

University of Macedonia
Department of Balkan, Slavic and Oriental Studies

Reactions to the Persecution of
the Jews of Thessaloniki, 1942-1943

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*To all the great friends
who walked along with me*

Outside Thessaloniki, 1942

The accountant sits chewing
through the misty arithmetic of crop yields
on lined paper that curls and yellows
in wet heat,
flies buzzing like Messerschmitts.
In the dry dirt at the courtyard's perimeter,
rats occupy themselves
with the bureaucracy of consumption.
Splatterings of sunlight
break the shade like incendiary bomb fires.
He draws lines, forms columns,
the only sound the perfunctory clang
of an olive pip
spat into the basin of an upturned helmet.

Tim Clare
1 October 2011
The Poetry Takeaway @Tate Britain

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Foreword

Within a few months of 1943, the overwhelming majority of the members of the historic Jewish community of Thessaloniki were transported from their homes, in cattle cars, to be exterminated at the Nazi death camp of Auschwitz. Thessaloniki, a major port city in the Balkans and Greece's second largest city has the sad privilege of having lost one of the largest percentages of Jewish population during the Second World War compared to other cities in Europe. Almost 95% of the city's 50,000 Jews did not survive the war, most of them deported and exterminated in Nazi-occupied Poland.

This was not a fringe event in the history of Greece's second biggest city during World War II. Rather, the Jews constituted a large percentage of Thessaloniki's population, with a long presence in the city, who contributed to the social, economic, political and cultural life. Their suffering was felt by all the citizens in the city and beyond.

The Holocaust occurred all over Europe, in different times and regions, with varying levels of success. One of its most successful outcomes was the city of Thessaloniki. This Ph.D. thesis—the first in a Greek University on a subject related to the Holocaust in Greece—will try to look into the reasons for this big loss. Examining in detail many of the local actors, the study will detail the particularities of Thessaloniki in relation to the rest of Occupied Greece and Europe in general. Some of actions that took place are unique for Thessaloniki and this makes the city an ideal case study.

Several explanations could be brought up to justify the large number of Jewish deaths. Molho and Nehama provided eight such reasons in their monumental work *In Memoriam*, the first effort to document the Jewish Genocide in Greece and an homage to the murdered victims of the Holocaust.¹ Yet, even if they wrote that “examples of self-abnegation and self-sacrifice [by Greek Christians] exist of course in Thessaloniki but can be counted in the fingers and cannot counterbalance—as big as is the gratitude owed to those who made this sacrifice—the pressures, the blackmail and the betrayals that the Jews went through trying to save themselves,”² the attitudes of the local population during this period had not been studied until recently. Only in the last few years have historians integrated this local

¹ Michael Molho and Joseph Nehama, *In Memoriam: Dedication to the memory of the Jewish victims of Nazism in Greece* (Greek) (Thessaloniki: Jewish Community of Thessaloniki, 1974), pp. 126–127.

² *Ibid.*, p. 150.

perspective in the research of the Holocaust in Thessaloniki and started to look into the stance of the war-time Greek-Christian elite of the city, how they reacted to the antisemitic agenda of the Nazis, and the moral priorities they held during that period.

The dissertation focuses on Thessaloniki's Greek Christian elites and examines their role during the Holocaust. By enriching the existing knowledge with new sources and analysis, the study is able to highlight the role of local actors in key events regarding the Holocaust. These include the call for slave labor of all Jewish males, the destruction of the Jewish cemetery of the city—a unique event in occupied Europe—and, lastly, the implementation of the Nazi antisemitic laws on the local level.

The dissertation will also endeavor to document the complex relations between Christians and Jews from the interwar period to the post-war, mainly through the lens of transition from empire to nation state, nation-building and state consolidation. Although several actors were involved, both local and outside ones, these processes continued throughout the turbulent first half of the 20th century and have culminated in a city today where the Jews is a distant—and often forgotten—memory. The Ottoman institution of the *millet*, the system of organizing the different religious groups, will be also examined as an interpretive scheme to explain certain stances of the Greek population.

Using methods of microhistory to look into the stance of the war-time Greek-Christian elite of the city, the paper broadens the problematic on bystanders and collaborators in Thessaloniki and reassesses Greek-Christian attitudes. Did these local decision-makers have room to maneuver? Were they aware of the historical significance of this period? How did they implement the issued Nazi orders? Did they inform their fellow Jewish citizens of what was up ahead and try to help them? Was it just “following orders” or weighting other priorities?

One always needs to keep in mind the central role of Nazi Germany in executing this plan. Yet, the Nazis could not have done it on their own. The Holocaust was a carefully planned and organized bureaucratic enterprise and bureaucracy affected all aspects of daily life under German occupation. The Germans issued the orders but it was often civil servants, government employees and city clerks but also mayors, heads of the associations and unions, and other local administrators who were tasked with their implementation. Indeed, in

describing the reactions of the professional classes, Mazower spoke of a “deafening silence,”³ while Margaritis said that the general rule in Thessaloniki seemed to have been “silence and ‘neutrality.’”⁴

Using unpublished documents from a wide variety of sources, some used for the first time in research on the Second World War in Greece, the paper will examine the interaction of local Thessaloniki actors with the German occupation authorities. Studying the issue of decision-making at the local level can help us answer many of the questions that are lost in a broader approach, including any moral or other reservations that could have emerged. Moreover, it will help us elaborate upon the distinction between collaborators and bystanders, a common theme related to the Holocaust, where the limits are often unclear.

³ Mark Mazower, *Salonica City of Ghosts: Christians, Muslims and Jews, 1430–1950* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), pp. 409–410.

⁴ Giorgos Margaritis, *Unwanted Compatriots: Data on the Destruction of the Minorities of Greece: Jews and Chams* (Greek) (Athens: Bibliorama, 2005), p. 110.

Map I: Division of Greek Territory by Axis Power



Table I: Jewish losses in Greece during World War II

CONSEIL CENTRAL
 DES COMMUNAUTES JUIVES
 DE GRECE

Opinion finale

DELEGATION DU C.I.R.C. EN GRECE

T A B L E A U

Indiquant les Pertes subites par la Population Juive de Grèce à la suite des Persécutions et Déportations Allemandes (1943-1944)-

Communautés Juives Villes	Population Juive à la veille des Déportations.	Pertes	Survivants à la fin des hostili- tés-1945
<u>THRACE</u>			
1/Com. de DEDIMOTIHON	900	867	33
2/ " " NEA ORESTIAS	197	194	3
3/ " " ALEXANDROUPOLIS	140	136	4
4/ " " GOMOTINI	819	791	28
5/ " " XANTHIE	550	544	6
<u>MACEDOINE</u>			
6/Com. de CAVALLA	2.100	2.058	42
7/ " " DRAMA	1.200	1.161	39
8/ " " SERRES	600	597	3
9/ " " THESSALONIQUE	56.000	50.000	1.950
10/ " " VERRIA	460	329	131
11/ " " CASTORIA	900	865	35
12/ " " FLORINA	400	336	64
<u>THESSALIE</u>			
13/Com. de TRICCALA	520	160	360
14/ " " LARISSA	1.120	394	726
15/ " " VOLO	872	227	645
<u>GRECE CONTINENTALE</u>			
16/Com. de CHALKIS	325	155	170
17/ " " ATHENES	3.000	1.000	4.930
<u>PELOPONESE</u>			
18/Com. de PATRAS-AGRINION	265	113	152
<u>EPIRE</u>			
19/Com. de JANNINA	1.850	1.687	163
20/ " " PREVEZA	250	235	15
21/ " " ARTA	384	324	60
<u>ILES</u>			
22/Com. de CORFOU	2.000	1.815	185
23/ " " ZANTHE	275	0	275
24/ " " LA CANEE	350	343	7
25/ " " RHODES-COS	1.900	1.700	200
TOTAL	77.377	66.031	10.226

Note: Une partie des survivants de la Communauté Juive de Thessalonique s'est installée à Athènes, pendant et après les persécutions, alors qu'une autre partie a quittée la Grèce.

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Source: Archive of the ICRC, G59/8-347. as communicated by the Central Board of Jewish Communities of Greece to the International Committee of the Red Cross in Geneva, December 1948.

Chapter I: Historical and Theoretical Background¹

Introduction

The great majority of the Jews of Greece who perished during the Holocaust were residents of Thessaloniki. Thessaloniki, Greece's second biggest city, had been for centuries a major Jewish center, often dubbed the "mother of Israel."² The city's Jewish community has a history of more than 2,000 years, already settled when Apostle Paul came to preach there the new religion. The Jewish population received a significant boost when, in 1492, thousands of Sephardic Jews fleeing the Spanish Inquisition found shelter in Thessaloniki, at the time under Ottoman control. The newly arrived transformed the city and dominated its economic, cultural and political life, making it a "Sephardic metropolis."³

At the turn of 20th century, Thessaloniki counted 70-80,000 Jews out of a total population of 150,000.⁴ Some fifty percent of the total inhabitants were Jews, with many

¹ If not otherwise indicated, translations are by the author. The titles of Greek language books are translated into English with the remark "Greek" in parenthesis. The original Greek title is provided in the bibliography.

² On how this term came about, see Devin E. Naar, *Jewish Salonica: Between the Ottoman Empire and Modern Greece* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016), p. 194.

³ For a history of the Jews in Greece, see K. E. Fleming, *Greece: A Jewish History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010). For Thessaloniki in particular see the 3-volume work of Joseph Nehama, *History of the Jews of Thessaloniki* (Greek) (Thessaloniki: Jewish Community of Thessaloniki and University Studio Press, 2000). The book appeared first in French as Joseph Nehama, *Histoire des Israélites de Salonique* (Thessaloniki, 1978).

⁴ It is very difficult to cite exact numbers as the estimates differ based on the intentions of the source. "As population figures became tools of nationalist ambition in the twentieth century, Salonica entered a battlefield of 'ethnological statistics' with Greece and Bulgaria, each claiming that Greeks or Bulgarians constituted the predominant demographic group in the region." The census made by the Jewish Community after the fire of 1917 found 75,062 Jews in the city. Naar, *Jewish Salonica*, pp. 56–57. For more discussion on the issue,

other ethnic groups being part of this cosmopolitan matrix. Due to the transition from the Ottoman Empire to the Greek state—the city became Greek in 1912—there was a considerable change of the ethnic-religious composition of the population. In the interwar period the Jewish inhabitants dropped considerably, due mainly to migration abroad for political or economic reasons,⁵ while the Greek Christian population got a significant boost by refugees who came from Asia Minor as a result of the Greek-Turkish War of 1922-23.

When the German army entered the city in April 1941 as Greece lost the war, Thessaloniki counted about 50,000 Jews, approximately 20 percent of the population, still marking the city's character. This illustrious history came to an abrupt end with the Nazi deportations and the Holocaust when more than 90 percent of Thessaloniki's Jews found a tragic death in the Nazi death camp of Auschwitz. These Jews were well integrated in city life, so their plight affected all sectors of the Greek public administration and civil society. Although many Jews worked as independent professionals, a number of them were employed as civil servants in the local government. With the majority living in the center of Thessaloniki, their plight was known and could be felt by all citizens and institutions.

SUBCHAPTER I: Methodology, Sources, Bibliography

1. Methodology, Approach

The dissertation will focus on Thessaloniki's Greek Christian elite and will examine their role during the Holocaust. It will propose a new narrative into the historic developments, looking into the role of local actors and their actions during this period. It will argue that the period of the German occupation—a period of crisis that marked a clear cut from what was normal until then—shook up basic notions of the Thessaloniki society. Developments that were in

providing all available estimates, see Rena Molho, *The Jews of Thessaloniki: 1856–1919, A Particular Community* (Greek) (Athens: Themelio, 2001), pp. 29–48.

⁵ For more on the Jewish immigration from Thessaloniki on different occasions see Bernard Pierron, *Jews and Christians in Modern Greece* (Greek) (Athens: Polis, 2004). For the period after 1912 see pp. 101–106, after the 1917 fire see pp. 115–117, and after the Campbell riots, see pp. 203–207. The study, based on Pierron's Ph.D., was first published in French as Bernard Pierron, *Juifs et chrétiens de la Grèce moderne* (Paris: Editions l'Harmattan, 1996).

play for thirty years, such as the integration of the city's Jews into the national body, were sidelined and the Greek Orthodox community started to think in terms of "millet," the way that life was organized prior to the city's incorporation into the Greek state, in 1912.

Using the approach of microhistory, the study will look into several case studies. In particular, the actions of the city authorities, the Church, the Courts, the University, the professional associations and the press. These were the city's most prominent institutions which had—or could have had—an impact on the deportation of the Jews. The research would have liked to include a few more institutions, such as the office of the General Governor of Macedonia, the representative of the Greek government of Athens in the region, but their archives have not been discovered and information is fragmented.

The focus is primarily on the elites, the people who had positions of power, contacts with the German and Greek authorities, as well as a certain ability to act. We have been able to find several sources detailing the actions of these elites, in contrast to regular people, our knowledge on their attitudes of whom is quite scarce and fragmented. In addition, the study will concentrate on the city of Thessaloniki itself during the period between July 1942 and August 1943, and follow the local developments. Consequently, the actions of players located elsewhere, such as Greek authorities in Athens, the Government-in-exile in Cairo, or the leadership of the resistance groups, will be discussed only as they relate to the issues at hand.

This research did not aspire to be a comprehensive historical narration of the period of the Nazi occupation of Thessaloniki and the antisemitic measures. It aims to highlight some of the key events that took place in a new context, by providing additional information and insights. In this way, our understanding of the events that unfolded can be deepened, elaborated and contextualized.

2. Sources

The dissertation is based to a large extent on primary sources. In this way, we are able to document the events that unfolded through contemporary materials, originating often from eye-witnesses themselves. In addition, extensive archival research allows us to cross-check and evaluate the trustworthiness of descriptions or allegations, through this multi-dimensional approach.

The research tried to find as many archival sources possible, in Thessaloniki, in Greece and around the world. The sources consulted in Thessaloniki include the archives of the following institutions: Municipality of Thessaloniki, Diocese of Thessaloniki, Chamber of

Commerce and Industry, Traders 'Association, Professionals' Chamber, Bar Association, Union of Journalists, the Electricity Company, the University Senate, the Greek Literature and Historical Archive (ELIA) and the Autonomous Food Agency, located in the Historical Archive of Macedonia. The Jewish Museum of Thessaloniki have also several archives from this period. In addition, the full body of the two newspapers that were in circulation during the period of the occupation, *Nea Evropi* and *Apogevmatini*.

