacco and such like, in specially prepared suitcases. The Germans used the keys to their homes and took whatever furniture they liked. Anything left over was then sold at auction.

The appointed mayor, who was head of Corfu Corporation, expressed his satisfaction. In a short speech he gave at the time he said, among other things, 'Our great friends the Germans have cleaned up our island of the Jewish riffraff. From now on we will be able to enjoy the fruits of our fields ourselves.'

About two hundred people, mainly women, managed to flee to inland villages. On 11 June three hundred women were piled onto barges towed by a motor boat. And oh irony of ironies! Midwives were sent to accompany them so as to help if any should go into labour and give birth on the way. The convoy set sail for the coast of Ipirus and, after arriving in Igoumenitsa, went on to Athens by truck.

On 14 June another group, consisting of the island's entire male Jewish population and the rest of the women, were piled onto pairs of barges towed

by a small ship. The convoy made a port stop at Lefkas. The islanders showed the prisoners deep sympathy, and great solidarity. They ran from everywhere bringing soup, bread, different fish and lots of fruit. The Germans were taken aback. A priest approached one of the prisoners and offered him a cigarette. A German soldier who was watching, stamped on the cigarette with his boot, forced the Jew to his knees, held a pistol to his neck and shot him.

The uprooted Jews stayed on Lefkas for two days. In Patras, where they were taken next, the Red Cross supplied them with food and medicine. A small ship then took them to Piraeus. On disembarking they were savagely whipped by the SS, supposedly for not telling the German officers – who were dressed in civies – everything they should have. Their pockets were methodically searched and anything left hidden there removed. They were kept in Haidari for a few days. On 20 June they were taken to Larissis railway station and piled like animals into filthy freight cars – as many as seventy people in each one. Other Jewish prisoners, 575 souls in all, who had been kept in the same terrible conditions in Haidari, were added to the 1,800 prisoners from Corfu. The only supplies thrown into the wagons for their journey were a few parcels of onions and beet. They were not even given any water.

The convoy arrived in Auschwitz on 29 June at 11.30 in the evening. The selection process began as soon as they got off the train. They were asked their age and occupation. The Germans needed labourers and wanted to make use of these human resources. So they did not send all their prisoners blindfolded to the crematoria, but excepted a few groups chosen at random here and there. Two hundred people from Corfu were sent for delousing and showers, and then put to work in factories, on roads and such like. One thousand six hundred were sent straight to the crematoria. The team of Greek Jews who worked on the furnaces, the so-called Judecommandos, never laid a finger on the bodies of those from Corfu. Neither did they touch anything that they may still have had with them. It

was like a taboo. They were overtaken by a genuine sense of sacred awe.

Those Jews of Corfu who did come back from Poland tell of how, at one point, a hundred or so of those in the ranks of the labourers were taken out and sent to the crematorium. Their number was swelled by a group of Gypsies, who shared the same fate. The doomed walked towards the gas chambers in orderly fashion, singing as they went. They were fully aware of what lay in store for them and were prepared to accept their fate with little resistance. Suddenly the guards received new orders. About turn. Everyone back to the camp. So some of the Jews of Corfu had a last minute escape from the horror of the German crematoria.

THE TRAGIC END OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITY OF RHODES

From September 1943 until July 1944, while the Germans were arresting and displacing Jews all over Greece, no measures were taken against the Jews living in Rhodes. This eased their initial fears and gave to the members of the Jewish Community the false impression of peace and hope that nothing serious was going to happen to them. Only a few young Jews, risking their lives, dared to escape in shaky boats to the Turkish coasts. The rest waited and hoped. Their major concern was the continuous air bombing by the Allies, which although aimed at the port, had caused considerable damage and had cost the lives of many civilians.

In the meanwhile, the Nazis were preparing their criminal plan for the displacement and the elimination of the Jews. In mid-July 1944, the German Command ordered the Jews to reside solely with the confines of the city of Rhodes or in the villages of Trianta, Kremasti and Villanova (now known as Paradisi). These were the places were

they had fled in order to escape the bombardments, in a distant no more than twelve kilometers from the city.

A few days later, on 18 July, a German officer turned up at the house of the President of the Jewish Community and told him that, according to the orders of the German Commander, all Jewish men over 16 had to appear the following morning in the old headquarters of the Italian air force. They had to bring with them their identity cards and their work permits. This trick made everyone believe that they would be gathered to be sent to forced labour. In the next morning they were all there. Two SS officers, who were sent from the "Rosenberg Command" in Athens, walked into the room accompanied by an interpreter who was speaking Spanish-Jewish. With the brutality that characterized them, and with the worst threatening, they grabbed the documents from the hands of the Jews gathered in the room, leaving them wonder what was going to happen. They assigned the President of the Community the task to inform the women that they had to join their husbands within 24 hours, otherwise they would be shot. They also had to carry with them all their belongings: jewelry, gold sovereigns, banknotes, a few personal items and food.

In the confusion that ensued, and in their ignorance, the women could do nothing more but to obey the order. On 20 July, almost all the Jews of Rhodes (men, women children, infants, old people, sick people and handicapped persons) had been captured and were held in this improvised concentration camp. The satanic plan of the Nazis was proceeding.

At this point one should mention the humanitarian stance shown by the Turkish consul, Selahettin Ulkumen, who intervened to save not only Turkish nationals but whole families as well, even at the remotest proof of their Turkish citizenship. He managed to save from the Nazis approximately 40 Jews who would have otherwise been led to death. For his acts, he was awarded after the War the title of "Righteous among the Nations" by Yad Vashem.

The Germans started, with immense brutality, taking everything from the Jews: the jewelry of the women, even

their wedding rings. At the slightest hesitation, they would kick and beat them and threaten that they would execute them. The Germans threw gathered everything into the large bags that they had brought with them. Immediately afterwards, they forced them to the basement of the building, where they left them without any food. In the meantime, the Germans had plundered the houses of the Jews that had been hastily deserted. The Italian High Command was forced to issue an order according to which all Jewish real estate and assets were confiscated in favour of the Italian State.

The order for the departure came at noon of Sunday 23 July. An endless queue of Jews set off. They were more than 1,600 men, women, children and elderly. Some were dragging their sad belongings, others were carrying them on their backs. For the weakest ones, even this was difficult and they had to leave behind even the few of their belongings they had hoped to save. Some were not walking fast enough. The guards, who were following the file accompanied by wild Alsations, were beating them with their rifle stocks. Heads down, they passed through the city; they were forbidden even to look. The streets were empty as the Germans had sounded the alarm for air attacks. Once they arrived at the port, they were thrown in three very old cargo carriers (they used to carry coal). The presence of Jews on the island, which dated many centuries back, ended on that sad day of the summer of 1944.

The course to Piraeus was horrible. It was terribly hot and the vessels were so full that those in the cargo hauls could not go up even to get some air. Seven persons died in the course of the voyage and their bodies were thrown in the sea. They arrived at the port of Piraeus on 31 July 1944 and were immediately taken to Haidari, where they were ruthlessly humiliated. The Red Cross was not allowed to give them food and water until 36 hours after their arrival. The women were taken away from the men. They were stripped in the most barbaric way to make sure that they had no more jewelry on them. Those women who, out of shame, tried to hide their nudity were slammed on the face without mercy.

The Germans in an apparent attempt to break their morale were beating men, women and children sometimes to death. During the three days of their stay in the Haidari camp, another ten of the Jews of Rhodes died.

On 3 August, after having extracted their gold teeth and glasses, the Germans led the Jews in animal wagons. They put 65 persons in each wagon and sealed the doors. It was the last "consignment" of Jews from Greece. The trip to Poland lasted 13 days. About 100 people died during the trip and their bodies were thrown in the fields along the rail lines. They arrived in Auschwitz on 16 August and, after the horrible "selection" procedure, 1,200 persons, who were those judged too weak to work, were immediately sent to the gas chambers and the crematoria. The rest were sent to forced labour in quarries, in coal mines and in the railways. The women were raped, sterilized and used in inhuman experiments, with no mercy.

Despite their short stay in the camp, most died of the hardships, weakness and diseases. Out of the 1,700 Jews of Rhodes, only 150 survived: 120 women and 30 men. Even after their liberation by the Allied forces, many of them died of exhaustion as they had become living skeletons.

THE HARROWING ARREST OF THE JEWS OF KOS ON 23rd JULY 1944

In 1912 the Italians occupied the Dodecanese. Jews from Anatolia had settled on the islands of Kos and Rhodes between 1918-1923 and shortly before World War II the Community numbered 166 people. Some emigrated to South America and South Africa. Most stayed on the island. The Italians left them in peace and they prospered as merchants dealing in textiles, foodstuffs, haberdashery, and other such goods, as well as exporting currants and raisins to Egypt and Europe.

