

tional Christian Party (that had only received 9% of the popular vote) to lead the government. However, the National Christians' lack of authority and their alliance with the Legion of the Archangel Michael, prompted King Carol to dissolve parliament and assume control of the government himself. King Carol's control of government would last until 1940, when General Ion Antonescu forced his abdication over the issue of territorial cessation to Hungary and the Soviet Union. Antonescu established himself as dictator with support of the Iron Guard (founded in 1930). Antonescu had been known as an effective soldier who was fiercely anticommunist and espoused corporate authoritarianism. His cooperation with the Iron Guard would come to an end in 1941, as a result of an attempted coup against him by members of the Iron Guard and the Legion of the Archangel Michael in January. See Mann, pp. 288-92.

⁸² Armand Calinescu, King Carol's closest associate, was assassinated in April of 1939, by members of the Iron Guard, in retaliation to the shooting of thirteen members of the Iron Guard 'for attempting to escape from prison' in 1938. See Barbara Jelavich, *History of the Balkans, Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, 1983), p. 207.

⁸³ "From Sir R. Hoare, Bucharest, to Mr. Nichols," 22 September 1939, No. R 8180/214/67, Public Records Office, Britain (hereafter PRO).

⁸⁴ "To I. Dellas, C. Danas, G. Dellas, M. Anghelidis," 15 April 1940, Jewish Archive, No. 668, AMFA. The Romanian Consul stipulates that on the Greek Consular Certificate of Nationality stamp or a crest be placed if a person was not Orthodox.

⁸⁵ "Alexandros Koundouriotis to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, B. Division," 28 November 1940, Jewish Archive, No. 2029, p. 3, AMFA.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

⁸⁷ "Nikos Mavroudis to Michel Antonescu (sic)," 30 November 1939, Jewish Archive, No. 5158, AMFA. No further documents could be found concerning the religious affiliation law in the Romanian dossiers.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ "Alexandros Koundouriotis to Minister for Foreign Affairs," Jewish Archive, No. 5502, 16 November 1940, AMFA.

⁹¹ "Moisis Levy to Ambassador of Greece, Romani," 22 November 1940, Jewish Archive, No. 5156, p. 1, AMFA.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁹³ "Moisis Levy to Ambassador of Greece to Romania" 22 November 1940, Jewish Archive, No. 5156, attachment 2, p. 2, AMFA.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ No further documents could be found for Levy's situation in the Romanian dossiers, and the fate of Levy cannot be ascertained.

Lessons from the Shoah in Greece: Judenrat and Resistance¹

STEVEN BOWMAN

The agony of Greek Jews during WWII is both similar and dissimilar to the fate of their brethren elsewhere in occupied Europe. It is similar in the sense that they were deported to Treblinka and Auschwitz and most met their horrid deaths in that foreign land of concentration camps. It is dissimilar in the sense that the process was relatively neat and efficient with none of the butchery so common to the process during the slaughter of the East European Jews. There are no mass graves in Greece save for the theft of honor that shames the military graveyard in the hinterland of Marathon containing some 10,000 Wehrmacht and SS troops.

The literature of the Greek Jews eschews the existence of Judenraete in Greece, but this claim is not accurate, nor could it have been given Nazi policy that demanded such an ethnic organization of the conquered Jewish communities preparatory to their deportation and destruction. The question then is how many Judenraete were there in Greece?

We are familiar with the Judenrat of Thessaloniki where the vast majority of Greek Jews lived, some 50,000 out of a national total ranging between 70- and 80,000.² There was also a Judenrat for a brief time in Athens. But little is known of the formal organizing of the communities in central Greece during the seven months of total German control, let alone the previous two- or two-and-a half years under the Italians. Something is known about Ioannina, but was the organization there a Judenrat? And were the islands of Corfu,

Rhodes and Crete to be considered as under the control of a local Judenrat? The question of regional Judenraete has not been hitherto asked, and little information is available to evince a simple answer as in the case of Thessaloniki and Athens. Even the definition of Greek Jew is somewhat problematic, given the question of national sovereignty. Rhodes and Kos with nearly 2,000 Jews, for example, were under Italian domination yet culturally Greek and not affected until the later German occupation.