Many of these archives and documents have been safeguarded due to the interest and care of a few collectors, who saved them from the oblivion of history, oftentimes literally from the trash. Christos Kavadas and Ioannis Megas shared their priceless collection for this historical research.

In Athens, we looked into the archives of the Greek Foreign Ministry, the National Bank of Greece, the Jewish Museum of Greece (which possesses the archive of the Agency for the Custody of Jewish Properties) and the Karamanlis Foundation.

The materials included in post-war trials were very helpful, most importantly of Max Merten in Athens in 1959 and Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem in 1961. These were located in the archives of the Military Tribunal in Athens, Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, online sources as well as transcripts published in newspapers at the time. In particular, we were able to identify and consult the verbatim transcript from Merten's trial and not the summary record which has been used so far.

The documentation contained in the collections of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum and of Yad Vashem are priceless and their efforts of both institutions to collect, digitalize, safeguard and disseminate this information is a great service to the academic community, the memory of Holocaust victims and the pursuit of historical truth.

Several archives outside of Greece were also consulted including the British National Archives, the Wiener Library in London, the Memorial de la Shoah in Paris, the archives of the Swiss Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Bern, the archives of the Argentinian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Buenos Aires, the archives of the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Copenhagen, and the archives of the International Committee of the Red Cross in Geneva. Important files from the German and Italian archives were integrated in the study through comprehensive volumes that have been published with these documents.⁶

⁶ For example, Daniel Carpi, ed., *Italian Diplomatic Documents on the History of the Holocaust in Greece (1941–1943)* (Tel Aviv: Diaspora Research Institute, The Chair in the History and Culture of the Jews of

The primary sources were enriched and contextualized with materials published after the war by historians, researchers or eye-witnesses. These materials have been sought in the main public and university libraries in Thessaloniki, Athens and abroad. It is important to note here that the study did not rely on—and those does not substantially incorporate—survivors’ testimonies. This happened for several reasons and among them to keep the narration without the effects of hindsight.

3. Overview of Bibliography

Quite substantial overviews of the bibliography on the Holocaust in Greece have been published recently and we will not repeat them during this study.⁷ The research used extensively two important works: the volume *In Memoriam*, written by Thessaloniki Jewish intellectuals Michael Molho and Joseph Nehama⁸ and the *Memoirs* of Yomtov Yacoel, the Jewish Community’s legal advisor and one of its leaders during this period.⁹ Both works contain a lot of eye-witness testimony and are significantly deprived of much hindsight, as they were published very close to the actual events.

Salonika and Greece, Tel Aviv University, 1999) and Irith Dublon-Knebel, ed., *German Foreign Office Documents on the Holocaust in Greece (1937–1944)* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 2007).

⁷ See for example, Rika Benveniste, “The historiography on the Holocaust in Greece: a survey,” (Greek) *Synchrona Themata*, Issue 76–77 (January–July 2001), pp. 104–109, Rika Benveniste, “The coming out of Jewish History in Greece,” published online at Atelier international de recherche sur les usages publics du passé, January 27, 2001, Anthony Molho, “Introduction,” *Jewish History*, Special issue on Salonica’s Jews, Volume 28, Issue 3–4 (December 2014), pp. 249–259, Rena Molho, “Survey of recent historiography on the Holocaust of the Jews of Greece,” *The Holocaust of the Greek Jews* (Greek) (Athens: Pataki), pp. 25–48 and Odette Varon-Vassard, “The Genocide of Greek Jews (1943–1944) and its depictions: testimonies, literature and historiography,” *The Emergence of a Difficult Memory: Essays on the Jewish Genocide* (Greek) (Athens: Vivliopolion tis Estias, 2008), pp. 157–197.

⁸ Michael Molho and Joseph Nehama, *In Memoriam: Dedication to the memory of the Jewish victims of Nazism in Greece* (Greek) (Thessaloniki: Jewish Community of Thessaloniki, 1974). The book was first published in French as Michael Molho and Joseph Nehama, *In memoriam: hommage aux victimes juives des Nazis en Grèce* (Thessaloniki, 1948–1953).

⁹ Yomtov Yacoel, *Memoirs 1941–1943* (Greek) (Thessaloniki: Paratiritis, 1993), p. 88. Yacoel’s diary is also available in English in Steven Bowman, ed., *The Holocaust in Salonika: Eyewitness Accounts* (New York: Bloch, 2002), pp. 25–122. As the Community’s legal counsel, Yacoel played a central role in daily events, and his diary is an invaluable record of the period in question.

Publications of works related to the Holocaust in Greece started with a significant delay. “If Holocaust memory made it into the Western cultural mainstream in the early 1980’s, in Greece it had to wait until the early to mid-90s in order to pass the threshold into historiography and mainstream publishing.”¹⁰ According to historian Odette Varon-Vassard, “one has to view this ten to fifteen-year delay within the context of Greek post-war history and its particularities. [...] Greek [World War Two] collaborationism began to be researched and openly discussed only in 2000. The story of the Greek Jews was in a sense the fourth silence to be broken, as Greece had to deal with its deepest wounds first.”¹¹

Due to the late start and certain language and cultural barriers, the bibliography on the Holocaust in Thessaloniki lacks great detail and depth on the range of the different characters involved. Thus, the issue of elites and bystanders only started to be researched quite recently. Andrew Apostolou first looked into the local actors, in particular the press and the provincial administration.¹² Others, such as Mark Mazower,¹³ Stratos Dordanas,¹⁴ Giorgos Margaritis¹⁵ and Vassilis Ritzaleos¹⁶ followed, looking at several institutions, ranging from the Church, the local administration to the professional associations.

This dissertation aims to build upon the work of previous scholars and enrich the field with new sources, research questions and interpretations.

¹⁰ Evangelia Avloniti, “The Holocaust and the Story of Greek Jews in Publishing,” *Publishing Perspectives*, June 12, 2015, available at <http://publishingperspectives.com/2015/06/the-holocaust-and-the-story-of-greek-jews-in-publishing>.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Andrew Apostolou, “‘The Exception of Salonika’: Bystanders and Collaborators in Northern Greece,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, V14 N2 (Fall 2000), pp. 165–196.

¹³ Mark Mazower, *Salonica City of Ghosts: Christians, Muslims and Jews, 1430–1950* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005).

¹⁴ See for example Stratos Dordanas, “Extermination and plunder: Agency for the Custody of Jewish Properties,” in Giorgos Antoniou, Stratos Dordanas, Nikos Zaikos, Nikos Marantzidis, eds., *The Holocaust in the Balkans* (Greek) (Thessaloniki: Epikentro, 2011), pp. 331–352.

¹⁵ Giorgos Margaritis, *Unwanted Compatriots: Data on the Destruction of the Minorities of Greece: Jews and Chams* (Greek) (Athens: Bibliorama, 2005).

¹⁶ Vassilis Ritzaleos, “The Greek Orthodox Church of Thessaloniki and the Holocaust,” in Giorgos Antoniou, Stratos Dordanas, Nikos Zaikos, Nikos Marantzidis, eds., *The Holocaust in the Balkans* (Greek) (Thessaloniki: Epikentro, 2011), pp. 295–330.

SUBCHAPTER II: Historical Overview: From the Millet to the Second World War

1. The Millet System and the Integration of Thessaloniki into the Greek State

This study proposes a new interpretive scheme on the Holocaust in Thessaloniki. The special conditions of the German occupation—the separate administrative regions, the hunger and terror of the civilian population, and the targeting and isolation of the Jewish community—brought back the *millet* system of the Ottoman Empire to the city’s routine. Under this system, which was solidified in the mid nineteenth century during the Tanzimat reforms, each confessional community (Muslims, Christians or Jews) had certain self-rule.¹⁷ This was the *modus vivendi* for hundreds of years in the city and the whole empire. Even after the Greek army entered Thessaloniki, in 1912, some thirty years before the arrival of the German army into Greece, the spirit of millet remained alive and it persisted throughout the interwar period.

The Greek Orthodox Community of Thessaloniki was the only institution in charge of the local issues of the Christians in the city during the late Ottoman Empire, like the Jewish or Muslim one for the rest of the citizens. The leader of each millet was the intermediary between the Ottoman authorities and its subjects. In the last phase of the Ottoman Empire, right before the city became part of the Greek nation state, the Community was headed by prominent lawyers, doctors and merchants, under the spiritual guidance of the Metropolitan. These elders were part of structures with judicial and executive powers, which regulated education, tax-collection, social policy and even the defense of national aspirations. Many of the community leaders participated in the Macedonian Struggle, the effort to win over the population of Macedonia for the Greek side against Bulgaria during 1904-1908, and continued to play important roles in the decades that followed 1912, even though most of the civil servants had come from “Old Greece.”¹⁸

¹⁷ For information about how the Jewish Community of Thessaloniki was organized during this period, see Devin Naar, “The ‘Mother of Israel’ or the ‘Sephardi Metropolis’? Sephardim, Ashkenazim, and Romaniotes in Salonica,” *Jewish Social Studies*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (Fall 2016), pp. 86–88.

¹⁸ Evangelhos Hekimoglou, *Nikolaos Manos and the Interwar period in Thessaloniki* (Greek) (Thessaloniki: Society for Macedonian Studies and University Studio Press, 2010), pp. 54–62.

The Greek Church, “which has always had an active presence in all the aspects of the everyday life of the Greek people,” was headed by Bishop Gennadios, who was appointed to this position a few months before the entry of the Greek army in Thessaloniki in 1912. Prior to that, Gennadios had served for eight years (1897-1905) as secretary of the Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Constantinople, becoming exposed to the Ottoman structures. Gennadios, apart from his church duties, was also president of the city’s Greek-Orthodox Community, having important political responsibilities.¹⁹ This important role played by Gennadios and the other Greek notables, although not any more institutionalized, remained as an unofficial practice in the life of the city in the interwar period. In the years of the German occupation, some of the leaders of the Greek Community were still alive and active in the city’s affairs.²⁰

The perception of “Greekness” is closely related to the tradition of the Greek-Orthodox millet, which uses religion as its basis. Indeed,

The notion that there was continuity in the Greek *genos* (race/descent) and that this was transmitted via religion was one of the building blocks of Greek citizenship ever since the inception of the Greek Kingdom. [...] The ethnic/national homogeneity of Greece is built upon the elements of religion (Greek-Orthodox), language (Greek), national consciousness, and an ambiguous conceptualisation of ‘Greek descent’ which gives rise to a division among Greek citizens, as well as among aliens on grounds of descent. Thus there are the *omogeneis* (of Greek descent) and *allogeneis* (of non-Greek descent).²¹

The expansion of the Greek state to the north in the 20th century brought within the national union significant Jewish and Muslim populations. Although they became Greek

¹⁹ Dionisios Valais, “The Activities of Bishop Gennadios Alexiadis during the First Year of the Liberation of Thessaloniki from the Ottoman Occupation” (Greek) *Synthesis*, Issue 2 (2012), pp. 34–36.

²⁰ For example, see the cases of Nikolaos Manos and Dimitrios Dingas. For Manos, Hekimoglou, *Manos*. For Dingas, Giorgos Anastasiadis and Evangelhos Hekimoglou, *Dimitrios G. Dingas (1876–1974): The life and work of the first Macedonian minister* (Greek) (Thessaloniki: University Studio Press, 2002).

²¹ Konstantinos Tsitselikis, “Aspects of Legal Communitarianism in Greece: Between *Millet* and Citizenship,” *Oñati Socio-legal Series* [online], 2 (7), (2012), p. 110, available at https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2050345.

citizens, the old Ottoman traditions as well as concepts of belonging to the Greek nation endured and became an angle through which the Greek state dealt with these populations. It is argued that in the independent Greek state, “the survival of elements of the Ottoman millet system turn[ed] religious divisions into political and legal categories.”²²

As far as the Greek state’s dealings with its minorities is concerned, it consists of a unique combination of “pre-modern legal definitions based on religion” together with modern notions of citizenship.²³ Religion became thus the lens through which the Greek state approached its minority populations, creating new millet-style structures for the Muslim Community and abolishing Christian Orthodox Communities, with the Orthodox Christian Community of Thessaloniki only officially dismantled in April 1921. “Only the structure of the Jewish Community survived the transition from Ottoman to Greek rule largely intact.”²⁴

2. The Interwar Period

The events that unfolded during the thirty years between the entry of the Greek army in Thessaloniki in 1912 until the Second World War may help cast a light on what followed. A combination of different factors, “[d]isputes over language instruction, the harmonization of the calendar and holidays, the status of educational institutions, religious freedom, communal self-determination,”²⁵ had created a rift between the Greek and Jewish populations of the city and many of these controversies were heatedly debated in the city’s press. These policies, aimed at strengthening the “Greek character” of the city and assimilating the Jewish population, were combined with “antisemitic clichés intersected with nationalist insecurities about the ‘Greek’ character of Macedonia (and Salonica in particular) and suspicions about the designs of neighboring countries, as well as with the anticommunist sentiment that predominated in the aftermath of the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution.”²⁶

The changes in nationalities, religions and classes created a new reality for Thessaloniki. “Mid-war Thessaloniki was not a linear decedent of the Ottoman *Selanik*, but

²² Ibid, p. 109.

²³ Ibid., p. 109.

²⁴ Naar, *Jewish Salonica*, pp. 50–51.

²⁵ Aristotle A. Kallis, “The Jewish Community of Salonica under Siege: The Antisemitic Violence of the Summer of 1931,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, Volume 20, Issue 1 (Spring 2006), p. 41.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 44.

another, very different city.”²⁷ To the contrary, efforts were made to create a continuity with its Roman and Byzantine past.²⁸ The city was in transition, the whole population in a period of great adjustments. And yet, the millet structure was able to survive among the local population and its leaders, until the eve of the Second World War. All the factors, which we will briefly discuss below, had “placed the Jewish community of Salonica increasingly in a state of siege during the period 1925–35.”²⁹

a) *Demographic/urban changes*

During the interwar period, the city saw developments that altered not only the ethnic composition and social fabric of the city, but also its look and functionality as an urban center. The first ten years of Greek rule over Thessaloniki and Macedonia saw a big change in the population mix of the region. After the Balkan wars, large number of Slavic populations left the region.³⁰ The Greek-Turkish war of 1922 was followed by the exchange of populations, based on religious grounds. This measure saw approximately two million people being forcibly displaced, around 1.3 million Greek Orthodox Christians from Turkey and 500,000 Muslims from Greece.³¹

Many of these new Greek citizens were installed in the “New lands,” the newly acquired territories in the north where the Greek population was deemed to require strengthening. Some 163,000 Anatolian Greek refugees settled in Thessaloniki, making

²⁷ Evangelos Hekimoglou, “Destruction and Reconstruction of the Class Structure in Thessaloniki (1912–1940),” in Dimitris Kairidis, ed., *Thessaloniki: A City in Transition, 1912–2012* (Greek) (Thessaloniki: Epikentro, 2015), p. 296.