The Germans occupied the island on 3 October 1943 and a time of terror and barbarity began. The following summer one more atrocious event was to be added to the long list of trials. The harrowing arrest, transport and eventual extermination of the Jews of Kos at the Auschwitz concentration camp. Twice in the month of June 1944 the German military commander of the island, Colonel Ruf (an anti-Nazi of Austrian descent) asked the Italian chief of police Lieutenant Dante Zucchelli (an anti-facist secretly co-operating with allied intelligence, who was actually married to a Greek woman from Kos) the awful question of whether there was anywhere on the island that could serve as a suitable holding place in the likely event of a round-up of the Jewish population. The answer he received was that 'a place would be found'. It was as if Colonel Ruf was warning the island's unsuspecting Jews of the fury that would soon be unleashed against them, because Lieutenant Dante Zucchelli wasted no time in informing Haim Menase, the president of the Jewish Community, pointing out what a terrible position those of his faith were in and suggesting that they leave the island as soon as possible to save their lives. Zucchelli had already decided to issue the Jews with false documents showing that they were Turkish nationals in the hope of saving as many as possible. (Turkey had not come into the war against Germany and its neutral status afforded its subjects some protection against occupying forces).

On Sunday 23 July 1944 the following telegram was sent to Kos by the German Administration of the Police and Security Forces of Greece: 'The Chief of Police and Security of Greece intends to deport Jews from the island. The military authorities are expected to lend the secret police their support so as to expedite this (deportation). All Jews, irrespective of sex or age, are to be arrested and prepared for transport. Deportation will be by sea. They may take only blankets and food with them as space available on the means of transport is insufficient. All Jewish owned property is forfeit to the state of Italy. Looting, beating and shoot-

ing are to be avoided during arrest. Furthermore, every possible precaution should be taken to avoid harming the residents' attitude towards us. Jews who are Turkish nationals are exempt'.

There followed a meeting in Kos Town Hall attended by the military commander of the island Colonel Ruf and his interpreter Kolmann, the commanding officer of the 10th Battalion which was posted in the town of Kos, Major Müller and the commanding officer of the German Military Police on the part of the Germans. On the part of the Italians the meeting was attended by Delegato (civilian governor of Kos), Carlo Giannazzi, Podestà (the town's appointed mayor), Luigi Pistone, and Chief of Police, Lieutenant Dante Zucchelli. During the meeting Colonel Ruf informed those present that the order to round up the Jews had arrived and told Major Müller to make the arrests and gather the Jews in the Civic Hall. He also told Zucchelli not to hamper the arrests, and Giannazzi to provide food for the detainees until he received further orders.

So everything was in the hands of the cruel Major Müller, who began the arrest of Jews at 3 pm by raiding homes, cinemas, and anywhere frequented by Jews, in or out of town. All in all 104 people were arrested and taken to the Civic Hall in a state of fear. There they were body-searched and obliged to hand over their jewellery. The islanders were only allowed to bring them food and a few blankets.

Their homes, furniture, household goods and jewellery, as well as their shops stocked with fabrics and other goods were locked up by the Germans and the doors sealed with notices on them prohibiting entrance on pain of death. All the Jews' chattels passed into German and Italian hands.

Zucchelli worked all Sunday night and Monday night to make documents showing that many of the Jews were Turkish nationals so as to save them. There were already six Turkish nationals among them: Julietta wife of Mois Menase, Kantie wife of Alberto Franco, a lady named Giboul and three more whose names are not known. Zucchelli pointed out to the German policeman

in charge that among those arrested there were several Turkish nationals and that this should be looked into.

He informed Major Müller, who ordered all Jews to be taken to the courtroom in the Civic Hall where their files would be looked into. So it was that at 9 o'clock in the morning on Tuesday 25 July the Chief of the German Police arrived in the courtroom and began reading the list of Jewish names. First he read the names of the six who were genuine Turkish nationals. But when he reached the names of the others that Zucchelli had included in the list, intending to supply them with false passports, there were panic stricken cries from some young girls who protested, 'All or none!' The German lost his temper and stalked out of the room saying, 'Enough! The six are free to go. The rest stay here.' Zucchelli went up to him and advised him to think carefully before making such a decision because it might prove mistaken. The German answered that the final decision was down to Major Müller. Every attempt Zucchelli made to see Major Müller was in vain. The German major had already decided the fate of the Jews of Kos. He would let the six go but the other 98 were to be taken to Auschwitz.

So in the afternoon of Tuesday 25 July the Jews walked the 300 metres from the Civic Hall to the harbour, one behind the other, heads bowed and devastated, escorted by a military guard. The frightened islanders watched their slow, reluctant progress from a distance, unable to help or even say goodbye. They did not know where they were being taken or what fate lay in store for them. The Jews were piled onto a cargo ship bound for Samos, where there were more ships full of Jews from Rhodes. They were all sent to Piraeus together and from there were taken by rail to the gas chambers of Auschwitz. It should be pointed out that the mass despatch of Jews from Rhodes and Kos was one of the last to that place of martyrdom. The German commanding officer Colonel Ruf left Kos a month later. He was replaced by Major Heinemeier, who handed the island over to the Holy Company and the British allies on 8 March 1945.

ZANTE – THE ISLAND OF THE RIGHTEOUS

While the German persecutions and displacements of Jews were carried out with great effect all over Greece, Zante constituted the only exception. Two brave men, Bishop Chrisostomos Dimitriou and the Mayor of Zante, Loukas Karrer, achieved something unimaginable: they risked their own lives and managed to protect all Jews living in Zante so that they would not have the same fate as the other Greek Jews.

At the end of 1943, the German Governor of Zante, Berenz, called the Mayor in his office and, under the threat of a gun, demanded a list with the names of all the Jews living on the island. The Mayor and the Bishop realizing the true meaning of this demand, tried to gain some time. However, the Governor stood in his position, because he had taken his orders from the General Command. After giving the matter serious thought, and while they were in grave danger, the two men took the brave decision to submit a list containing only two names: the Bishop of Zante Chrisostomos and the Mayor of Zante Loukas Karrer.

The German Commander was speechless. Bishop Chrisostomos wrote a letter addressed to Hitler himself by which he took full responsibility for the behaviour of the Jews living on the island. The two documents were sent to the General Command, where they must have made quite an impression since the order to arrest all Jews was revoked.

However, in order to be prepared for the worst, the Jews of Zante left the city and were scattered to the villages, where they hid in the houses of Christian families, which also took care of their daily needs. Thanks to the influence, the courage and the determination of the two leaders of the island and the local population, all 275 Jews of Zante survived a war which, in many other regions, eliminated the totality of the Jewish element.

CHANIA: DROWNED IN HISTORY

At the eve of the World War II, the Jews of Crete were not more than 400 persons, most of whom were immigrants of the second or third generation.

When the Nazis set foot in Greece, some Jewish families living in continental Greece moved to Chania, as they thought that Crete would be safer. However, when the Germans conquered Crete, they shot the eight Jews of Heraclion that they met. Before that they had bombed the historic Synagogue of the city. The cemeteries of Heraclion, Chania and Rethymnon were pillaged and destroyed. The few tombstones that exist today have been “saved” owing to the “aesthetic inventiveness” of the Nazis, who used tombstones in order to make fortifications.

Early in the morning of 20 May 1944, the following order – written in Greek – was delivered to all Jewish homes: “In order to be transferred, you must prepare for immediate departure together with all the members of your family belonging to the Jewish faith. You and your relatives must take with you:

- a) All your personal documents
- b) All your jewelry and other valuables
- c) Documents showing bank credit, participation in economic enterprises, real estate, etc.
- d) Blankets, dresses, clothing as well as food for several days. The total weight of your belongings must not exceed 50 kilos”.

On the night of 20 May 1944, 314 Jews were arrested in Chania and 26 in Heraclion. They were kept in the Agia prison until 3 June. The following day they were transferred by military vehicles to Heraclion, where they were kept in the prison of the Makasi fort. It is rumored that only two Jews escaped arrest, because they were hidden by villagers in Kissamos.

Cretans stood by their fellow citizens in any way they could. But the Nazis had the upper hand. In the afternoon of 7

June, 340 Jews together with 48 Greeks of the resistance and 112 Italians who supported the Allies were forced to embark from the port of Suda on the fatal cargo steamship. This vessel, which had the name “Hollywood” when it was registered in England in 1907, had his name changed to “Tanais” when it came to Greek hands.