The accusations against Rabbi Zvi Koretz, Chief Rabbi of Thessaloniki before and during the war, were initiated in reports emanating from Istanbul, which then found their way to the archives in Palestine and the United States. Greek Jews denounced him as a collaborator and a war criminal and tried him, other members of the Judenrat, and the various members of the many committees that served the population during the occupation.³ Greece in fact was the only country to hold a collective postwar trial of Jewish collaborators that included the major portion of the Judenrat. That trial was demanded by the survivors and brought some sense of achieved revenge, if not justice, to the 10,000 Jews who returned from the mountains or the death camps, in particular the handful who returned to Thessaloniki.

We have three perspectives on the Judenrat of Thessaloniki: The Nazi framework which, of course, was unknown until the Nuremberg Trials brought forth Heinrich Himmler's September 1939 telegram to Reinhard Heidrich outlining the need to establish Judenraete for the Jews in occupied territories; the reports of escapees and survivors who were totally out of the loop insofar as the organizational aspects of the Judenrat were concerned; and reports from two members of the Judenrat which need to be put into their historical perspective. Clearly such a body of memory is not conducive to an impartial understanding of the role of Rabbi Koretz or the other members of the Judenrat.

The situation for Athens is somewhat better. The first post-war history of the Holocaust in any country was published in Greece by Rabbi Michael Molho, who survived in Greece, and Joseph Nehama, who returned from the camps. Both of these men were from Thessaloniki. Theirs are chronicles whose criticisms are less scholarly than *ad hominem*. Yet for the mass of readers they still hold an authority and an indictment of individuals that Rabbi Molho himself later repudiated.⁴ There were also a considerable number of leading figures familiar with the Athens story who survived to give their informed testimony. A critical sifting of these and other sources elicits a more complicated picture relating to the survival of the vast majority of Jews in Athens during the fourteen months of German occupation.

Thessaloniki suffered the worst of the Greek agony. Already before the war, the city was divided between those who supported Rabbi Koretz and those who wished him out. The rabbi's supporters included the community leadership, the Greek government, and the local metropolitan. He was learned, held a PhD in oriental thought, and he was an ardent Zionist. His approach to Judaism was liberal, the primary reason for his appointment. He was, in addition to being a polymath, fluent in several languages including modern Greek and spoken Ladino (*Judezmo* or *Sepharadit*, as it is more correctly known) which he had learned shortly after his arrival in Greece in 1934. He was somewhat reserved with an arrogance deriving from an inferiority complex common to East European Jews (*Ostjuden*) who had studied in Vienna or Berlin. His opposition stemmed from the masses of Thessaloniki who were unhappy with his Germanic demeanor and who had adored their former Chief Rabbi, who had been politely dismissed after he insulted the Queen of Greece by refusing to take her hand when proffered. Koretz was the modern liberal rabbi that the power structure preferred. Unfortunately, given the situation he would be placed

in, Koretz was totally naive in the political sphere, a trait common to his background. The sources for this sketch are drawn from a variety of reports, including the important memoir of his wife and son, acquaintances who knew him before he accepted the position in Thessaloniki and those who were in Bergen-Belson, as well as the memoirs of his detractors. A thorough analysis of his character is much needed.⁵

The two community leaders' reports mentioned above are those of Yomtob Yakoel, who served as the community lawyer, and Salomon Mair Uziel, erstwhile member of the Community Council. Yakoel's memoir has been characterized as a "diary" in its Greek original. It was translated into Hebrew by Asher Moissis and presented as evidence in the Eichmann Trial in Jerusalem. The Hebrew translation, despite Moissis' linguistic competency, is somewhat less than a faithful rendition of this testament. A more accurate English version is now available. Uziel's report is more a dossier that was assembled to defend himself against the charge of collaboration and to end the ostracism that he suffered for half a decade.⁶ It is a tragic document, both for the reasons written and for the description of the Community Council which was the representative of a community organized for extermination.