²⁸ Katerina Lagos, “Forced Assimilation or Emigration: Sephardic Jewry in Thessaloniki, 1917 – 1941,” *Journal of Modern Hellenism*, Issue 31 (2015), p. 63.

²⁹ Kallis, “The Jewish Community of Salonica under Siege,” p. 36.

³⁰ Iakovos Michailidis, “From Christians to Members of an Ethnic Community: Creating Borders in the City of Thessaloniki (1800–1912),” in Lud’ a Klusáková and Laure Teulières, eds., *Frontiers and identities: cities in regions and nations* (Pisa: Plus-Pisa University Press, 2008), pp. 169–180. See also therein how the rise of national liberation movements in the Balkans in the end of the 19th century lead to a split into the Orthodox millet into Greeks and Bulgarians.

³¹ Martin Baldwin-Edwards, “Migration between Greece and Turkey: from the “Exchange of Populations” to non-recognition of borders,” *South East Europe Review*, Issue 3 (2006).

Greeks the ethnic majority in the city.³² By the end of 1920s, the only significant minority population in the region were the Jews, primarily those located in the regional capital of Thessaloniki. By 1941, out of 250,000 citizens, only 50,000 were Jews, the rest being Greek Orthodox Christians.

The Big Fire of 1917, which burned most of the historic center, also marked irreversibly the city's character. The largest area that was burned was part of the Jewish quarter and the great majority of those left homeless were Jews. Apart from the great struggle to rehabilitate all these people, another challenge for the city's Jews were the designs of the Athens government for the rebuilding of the area, which were seen by many as containing an antisemitic agenda.³³ The Jews would lose their prominent role in the city center and the ethnic geography of the city would be reshuffled. In the same spirit, the vast area of the Jewish cemetery, once outside the city walls but by now inhibiting the city's growth, was put in the target of the new urban planning.

The fluidity of borders, populations and economic realities, as well as the big fire of 1917 saw many changes in the established elites of Thessaloniki. The traditional elites, capitalists and bureaucrats, were replaced or relocated to Athens and other European cities. The urban middle class was destroyed and in turn massive pauperization occurred. Former large land owners were replaced by small ones.³⁴

As these changes were occurring in the old class structures of Thessaloniki, new populations took some new roles.

Businessmen from Southern Greece and the Ottoman territories and Greek bureaucrats established themselves in Thessaloniki and replaced the older dominant classes. Of course some of the old industrialists and merchants kept their position. But no more than ten out of the sixty richest Thessalonians continued to live in Thessaloniki in the 1920s. New middle classes and a stratum of paupers made their appearance in the new slums around the city.³⁵

³² Lagos, "Forced Assimilation," p. 70.

³³ Molho, *The Jews of Thessaloniki*, pp. 120–130.

³⁴ Hekimoglou, "Destruction and Reconstruction," pp. 286–290.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 290.

This change in the elites, between native and new-comers, is also evident in the ownership of Thessaloniki's 146 share-holding companies during the interwar period:

Only 21 out of the 146 companies were owned by "native" families, in the sense that they used to live in Thessaloniki in the 19th century. Seven out of these 21 families were Christian, one was Muslim (Christianised) and the rest 13 were Jewish. That means that capital accumulation was linked with the establishment of newcomers rather than with the "natural" development of the "native" capital. Indeed, more than half of the factories' owners came from the Macedonian interior and 30 per cent from Asia Minor, Thrace and Eastern Rumelia.³⁶

b) Hellenization/integration

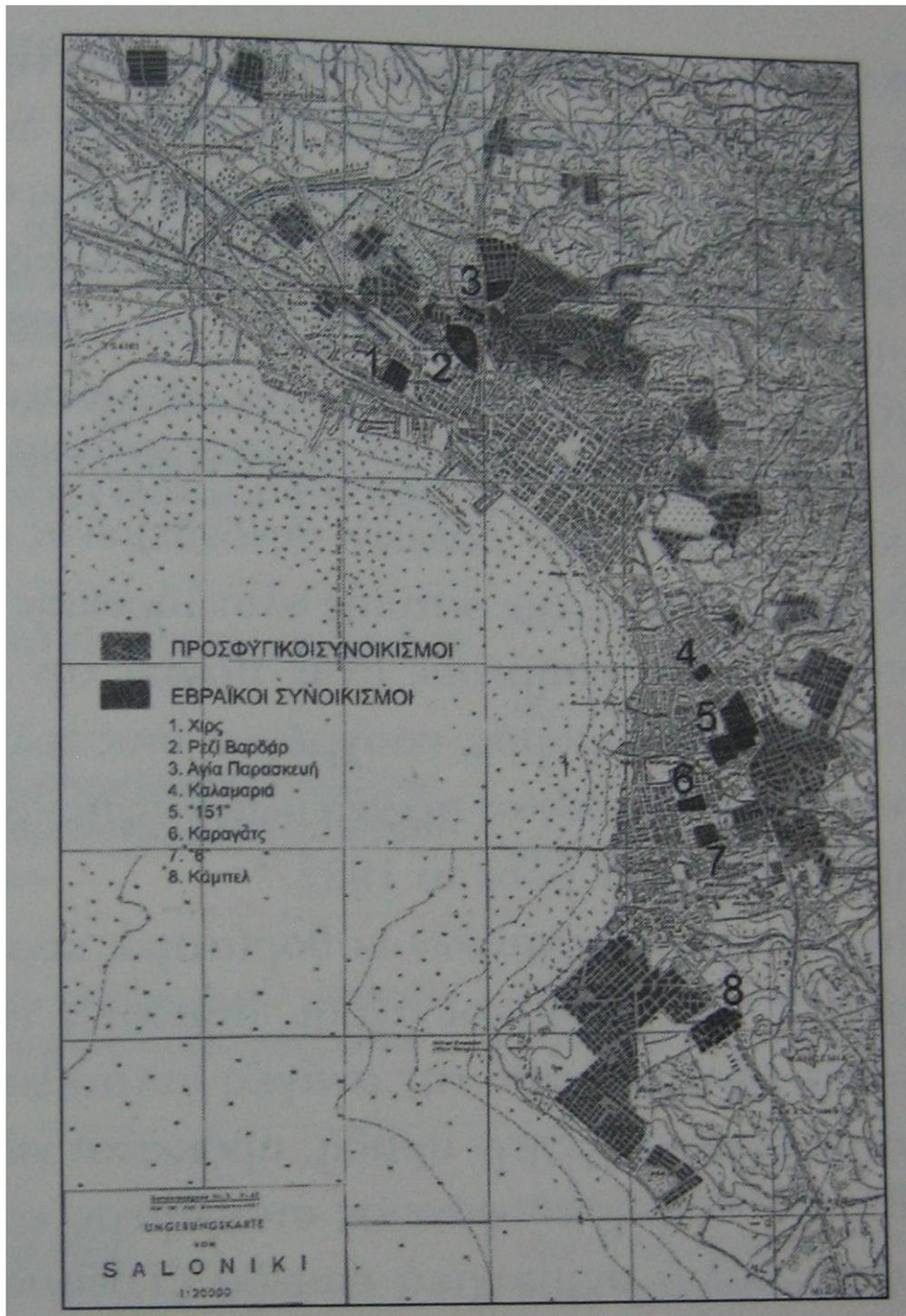
The Jews of Thessaloniki became overnight from citizens of an empire to citizens of a nation state. Most of them did not identify with the Greek Christian Orthodox nation and had trouble integrating. The Athens government tried to assimilate this population through education, but also through measures that would change their everyday lives, such as conscription to the army, mandating by law that Sunday should be an official day of rest (which meant that the city's Jews could no longer observe the religious holiday of *Sabbath*), adopting the Greek language in their businesses, etc.

Many efforts were made to insert the teaching of Greek into the curriculum of all Jewish schools. The new national language replaced much of the teaching in French or in Hebrew, as well as sidelined the traditional idiom Judeo-Spanish which was still spoken at home. Yet, only a small part of the young generation was able to learn the new language with adequate fluency on the eve of World War Two.³⁷

³⁶ Ibid., pp. 291–292.

³⁷ See Naar, *Jewish Salonica*, Chapter III: "More Sacred than Synagogue: the School," pp. 140–188.

Map II: The Jewish and Refugee neighborhoods in Thessaloniki, 1930



The map indicates in the lighter color the refugee neighborhoods and in darker colors and number the Jewish neighborhoods. The neighborhoods in the city center were mixed. Source: Historical Center of Refugee Hellenism, Municipality of Kalamaria, *The transformation of Thessaloniki: The settlement of the refugees in the city (1920 - 1940)* (Greek) (Thessaloniki: Epikentro, 2010), p. 53 (Archive of Vilma Hastaoglou).

c) *Rise of nationalism/antisemitism*

The Greek refugees who came from Anatolia, although not familiar with the particular structures of Thessaloniki and its methods of intercommunal coexistence, nevertheless were aware of the organizational system of the millet, as former Ottoman subjects themselves. The prevailing of the Jews in many aspects of the city's economy created an economic competition between the refugees and the city's Jews. They were also introduced to a new version of post-1922 Greek nationalism, spearheaded by Greek Prime Minister Venizelos, whose party and policies represented the main political expression for the refugees. Its elements included a "vision of a homogeneous, internally unified, territorially conscious, and regenerated Greek nation."³⁸

The war of 1922 and the collapse of *Megali Idea*,³⁹ had made Thessaloniki "a battleground for the reconfiguration of Greek national identity."⁴⁰ As Aristotle Kallis remarked, "In Greece, the nationalist movement was marked not just by the pursuit of ethnic homogeneity and cultural assimilation, but also by an idiosyncratic siege mentality vis-à-vis minority groups inside state territory and the country's still-covetous Balkan neighbors."⁴¹

These developments, occurring during a brief time period and in close sequence to one another, had also an impact on inter-communal relations. A competition grew between the Greek population and the Jewish community, which was seen as being insufficiently Greek and unwilling to assimilate into the new nation state. Right-wing groups were formed with antisemitic agendas that fueled these tensions, with the help of local newspapers and other instigators. Such was the case of Triple Epsilon (EEE, National Union of Greece), comprised mostly by Anatolian refugees. The climax in intercommunity hostility and EEE's most notorious act was the burning of the Jewish neighborhood of Campbell on June 29, 1931, which has also been dubbed by some as a "pogrom."⁴²

³⁸ Kallis, "The Jewish Community of Salonica under Siege," p. 38.

³⁹ Translated as the "Big Idea," the Greek nationalistic vision of claiming back territories of the Byzantine Empire, thus creating *Megali Ellada*, "Great Greece."

⁴⁰ Kallis, "The Jewish Community of Salonica under Siege," p. 34.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

⁴² For the EEE and their involvement in the Campbell riots, see Pierron, *Jews and Christians*, pp. 203–234; Maria Vassilikou, "Ethnic Opposition in Greece of the Interwar Period: The Case of the Campbell Arson," (Greek) *Istor*, Issue 7, December 1994, pp. 153–174; and Kallis, "The Jewish Community of Salonica under Siege," pp. 34–56. For the lack of condemnation by the Greek Church, see Sotirios Terzis, *Watching the trains*

A response by elements of the Jewish community was the Zionist movement, a form of Jewish nationalism that called for the creation of a Jewish homeland in the biblical territory of Palestine. Many Jews adhered to the cause which caused frictions with the other two camps, the assimilationists and the communists. The community was divided among those three groups, which competed with each other for influence and support.

Another issue that troubled Christian-Jewish relations during most of the inter-war period is that of the separate electoral colleges for Christians and Jews. In the 1923 elections, the Jews of Thessaloniki had to vote their own candidates, separate from the rest of the electorate. This measure, which was only cancelled in 1934, went through different phases and also included the rearrangement of the election precincts so that the Jews voted all together in certain stations exclusively reserved for them.⁴³ The expressed reason was that this move would guarantee the parliamentary representation of the Jews. However, the real reason was that the Jews, due to the numbers, were seen as influencing the outcome of the general election, especially as they opted for anti-Venizelist parties. The government thus chose to limit their perceived impact.⁴⁴

This clearly discriminatory measure which legally separated citizens based on their religious beliefs was amplified by harsh attacks by certain prominent Greek politicians, coupled with an antisemitic campaign of particular newspapers with links to extremist groups. While a complete discussion of this issue goes beyond the purview of this thesis, its important manifestations will be addressed in brief below.

The measure to separate the Christian and Jewish voters created the image of the Jew as a traitor for the nation, who lacked patriotism, creating suspicion between the two

of the Final Solution: The Jews of Thessaloniki and Metropolitan Gennadios Alexiadis (Greek) (Thessaloniki: Barbounakis, 2017), pp. 103-113. For some alternative versions on the reasons for the riots, see Hekimoglou, "Destruction and Reconstruction," pp. 297–298 (as an attack against the city's poor) and Devin Naar, "The Boundaries of Hellenism: Language and Loyalty among Salonican Jewry, 1917–1933," (Greek) in Dimitris Kairidis, ed., *Thessaloniki: A City in Transition, 1912–2012* (Greek) (Thessaloniki: Epikentro, 2015), p. 217 (as a reaction to the unexpected integration of the Jews).

⁴³ The narration of the issue of the separate electoral college comes from Pierron, *Jews and Christians*, pp. 162–176 and Leon Nar, *The Jewish Members in the Greek Parliament (1915–1936)* (Greek) (Athens: Greek Parliament Foundation for Parliamentarianism and Democracy, 2011), where also one could find a lot more information on the issue.

⁴⁴ These allegations have since proven false. See Apostolou, "Exception," p. 171 and footnote 40.

populations and enabling tension and discrimination.⁴⁵ It also revealed an undercurrent antisemitism in a sector of the Greek political body. Prime Minister Venizelos openly criticized the Jews of Thessaloniki in Parliament for not wanting to integrate and learn Greek, justifying the need for the separation.⁴⁶ Several heated debates took place in Parliament over the years, providing political cover for voices such as Thessaloniki newspaper *Makedonia*, which had also instigated the Campbell riots. In addition, groups like EEE were fed by these headlines, which aggravated inter-communal tensions even further. Politicians would intervene to calm the situation only when political confrontation between the two communities had reached very tense levels.