After the sun had set, it sailed following the policy of night sail. Two small pursuit vessels and the equipped sailing vessel “Hera” accompanied it. Their destination was the port of Piraeus.

The sailing time of the convoy is estimated at 8:32 pm. The course followed by the convoy was northbound and apparently its direction was towards the strait between Thira and Fologandros. Had it reached that spot, it would have turned northwest and sailing through the islands of South Cyclades it would have taken a course towards the final destination, Piraeus.

The British submarine Vivid spotted steamship “Tanais” at 2:31 am on 9 June, when the convoy had entered its patrol zone. That night the sea was calm. The submarine came to the correct attack angle at 3:12 am. It is estimated that its distance from the target was 2,000 to 2,700 meters. Being at periscope depth, it fired four torpedoes and immediately submerged to 80 feet (24,38 meters). Two minutes later, two of the torpedoes hit the vessel and an equal number of explosions were heard.

At that time, “Tanais” was 23 miles northeast of Heraclion. In the next 45 minutes another four blasts were heard and the vessel sank, taking with it hundreds of human lives. The spot that was to become the tomb of so many innocent victims is at 35 53’ north and 25 11’ east of the Cretan Sea. Steamship “Tanais” lies at the bottom of the sea, at a depth of 1858 meters.

After the Holocaust, only a few Jews returned to the island. In 1956, there were only two Jewish families in Chania. As the years went by, none was left. A visitor wishing to find traces of the Jewish presence when wandering around the island will probably get disappointed. The only exception is the Synagogue of Chania, which was restored in 1999. Since then, it is open during the Jewish holidays but mainly it operates as a cultural centre.

ESSAYS & TEXTS ON THE PERSECUTION

ΑΚΑΔΗΜΙΑ



ΑΘΗΝΑΝ

Resolution of the Academy of Athens on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the Holocaust of Greek Jews

The Academy of Athens shares fully the feelings of horror and abhorrence experienced by the whole nation in memory of the unjust annihilation of thousands of Greek Jewish citizens and millions of their corereligionists of Europe, under the hitlerian regime. The genocide of the Jews by the nazi forces was one of the most barbaric crimes in world history and is condemned by the conscience of every human being.

The Academy of Athens honours the memory of

the innocent victims and declares its opposition to all forms of intolerance, to every form of discrimination, based on the religion or the race of the individual; a discrimination which totally is in opposition with the democratic and human principles and traditions of the Greek people.

Athens, 26 April 1984

THE ACADEMY OF ATHENS IN MEMORY OF THE HOLOCAUST OF GREEK JEWRY

On Thursday 28th April 1984 the Academy of Athens, the highest intellectual institution in Greece, marked the Holocaust Day of Greek Jewry with a special ceremony.

Introduction

By

George Michaelidis - Nouaros

President of the Academy of Athens

It is with great emotion that I have accepted the invitation of the Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece to participate in tonight's pious remembrance for the forty years of the Holocaust of Greek Jews. In my capacity as President of the Academy of Athens but also as an ordinary citizen, I would like to express the deep sorrow and the indignation that all Greeks have felt and still feel for the inconceivable suffering, the degradation and the annihilation of many thousands of Greek Israelites and of many millions of Jews living in other European countries. This annihilation can only lead to revulsion and constitute an indelible shame

in the history of the 20th century. It is very sad that the 20th century, which had dawned with so many hopes for humanity, already in its very first decades revealed two instances of grave barbarism and criminality. First, the genocide of Armenians by the Turks in 1915. Second, seven years later in 1922, the destruction of the Greek population in Minor Asia again by the Turks. However, the annihilation of more than six million Israelites in Europe was an even darker page. Without any reason, except their Jewish origins, they suffered in the Nazi concentration camps a death of ordeal and torment through methods that were not only unprecedented in malice but also terrifying in inhumanity.

In modern Greece, Israelites, who had settled in different parts of the country many centuries ago, have been living and still live in harmony with their Christian fellow citizens and they have contributed and still contribute significantly to the welfare and the advancement of society. Being as it were

good citizens, Greek Israelites participated in the liberation struggle and in the defense wars of our country. They offered their sweat and blood for the defense and for the advancement of our nation. It is a well known fact that during the Second World War Greek Israelites fought heroically in North Epirus and in Albania side by side with the rest of the Greeks. Many of them died fighting for Greece. Suffice to mention only one, the hero Colonel Mordechai Frizis.

After Greece was occupied by the German-Italian forces, Greek Jews initially shared all the hardships and the suffering of the foreign occupation. This lasted until the collapse of Italy, which offered the opportunity to Germans to begin the systematic persecution of all Greek Jews. This persecution caused deep emotion to the rest of the Greek population and led to the manifestation of feelings of solidarity and altruism towards the Jews living in our country. Archbishop Damaskinos of Athens, the Academy of Athens, the University of Athens, the National Technical University of Athens, and the other Ecoles Supérieures, the most important

intellectual and professional organisations, they all made strong representations to the occupation authorities calling for the cancellation of the persecution. On the other hand, the police and other state authorities together with ordinary people devised many ways to hide or to assist the unfortunate Israelites in escaping. In this way they saved them from the rage of the Nazi beasts. Moreover, many younger in age Israelites found refuge in the mountains, where they teamed up with guerrilla resistance groups and participated in many acts of sabotage against the German military forces.

Despite these efforts for saving the lives of Greek Israelites from the deadly danger that threatened them, their losses were so large that, on average, 86 per cent of the pre-persecution Jews perished.

Today, all these tragic events are painful memories. However, we should never forget them because they offer to us a perennial lesson and reveal the moral degradation, the debasement and the crimes to which hatred, blind fanaticism, the lack of democratic freedoms and to totalitarian regimes lead.

From Martyrdom to Inalienable Glory

Address by

Constantinos G. Bonis DD

Academician – Professor Emeritus of the University of Athens

We have been invited to join in the Memorial Ceremony to mark the fortieth anniversary of the Holocaust perpetrated by the Nazis on 60,000 of our Greek-Jewish brothers and sisters from all over the country, but mainly from Thessaloniki. The distinguished members of the Central Board of Jewish Communities chose the present speaker because he specialises in the study of religious documents, particularly the Holy Bible, and is, therefore, able to give a free unbiased opinion of the sacrifice and bloodshed that Jews and Orthodox Greeks alike suffered for their contribution to the development of civilised nations; a contribution based on their belief in God Almighty, Father and Creator of all that is, the world, Creation and, above all, mankind.

I must admit that it was not without awe that I accepted this kind invitation, for fear that I might be inadequate, especially in my powers of expression and ability to find words to describe “the crime of the century” as the diabolical, satanic, deliberate, human-engineered annihilation, torture and suffering inflicted on approximately twelve million Jews all over Europe by the brutal Hitler regime has rightly been called. Among their number was, as was only to be expected, the approximately 60,000 strong Jewish community living in Greece, especially in Thessaloniki. Exactly one year after Hitler’s hordes invaded and occupied Greece, they had traced and recorded the Jewish roots of Greek nationals – men, women, young, old and infants – and made them identifiable by way of yellow armbands (with a pentacle added in the case of students) an order was given for all Jews to gather in a certain square in Thessaloniki, from where this tide of humanity was driven through the main streets to the railway station. The present speaker, as many of my fellow

Academicians today, including the incumbent chairman of the Academy Mr G. Michaelides-Nouaros, Academician and former minister Mr Pan. Zeppos, Academician and former minister Mr I. Xanthakos, Academician Mr Othon Pylarinos and many of our colleagues, professors of the University of Thessaloniki, witnessed the horrific, indescribable drama of thousands of our Greek-Jewish compatriots being herded through the streets like lambs to the slaughter.

It is difficult for anyone who has not read Heinz Salvador Cunio’s soul-stirring work, “I Lived Through Death” (Thessaloniki 1981, pp. 560) to comprehend the extent, magnitude of Hitler’s Crime of the Century. It is impossible not to feel ashamed and repelled by the fact that there were people – savage people – who turned into anthropomorphic monsters and rushed like rabid wolves and tigers with no hesitation and no scruples burdening their consciences to slaughter innocent ones simply because they happened to be born Jews. I have read this book and must admit that I was overwhelmed by shock, shame and wrath. The voice of my conscience trembled and I plunged into crisis. Though a theologian, I asked myself how it was possible for a merciful God to allow such crimes to be committed against His innocent people. However, now that forty years have passed since the horrific Holocaust, we see things more clearly and are able to form a fairer picture of the will of the Almighty. And the words of the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 40:13-17) come to mind: “Who hath directed the Spirit of the Lord, or being his counsellor hath taught him? With whom took he counsel, and who instructed him, and taught him in the path of judgement, and taught him knowledge, and showed to him the way of understanding? Behold, the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the

balance: behold, he taketh up the isles as a very little thing. And Lebanon is not sufficient to burn, nor the beasts thereof sufficient for a burnt offering. All nations before him are as nothing; and they are counted to him less than nothing, and vanity."