Yakoel's report is not a diary. It was not written in Thessaloniki during the period of the Judenrat. Rather it is a lawyer's apologia, written in a meticulous and professional style, set down while the author was in hiding in Athens after his escape from Thessaloniki. Unfortunately it was never finished. It breaks off in mid-sentence a week prior to the first deportation in March 1943. The blood on the page is a harbinger of the author's fate which was arrest and deportation to Auschwitz, service at the gas chamber on arrival, and the crematorium where his body was recognized by the Greek members of the *Sonderkommando*. It is no wonder

then that this document holds such authority: the author's martyrdom, the support of his friend Asher Moissis who led the postwar Greek Jews to a semblance of recovery, and the details it contains of the Thessaloniki disaster.

Asher Moissis was the President of the Jewish Community of Thessaloniki until the mid- 1930s. He was deposed from his position during the dictatorship of Ioannis Metaxas, who was otherwise well disposed to the Jewish community whose leaders supported him and the king, newly returned from exile. Moissis re-established himself in Athens where he integrated himself among the ousted political leaders of the various parties. He would use these connections to seek and obtain aid for the beleaguered Jews during and after the war. This support was freely given and resulted in numerous instances of opposition, albeit for the most part ineffective, to the German policy. Still the highest police officials and the archbishop of the Greek Orthodox Church aided and saved many Jews as a result of their belief that there was neither Greek nor Jew in occupied Greece, that is to say in our paraphrase of the New Testament allusion: Jews were citizens of Greece and entitled to all the rights and privileges of that citizenship.⁷

Yakoel was a good friend as well as former law partner of Moissis, both from Trikala.⁸ The two remained in close contact, at least by telephone during the German occupation. Thus Athens was fully aware of events in Thessaloniki. When Yakoel escaped to Athens, it was Moissis whom he sought, and it was Moissis who sat him down and ordered him to write a full account of the tragedy of Thessaloniki. Such a document would be needed in the postwar record and could be a basis for an accounting with the traitors who collaborated in the destruction of the community. The first filter of the story then is Yakoel's. We cannot be certain what he may have omitted or why. Nor can we be certain of his interpretation of events and actions and personalities. Such consider-

ations are necessary rather than simply accepting his brief at face value. One thing we know he left out: a surviving handwritten list of the neighborhoods where Jews lived scattered throughout Thessaloniki. This list apparently was the basis for the organization of the ghettoization and schedule of deportation. The handwriting has been tentatively identified as that of Yakoei. We do not know how many members of the Community Council, if any, assisted in preparing this list which was used by the Gestapo to facilitate the process.

The Athens story is different in many aspects. The 50,000 plus Jews of Thessaloniki made up about a fourth of the population of nearly a quarter million, and many spoke with a clearly identifiable accent.⁹ Many were old and poor. All were ill served by their "collaborationist" chief rabbi. Athens had a much smaller Jewish population of some 3,000 which swelled to over 5,000 (some estimates claim 8,000) as the Occupation went on and refugees fled to Athens from the German and Bulgarian zones of Occupation. They constituted a miniscule percentage of the city's total population. Rabbi Barzilai is hailed as saving the community by having the Jewish lists destroyed and then by escaping to the mountains where he assisted the Resistance until liberation. This last is based on his short memoir which was published in Hebrew and collaborated by other sources.¹⁰

A reevaluation of the historical record elicits that, in fact, Rabbi Barzilai did tell the Gestapo that the records were burned. And they had—by the Jews in the Resistance. Rabbi Barzilai did go to the mountains escorted, if not nearly kidnapped by Jews in the Resistance.¹¹ Jews such as Asher Moissis and the wife of Jean Politis lobbied government officials and other politicians. Archbishop Damaskinos delivered petitions to both the Greek prime minister and the German ambassador. Jews in the Resistance warned their coreligionists to flee or hide and found refuge for many. The Communist-led EAM (The National Liberation Front) facil-

itated the hiding of Jews within Athens. All these concerted actions were taken lest what befell Thessaloniki in spring 1943 would be repeated in Athens.¹²