Following the elections of March 1933, an appeal to the Election Court by anti-Venizelist parties found that the separate electoral college was unconstitutional and cancelled the elections in Thessaloniki.⁴⁷ *Makedonia* responded with headlines such as “Israelites, you want war? You will have it!”⁴⁸ After his electoral defeat, Venizelos described the stance of the Jews as “a hostile act against half of the Greeks,” while directly blaming the Jews for the collapse of the *Megali Ellas* [Great Greece], due to their vote in the 1920 elections.⁴⁹

The measure was finally cancelled after ten years in existence. Venizelos reacted vehemently against the repeal repeating the false argument that the Jews with their vote negatively influenced the election results.⁵⁰ However, this decade poisoned Christian-Jewish relations and fueled antisemitic accusations against the Jews of Thessaloniki. It also served as an official, government-sponsored barrier between the two communities, which reminded the Jews, every time there was an election, that they were not fully equal citizens within the Greek state.

⁴⁵ Pierron, *Jews and Christians*, pp. 163–165.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 168–169.

⁴⁷ Nar, *Jewish Members*, p. 127.

⁴⁸ Pierron, *Jews and Christians*, pp. 172–173.

⁴⁹ Nar, *Jewish Members*, p. 128.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 130.

d) Economic decline

All these events in the political and societal front, also impacted the economic one. The Jews were traditionally business oriented, with the middle class working in the commerce sectors and the lower class in production of tobacco, textiles, or as port stevedores.

Thessaloniki was transformed from a big port of an empire with strategic depth, to one of the second largest city of a smaller nation, thus losing a lot of its commercial and competitive edge. The Greek state wanted to undermine the monopoly of the Jews in sectors of the economy and encouraged Greek businesses. The economic crash of 1929 did not help things and neither did the rising social tensions. Business activities were severely curtailed, something that touched big parts of the Jewish community.

.....

As it is becoming clear from this brief historic overview of the interwar period, the consequences of wars, economic crises, the rise of nationalism and efforts by the government to “Hellenize” these new lands created conflict between the local Christians and Jews. Due to this upheaval, economic struggle and rise of antisemitism, many Jews of Salonika chose to migrate from their native lands and go to Palestine, France or elsewhere all around the globe.

We also saw how the legal system and government policies maintained the divisions on the basis of religion which were a left-over from the Ottoman period. This legacy of the millet was linked to the incorporation of the new lands to the Greek state. The transition from the empire to the nation state required national consolidation which created a strong sense of Greek nationalism. This had a strong religious component, as the Greek Orthodox Church is closely linked to the sense of Greekness. Nevertheless, it was also the communities themselves that preferred to live as an autonomous group. The Jewish Community of Thessaloniki tried hard to maintain these privileges, which were now accepted by law by the Greek state. Devin Naar described its role and reach of activities “like a municipality and a state.”⁵¹

During the interwar period, the Jewish community was in a balancing position. On the one hand, Thessaloniki’s Jews had to accept the new realities and become citizens of a nation state, instead of an empire. The Greek government sought to take away the primary role Jews

⁵¹ See Naar, *Jewish Salonica*, Chapter I: “Like a Municipality and a State: The Community,” pp. 37–88.

played in the economy of the city. They were seen as “not sufficiently patriotic,” leaving them only with two viable choices: assimilation or emigration.⁵² Among the measures it took was to institute Sunday as an official day of rest, in contrast to the Jewish *Sabbath* that was the norm till then, and to push for the linguistic assimilation of the Jews through education.⁵³

Albeit the problems, several young Jews started learning and speaking Greek.⁵⁴ There was a movement within the Jewish community to willfully undergo the process of Hellenization. By the mid-1930s, “the sources of communal tension were fading.”⁵⁵ This was enhanced during the period of the Metaxas dictatorship (1936-1941), which paradoxically created quite a hospitable situation for Thessaloniki’s Jews. Ioannis Metaxas was a Greek general who was named Prime Minister in April 1936 and, four months later, became a dictator suspending Parliament and certain articles of the Constitution guaranteeing civil liberties. His regime lasted until his death, during the Greek-Italian War and few months before Greece’s capitulation to the Nazis. Metaxas copied many of the elements of Mussolini’s fascism, with strong corporatist, anti-Communist and rightist characteristics. Yet he did not express any hostility to the country’s Jews. To the contrary, Metaxas banned certain antisemitic organizations that had troubled the Jewish community in the years’ prior—such as the EEE—earning the respect and admiration of the Jews.⁵⁶

Through this lens, one should consider the case of the large numbers of Greek Jews, especially those of Thessaloniki, who enlisted and fought courageously during the Greek-Italian war of 1940-41, the first episode of the Second World War in Greece. This could signify the progress of integration, as 165 Jews who lived in Thessaloniki died fighting

⁵² Lagos, “Forced Assimilation,” p. 65.

⁵³ For more details, Lagos, *Ibid.*, pp. 69–78 and Pierron, *Jews and Greeks*, part II, “1912–1940: A New Era.”

⁵⁴ According to some scholars, the many Thessaloniki Jews were more keen to be integrated and played an active role in “shap[ing] the boundaries of the Hellenic collectivity and the very meaning of being ‘Greek.’” For more of the issues of education and language of the Jews in the interwar period, see Naar, *Boundaries*, pp. 205–219, Eyal Ginio, “‘Learning the Beautiful Language of Homer:’ Judeo-Spanish Speaking Jews and the Greek Language and Culture between the Wars,” *Jewish History*, Volume 16, Issue 3 (October 2002), pp. 235–262.

⁵⁵ Mazower, *Salonica*, p. 391. For a perspective on the inner politics of the Jewish Community at the time, which was divided into Assimilationists, Zionists and Socialists, see Minna Rozen, “The Jewish Community of Salonika, 1912–1941: Organizational Patterns,” in Friends of the Thessaloniki History Center, *Archive Analects* (Greek) (Thessaloniki: 2016), pp. 307–367.

⁵⁶ For more on Metaxas’ relations with the Jewish community, see Katerina Lagos, “The Metaxas Dictatorship and Greek Jewry, 1936–1941,” *Journal for Modern Hellenism*, vol. 23–24 (2006–2007), pp. 45–80.

during the war, out of 658 total deaths in the city, or twenty-five percent, more or less their share in the population.⁵⁷

However, these positive developments did not finally solidify the links between the two communities, in creating the bonds of citizenship and a common sense of belonging and brotherhood. This short-lived success in the battlefield was shadowed by the arrival of Italy's stronger ally, Nazi Germany, who in a couple of weeks was able to occupy the Greek territory, with Thessaloniki falling in April 1941.

3. Three Periods of the Holocaust in Thessaloniki

One can distinguish three periods in the measures against the Jews in German-occupied Thessaloniki. The first period starts in April 1941, when the Germans entered in Thessaloniki, until July 1942. During this period, there were no systematic antisemitic measures. Some Jewish leaders were put in jail,⁵⁸ the Jewish archives and libraries were confiscated (by the Special *Kommando* [Detachment] Rosenberg to be discussed below), some Jewish merchants were robbed, and yet these actions did not have a mass character and most of the people went on with their lives. Particular categories of both Jews and non-Jews were targeted, so these measures were not seen as exclusively and uniformly anti-Jewish.

In contrast, in Serbia, which was occupied only a week before Thessaloniki, by May 1942 all of its Jews were killed.⁵⁹ Even more so, in a report of August 1942, the German consul in Thessaloniki, Fritz Schönberg, complained that the Jews of the city “have remained untouched in their stores and still exert the same influence on the financial life of Greece to this day. It is amazing that even today the Jews of Salonika hold the lion's share of the import of German goods.” He attached two lists of twelve pages total with the German companies

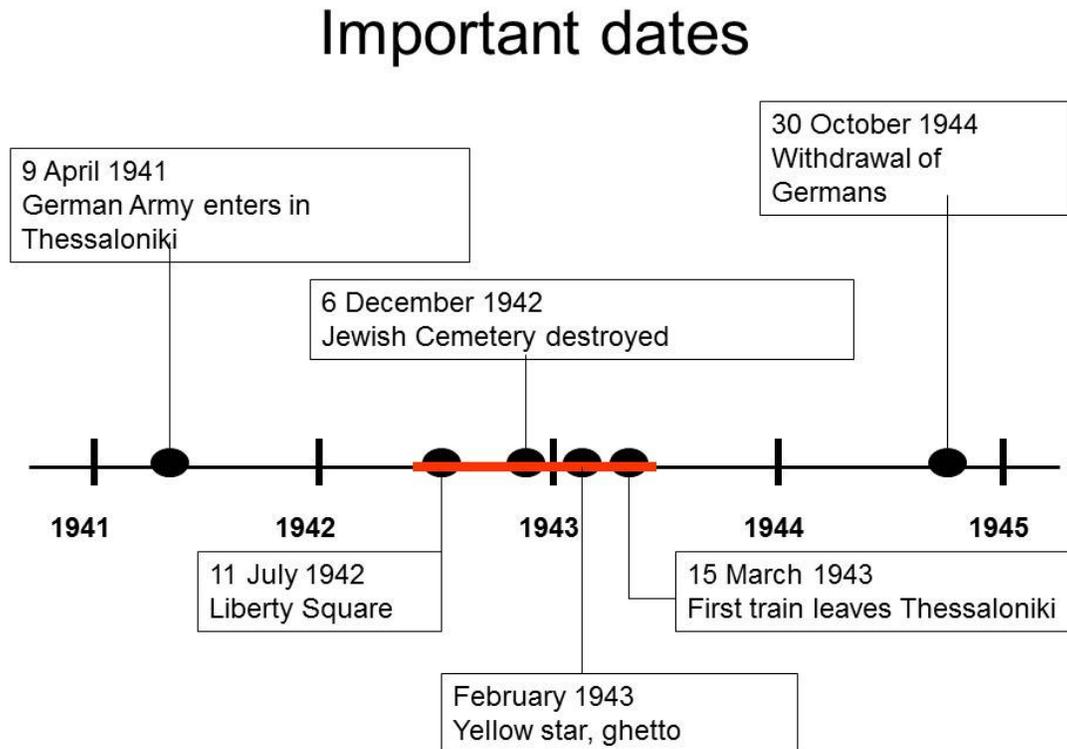
⁵⁷ Maria Kavala, “Thessaloniki during the German Occupation (1941–1944): society, economy, persecution of Jews,” (Greek) Ph.D. thesis, University of Crete, Rethymno, 2009, p. 119.

⁵⁸ For a rare testimony of this early imprisonment of both Jewish and Christian notables, see Achilleas Kalevras, *Hitler, the Crime and Germany: the Agony of the Time* (Greek) (Thessaloniki 1960).

⁵⁹ For a discussion, see Manfred Messerschmidt, “The Final Solution in South-East Europe – Enforcement and Obstruction,” in *Macedonia and Thrace, 1941–1944: Occupation-Resistance-Liberation, International Conference Proceedings* (Thessaloniki: Institute for Balkan Studies, 1998), pp. 211–220.

doing business with Jews in Thessaloniki.⁶⁰ Similarly, Greek antisemitic campaigner Laskaris Papanoum sent a strong letter to the German Consulate in Thessaloniki⁶¹ complaining, inter alia, that “the Jews in Salonika, as all of Greece, live like God in France,” a German expression meaning that they live extremely well.⁶²

Chart I: Timeline of Measures against Jews of Thessaloniki



(in red the main period of focus of this study)

⁶⁰ Report of German Consul in Thessaloniki to Ambassador in Athens, August 17, 1942, in Dublon-Knebel, *German Foreign Office Documents*, document T28, pp. 103–105. The two lists are reproduced in pp. 250–261.

⁶¹ Letter by Laskaris Papanoum to German Consulate in Thessaloniki, April 20, 1942, in *ibid*, document T21, pp. 94–96.

⁶² Papanoum sent another complaint letter to the editor-in-chief of the newspaper *Regime Fascista* in Bologna, on September 6, 1942. Joseph Rochlitz, *The Righteous Enemy, Document Collection* (Rome, 1988), pp. 176–179. The Italian Embassy in Athens decided to censure the letter. Letter from Italian Embassy in Rome to Foreign Ministry in Rome, October 15, 1942, in *ibid*, p. 175.

For different reasons, some of which we can only speculate, the Germans waited for a long time to implement the “Final Solution” in Thessaloniki.⁶³ The most plausible explanation for the delay is the German wish to apply uniformly the antisemitic measures to all Jews in the country. That required the cooperation of the Italians, who were not willing to lose the Jews who were seen as agents of Italian culture, especially in the newly acquired territories for which they had preponderance. When the Germans saw that the Italians were not willing to cooperate, they decided to proceed unilaterally with the deportation of the Jews in the territories they controlled.⁶⁴ The Italian non-cooperation continued, as the Italian consulate was authorized to issue certificates to Thessaloniki Jews of Italian ancestry, with “larghezza” (generosity), by the Foreign Ministry in Rome.⁶⁵

Another reason could be the fact that Jewish companies were still needed for the supply of the German forces and were representing German companies. The complaints of the German consul showed also the other side of the coin: that the contribution of the Jewish businessmen in the city’s economy was of primary importance and their possible removal would not only affect the local economy but also the war effort.⁶⁶ The Germans in Thessaloniki had to build their own networks of collaborators and supporters before they removed this important commercial element.

The second period began on July 11, 1942, with the gathering for forced labor of all male Jews in Liberty Square until the end of December 1942, with the destruction of the city’s Jewish cemetery. The destruction of the cemetery, together with a ransom of two billion drachmas, was part of the deal for the release of the Jewish laborers. This period is important because it was the first time that the Jewish measures were systematic and touched all the members of the Jewish community. Nevertheless, these events were not orchestrated

⁶³ For a presentation of different reasons, see Messerschmidt, “Final Solution in South-East Europe,” pp. 215–216.

⁶⁴ Dublon-Knebel, *German Foreign Office Documents*, p. 24. See also relevant documents in the volume.

⁶⁵ Carpi, *Italian Diplomatic Documents*, pp. 146–151. The confirmation of this policy was received on April 3, 1943.

⁶⁶ See for example letter from businessman Dario Israel to the Thessaloniki Chamber of Commerce, dated September 2, 1942, asking for the certification of an invoice for the “Special Service for Supplies of the Occupation Authorities.” Archive of Nestor Kavadas, Chamber of Commerce, document 25279 received September 3, 1942.

directly from Berlin and one could claim that they were more a response to long-standing local grievances rather than part of a plan from Adolf Eichmann's office.