The title of this address, *From Martyrdom to Inalienable Glory*, was studiously chosen. For I truly believe that the crimes committed against the Jews, not only the 54,000 Jews of Thessaloniki and the 6,000 from the rest of Greece, but also the millions of Jews from elsewhere in Europe, bear witness to the glory of their race. Moses himself, the greatest religious and political figure in the Old Testament, verified this in prophetic spirit. This is what Israel's great leader Moses prophesied in his "Song" (Deuteronomy 32: 43).

"Rejoice, O ye nations with his people:
for he will avenge the blood of his servants,
and will render vengeance to his adversaries,
and will be merciful unto his land, and to his people."

Discerning people with good judgement see the prophecy of the great Moses unfolding in the gradual re-establishment of the state of Israel for the first time since Titus destroyed the holy city of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 and the Jews were dispersed. The whole world watches in admiration as Israel grows more mature day by day. And it would indeed be a happy event if the neighbouring nations and others that have the ability, acted as soon as possible in this area which is in turmoil today, to bring days of peace, stability and brotherly coexistence once more to Israel and its neighbouring countries, indeed to the whole of the Mediterranean. For the first time the will of the Almighty judge has become apparent. The state of Israel is already recognised by most countries. Until all countries bow to His will, everything will be governed and the human race guided by far-seeing goodness towards mutual understanding and the end of suffering and greed, to the peace that everyone yearns. God's chosen people will find the homeland they desire. This is why Moses calls upon nations and peoples of every race and colour, Christian and non-Christian, saying, "Rejoice herein, ye skies. Rejoice, ye nations. With this my people are strengthened with all the angels of God!"

My position as a theologian precludes my making a political statement; and I lack the authority to do so. But as an interpreter of the Bible and adherent of the Greek Orthodox Faith it is my duty to pronounce from this official position that we Greek Orthodox should not misinterpret the Scriptures. On the contrary, it is our duty to recognise the will of God as it is naturally manifested. It would be totally irrational and foolish to say that when our Lord was crucified all Jews were to blame – and even more foolish to blame subsequent generations of Jews. We must put an end to every form of religious intolerance. Indeed, never in the history of the nation have the Greek Orthodox people been marked by anti-Semitism. Our Ecclesiastical writings, especially the Defences of Christianity against Judaism, bear witness to how close we feel we are to the principles and religious convictions of Judaism. The first Christian apologists turned against idolatry with a vengeance, but sought to enter into dialogue with the Jews so as to prove that the Old Testament

prophecies had been fulfilled in Christ, the true Messiah. They, however, did not accept this. The earliest Defence of Christianity was the, now lost, dialogue written by Ariston of Pella (circa A.D. 140) entitled "Dialogue between the Jewish-born Christian Jason and the Jew Papiskos" who did not believe in Christian baptism¹. Nearly all subsequent defences of Christianity against Judaism used dialogue to retain the friendly tone, indicating that Greek Christians regarded Jews more or less as friends, and would enter discussions so as to allow both parties to put forward their views. We Greek Orthodox Christians cannot possibly recognise the Old Testament laws on which the entire religious philosophy and beliefs of the Jews rest, as God given, and at the same time oppose Jewish religious principles and convictions, as our principles and convictions rest on those same laws. It is time we built a bridge of love and drew closer to one another. We should never forget that belief very often divides people, even those of the same faith, whereas love unites people and justifies God's will. Hence, "All may be one," (John 17: 21).

And now the apparently friendly summons of Greek Thought and Judaic Reasoning that follows this prompts us to take a necessarily brief look at the reciprocal influences of Greeks and Jews through the course of their history. It is well known that after the fall of Jerusalem and its destruction by Vespasian and Titus in A.D. 70, the Jews were harshly treated by the Romans, indeed they were forbidden to enter Jerusalem (after A.D. 135 under Emperor Publius Aelius Hadrian, fl. A.D. 117 – 138) and those few who remained were forced to leave their beloved country. This persecution of the Jews was even harsher than all preceding ones, including that in Babylon. But the loss of the Jewish religious centre resulted in a certain amount of exposure to the influence of Hellenism and nationalism (idolatry), and also to Christianity. The distinguishing features of Judaism among the Diaspora, already in place in early Christianity, led to the development of separate "distinct" religious communities which exerted a proselytising influence on nationalist-idolaters. Monotheism, the superior moral teachings of the Old Testament, and belief in the immortality of the soul, prepared the ground for their approach and eventual acceptance of Christianity. For Christianity had not only inherited the basic principles of the Old Testament and accepted them as God-given principles, but also evangelist methods for spreading the Christian faith. The development of Apologist writing, as well as the moral and religious teachings of Judaism, was such that it had a direct influence on both nationalist-idolaters and Christians, even on the educated among them.

No one conducting a study of the ritual practices of our Church, including sacerdotal vestments and other sacred objects, no one wanting to study what goes on inside a church in general, what takes place during every mass or sacrament, the hymns, the annals of the saints etc., can fail to see strong Old Testament influences in most things, if not in everything. In fact, the whole structure of our Ecclesiastical Writings is based on the Judaic Writings developed before Christ, especially on the treatises of Philo, and to a lesser extent on those of Josephus and the other educated Jews based in Alexandria. So it was in Alexandria, where most of the Jewish

Diaspora lived, that the spirit of comparative reciprocal influence of Greek philosophy and Jewish religious-moral cosmogony developed. We may say that the Jews came under the influence of Greek philosophy long before the advent of Christianity. Indeed, conditions favoured the influence of Greek civilisation on Jewish thinking from the 5th century B.C. Because the Jews were scattered among the large Greek cities, they came into contact with the Greek way of life and were able to learn the lessons of the new philosophy of life and living. However, the strongest and most important influence of Greek civilisation on Jewish philosophy came with Alexander the Great's conquest of Palestine. So great was this influence on the Jewish people that they later felt a danger of their spiritual heritage being absorbed, of suffering because of defeat, or of the cosmogony of their own culture being distorted and the very foundation of their nation being under threat.

It was in order to avert these dangers that the majority of Jews adhered to the religion of their forebears and strictly maintained those aspects that distinguished Jews from Greeks. The obvious differences were circumcision, the observation of the Sabbath, atonement, and so on. As always in such cases, as well as those who upheld the law scholastically, there were some who were more liberal in their views and had a friendlier attitude to Greek culture and the Greek way of thinking. Jewish liberalism, developed mainly by the so-called Hellenists, used the pen to draw attention to the similarities between Greek philosophy and the Laws of Moses in an attempt to make them meet half way. This resulted in a split between two equally strong sides, known as the "godly", who strictly upheld the Laws of Moses, and the "ungodly" of very different, liberal principles. Recent Old Testament researchers say it is they that are alluded to in the first Psalm, "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly...." One thing, however, is certain. Greek philosophy did exert its influence on Jewish Scriptures. Recent researchers see its influence in some of the Psalms, in parts of the Book of Job, Proverbs, The Wisdom of Jesus Son of Sirach, Ecclesiastes, and above all in the Wisdom of Solomon³.

Time does not allow me to talk further of the influence of Greek philosophy on Jewish thought – neither have I any intention of doing so. What little has been said, was said with the sole intention of demonstrating how important and desirable it has been since ancient times, for mutual understanding of their respective ideals to develop between these two peoples – indeed, not just for there to be friendly understanding, but **brotherly** bonds, allowing good use to be made of the great gifts that God in all His wisdom bestowed on them both so that, by divine grace, they alone of all peoples would be saved, surviving dangers and invasions by numerous enemies, as well as the hardships of life through the ages. And these two blessed peoples, Greeks and Jews, did survive, mainly by the Grace of God, but also thanks to the power of their God-sent gifts of genius and unity in their belief in the one true God, their Creator and the Maker of all things. The creative concepts and **achievements** of Greek philosophy, Jewish **reasoning**, and **Christian cosmogony**,

combined to create the greatest civilisation of all. This is why I am justified in referring to our two peoples as brothers. And this is why together we mourn the Holocaust of some 60,000 of our fellow people. Our people, people of our country – Greek Jews!