It was somewhat easier for the Jews of Athens singly or in groups to escape to the mountains held by an organized resistance movement supplied by the British. By spring 1943, although the Resistance had not yet been formally organized, individuals could escape the steel trap of the German Army Group that was centered in Thessaloniki. The Communists arranged escapes of fighting men in the north. Many Jews had fought in the Greek army in the rout of the Italians in the mountains of Albania. One of these veterans was a young 22-year-old Communist, a Jew from the Baron Hirsch Quarter, soon to be a ghetto. He would eventually rise to be known and celebrated as Kapetan Kitsos whose exploits still ring through the towns and villages of southern Macedonia.¹³

To summarize: Thessaloniki was effectively organized with a Judenrat led by an Ashkenazi rabbi who was a prime candidate for meeting Nazi criteria. The members of the community council were servants of a social tradition of self-help that could not see beyond the immediate problem of succoring the poor and the hungry. There was no easy place for the Jews to run. Resistance was minimal and was restricted to individuals who escaped to Athens, were recruited to the fledgling resistance in the mountains, or sought the protection of the foreign consulates. But the vast majority, nearly 50,000, enjoyed Greek citizenship and felt they had little recourse but to follow orders. And there was no exceptional German violence to panic them.

Athens was forewarned by the disaster in Thessaloniki. Its leadership was activated in all the areas to which it had access. Moreover, those who had fled from Thessaloniki were active with the Resistance, e.g., Sam Modiano, an aggressive newspaperman with Italian citizenship who counted Mussolini among his friends. The Greek majority of Athens

at all levels of society led by Archbishop Damaskinos and Angelos Evert, the Commander of the Athens police, stood with the Jews. Rabbi Elia Barzilai advised the community to go into hiding and the Nazis could capture only a handful of Jews who insisted on reporting to the stations set up by the Nazis who promised the starving refugees distribution of Passover matzoth.

In other cities the situation varied according to the information known to the community and the quality of its leadership. The rabbi of Kastoria distrusted and feared the Communist resistance and kept the community quiet until deportation. Some 95% of the Kastoria population of 900 were thus lost. In Volos and Katarini the police chiefs warned the rabbi and the community president respectively. Most Jews fled and were protected by the Resistance. Several Jews, in fact, would rise to leadership positions in the Resistance. All 30 of the Katerini Jews survived and 645 of the 872 Jews of Volos. In Agrinion the entire community of 40 decided to go to the mountains which could be accomplished simply by taking a taxi to safety. The survival rate was 100%. But life in the mountains was hard on the city folk. In Ioannina, the President of the community was jailed and his kabbalist subordinate followed German orders all the way to the gas chambers of Auschwitz; 91% of the city's 1,850 Jews would perish.

The island Jews were for the most part literally isolated; and their ghettoization and deportation were easily effected as an aspect of the German retreat. It is tragic that nobody with the British forces that occupied Kos in September 1943 warned the 100 Jews of Kos to join the exodus of some 12,000 Christians to the newly built refugee camps in Cyprus and Gaza. The loss rate for Kos and Rhodes (1,900) would be 89%. In contrast, on Zakynthos the entire community of 275 Jews were saved, due to the heroic action of the Mayor Loukas Karrer and the Bishop Chrysostomos and the general

lack of support to the Nazi's half-hearted attempt to deport the community.

Hence the tragic lesson of Greek Jewry. Even in a country whose hinterland was friendly to the Jews, the numbers saved, only 10,000 out of a prewar 70-80,000, was small. Most of those saved had to be assisted to survival, an interesting parallel to Denmark where recent work argues that the Danish Jews were all but kidnapped to Sweden. Jewish army veterans were deported to Auschwitz where they participated in, if not initiated, the revolt of the *Sonderkommando*. Other army veterans participated successfully in the 1944 Warsaw revolt where their skills were usefully employed even by the openly antagonistic Jew-haters among the Polish forces. Insofar as the Judenraete concern us, only Thessaloniki is a model we can analyze and compare to the Judenraete in Slavic areas. There, a pliant Ashkenazi head with the support of a pliant Sephardi council organized themselves and a divisive community of mixed nationalities for self-destruction in complete ignorance of their fate.