Indeed, the delay in implementing the "Final Solution" in Thessaloniki could also be true in the second period. The measure of the gathering in Liberty Square for forced labor seems to have been the suggestion of Colonel Athanassios Chrysochoou, one of the major figures in the city's administration at the time.⁶⁷ He complained to the Germans that "the Jews—in contrast to the largest part of the population—are not obliged to carry out labor work or to provide contributions in kind."⁶⁸

At the same time, the Liberty Square events took place without direct instructions from Berlin. Friedrich Suhr, the legal advisor in Eichmann's office, who was probably not informed at the time of the events, reported them to the Jewish Affairs section of the Foreign Ministry only after several weeks, giving full credit for the action to the German Commander of Salonika-Aegean, mentioning the agreement of Minister Vassilios Simonidis,⁶⁹ the General Governor of Macedonia, the most senior Greek official in the region. Instead, on the same day, July 11, 1942, Suhr wrote a memo to the Foreign Ministry in Berlin calling for the need of "synchronization" of the marking of Jews and Jewish companies in Greece.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Colonel Athanassios Chrysochoou served as Chief of Staff of General Georgios Tsolakoglou, Commander of the Third Army Corps during the Greek-Italian War (1940–41) and later the first Quisling Prime Minister in Athens. Since the autumn of 1941, Chrysochoou served as Inspector General of Prefectures, having as his main task to monitor and counter "Bulgarian propaganda," which was aimed at gaining the allegiance of the Slavic-Macedonian population of the region.

⁶⁸ See relevant discussion in Chapter 2.

⁶⁹ Vassilios Simonidis (Serres 1899 – Athens 1960) studied Engineering and Agronomics. He received a PhD in Law from the University of Athens and went to Paris for further studies. He worked as a Division Director at the Ministry of Agriculture and as Director of the Autonomous Raisin Organization. In 1941 he became senior economic advisor to the General Governor of Macedonia with the rank of vice-minister. In end of November 1941, with the insistence of the Germans, Simonidis was appointed General Governor, with the rank of Minister, a post he held until the end of the war. Technically he was answerable to the Greek Prime Minister in Athens, but due to the distance and the fact that Thessaloniki was under German control, his real bosses were the Germans. His ideological leanings are unclear and many crucial details about him are still missing.

⁷⁰ The delay in implementation of anti-Jewish measures in Greece, and in Thessaloniki in particular, had caused problems for the Nazis on a practical level. For more, see Dublon-Knebel, *German Foreign Office Documents*, pp. 40–43.

In addition, the initiative for another key event of this period, that of the destruction of the old Jewish cemetery, also seems to have come from the local Greek population, based on a number of documents, references and testimonies. These two events clearly marked the actions and perceptions of the local Greek population and shaped its stance during the crucial third period.

According to the existing documentation, these two measures, the slave labor and the destruction of the cemetery, were not part of an organized antisemitic plan. The Nazis had no sympathy for the Jews and they responded favorably to any local triggers. They maintained control and directed the whole process. At the same time, it is also possible that the Germans saw some limited utility in exploiting Jewish labor for construction projects vital to their needs, although they were willing to reconsider when they realized the limited productive of these laborers.

The third period started in January 1943, with the preparatory visit of Rolf Gunther from Eichmann's office to Thessaloniki and Athens, followed by the arrival of SS officers Dieter Wisliceny and Alois Brunner in February 1943.⁷¹ This is when the implementation of the "Final Solution" in Thessaloniki commenced, which included harsh antisemitic measures such as ghettoization, yellow star, plunder of properties, and the deportations from March to August 1943. Eichmann's men were clearly in charge of this process and had the initiative. After this period, only a handful of Jews remained in the city, until the end of the war.

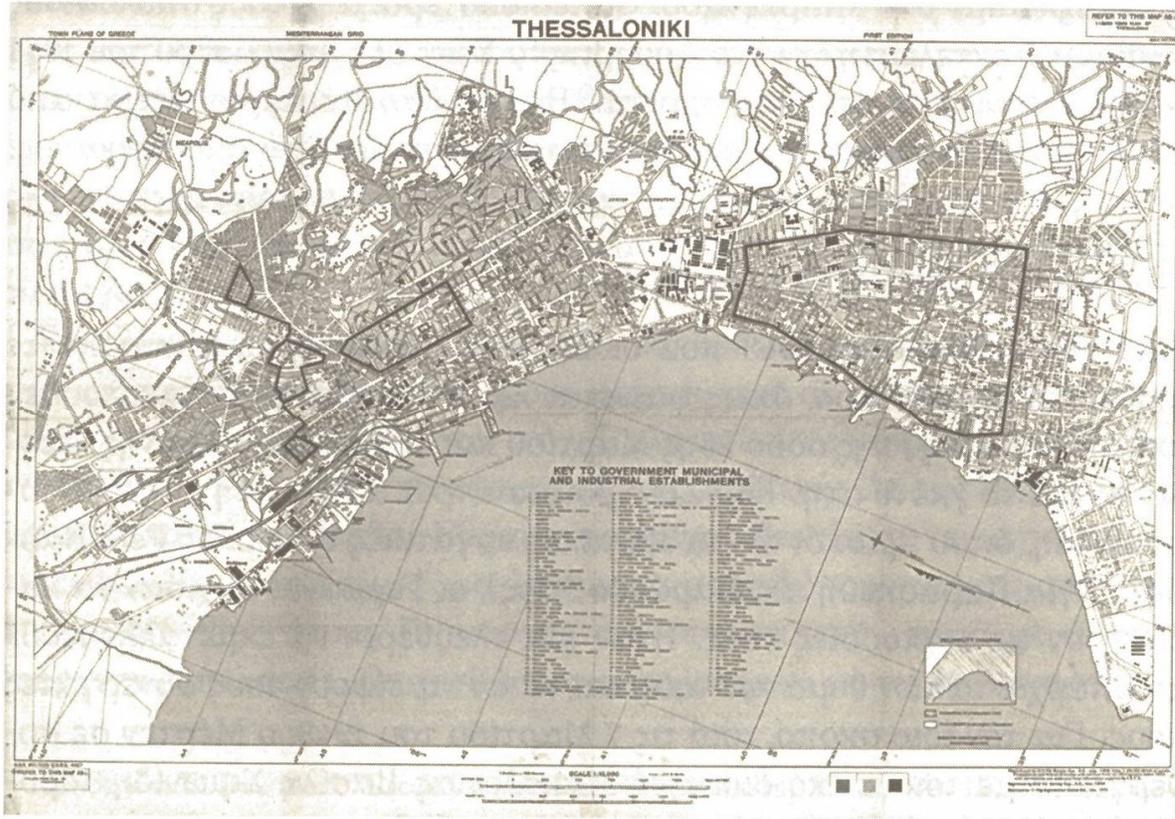
What is important to stress is that while the narration so far has been linear, these two last periods were not a natural continuation of one another. They did coincide time-wise but this was more of a coincidence rather than an organized plan. It is unclear whether the events of the second period triggered the developments that followed, possibly by bringing the issue of the Jews of Thessaloniki more forcefully to the attention of authorities in Berlin. But what is clear is the following: In the second period, the main initiators are the local Germans and the local Greek Christians against the local Jews, without any instructions or involvement from Berlin, whereas in the third period the targets remained the local Jews but with instructions directly from Berlin, and the participation of local Germans and local Greek Christians.

To provide more context of the events that are narrated in this study, it is important to keep in mind that deportation trains left Thessaloniki every three to five days, packed with

⁷¹ For a discussion about the choice of timing of the third period, see Terzis, *Watching*, pp. 171-172.

thousands of Jews. These Jews, trapped in ghettos, had to cross the whole city to get from the residencies to the transit camp of Baron Hirsch⁷² next to the train station. A chart is provided below with the best approximations as to the numbers.

Map III: The areas of the ghettos in Thessaloniki, 1943



Source: Rena Molho, *The Holocaust of the Greek Jews* (Greek) (Athens: Pataki), p. 70

The number of how many Jews were deported in each convoy are not exact. The two main sources, the Greek Railway Company and the Auschwitz camp, only provided estimates. Some of these trains included also the Jews outside of Thessaloniki, such as Veria

⁷² Baron Maurice von Hirsch, was a philanthropist and a big benefactor of the Jewish Community of Thessaloniki, together with his wife Clara. He built the neighborhood named after him behind the train station in order to house Jews who were fleeing the Russian pogroms during the 19th century and sought shelter in Thessaloniki. In the decades that followed, it housed poor Jewish families. Due to its location next to the train station, it was used as a transit camp, after its residents were deported in the first convoy.

and Florina, as well as the German occupation zone next to the border with Turkey, such as Orestiada, Didimotiho and Soufli, some 2,000 in total.

Table II: Deportation trains of Jews of Thessaloniki, 1943⁷³

Transport Number	Date of departure	Destination	Date of Arrival	Passengers (SEK)	Passengers (Auschwitz)
1	March 15	Auschwitz	March 20	2400	2800
2	March 17	Auschwitz	March 24	2500	2800
3	March 19	Auschwitz	March 25	2500	1901
4	March 23	Auschwitz	March 30	2800	2501
5	March 27	Auschwitz	April 3	2800	2800
6	April 3	Auschwitz	April 9	2800	2500
7	April 5	Auschwitz	April 10	2800	2750
8	April 7	Auschwitz	April 13	2800	2800
9	April 10	Auschwitz	April 17	2800	3000
10	April 13	Auschwitz	April 18	2800	2501
11	April 16	Auschwitz	April 22	2800	2800
12	April 20	Auschwitz	April 26	2800	2700
13	April 22	Auschwitz	April 28	2800	3070

⁷³ The information on the departures from Greece comes from a letter sent by the Greek Railway Company (SEK) to the Jewish Community of Thessaloniki on January 9, 1945. SEK called the numbers “rough” needing additional checking. On the arrivals to Auschwitz, the source is the records of the Auschwitz Museum as collected by Danuta Czech, *Auschwitz Chronicle 1939–1945* (London & New York: I. B. Tauris & Co Ltd Publishers, 1990). Czech also speaks of the numbers being estimates. These sources have been published in Hagen Fleischer, *Crown and Swastika: Greece during the Occupation and the Resistance 1941–1944* (Greek) (Athens: Papazisis, 1995), p. 344 and Georgios Handrinos, “The ‘Trains of Death’: From Thessaloniki to Auschwitz,” *Sidirotrohia*, Issue 43–44 (December 2013), pp. 18–32. The train to Bergen-Belsen carried 74 “privileged” Greek Jews and 367 Jews with Spanish citizenship. On July 15, 1943, a train carrying some 322 Jews of mostly Italian citizenship left Thessaloniki for Athens. On the same day, the couple of dozen Jews with other nationalities, such as Swiss, Turkish or Persian, were also repatriated. See Telegram of Italian Consulate in Thessaloniki to Italian Embassy in Athens and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Rome, July 15, 1943, in Carpi, *Italian Diplomatic Documents*, document 1943.102, pp. 256–269.

14	April 28	Auschwitz	May 4	2600	2930
15	May 3	Auschwitz	May 7/8	2600	1000+2500
16	May 9	Auschwitz	May 16	1500	4500
17	-	Auschwitz	June 8	-	880
18	August 2	Bergen Belsen	August 13	441	-
19	-	Auschwitz	August 18	-	1800

4. The Issue of Jewish Properties

An underlying issue across the examination period of this dissertation is that of the Jewish properties. Many of these elements will be discussed in the chapters that follow.

Jewish properties and assets were confiscated by the Germans from the early days of the German army's entry to Thessaloniki. The Germans took over Jewish assets that were deemed strategic such as movie theaters, paper supplies or apartments needed to house their officers. However, these measures were not seen as threatening by the Jewish community, as they were targeted, not life-threatening and in parallel to the hardships of the city's Greek population.⁷⁴

A rather unknown issue that relates to Jewish assets is that of the safe deposit boxes in the banks. Between May and November 1941, a special German unit called Special *Kommando* [Detachment] Rosenberg came to Thessaloniki and other Greek cities. Its experts plundered the archives of many institutions, including those of the Jewish Community, all synagogues and Jewish organizations, newspapers, bookstores as well as prominent intellectuals of the city. In addition, this group also opened to "systematically check" 2,300 Jewish safes in Greek banks. While no list with the contents of these deposit boxes was appended to the report, it is to be assumed that much of its valuable contents ended up as property of the Reich.⁷⁵

When the Jews were being forced into ghettos, a government body, the Agency for the Custody of Jewish Properties (YDIP), was established on March 7, 1943 by the Nazis in

⁷⁴ Stratos Dordanas, "Extermination and Plunder: Agency for the Custody of Jewish Properties," in Antoniou, Dordanas, Zaikos, and Marantzidis, eds., *The Holocaust in the Balkans*, pp. 332–333.

⁷⁵ Bundesarchiv Koblenz, NS 30/75, Final Report on the Activity of the Special Kommando Rosenberg in Greece, November 15, 1941, p. 22.

order to administer the properties, businesses, and homes that the Jews were leaving behind.⁷⁶ This agency acted under German supervision and in order to operate with a sense of legality branded Jewish properties as “enemy assets.”⁷⁷ One of its main purposes was to identify and appoint eligible “custodians,” on various grounds, to manage these assets.

This was not an easy task. There were over 2,300 stores and 12,000 apartments owned by Jews.⁷⁸ Many institutions petitioned YDIP with suggestions of people for the allocation, such as the General Governor, professional associations, the Church, etc. Many properties were also given to institutions such as the Municipality of Thessaloniki, the International Red Cross, professional associations, etc.⁷⁹ Nevertheless, the Germans tightly controlled the agency and often offered the lion’s share of the Jewish assets to people close to them, such as informants or agents,⁸⁰ making it “an extraordinary story of greed, coercion and fraud.”⁸¹ According to Stratos Dordanas, “a large number of Christian caretakers [were] appointed by the Germans to manage the Jewish owned commercial properties, which touched the very core of the Greek collaboration phenomenon.”⁸²

Several prominent individuals of the Thessaloniki society were involved in the allocation of the properties in different capacities. Mark Mazower observed that “German policy implicated much of the city’s business elite in the disposal of Jewish property and created a powerful incentive for them to work with Berlin.”⁸³ Later on, these custodians were allowed to sell the movable and immovable properties under their purview, bringing them a significant financial profit.⁸⁴

⁷⁶ For more on the structure and operation on YDIP, see Mark Mazower, “The Consequences of the Persecution of the Jews for the City of Thessaloniki,” in Rika Benveniste, ed., *The Jews of Greece during the Occupation* (Greek) (Thessaloniki: Vantias, 1998), pp. 53–61.