But because of the sacred and moving nature of this gathering, our focus should be Israel, and I think it only right and fair that I should draw attention to the Great Mystery which is particularly apparent today in this review, albeit brief, of the truly miraculous course of its history. So this is what we learn about it. Nobody can deny that the history of the Jewish people is one of the most important chapters in the history of mankind. The Biblical account of the origins and history of the Jewish people clearly takes the existence of God the Creator and providential Judge of all things as a given fact. It also recognises His supernatural manifestations during the course of His chosen people of Israel. When looking at the prophecies in the light of historical fact and what actually happened to the Jewish people, right down to present-day Nazi anti-Semitism, it is not possible for intelligent, well-intentioned, educated people to fail to see the similarities between the **prophecies** and **actual fact**. The only people who deny that the Holy Bible is inspired by God are the rationalists. But I ask how it is possible to attribute the complex, undeniably characteristic qualities of the Jewish people that distinguish them from other peoples, to natural causes alone. I also wonder how it is possible to attribute the incredible, unprecedented coincidence of significant events from the history and present-day situation of the Jewish people with what the Prophets foretold to pure chance.

There are still rationalists today, and materialists, and even atheists and nihilists. But I ask how it is possible for honest readers of the Bible not to admit that the supernatural element is intricately woven into the history of the Jews. All through the history of Israel, from Abraham to the destruction of Jerusalem under Titus, the mark of the hand of God is evident. The Old Testament with its high moral values and ennobling influence on people, both before and after Christ, really is the "Book of Books". Recent studies of the history of the holy book of the Old Testament testify to the truth in what is said about influences on people. Experts in the study of the Bible have proven that it is inspired by God because no human being, however wise, could produce such a work, it would be beyond his powers to conceive it or write it. And furthermore, it is impossible to explain in natural terms the distinguishing features of the Jewish people, as seen not only in their past history but also in their religion and present-day situation and revealed in the Old Testament, and attribute it all to purely natural causes.

Despite what the Old Testament foretold concerning the anti-Semitism that would prevail after Hitler's rise to power in Germany, the consequent persecution of the Jews and the Satanic Nazi plan to annihilate the millions of Jews in Europe – a plan which included the Holocaust of Greek Jews – the Jews not only retained their identity, but reinforced it with new meaning. It is impossible to appreciate the significance of this if you have not studied the prophecies concerning this chosen nation carefully and diligently. I will not repeat the

verses of Deuteronomy (chapters 28 & 29) which mention the persecution and the uncountable numbers of Jews living in communities scattered all over the world. The prophecies of Jeremiah and Amos are particularly relevant today as they speak discerningly and in great detail of the return of the people of Israel to the Promised Land. Jeremiah speaks this way in chapters 30 verse 3, and 10 to 31, chapters 35, 37, 3, 25, 26 etc. In chapter 30 from verse 8 and on he says, "I will cause them to return to the land that I gave to their fathers (i.e. in Jerusalem and the greater region of Palestine which had been taken over by idolaters and heathens) and they shall possess it." And in chapter 10 verse 1 and on, the same prophet says, "Here ye the word which the Lord speaketh unto you, O house of Israel. Thus saith the Lord, Every man is brutish in his knowledge: every founder is confounded by the graven image: for his molten image is falsehood, and there is no breath in them. They are vanity..... the portion of Jacob is not like them: for he is the former of all things; and Israel is the rod of his inheritance: the Lord of hosts is his name. Gather up thy wares out of the land, O inhabitant of the fortress. ..." And in chapter 16 verse 14 and on he says, "Therefore, behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that it shall no more be said, the Lord liveth that brought up the children of Israel from the land of the north, and from all the lands where he had driven them: and I will bring them again into their land that I gave unto their fathers." But the prophet Amos speaks even more clearly about the return of the tribe of Israel to the Promised Land. In chapter 9:14 he says, "And I will bring again the captivity of my people of Israel, and they shall build the waste cities, and inhabit them: and they shall plant vineyards, and drink the wine thereof; they shall also make gardens and eat the fruit of them. And I will plant them upon their land which I have given them, saith the Lord thy God."

There are, of course, sceptics and people who simply regard the prophecies of the rebuilding of Israel as promises and wishful thinking on the part of the pious authors of the Bible. If we interpret these excerpts from the Prophets' sayings without bias but with good judgement, and if we look at the amazing things that are at present taking place in Israel without prejudice, then we are justified in recognising the prophetic foresight concerning the return of Israel to Palestine as truly flawless. The prophets did not know in advance when it would take place; only Divine Providence did. Now it is we that see the promise made by God in all His wisdom about the return of Israel to the Promised Land coming true! Judging by the fact that the Jewish population of Palestine has been constantly increasing in number since it was declared an independent state, we must surely reach the conclusion that the fulfilment of the prophetic sayings concerning a better future for Israel has already begun. As a theologian and objective reader of the Holy Scriptures, I have expressed my own interpretation of the prophecies in question. It is the interpretation I believe and accept. It would be most fortunate for mankind if everyone, in Palestine the region around it, everywhere in the Near East, in the Mediterranean, in countries bordering to the east, north, west and south, accepted what is happening today as soon

as possible. Countries everywhere should aim to instil peace in everyone's mind and make this their purpose, otherwise we may once again regard everyone as opposing God and setting themselves against His will!

I would not like to end this address without reiterating what I said at the beginning; that despite everything Greeks and Jews have been through during their long history, Greece and Israel are the only nations of all nations that managed to survive. Thanks to their intelligence and adaptability as well as divine providence, they have been declared "chosen" people and therefore have a duty to approach one another while preserving their spiritual and racial hypostasis, but without bigotry. It is their duty to seek out and take note of the things that urge them on to mutual understanding, friendship and love. We must not overlook the fact that "Everything is as the great Creator and Lord of all in peace and harmony ordained" (St. Clement of Rome A.D. 98, 1st Epistle to the Corinthians, chapter 20 verse 11). We see that the whole world seeks to solve its accumulating problems through dialogue. It is through dialogue that different faiths, religions, churches and large groups of peoples and countries try to reach mutual understanding and approach one another. The most optimistic see a coming together of similar faiths and tendencies in the distant future. However, they overlook what that most ancient author of religious texts, St. Clement of Rome, has to say, "The heavens bow to the power that moves them. Day and night traverse the set course and hinder not each other. Sun and moon and stars dance to his order in harmony and deviate not as they execute the orders he has determined. By his will the earth brings forth in abundance at the same time food for man and beast and every kind of life living on it, and this neither divides them nor changes what has been ordained," (chapter 9).

It is easy to see the import of the words of this Holy Father of the church. Everything in the whole of creation is in harmony, not only in their infinite differences, but also in their infinitely disparate ways, although you would expect them to be hostile to one another. Yet they live in peace and harmony, and do what was ordained for them to do right from the start. None of them are exactly the same as others, not even the leaves of the olive tree are identical with other leaves on the same tree, though they are similar. In spite of similarities they may have in many different areas, we would consider it a great miracle if one religion united with another different one, or if a church with a recognised dogma united with another one with different beliefs. Age-old traditions have stamped the mark of individuality on all peoples, and I think it is almost impossible for us to believe that we can achieve **union**, other than through the bonds of brotherly **love**. If the Biblical "all things will thus be" is not taken as the ultimate state, but seen over the course of time as human evolution, it becomes a question of individual faith and hope. I mention this in order to point out that there is a host of common features in the religions of the Jews and Orthodox Christians, which alone could lead to closer ties of mutual esteem, mutual respect and love for one another – the love meant by God in, "...there is none other... greater than these," (Mark chapter 12 verse 31). We are Orthodox Christians and

are proud of our sacred traditions. And the Jews, who came before us, are justifiably proud of their enduring faith in their Fathers, in Moses, the prophets, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Suffice it to say that we Orthodox Greeks recognise these holy figures, believe in them and revere them. It is exactly because of this that the Greek people have never shown any anti-Semitism. Although while the new religion of Jesus was struggling to survive some authors did oppose Jewish beliefs, the Fathers of our Church never displayed such opposition and never denied the truth of the Old Testament – they saw that its contents were of a “preparatory” nature. The only division between us and the Jews is that surrounding the Messiah, our Lord, Redeemer and Saviour, Jesus Christ, and the Jew’s non-recognition of Him as the Messiah and Redeemer. Even so, we Christians owe a debt of gratitude to the Jews for the many things we have gained from the Old Testament. The Jews are our progenitors and the forefathers of our religion. And as a result of this, as I have already mentioned, Greeks have never been possessed by feelings of religious intolerance against the Jews.