NOTES

¹ This essay is edited from a paper delivered at the Chicago meeting of the Association for Jewish Studies in December, 1999.

² The question of numbers will be examined in my forthcoming book *The Agony of Greek Jewry during World War II* (Stanford University Press).

³ Rabbi Koretz died shortly after liberation but is listed in the indictment.

⁴ In a letter to the widow of Rabbi Koretz. Copy supplied to me by the rabbi's son Arie Koretz, summarized in Rozen (see following note) end-note 55.

⁵ The first part of a critical study is available now by Minna Rozen, "Jews and Greeks Remember Their Past: The Political Career of Tzevi Koretz (1933-43)," *Jewish Social Studies* 12 (2005), 111-166. Arie Koretz's memoir of his experience in Bergen Belson is a necessary addition to this inquiry. See my review of Arie Koretz, *Yomano shel Na'ar* in *Bulletin*

of *Judeo-Greek Studies* 13 (1993), 23-24. The testimony of Gita Koretz, the widow of the rabbi, and her son Arie is available in Yad Vashem Archives, Jerusalem and archives at Tel Aviv University.

⁶ Now available in English in *The Holocaust in Salonika: Eyewitness Accounts*, edited with introductory essay by Steven Bowman; translated by Isaac Benmayor. New York, 2002.

⁷ "Greek Jews and Greek Christians During World War II," in *Remembering for the Future*. Conference Preprints, I, (Oxford, 1988), pp. 215-221. There are further materials in the World Jewish Congress Archives at the American Jewish Archives in Cincinnati that have not yet been exploited.

⁸ Discussions by the author with Asher Moisses in Athens in 1972.

⁹ There were an estimated 55,000 Jews left in Thessaloniki on the eve of the war. At least 5,000 escaped in 1941 and 1942, although some returned before the persecutions began. Thessaloniki's population was about 225,000 at the time.

¹⁰ *Guinzach Saloniki (Archives Saloniciennes)*, Fascicule A, ed. Barouh Ouziel (Tel Aviv, 1961), 90-92. An unedited English version by the author was deposited in the Gennadeios Library in Athens in 1972 following an interview with Rabbi Barzilai.

¹¹ See now my *Jewish Resistance in Wartime Greece* for details.

¹² Inter alia see Michael Matsas, *The Illusion of Safety* (New York, 1997). After the disappearance of Rabbi Barzilai, Isaac Kabelli became the representative head of the community.

¹³ His story is outlined in my *Jewish Resistance in Wartime Greece*.

Book Review/Essay

Bowman, Steven. *Jewish Resistance in Wartime Greece.*
London/Portland OR: Vallentine Mitchell,
2006. 142 pages. Illustrated.

ANDRE GEROLYMATOS

The story of the Greek resistance against the Axis occupation forces between 1941-1944 is still a work in progress. A great deal of the extant literature is focused on the guerrilla warfare in the mountains and primarily on the political schisms that conspired to inflict three rounds (1943, 1944 and 1946-1949) of a devastating civil war. Little work, unfortunately, has been done on the actual military accomplishments of the guerrilla bands and even less on the sabotage and espionage efforts of the resistance groups in the cities.

The Greek resistance played a major role in the history of the Second World War, yet outside of scholars in the field and aging participants in and out of Greece, few know of the accomplishments and sacrifices of the Greek resistance. The people of Greece were one of the first to fight against the Nazi and fascist occupation forces and to do so successfully against overwhelming odds. Sadly, after the war, this period of Greek history has been deliberately obscured by the post-war authoritative Greek governments anxious to distance the left-wing resistance from any glory even at the price of forgetting the achievements of right-wing partisan groups.

The election of the first socialist government in 1980