⁷⁷ Maria Kavala, “The Fate of the Jewish Population and the Jewish Properties during the German Occupation,” in *German Reparations: A Betrayed Case* (Greek), E Istorika, June 2010, p. 146.

⁷⁸ Dordanas, “Extermination,” p. 337.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 346.

⁸⁰ See Stratos Dordanas, *Greeks against Greeks* (Greek) (Thessaloniki: Epikentro, 2006), pp. 398–437.

⁸¹ Mazower, *Salonica*, p. 414.

⁸² Dordanas, “Extermination,” p. 331.

⁸³ Mazower, *Salonica*, p. 413.

⁸⁴ Katerina Kralova, “In the Shadow of the Nazi Past: Post-war Reconstruction and the Claims of the Jewish Community in Salonika,” *European History Quarterly* 46/2 (April 2016), pp. 265–266.

But the Germans and their collaborators failed to keep this process orderly. As the Jews were being deported, a “general and shameless pillaging took place.” People rushed into the vacated Jewish homes looting everything inside, even tearing down walls and ceilings looking for valuables. The most valuable assets, pianos, carpets, furniture, were stolen by the Germans themselves and much sent to Germany. YDIP needed twenty-seven warehouses to store what was left of the Jewish goods.⁸⁵

This plundering reached such an extent that even the materials of the buildings of the former Jewish neighborhoods, as well as the marbles and bricks of the destroyed Jewish cemetery, became objects of profit. Numerous advertisements that appeared in the city’s press touted the sale of wood, tiles, bricks, pipes, chimneys, doors, windows “of excellent quality.”⁸⁶ Consequently, it was not only the Jews that left Thessaloniki, but also any other proof of their material existence, even the building components of their homes.

SUBCHAPTER 3: Main Concepts: Elites, Bystanders and Bureaucracy

In the section below, we will describe the framework through which we analyze the reactions of the Greek society of Thessaloniki. In this study, a major focus will be the Greek elites and their motivations. In the international bibliography on the Holocaust, such populations have been dubbed ‘bystanders,’ and their examination has attracted the interest of scholars and researchers during the last decades. Finally, these elites constituted a part of bureaucratic mechanisms that had to enforce the Nazi antisemitic measures against the city’s Jews. In that sense, the political, economic and social elites, the Greek bystanders, also became intermediaries and implementers of the Nazi orders against the Jews.

1. The Greek Elites of Thessaloniki

The main focus of this study is the Greek elites of Thessaloniki. We will examine their composition, their stance during the period of the antisemitic measures as well as their key motivations. The reasons for this choice are multiple. First, elites emerge as natural leaders of collectives, especially in times of crisis. Second, they enjoy privileged access to the main

⁸⁵ Mazower, *Salonica*, pp. 412–413.

⁸⁶ See *Nea Evropi*, June 29, July 10, August 7, August 18 and September 9, 1943.

decision-makers and other important stakeholders. Third, they represent not just themselves, but the public at large, which gives them a larger mandate as well as more legitimacy and protection for their actions. Fourth, elites are considered as having more duties in a society than the common people. And last but not least, we have more sources to examine the actions of this group of senior individuals than those of ordinary citizens, who often leave little paper trail behind them and their actions carry less impact.

As the Germany army was making significant gains against the Greek and invading further into the country, a group of officers led by General Georgios Tsolakoglou decided to sign a truce, on April 20, 1941. Few days later, a government was formed under the leadership of Tsolakoglou which had among its goals “to keep the state employees and to maintain them with the appropriate respect as organs of the State.”⁸⁷ The state would thus continue to operate and there would not be a possibility of an active administrative resistance supported by state structures.

When the Germans entered Thessaloniki, they found a functioning network of different institutions that were in place in the city. On most occasions, they chose to keep these officials in their positions. They were the Metropolitan, the General Governor, the mayor, the judges, senior civil servants, etc. For the Germans, keeping the order was of primary importance and they wanted to leave as many of the daily administrative tasks as they could to the local Greek officials. Any changes that happened during the period of the German occupation came from within Greek administration circles, such as Vassilios Simonidis who assumed the position of General Governor in November 1941, until then serving as an economic expert in several high positions.

Most of these officials were first appointed during the dictatorship of Ioannis Metaxas. The same can be said for the leadership of the city’s professional associations, grouping businessmen, industrialists, lawyers, most of whom remained in place guaranteeing a continuity in the institutions. These individuals were also close to the numerous Jewish

⁸⁷ Georgios Tsolakoglou, *Memoirs* (Greek) (Athens: Akropoli, 1959), p. 162. This also happened in other countries in occupied Europe, such as the Netherlands and Belgium, where the top civil servants of the ministries “had received orders from their governments to stay in office and co-operate with the occupying force.” Pim Griffioen and Ron Zeller, “Comparing the persecution of the Jews in the Netherlands, France and Belgium, 1940–1945: similarities, differences, causes,” in Wichert ten Have, ed., *The Persecution of the Jews in the Netherlands, 1940–1945* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012), p. 58.

community of the city, regularly interacting as business partners, clients, colleagues and friends.

Metaxas had imposed severe restrictions and censorship in the press. One of the first acts of the German administration was to shut down all of Thessaloniki's newspapers, barring one, *Apogevmatini* [Evening], while establishing a new daily that would become their principle propaganda mouthpiece, *Nea Evropi* [New Europe]. These two newspapers gathered journalists with a pro-Nazi, anti-communist, and antisemitic ideology, who reported the news and commented on developments, shaping public opinion.⁸⁸ In this period of severe control of the media, let alone an acute shortage of paper, alternative voices had difficulties making it to the mainstream, and had to operate in secret, taking great risks not to be caught.

As the country was divided in three occupation zones—German, Italian and Bulgarian, with Thessaloniki falling under German control⁸⁹—the ability of the Athens collaborationist government to effectively administer the whole of the country diminished significantly. Thus, all these prominent individuals, comprising the ecclesiastic, governmental, business and media elite of Thessaloniki of the time, gathered additional duties and responsibilities. They were empowered because of the war situation and were trusted with crucial tasks by both the Germans and the Greek collaborationist regime.

As for the intellectual elites, they were also individuals close to the Metaxas regime, often German educated, such as Stilpon Kyriakidis and Periklis Vizoukidis, professors and high-ranking officials of the University of Thessaloniki, who also assumed important roles in the city. Intellectuals who were more free-minded, let alone sympathetic to leftist circles, had already been targeted by Metaxas and continued to be persecuted during the Nazi period, thus having limited influence in public opinion.

Several members of the pro-Allies Greek political or intellectual elite had fled Greece hours before the capitulation and constituted the exiled Greek government in Cairo, functioning in close collaboration with the British. Others had joined the growing partisan

⁸⁸ For more background on the collaboration press of Thessaloniki, see Alexandra Patrikiou, "A 'new' historical period under creation: Types of the public speech of the newspapers *Nea Evropi* and *Apogevmatini* in occupied Thessaloniki," and Stratos Dordanas, "'The Enemy with the pen': The trial of the journalists of *Nea Evropi* and *Apogevmatini*," in Educational Foundation of the Union of Journalists of Daily Newspapers of Macedonia-Thrace, *National Resistance 1941–1944: The Illegal Press in Northern Greece* (Greek) (Thessaloniki, 2009), pp. 138–163.

⁸⁹ See Map 1 in p. 11.

movement and were located in the mountains with them. Thus, one needs to speak of several groupings of Greek elites, even though most Greek people were under the influence of the ones selected or tolerated by the Germans. This last group, in particular those living in Thessaloniki, will be the focus of this study.

2. Key Motivations

One of the main motivations of the Greek elite of Thessaloniki that we will see throughout this thesis is the need to counter the perceived Bulgarian threat. Bulgaria, an ally of the Nazis, had for decades eyed Thessaloniki and its environs, especially as it had failed to capture the city during the Balkan wars. At the beginning of the German occupation of Greece, Bulgaria took over and officially annexed into its territory areas of Greece located to its south. There, it imposed severe restrictions on the ethnic Greek populations, orchestrating purges with hundreds of deaths in some cases. A part of the Greek population of that region moved to the German-occupied territory to seek shelter, many of them choosing the city of Thessaloniki.

These actions by Bulgaria and its expansionist policies, which were challenging the territorial status quo of the region, brought back to mind the struggles of the 19th and early 20th centuries, which reached their peak during the Macedonian struggle and the Balkan wars. This reality created a split between the Greek and the Jewish communities, due to the different perceived threats and priorities.

From the beginning of 1942, in order to deal with the “national danger caused by the foreign propagandas in Macedonia,”⁹⁰ the Greek elites of Thessaloniki established the “National Council,” at the initiative of General Governor Simonidis.⁹¹ Initially focused on the Bulgarian and Italo-Romanian propagandas, it quickly expanded its mission to serve as a coordination body in order to “define each time the position to be held by the Greek political

⁹⁰ Athanassios Chrysochoou, *The Occupation in Macedonia: The Germans in Macedonia 1941–1944* (Greek) Volume 5 (Thessaloniki: Society for Macedonian Studies), p. 117. See also Vaios Kalogrias, *Counterweight: The nationalist resistance organizations in Occupied Macedonia (1941–1944)* (Greek) (Thessaloniki: University Studio Press, 2012), pp. 167–169.

⁹¹ Regrettably, the archive of this important body has not been found.

authorities, the Church, the organizations and the people on each issue that would arise.” It would meet twice or three times per month and at times once a week.⁹²

Members included:

Metropolitan [Gennadios] as its chair, his assistant Bishop of Olympus Kallinikos, General Governor of Macedonia Vassilios Simonidis, General Inspector of Prefectures Athanassios Chrysochoou, the director of the General Governor Ioannis Stergakis, the professors of the University of Thessaloniki Periklis Vizoukidis and Stilpon Kyriakidis, general Dimitrios Kakkavos, the Mayor of Thessaloniki Konstantinos Merkouriou, former minister Dimitrios Dingas, tobacco merchant and former parliamentarian G. Hatzigeorgiou, and the Presidents of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry Alexandros Krallis, the Industrialists Association Dimitrios Hatzopoulos, the Merchants Association Alexandros Letsas, and the labor center Dimitrios Theodorou.⁹³

Others who would be invited at its meetings based on the issues on the agenda included the director of the Thessaloniki police, colonel Mihalis Mantouvalos, the Bishops of other Macedonian regions residing in Thessaloniki, Drama [Bulgarian-occupied city] prefect D. Andreadis “who regularly visited Thessaloniki as liaison between the Government and the General Governor,” the director of the Bank of Greece, industrialist Anastasios Tsitsis, the prefects, etc.⁹⁴ No Jew was a member of this body.

This body, other than bringing all the important personalities around one table to deal with topical issues, also allowed for the formation and application of one unified policy. Any political or ideological differences were put aside in support of one common voice. This structure could also be considered as a replica of the institution of the Greek community that operated at the time of the Ottoman Empire.

One such meeting took place on January 3, 1943, in order to deal with the “serious national danger” of the possibility of “the enlargement of the Bulgarian occupation zone or the installation in German-occupied Macedonia of Bulgarian army for maintaining the order

⁹² Chrysochoou, *Occupation*, pp. 117–118.

⁹³ Chrysochoou, *Occupation*, p. 117.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

and fighting of [communist] gangs.” The issue was discussed at the National Council under the chairmanship of Gennadios, with the additional participation of all Metropolitans of Macedonia, the perfects, etc. Based on the efforts of the Greek authorities and “other patriots who begged the occupation authorities” this fear did not materialize.⁹⁵

Countering Bulgarian initiatives preoccupied the Greek elites throughout 1943, the crucial period of the deportation of the Jews. In the first months of 1943, amid fears that the Bulgarians were trying to bring a theatrical group to Thessaloniki for propaganda reasons, Metropolitan Gennadios and General Governor Simonidis took the initiative to establish a Greek theater. The first board of the theater consisted of important personalities such as, together with Stilpon Kyriakidis, Alexandros Letsas, Ioannis Vasdravelis, Dimitrios Panou, and engineer Athanassios Broikos.⁹⁶

Another instance where the local Greek authorities had to deal with the news of the Bulgarians moving troops to German-occupied Central Macedonia—the area containing and around Thessaloniki—was around the beginning of July 1943. Max Merten, on his return from a visit to Sofia, met with General Secretary of the General Governor Christos Tenzos, as Simonidis was in Athens. The meeting took place at 10 pm on July 4, 1943 at the apartment of Tenzos, between Merten and his interpreter Meissner on one side and Tenzos, Panou and Mihail Almeida on the other. Merten announced to the assembled Greek officials that the region of central Macedonia would be governed directly by Germany, he would be named as General Governor, and a division of the Bulgarian army would be installed in the areas of Central Macedonia, but outside of Thessaloniki. Tenzos, in responding to the last part of Merten’s announcement, spoke of “a huge gap that divides the two peoples,” “an ethnic hatred,” and protested the German decision on behalf of the Greek government and people.⁹⁷

This was in effect acceptance of the Bulgarian offer of December 1942. It triggered an urgent meeting of the National Council under Gennadios on July 6, 1943, who hand-delivered a petition to German Lieutenant-General Kurt von Krensky, in charge of the

⁹⁵ Ibid., pp. 208–209.

⁹⁶ Ekaterini Kilesopoulou, “The Beaux Arts in Thessaloniki during the Period 1912–1967” (Greek), Ph.D. thesis, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, 2006, p. 206.

⁹⁷ Ioannis Vasdravelis, “Tragic pages of the history of Macedonia during the Second World War: Installation of Bulgarian troops in Central Macedonia with the permission of the Germans,” *Makedonika*, Volume 13 (1973), pp. 316–323. The same event is also described by Chrysochoou, *Occupation*, pp. 257–260.

German authorities in the region. As a sign of mourning, all stores in Thessaloniki stayed closed on Saturday, July 10, 1943 and the people stayed at their homes.⁹⁸ Many other organizations and associations also published petitions against this development. The government in Athens also met with the German Embassy, and Athens-based Greek politicians sent a letter of support to Metropolitan Gennadios and issued a declaration to the people of Northern Greece.⁹⁹ On July 22, 1943 some 200-500,000 people took the streets in Athens in protest, with leaving some thirty protestors dead.¹⁰⁰

Other interests of the Greek elites of the time included halting communism and protecting the ordinary Greek population from hunger and terror. As we saw, the Greek notables tended to be conservative and nationalistic and adamantly opposed to communism. At the same time, they sought to provide some relief to the Greek population who was undergoing severe challenges. As it will be discussed in further detail later on, in the eyes of the Greek elites of Thessaloniki, their main agenda and goals were aligned or, at least, best served by the Germans.