Finally, I would like to cite two, historically significant examples as proof of this. It is a well-known fact that, far from being racially or religiously intolerant, Byzantium elevated Armenians, Scythians, Slavs, Alemannians, Arabs and Ethiopians to high office provided they confessed belief in the Greek Orthodox Church and were baptised into it. Even so, the great emperor **Justinian** was amazingly friendly to the Jews and showed no signs of religious intolerance. The only rule he imposed on them was that in synagogues all over the empire the Bible (the Old Testament) should be read in the language that the people of the community spoke and could understand, because many of them were unschooled in Hebrew and could not understand what the holy scriptures said. In A.D. 553, following complaints by Jews who did not know Hebrew, Justinian issued **Novel No. 162**, in which this theologian emperor states, “It has come to our notice that only the Jewish tongue is used in the reading of the Holy Scriptures, and it is our will that, as many have been asking for many years now, the Greek language be used.” So the order was given by Justinian, the greatest theologian of the time, according to **Ad. V. Harnack** (Dogmengeschichte 4, Berlin, 1924 p. 422). “We hereby legislate that in the Synagogues of the Jews, as is our will and that of Jews in the whole of this land, the Holy Bible shall be read in the Greek language which is understood, or in the language of the country of origin (Italian that is for those from Italy) they know **or be read in the language they know of whatever place**, so that from now on what is said is clear to the whole congregation that they may live by it and its precepts, and need not rely on explanations proffered by those who speak Hebrew and be misled if they so want, as when there is ignorance, both may harbour malice. Furthermore, it will make the traditional reading of the Seventy’s in Greek so much clearer...”

The liberal sentiment behind Emperor Justinian’s Novel is plain to see, as is his concern that there should be consensus among Jewish Synagogue congregations who should go to the Synagogue and hear the Holy Bible read and interpreted in the language they were educated in and understand. There

is no religious intolerance in this. On the contrary, Emperor Justinian’s Novel bears witness to his deep understanding of the problems his Jewish subjects faced as the decree promotes peace and teaches the benefits of reading and interpreting the Holy Bible not only in Greek, but in whatever language, Italian or any other, that was spoken in the area and the people understood. Coming in the Middle Ages, this liberal spirit is most laudable, as is the traditional acceptance of religious differences among Greeks who, generally speaking, still tolerate no bigotry or racial prejudice, with the exception of a few, for the most part uneducated, fanatics.

Finally, it would be greatly amiss not to quote from the monumental appeal made by Archbishop of Athens Damascinos to Prime Minister of occupied Greece K. Logothetopoulos on 23rd March 1943. Among other things, this document says, “...2. The Jews of Greece have not only shown themselves to be valuable contributors to the economy of the country, but have also shown themselves to be law-abiding people who are fully aware of their duty as Greek citizens. They have made sacrifices for Greece as others have and been in the front lines when Greece fought to defend her inalienable rights.....4. The children of our common mother Greece are inseparably united in the national conscience and are equal members of the National Organisation irrespective of differences in faith or dogma. 5. Our sacred faith knows no distinction, superiority or inferiority rooted in race or religion, and believes “There is neither Jew nor Greek,” (Galatians: chapter 3, verse 28) and thus condemns anything that may lead to prejudice based on racial or religious differences. 6. The communality of fortune in both days of glory and in times of national misfortune has forged insoluble bonds between all Greek citizens of whatever race on the anvil of the Greek spirit.” The Central Jewish Council describes this truly admirable document in the following terms, “The document that blessed Archbishop Damascinos addressed to Prime Minister K. Logothetopoulos is a monument to the courage, national pride, and respect for human ideals of the Greek spirit. This monumental document, unprecedented in the annals of the whole of occupied Europe, was signed by representatives of the country’s main Intellectual and Spiritual Institutions, Bodies and Organisations on behalf of its silenced people. It took ‘Virtue and Courage’ to sign such a bold document in those dark times.”

I would like to end this address on the Holocaust of the Greek Jews of Thessaloniki and the rest of Greece with the comment just mentioned, which was made by the Central Jewish Council when the historical document was made public. As the comment points out, “It took ‘Virtue and Courage’ to sign such a bold document in those dark times.” The first signature added after that of heroic Archbishop Damascinos is that of unforgettable Mr S. Dontas, President of the Academy at that time, who signed on behalf of the whole assembly. It is significant and meaningful that the Central Jewish Council chose the present Chairman of the Academy and myself to speak at today’s anniversary of the Holocaust. I entitled my address “From Martyrdom to Inalienable Glory” because the Holocaust sealed the ‘inalienable glory’ of the rise and establishment of Israel through the indelible mark

of Nazi brutality and the continuing sorrow and unceasing flow of tears from Greeks and Jews alike for the Holocaust of their loved ones. But this Holocaust has led to even closer ties between our two peoples – Orthodox Greeks and Jews. The fact that our brother Greek-Jewish survivors have founded a ‘Greek House’ at the University of Israel is proof of this.

Official and non-official bodies have often said and still often reiterate, that we Greeks have no brothers and are alone in the world. I believe, I am convinced, that we are neither alone, nor without brothers! We Orthodox Greeks and Jews are brothers of the same heart in the revealing religion of the Old Testament prophets, evangelical teachings and truths. Both peoples have been “chosen” and “blessed” by the most wise, most powerful, most merciful God our Father, Father of all creation. And He protects us through indescribable tides of sorrow, hardship and adversity, among which, the Holocaust of the Greek-Jews of Thessaloniki and the rest of Greece – the Holocaust which we remember today on this its 40th anniversary. It should be pointed out that neither Greeks nor Jews have ever distanced themselves from their belief in the one true God, our Creator and keeper, and never will. We bow our heads to His great kindness and mercy, and humbly ask and implore Him to punish those who have wronged us, each and every one according to his deeds, forgive us our transgressions and protect us – Greeks and Jews, Greece and Israel – be that so and both peoples will worship and adore God in His grace, which will make us, “brothers and helpers in time of sorrow” (The Wisdom of Jesus Son of Sirach, 40:24) and “make between them – Jews and Greeks – a Covenant of Peace to protect His saints and people,” (The Wisdom of Jesus Son of Sirach, 45:24).

May our inhumanely slaughtered Greek-Jewish brothers and sisters **never be forgotten!**

Let their memory live for ever!

Footnotes

¹ The Epistle, attributed to St. **Barnabas** the Apostate and written under a pseudonym between A.D. 130/5 and A.D. 140, is the earliest catechism-indoctrination by an Alexandrian Christian. The epistle sets out to prove that the prophecies were fulfilled in the figure of Christ. The influence of Philo is evident in the liberal use of allegory. It urges the Jews to accept Christ as the Messiah foretold by the Prophets.

In A.D. 23/24 **Kordatos** the Apologist, a student of the apostles, gave Emperor Hadrian a Defence which was, wrongly, thought to be **Barlaam and Jassaph**, the novel extant during the lifetime of Saint Katerina. It was later proven to be the *Defence* written by the Athenian Aristides. It seeks to prove Christ’s divinity, mainly through his miracles, but also through his teaching, and thus that what the prophets foretold was fulfilled in the figure of Christ. Not a polemic diatribe.

Circa A.D. 140 **Ariston** wrote his *Dialogue between Papisios and Jason on Christ*, which we have referred to, and which takes the form of an admonishing dialogue throughout.

Around A.D. 161-9 Miltiades the orator of Asia Minor gave Marcus Aurelius (emperor A.D. 161 – A.D. 180) a *Defence* consisting of two volumes *According to the Greeks*, two volumes *According to the Jews*, and a *Defence of Christian Philosophy*, all now lost.

Apollinarius Bishop of Ierapolis in Phrygia (the hometown of apostolic Papias) wrote 4 Defences, circa A.D. 172, which he gave to Marcus Aurelius, all now lost. He wrote 5 books according to the Greeks, 2 books on the truth, and 2 books according to the Jews. He also wrote a book *On the Celebration of Easter*.

The renowned Bishop of Melitus, Bishop of Sardes in Lydia, also called the Prophet, wrote many defences, most now lost. Among them were 6 volumes *On Law and the Prophets* (the earliest *Table of Old Testament Prophets*) and *On Faith and the Birth of Christ*, 3 books on Christ taking human form (according to Markinios the heretic). These works are of a didactic-admonishing nature.

The extant work (probably written after A.D. 135) by Justine the philosopher and martyr (A.D. 165) *Dialogue to the Chief of the Synagogue*, probably Tryphon or Tarphon, was in dialogue form.

The first Epistle by **Clement** of Rome (A.D. 96) based for the most part on the Old Testament, is an admonishing epistle to the Corinthians in which he sees the fulfilment of the prophecies in the figure of Christ. There is no trace of polemic diatribe against the Jews. Melitos of Sardes was exceptional in accusing the Jews of ingratitude and injustice to Christ, as the prophecies were fulfilled in him, so they were called upon to believe in him as the prophesied Messiah, the awaited one. Almost all the ancient apologists did this but were untouched by any form of religious intolerance or hostile diatribe. Hostile, polemic developed mainly from the 3rd century on, and was for the most part the work of western apologists. It is notable, however, that *Proof to the Jews*, attributed to Hippolytus (A.D. 236) retains the dialogue form. Gregorios Nissis’ work, *Selected Accounts for the Jews*, is in the form of admonishment, as is the disputed work by Chrysostom, *Proof to Jews and Greeks of Christ’s Divinity*, and many others that retain the form of dialogue and admonishment.

² Adolf V. Harnack, *Die Mission und Ausbreitung des Christentums in der ersten drei Jahrhunderten*, Leipzig 1924 1,5 says: “The synagogues of the Diaspora are not only, as Tertullianus says, the gateway to the well of persecution (fontes persecutionum) for early Christianity, but also the most significant factors in the emergence and development of Christian communities within the State. The synagogue network was instrumental in determining the lines and directions to be taken by the centres of Christian enlightenment and proselytism. The sacred mission of the new religion, undertaken in the name of the God of Abraham and Moses, had already found, as it were, its predetermined area of activity.” **Philo**, *Legatio ad Gaium*, Bd. VI. 201,4 (pub. **Leopold Cohn et Sigofredus Reiter**, *Philonus Alexandrini Opera*, Berlin 1915) says: “The Jews are most numerous in every town, in Asia and in Syria.”

In 1.13 *ibid.*, **Harnack** says: “2. The Jews of the diaspora were in part true Jews (he thereby differentiates them from Samaritans and others). However, the Jewish population in the State was so strong that its influence and social significance was plain to see, given that seven per cent of the population of the empire under Augustus was Jewish. In order to understand proselytism, its methods and the spread of Christianity, we must bear in mind that the Jewish faith, in whose shadow (“umbraculum”) Christianity emerged, was a definitive factor, not only because of its strength, but also because of its extent among the population.” It should also be pointed out that the Jewish people were proud to be able to offer the whole world, and the whole human race, belief in **One God; a Spiritual Being. So they were the bearer and patron of Moral Law and Judge. These beliefs were also the most powerful means that the Christian proselytising mission had to combat the worship of soulless idols and promote recognition of the One God, the Creator and judge of all things among idolaters.** It would be beyond the scope of the present purpose to describe, even

briefly, what the spread of Christianity owed to the Jews of the Diaspora. But the debt bears witness to the fact that the Diaspora of the Jews and the spread of the Greek people are the work of Divine Providence, as they paved the way for the establishment of Christianity through Judaism.

³ As far as the mutual influence of Greek philosophy and civilisation and Judaism is concerned, it has been a recognised fact since the time of the conquest of Palestine by Alexander the Great in 324 B.C. that the influence of Greek Philosophy and civilisation on Judaism had indeed been profound and extensive since the 5th century B.C. But the spiritual, religious, moral influence of Judaism on the Greeks was also great. This mutual influence is evident in the Scriptures of both peoples. Here I merely mention works by **M. Friedlander**, *Griechische Philisophiim Alten Testament*. Berlin 1904, **E. Sellin**, *Die Spuren grichischer Philosophie im alten Testament*, Seipzig 1905 **Lange**, **P. Heinisch**, *Die griech. Philos: im Buche Weisheit*. Munster 1908, *The Wisdom of Solomon and Plato*, Journal of Bibl. Lit. 1936. I refer in more detail to the excellent later researcher and scholar of Old Testament issues and problems, Professor V. Vellas, who many times spoke admirably on related problems while analysing the Prophets, added astute observations and insight into everything he dealt with and included the necessary bibliography. See Vassilis Vellas, *The Influence of Greek*

Philosophy on the Book of The Wisdom of Solomon, Athens 1961 (An address delivered in abridged form on 22nd January 1961 the University of Athens Grand Auditorium on the occasion of the establishment of new principles for the university in the 1960-1961 academic year.

Professor V. Vellas, *Religious Figures of the Old Testament*, Athens 1934: in his prologue, **A. Moesis** says the following, which is worthy of study, "The student is dazzled by the intensity of the religion of the Great Moses for example, amazed by the eternal validity of the prophetic teachings, by the invincible power of the teachings of the prophets. Centuries come and go, human ingenuity evolves with the passage of time, and respected theories, principles and philosophies succeed one another, new states of affairs and new mentalities emerge every day, everything seems to change daily, but the principles laid down by the great figures of the Jewish religion seem always to be contemporary, always of value, always new, permeated with eternal authority and invincible strength... These great figures remain an insoluble puzzle for the scientific community, no matter how strictly they apply their time-honoured scientific methods. This is where scientific methodology, unable to penetrate deeper, ceases and **theology** steps in. Working on a plane which is above the senses, theology seeks to solve the puzzle through acceptance of the **miracle** that takes place in the spiritual realm.

Day of Remembrance

By

Mrs Hélène Ahrweiler

First of all, allow me to address the martyrs. It is only in the Greek language that the word "martyr" has two meanings: it means him who reveals the truth but also him who dies for the truth.

The number of Jews who died suffering martyrdom for the truth cannot be counted. They chose April, this merciless month as T. S. Elliot has written, for remembering the largest atrocity in history, for remembering Shoah; this is the hell that man himself created for man. And they created Shoah next to museums, next to universities, next to libraries, next to theatres, next to civilisation. Civilisation does not necessarily make a person civilised. This is the conclusion that we, the supposedly intellectuals, can derive from the tragic events of Nazi atrocities.

What have we now to tell our children? I shall recall the words of Lili Zografou, who in her work "Michael" wrote: "When I encounter a Jew, I who come from the other camp, that is from those who turned their heads away or even led them to Auschwitz, have neither words nor any reason to be proud". These are the words that we can tell our children, we who come from the other camp. For Shoah is not something that concerns only Jews. The annihilation of Jews is the end of the European civilisation and of the European intellect as it lived throughout the centuries. The horror is immense, the pain cannot be measured and the shame is even greater. And we should not attempt to find excuses or reasons for sleeping better.

Some, like Milosevic, by claiming that Hitlers will always exist. Some others by refusing the Holocaust, while others by talking generally about genocides without being aware that Shoah, the genocide of Jews, is unique. And it is unique for only one reason: because for the first time in history man denied his fellow man, not in his capacity to be Jew but in his capacity to be a human being. This has happened only once in history and should never be repeated. But we must be vigilant, we must not be complacent and must not forget what a German Protestant priest wrote shortly before he died, while Brecht also said the same thing: the tummy of horror is about to give birth again. The priest wrote: when they came to arrest my neighbour because he was a Jew, I did not protest since I was not a Jew. When they came to arrest my other neighbour because he was a communist, I did not protest since I was not a communist. When, some distance away, they arrested some Catholic Germans, I did not protest since I was not a Catholic. However, when they came to arrest me, there was nobody left to protest! We should never forget for whom the bell tolls, for it tolls for each and every one of us.

Your Eminence, in my capacity as a byzantinist, I would like to recall the history of this great European cultural community, I am referring to the Israelite community and particularly its Greek community. Long before Slavonic Greeks, long before Greeks of Vlach descend and well before the Albanian Greeks, Jews had settled in Greece

during the first years A.D., as the inscriptions found in Corinth reveal. Thus, when Apostle Paul arrives in Macedonia, he addresses the Jewish Communities in Macedonia to convert the population to the first Christians. The blossoming of the Jewish community be it European, be it Greek or be it Byzantine was always impressive. Even though the Byzantines always treated Jews as a kind of scapegoat, they never proceeded in a pogrom. When in the 12th century Benjamin of Tudela arrives in Greece to censor Jews, he finds that thousands upon thousands had settled in every port and in every city. And when in 1492 the Catholic “devout” Kings of Spain, naturally the word devout must be used in inverted commas, started the first pogrom, the largest in history, by expelling hundreds of thousands of Jews from Spain and Portugal, more than 70,000 Jews arrived in Thessaloniki and in Macedonia. It was thanks to these Jews that Thessaloniki and its surrounding region blossomed financially and culturally during the period of Greek slavery under the Ottoman Empire. I must add that Bagiazit the Second, who was the sultan at the time, welcomed the Israelites coming in waves in the Ottoman Empire by saying: “I am told that Ferdinand of Spain is a very clever monarch. I very much doubt it. For, by expelling Jews from his country, he made me even richer. Nowadays, the Ottoman Empire is the richest country in the world thanks to the Jews”.