3. The Paradigm of Bystanders

Historians have made different distinctions of individuals depending on their behavior during World War II, such as victims, perpetrators, bystanders and rescuers.¹⁰¹ Drawing the line between these categories is hard, especially over a long period of time and in rapidly changing environments, and may also appear simplistic. For example, an Italian soldier perpetrator may become a rescuer. A rescuer may eventually betray the victim, and so on.

The role of the bystanders has become key in Holocaust research during the last decades, as it allows us to go beyond the perpetrator/victim paradigm and explore the reactions of society as a whole. In defining this category of behavior, Hilberg made the following remark:

⁹⁸ Chrysochoou, *Occupation*, pp. 261–262.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 265–269.

¹⁰⁰ “Bloody demonstration in Occupied Athens,” (Greek) available at <https://www.sansimera.gr/articles/652>.

¹⁰¹ One of the first to come up with this terminology was Raul Hilberg, *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders: The Jewish Catastrophe, 1933–1945* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1993).

Most contemporaries of the Jewish catastrophe were neither perpetrators nor victims. Many people, however, saw or heard something of the event. Those of them who lived in Adolf Hitler's Europe would have described themselves, with few exceptions, as bystanders. There were not "involved," not willing to hurt the victims and not wishing to be hurt by the perpetrators. Yet, the reality was not so uncomplicated.¹⁰²

The Nazi measures against the Jews took place in the center of the urban life of Thessaloniki from the summer of 1942 to the summer of 1943, and affected Jews who lived in central areas, side-by-side with Greek Christian neighbors. Many of Thessaloniki's Jews were employed in businesses located at the city center, working as tradesmen, lawyers, clerks and employees. These measures were widely announced in the local collaborationist press and the local Greek population could easily witness this process.

In our study, the main victim group we will examine are the Jews of Thessaloniki, who were the targets of the Nazi antisemitic measures and were undergoing a process that lead to their deaths. The perpetrators are the Nazis, the SS facilitated by the German military authorities, the German foreign service, as well as Greek collaborators.¹⁰³ The Greek population of Thessaloniki could fall in the bystander category, according to his scheme. Nevertheless, this categorization is not fully helpful, as we will explain below.

During the Nazi Occupation of Thessaloniki, the local population had to face unprecedented challenges. During that harsh winter of 1941 food was scarce and almost two thousand people died from starvation, close to one percent of the total population.¹⁰⁴ In addition, the average citizen had to live in a climate of fear, terror and reprisals. Life and death started losing distinction.

Notwithstanding the harsh condition of the occupation, there were some groups of people who not only were able to preserve their lifestyle but also enrich themselves, during these difficult and turbulent times. First, it was the collaborators, people who were close to the German authorities, working as interpreters, assistants, journalists, spies, providing them

¹⁰² Hilberg, *Perpetrators*, p. xi.

¹⁰³ For a discussion of collaboration in the Greek case, see Andrew Apostolou, "Strategies of evasion: Avoiding the issue of collaboration and indifference during the Holocaust in Greece," in Roni Stauber, ed., *Collaboration with the Nazis: Public discourse after the Holocaust* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), pp. 138–165.

¹⁰⁴ Maria Kavala, "Thessaloniki during the German Occupation," pp. 183–184.

with much needed services, whose standard of life significantly improved compared to that before the war.

Another group—which is the focus of this study—is that of the local political, business and intellectual elites. This group comprised of the General Governor with his senior staff, the Mayor with the members of the City Council, the Metropolitan, the Presidents of the business associations, the Dean of the University, former parliamentarians and other senior government officials, bankers and other people with clout and connections. They enjoyed respect from the general public, connections with people of influence in the public administration, including the German authorities. This group emerged as leaders during this period and dealt with the problems faced by the local population. In addition, they also saw the larger picture, in terms of what they perceived to be the “national interest” and took several initiatives to that extent.

This group of people, the Greek elites of Thessaloniki, falls in between the German occupiers and the ordinary Greek civilians. They could easily fall in the bystander category, as individuals who lived through the Holocaust but did not intervene one way or another. Yet, according to this research, this group fluctuated between perpetrator and victim. At times, it seems they were the imitators of antisemitic actions, without however having a clear genocidal intent, like that of the Nazis. Actions, which were quickly endorsed and adopted by the Nazis, who willingly implemented them. In other occasions, they perceived themselves to be victims, or representatives of the victims, trying to alleviate the hunger, terror and fear of the ordinary Greek population of the city.¹⁰⁵

How did this group of people, with influence and access, react when the antisemitic measures started to get implemented? How did they deal as the situation was escalating and the Jews were forced to get concentrated in a ghetto and then be deported to Nazi-occupied Poland? Did they reach out to their Jewish compatriots or preferred to adopt a more neutral stance?

Members of this group did take some positive action with regards to the Jews during the period of the deportations. For example, Bishop Gennadios sent an appeal to German officer Max Merten.¹⁰⁶ A group of lawyers met with Governor Simonidis to ask him to stop

¹⁰⁵ For a discussion on the limits of the term bystander, see Jan Grabowski, “The Role of ‘Bystanders’ in the Implementation of the ‘Final Solution’ in Occupied Poland,” *Yad Vashem Studies*, Vol. 43:1 (2015), p. 131.

¹⁰⁶ This will be examined in more detail in Chapter 4.

the persecution.¹⁰⁷ Some 150 lawyers wrote to the Greek Prime Minister in Athens to request that all Jews be gathered in an island of the Aegean.¹⁰⁸ Most of these efforts are listed in Molho and Nehama's book without any real substantiation. It is very hard to correlate these claims, which are wide-spread in the literature, via archival sources, or post-war testimonies. Notwithstanding these research limitations, all these protests seem to have been private in nature and there was no substantial follow-up or call to action. As Margaritis pointed out, no high-level Greek official resigned in support of the persecuted Jews.¹⁰⁹

These old preexisting elites of Thessaloniki were joined with newly formed ones, especially individuals who rose and profited by the turmoil of war and the occupation by a foreign power. They were connected to the new rulers with ideological, political or simply self-interests. It was a diverse alliance of ideologues, nationalist-minded individuals, thugs and opportunists.¹¹⁰

Why has the stance of Thessaloniki's elites been described as passive or neutral and what more could they have done? What were the main preoccupations they had? These are some of the main research questions of this study.

4. Role of Bureaucracy

The Holocaust of the European Jews could not have been organized had it not been for the utilization of existing bureaucratic and civil society structures which affected all aspects of daily life under German occupation. The Germans issued the orders but it was not only civil servants, government employees and city clerks but also mayors, heads of the associations and unions, and other local administrators who were tasked with their implementation.

The decisions of these bureaucrats affected marginalization, expropriation, ghettoization and even aspects of the deportations. Our study will examine their behavior, their actions, motivations and priorities, as they relate to events around the targeting of Thessaloniki's Jews. This will be achieved by describing in detail the stances and actions of

¹⁰⁷ Molho and Nehama, *In Memoriam*, p. 138.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 139.

¹⁰⁹ Margaritis, *Unwanted*, p. 116.

¹¹⁰ For some of these characters, see Stratos Dordanas, *Greeks versus Greeks: The world of the Security Battalions in Occupied Thessaloniki 1941–1944* (Greek) (Thessaloniki: Epikentro, 2006).

structures such as the municipality of Thessaloniki and the professional associations, which had to implement part of the Nazi antisemitic measures.

Furthermore, one can argue that at the top of these structures one finds the local political, economic and intellectual elites. Indeed, on the top of these bureaucracies, as will be discussed further in great detail, were prominent politicians, business and civic leaders, and intellectuals. Political influence and bureaucratic mechanisms concentrated around a small group of people, with access, prestige, contacts and means.

The relationship between bureaucracy and the Holocaust has been studied at great length specifically in the German case. In his 1961 classic work, Raul Hilberg first described “the machinery of destruction,” in the step-by-step process of dehumanizing, isolating and eventually deporting and killing Europe’s Jews.¹¹¹ Hilberg also wrote of the “Bureaucracy of Annihilation,” for which the “very mundaneness and ordinariness of these everyday official actions [...] made the destruction process so crass.”¹¹² Christopher Browning focused his research on the role of the German Foreign Ministry¹¹³ and other government agencies.¹¹⁴

Ian Kershaw argued that it was bureaucratic competition that crystallized the process towards the Final Solution, as different actors were competing as who will better implement the Fuhrer’s vision.¹¹⁵ Zygmunt Bauman saw “bureaucratic rationality” as one of the essential factors that made the Holocaust possible. The idea of the Final Solution, he argued, “was an outcome of the bureaucratic culture,” “a product of routine bureaucratic procedures.”¹¹⁶ Indeed it was the mechanisms of a modern state that were put into action to exterminate European Jews, in an “organized and industrialized mass-murder.”¹¹⁷

¹¹¹ Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of European Jews* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1961), p. 39.

¹¹² Raul Hilberg, “The Bureaucracy of Annihilation,” in François Furet (ed.), *Unanswered Questions. Nazi Germany and the Genocide of the Jews* (New York: Schocken Books, 1989), pp. 119–133.

¹¹³ Christopher Browning, *The Final Solution and the German Foreign Office: a study of Referat D III of Abteilung Deutschland 1940–43* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1978).

¹¹⁴ Christopher Browning, “The Government Experts,” in Henry Friedlander and Sybil Milton, eds., *The Holocaust: Ideology, Bureaucracy and Genocide* (Millwood, NY: Kraus International Publications), pp. 183–197.

¹¹⁵ Ian Kershaw, “‘Working towards the Fuhrer.’ Reflections on the Nature of the Hitler Dictatorship,” *Contemporary European History*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (July 1993), pp. 103–118.

¹¹⁶ Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000), pp. 14–18.

¹¹⁷ Stewart Clegg, “Bureaucracy, the Holocaust and Techniques of Power at Work,” *Management Revue*, 20(4), p. 345, footnote 16.

The trial of Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem, the chief bureaucrat in charge of the “Final Solution,” is a case in point. “In its judgment the court naturally conceded that such a crime could be committed only by a giant bureaucracy using the resources of government.”¹¹⁸

One always needs to keep in mind the pivotal role of Nazi Germany in executing this plan. Yet, the Nazis could not have done it on their own. Thus, when researching the Holocaust in greater detail, the roles of local decision-making and bureaucracy become key. Indeed, as Jacques Semelin wrote:

Although Germany was the most populous country in Europe, it did not have adequate personnel to manage the territories that had fallen under its control within just a few months. It was therefore natural for Berlin to seek to depend on the occupied countries’ local structures and especially on their administrative apparatuses.¹¹⁹

While comparing the policies of the Germans in 1940, after they occupied France, Belgium and the Netherlands, Pim Griffioen and Ron Zeller observed that:

Germany did not have adequate personnel or financial resources to administer all the territories directly. To preserve law and order and see to the smooth integration of the national economies into the German war effort, supervisory administrations were established. As much as possible, they left day-to-day matters to the local bureaucracy.¹²⁰

Hannah Arendt summarized it: “Germany, even in the brightest days of the war, depended upon local good will and cooperation everywhere.”¹²¹ But it was not just local bureaucracies that facilitated the Nazi plans, including the Holocaust. In the words of Saul Friedlander, a cast of characters sided with them:

¹¹⁸ Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Penguin Books, 1994), p. 289.

¹¹⁹ Jacques Semelin, *Unarmed against Hitler: civilian resistance in Europe, 1939–1943* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1993), p. 11.

¹²⁰ Pim Griffioen & Ron Zeller, *Jodenvervolging in Nederland, Frankrijk en België, 1940–1945: Overeenkomsten, verschillen, oorzaken*, (Amsterdam: Boom Onderwijs, 2011), p. 1000.

¹²¹ Arendt, *Eichmann*, p. 160.

Such a collaboration involved national and regional agencies and institutions, auxiliaries of all hues, political support groups, and independent agents, ranging from politicians to civil servants, from intellectuals to police forces and railway administrations, from journalists to industrialists; from youth movements to peasant leagues, from clergy to universities, from organized to spontaneous killer gangs.¹²²

These local administrators and officials were asked by the Nazis to implement their anti-Jewish orders. In the case of Hungary, Judit Molnár found that:

the majority of the officials in Hungary went about solving the “Jewish question” with initiative, flexibility, and often even with enthusiasm. Some officials waited for orders from above, others acted on their own initiative. In addition to decrees officially issued, oral instructions received over the telephone or at meetings, wanting even the semblance of legality, were immediately executed. As Deputy Mayor of Szeged, Béla Tóth said on May 13, 1944: “In the case of the Jews, rather than worrying about the letter of the decrees, we are considering their spirit and their aim, and we adjust the method of execution to this spirit and these aims.”¹²³

In addition, the Nazis created state bodies in order to deal specifically with Jewish issues. Tal Bruttman looked into the workings of the French “Jewish Affairs Agency.”¹²⁴ The Greek “Agency for the Custody of Jewish Properties,” has been studied by Mark Mazower,¹²⁵ Stratos Dordanas¹²⁶ and others. The “Jewish Question” was so central for Nazi Germany that all government agencies in different occupied countries had to deal, at one

¹²² Saul Friedlander, *The Years of Extermination: Nazi Germany and the Jews, 1939–1945* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2008), p. 76.

¹²³ Judit Molnár, “Nazi Perpetrators: Behavior of Hungarian Authorities During the Holocaust,” available at <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Holocaust/hungholo.html>.

¹²⁴ Tal Bruttman, *Au bureau des affaires juives: l'administration française et l'application de la législation antisémite (1940–1944)* (Paris: La Découverte, 2006).

¹²⁵ Mark Mazower, “The consequences of the Persecution of the Jews for the city of Thessaloniki,” in Rika Benveniste, ed., *The Jews of Greece during Occupation (Greek)* (Thessaloniki: Vaniias, 1998), pp. 53–61.

¹²⁶ Stratos Dordanas, “Extermination and plunder: Agency for the Custody of Jewish Properties,” in Giorgos Antoniou, Stratos Dordanas, Nikos Zaikos, Nikos Marantzidis, eds., *The Holocaust in the Balkans (Greek)* (Thessaloniki: Epikentro, 2011), pp. 331–352.

point in time, with its relevant aspects, according to their expertise and jurisdiction. These antisemitic policies also affected other organizations, such as state and private companies, professional associations, educational institutions, sports clubs etc., especially in relation to marginalization measures.

Did these local decision-makers have room to maneuver? Were they aware of the consequences of their actions and thus had any moral or other reservations? Did they add or subtract from the issued orders? Did they inform their fellow Jewish citizens of what was awaiting them? Were they just “following orders” or did they weigh other priorities?