As you are aware, it was Thessaloniki that largely paid the price for Shoah. More than 90 per cent of the Jews of Thessaloniki, some 46,000 people, were taken to the concentration camps. Only 2,000 returned and they now try to survive in a Community that is smaller compared to the Jewish Community of Athens. In an attempt to live, the Community of Thessaloniki built its own museum. As I see among the audience representatives of the Greek State, I would like to take this opportunity to say that someone should have the courage to delete the following words from the French language guide of Thessaloniki: “In 1492 a wave of Jews fell in the city of Thessaloniki”. This guide has been published by a printing office located immediately next to the Museum of the Jewish Community.

I would not like to prolong my address. As a historian, there is only one thing that I must say and this is what we must teach the future generations: that no one will ever understand how such an event was possible to happen in the very land in which centuries ago Antigone cried: “I was not born to hate but to love”.

[Mrs Hélène Ahrweiler is a former Chancellor of the Sorbonne University – Address to the Remembrance Day of the Holocaust in the Jewish Cemetery of Athens, 14 April 2002].

Virtue and Courage

The Greek Orthodox Church
and the academic world of the Greek people
protest against the persecution

The letter that was sent by Archbishop Damaskinos to the Prime Minister K. Logothetopoulos at the time, is a monument of courage, national dignity and respect for human ideals.

This historical document, unique in the annals of occupied Europe, was signed by representatives of the major cultural institutions and organisations, speaking on behalf of the silenced Greek people. It required “virtue and courage” to sign such a document in those dark times.

To
The Prime Minister
Mr. K. Logothetopoulos
Athens

23 March 1943

Mr. Prime Minister

The Greek people were rightfully surprised and deeply grieved to be informed that the German Occupation Authorities have already started to put into effect a programme of gradual deportation of the Greek Jewish Community of Salonica to places beyond our national borders and that the first groups of deportees are already on their way to Poland. The grief of the Greek people was even deeper since:

1) According to the terms of the armistice, all Greek citizens, without distinction of race or religion, were to be treated equally by the Occupation Authorities.

2) The Greek Jews have proven themselves not only valuable contributors to the economic growth of the country but also law-abiding citizens who understand fully their duties as Greeks. They had their share in the common sacrifices for the Greek country and were always on the front line of the struggles of the Greek nation to defend its inalienable historical rights.

3) The law-abiding nature of the Jewish community in Greece excludes a priori any reason that it may be involved in actions or acts that might endanger even in the slightest, the safety of the Military Occupation Authorities.

4) To the national conscience all the children of common mother Greece appear to be an inseparable unity; they are all equal members of the national body without regard to religion or dogmatic differences.

5) Our Holy Religion does not recognize any superior or inferior qualities based on race or religion, stating that: “there is neither Jew nor Greek”, (Gal. 3:28) and in this manner, condemning any attempt to discriminate or create racial or religious differences.

6) Our common fate, in days of glory and in periods of national misfortune, forged inseparable bonds among all Greek citizens, without exemption, no matter what their race.

Certainly, we are not unaware of the deep conflict between the new Germany and the Jewish community nor do we intend to become defenders or even simply judges of world Jewry in the sphere of the great political and economic affairs of the world. Today we are interested and deeply concerned with the fate of 60.000 of our fellow citizens, who are Jews. For long, we have lived together in slavery and in freedom and we have come to know their feelings, their brotherly attitude, their economic activity and what is even more important their irreproachable patriotism. True witness of this is the great number of victims offered without regret and without hesitation by the Greek Jewish community on the altar of duty when our country was in peril.

Mr. Prime Minister,

We are certain that the thoughts and feelings of the Government agree with those of all the rest of the Greek people on this matter. We believe also that you have already taken the necessary steps and applied to the Occupation Authorities to rescind the grievous and aimless measure to deport the members of the Jewish community of Greece.

We hope indeed, that you have indicated to those in power that such a harsh treatment of Jews who are Greek citizens, as opposed to Jews of other nationalities in Greece, makes the instituted measure even more unjustifiable and therefore morally unacceptable. If it is security reasons that justify it, we think that it is possible to suggest a solution, and to take measures such as the

detention of the active male population (except children and the old) at a specific place on Greek territory under the surveillance of the Occupation Authorities, so that their security is guaranteed even against a hypothetical danger, and the Greek Jewish community will be spared of this deportation which is threatening it. In addition, we note with regard to the above measure that the rest of the Greek people will be willing if asked, to guarantee without hesitation for their brothers in need.

We hope that the Occupation Authorities will realise in time the aimlessness of the persecution of Greek Jews in particular, who are among the most peaceful and productive elements of the country.

If, however, they insist on this policy of deportation, we believe that the Government as the bearer of any political authority left in the country, should take a clear stance with regard to these events and let the foreigners bear the full responsibility of committing this obvious injustice. For we believe that no one should forget that all actions during these difficult times, even those that lie beyond our will and power will be reviewed someday by the nation and will be subjected to historical investigation. During that time of judgement, the aspect of responsibility assumed by the leaders will weigh heavily upon the conscience of the nation, if the leaders fail to make bold and express the most justified protest of the Nation against measures like the initiation of the deportation of the Greek Jews which insult our national unity and honour.

With respect
Damaskinos

Archbishop of Athens and all Greece

Follow signatures of the heads of the major cultural institutions and organizations:

The President of the Academy of Athens, the Rector of the University of Athens, the Rector of the Polytechnical School of Athens, the Rector of the High School of Economic Studies, the President of the Medical Association of Attica, the President of the Roll of Barristers of Attica, the President of the Union of Notaries of Athens and Aegean, the President of the Journalist's Union, the President of the Association of Greek authors, the President of the Culture Association, the President of the Pireus Chamber of Commerce, the President of the Athens Professional Chamber, the President of the Greek Association of Chemists, the President of the Athens Association of Pharmacists, the President of the Dentist's Association, the President of the Athens Craftsman Chamber, the President of the Pireus Association of Pharmacists, the President of the Greek Actors, the President of the Greek Association of Pharmacists, the President of the Medical Association of Pireus, the President of the Athens Association of Commercants, the President of the Athens Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Vice-President of the Greek Union of theatrical and musical Critics, the President of the Medical Association of Callithea, the Secretary General of the Panhellenic Association of Dentists, the President of the Greek Industrialists Union, the General Director of the Refugee's Organisation, the General Director of Social Health Organisation.

ΑΦΙΕΡΩΜΑΤΙΚΟ ΤΕΥΧΟΣ
ΓΙΑ ΤΟ
ΟΛΟΚΑΥΤΩΜΑ
ΤΩΝ ΕΒΡΑΙΩΝ
ΤΗΣ ΕΛΛΑΔΟΣ

1^η έκδοση: 1984

2^η έκδοση: 1992

3^η έκδοση

(συμπληρωμένη & επαυξημένη):

2006

Σύνταξη - Επιμέλεια:

*Γραφείο Δημοσίων Σχέσεων
Κεντρικού Ισραηλιτικού Συμβουλίου Ελλάδος*

Φωτογραφικό υλικό:

*Αρχεία Κεντρικού Ισραηλιτικού Συμβουλίου Ελλάδος, Εβραϊκού Μουσείου Ελλάδος,
Άρη Δημόπουλου, Ilan Carmi, Μωϋσή Κ. Κωνσταντίνη,
Ραφαήλ Μωϋσή, Ανδρέα - Νέλλης Σεφικά.*

ΧΡΟΝΙΚΑ **תַּחֲנוּן**

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ΕΚΔΟΤΗΣ - ΔΙΕΥΘΥΝΤΗΣ:

Ο Πρόεδρος του Κ.Ι.Σ. ΜΩΨΗΣ ΚΩΝΣΤΑΝΤΙΝΗΣ

ΔΙΕΥΘΥΝΣΗ ΓΡΑΦΕΙΩΝ:

Βουλής 36 • 105 57 ΑΘΗΝΑ Τηλ. 210-32.44.315-8

E-mail: hhkis@hellasnet.gr

Internet site: <http://www.kis.gr>

Κωδικός εντύπου: 3502

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τις απόψεις των συγγραφέων τους.

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Μιχάλης Κύρκος, Υψηλάντου 25 Αθήνα, τηλ.: 210-72.18.421

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