Studying the issue of decision-making at the local level can help us shed light on questions that are lost in a broader approach, including any moral or other reservations that could have emerged. Moreover, it will help us elaborate upon the distinction between collaborators and bystanders, a common theme related to the Holocaust, where the limits are often unclear.

5. Summary of Chapters

In an attempt to explore these topics, several case studies will be examined pertaining to the city of Thessaloniki, Greece. On the eve of the deportations, in 1942, Thessaloniki counted 50,000 Jews, approximately twenty percent of the population, making the city a major Jewish center. The community was well-integrated within city life, with around fifty percent of its members living in central areas alongside with a considerable Christian population,¹²⁷ so their plight was known and could be felt by all sectors of the Greek public administration and civil society. In five substantive chapters, we will study in detail the reactions of most, if not all, of the prominent institutions in the city of Thessaloniki, including the city authorities, the Church, the University and the professional associations.

In Chapter 2, we will discuss the destruction of Thessaloniki’s Jewish cemetery. The cemetery, located close to the city center, became the object of dispute between the Greek and Jewish communities, with the former wishing to expropriate it in favor of the city’s new University and the latter trying to preserve the sanctity and history of the place. In the end, few months before the living Jews of Thessaloniki were deported, the cemetery of the dead

¹²⁷ Giannis Karatzoglou, “The Statistics of the Departed,” (Greek) *Thessalonikeon Polis*, Issue 8 (June 2002), p. 65. The other fifty percent resided in poorer, exclusively Jewish neighborhoods.

Jews was destroyed. The chapter will detail the alignment of interests of the different protagonists and what it signaled for the events that followed.

The focus of Chapter 3 is the contemporary printed sources, newspapers both from collaborationist and resistance sources as well as proclamations, all of which were circulating in the city and around the country. These sources allow us to get a glimpse of the level of awareness of the people at the period around the events that were taking place against the Jews. Some of the articles show a great understanding of the events and their potential consequences. Other materials, through their silence, also speak on the priorities and perceptions at the time. Based on the contemporary knowledge of the events against the Jews of Thessaloniki, we can evaluate the reactions of the Greek population, as detailed in the next three chapters.

Chapter 4 addresses the actions of the municipality of Thessaloniki, its mayor, city council officers as well as its staff. The Jews in question were citizens of Thessaloniki and their plight should have mattered for the city officials. However, the city showed little interest in its Jewish segment and took little action to speak out in their support. In some cases, it even profited from their departure, trying to obliterate their memory and taking over their properties.

The following Chapter, number 5, continues the same theme, looking in detail the actions of three important institutions: the Church, the Courts and the University. All three play an important role in every society and, some more than others, emerge as leading voices in times of crisis. The Church, although it played a principal role during this period, failed to enact a sustained and credible opposition to the persecution of the Jews. The University, through its professors and student body, did not elevate the issue of the Jews even to its last priority, as the city was shaken by populous demonstrations during this period. Lastly, the Courts provided a rare glimpse of hope, where some judges and lawyers tried to establish a network for adoptions of Jewish children but were discovered by the Nazis.

In Chapter 6 we look in detail the action of the city's professional associations. The Jews were very well integrated in city life, not only active in business and other professions but also holding leadership positions in many of these organizations. One of the Nazi demands was that the Jews be removed from such associations, which meant that they would be even more vulnerable to the measures that would ensue. Discussing the role of these organizations and their leaders goes into the topic of professional solidarity and whether this existed in Thessaloniki.

Chapter II: The Destruction of Thessaloniki's Jewish Cemetery

1. Introduction

In December 1942, three months before the deportations of the Jews of Thessaloniki began, a rare event in the history of Nazi-occupied Europe took place: the destruction of the vast and ancient Jewish cemetery of Thessaloniki. The Nazis lacked a consistent policy regarding Jewish cemeteries. As Carla Hesse and Thomas Laqueur point out, “In general, the Nazis did not systematically direct their fury against bones and monuments. All of Europe’s major Jewish cemeteries—except for that of Thessaloniki—survived the Holocaust more or less intact. This includes those in the very heart of National Socialism.”¹ The same can be said for all other Jewish cemeteries in Greece that survived the war.

The old Jewish cemetery of Thessaloniki was probably the largest Jewish necropolis in Europe, numbering nearly 500,000 graves and covering an area of 350,000 square meters (86.5 acres)—a powerful symbol of the centuries-old Jewish presence in the city. Initially outside of the city walls, the cemetery became a central location as the city expanded eastwards. Its vast area gradually inhibited local transportation and residents would complain that it attracted illegal and immoral activities in the late hours.

Following the great fire of 1917, various city plans aimed to transform the area into the main campus of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, by relocating the cemetery

¹ Carla Hesse and Thomas W. Laqueur, “Visible and Invisible Bodies: The Erasure of the Jewish Cemetery from the Life of Modern Thessaloniki,” in Martha Mihailidou and Alexandra Halkia, eds., *The Production of the Social Body* (Greek) (Athens: Katarti, 2005), p. 45. The page numbers given correspond to the Greek translation whereas the text quoted comes from the original article in English, published in the blog <http://thisisnotmycountry.com>. Several other smaller Jewish cemeteries in Europe were desecrated or destroyed by the Nazis, specifically in German-occupied Poland where this practice was more common, such as Plaszow in Krakow.

outside the city boundaries. This issue was a cause of friction between the Greek authorities and the 50,000-strong Jewish community in a city of 250,000 residents, but using religious, historical and political arguments the latter managed to delay this discussion.²

Several historians have claimed that the initiative for the destruction of the cemetery came from the local Greek authorities. For example, Bernard Pierron argues that “this act...is mainly a work of the municipality of Thessaloniki and those who were in power during that period.”³ Mark Mazower writes that “[during the German occupation] the municipal authorities saw the chance to resolve the cemetery issue for good, and they raised it with the Germans,”⁴ and Nicholas Stavroulakis adds that “soon after Salonika was seized by the Germans on 8 April 1941, a group of citizens, including members of the city council, requested that the Nazi command confiscate the entire cemetery.”⁵

The present chapter will investigate these claims, clarify important details, and contribute new information to the existing historiography. It will provide a timeline of the events that led to the destruction of the cemetery and endeavor to identify the main actors behind it and their motivations. Furthermore, it will discuss the fate of the land area occupied by the cemetery as well as its tombstones and bricks during the German occupation.

² For historical background on the issue, see Stella Salem, “The Old Jewish Cemetery of Thessaloniki” (Greek), *Thessalonikeon Polis*, vol. 6 (October 2001), pp. 57–78; Paraskevas Savaidis and Anthimos Badelas, *Polis Panepistimiou Polis* (Greek) (Thessaloniki: Adelfon Kyriakidi-University Studio Press, 2000); Michael Molho, “El cementerio judío de Salónica,” *Sefarad*, vol. 9, no. 1 (1949), pp. 107–130; Maria Vassilikou, “The Jewish Cemetery of Salonika in the Crossroads of Urban Modernisation and Anti-Semitism,” *European Judaism*, vol. 33, no. 1 (Spring 2000), pp. 118–131; Devin E. Naar, *Jewish Salonica: Between the Ottoman Empire and Modern Greece* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016), Chapter V: “Stones that Speak: The Cemetery,” pp. 239–276; and Photini Constantopoulou and Thanos Veremis, eds., *Documents on the History of the Greek Jews: Records from the Historical Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs* (Athens: Kastaniotis Editions, 1999), in particular document 40, pp. 144–146, document 42, pp. 147–148 and document 60, pp. 198–199. Salem’s article is also available in English in the *Cultural Forum of the Jewish Community of Thessaloniki, Ir Vaem Beisrael*, vol. 1 (Thessaloniki: The Jewish Community of Thessaloniki, The Ets Ahaim Foundation and the Cultural Committee of the J. C. T., 2003), pp. 49–60.

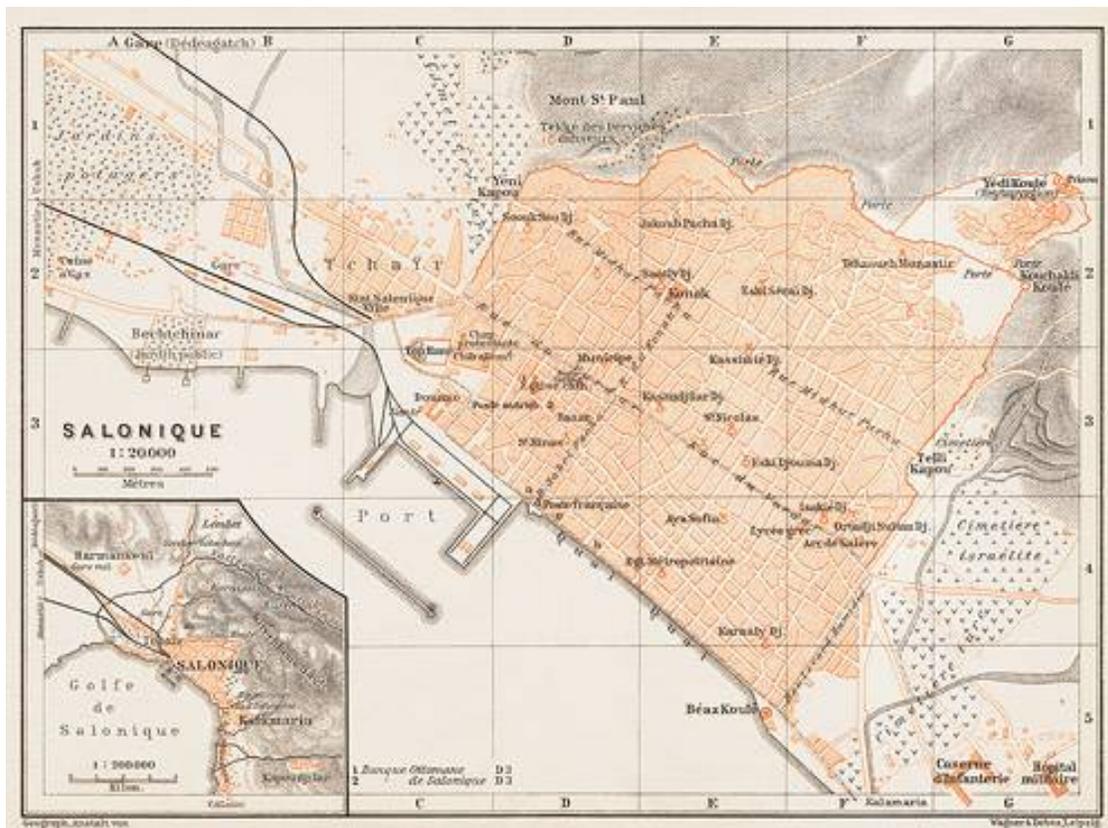
³ Bernard Pierron, *Jews and Christians in Modern Greece* (Greek) (Athens: Polis, 2004), p. 261.

⁴ Mark Mazower, *Salonica City of Ghosts: Christians, Muslims and Jews, 1430–1950* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), p. 397.

⁵ Nicholas Stavroulakis, *Salonika, Jews and Dervishes* (Athens: Talos Press, 1993). I was not able to find any evidence for such a meeting.

The destruction of the Jewish cemetery of Thessaloniki was not just an event in a linear sequence of Nazi antisemitic measures in the city. Rather, it was a pivotal event whose detailed study allows us to understand what followed in the next months. This chapter will show how the destruction of the Jewish necropolis—not directly linked to the Nazi “Final Solution”—nevertheless set the stage for the events that were put in motion a few weeks later. The destruction of the cemetery tested the relations between the German military authorities, the Greek authorities, and the Jewish community on the eve of the deportations. As such, it can also serve as a unique case study of their triangular relationship. It is not a coincidence that writing a few months after the destruction of the cemetery, Yomtov Yacoel, the legal counsel of the Jewish Community and one of its leaders at the time, called it “the harbinger,” of the general destruction of the community.”⁶

**Map IV: A historical city map of Thessaloniki in 1914.
The Jewish cemetery is indicated east of the city.**



⁶ Yomtov Yacoel, *Memoirs 1941–1943* (Greek) (Thessaloniki: Paratiritis, 1993), p. 88.

The documents used come from a variety of primary sources, several published for the first time. The chapter draws from a wide range of available material—contemporary to the events—ranging from the records of the city of Thessaloniki, the minutes of municipality meetings, Church archives, the two local collaborationist newspapers, *Nea Evropi* and *Apogevmatini*, and documents from German, Italian, and other government archives. Postwar testimony and documentation, such as those amassed during the trials of Maximilian Merten and Adolf Eichmann, are also used to shed light on the events whenever possible. For example, Max Merten submitted the German orders for the destruction of the cemetery as evidence at Eichmann’s trial.

2. Interwar Period

As Maria Vassilikou wrote, “the Jewish cemetery had been threatened long before the murderous policies of the Nazis troops reached Salonika Jews and their cultural heritage.”⁷ In fact, the efforts to claim part of the land of the Jewish cemetery of Thessaloniki started during the late Ottoman period. In 1890, the most ancient part of the cemetery, adjacent to the city walls was used to construct an avenue and an Ottoman school.

Following the big fire of 1917, the city was almost completely destroyed. French urban planner Ernest Hebrard prepared the first plan for the rebuilding of the burned area, which was approved in March 1919.⁸ He was urged by Greek Prime Minister Eleftherios Venizelos, in redesigning the city, to “conceive of it as a ‘blank state’—in effect, ignoring the centuries-long physical imprint made on the city by Jews and Muslims.”⁹ Hebrard used the latest practices in urban planning which dictated that cemeteries should be removed from within the city limits. He envisioned the area as the main campus of the University of Thessaloniki and a park, removing thus the cemetery from the city blueprint. Because of the underlying values of his plans, Hebrard has been described as an ideologist of “the project of

⁷ Vassilikou, “The Jewish Cemetery,” p. 118.

⁸ Savaidis and Badelas, *Polis*, pp. 96–106.

⁹ Naar, *Jewish Salonica*, p. 241.

(re)hellenization of the city,” being “against its Jewish, Turkish and Slavic urban components.”¹⁰

The new plans for the city marked the beginning of the struggle for the Jewish community, including its leaders, political representatives, teachers and journalists, to oppose efforts to move the ancient Jewish burial site. They invoked religious reasons—Jews are not allowed to exhume their dead in contrast to Orthodox Christian customs—principles of religious tolerance, archeological and historic ones, highlighting the significance of the cemetery as a monument that also narrated the city’s development.¹¹

In 1923, the arrival of the Asia Minor refugees put further strains on the fate of the cemetery. Many, desperate to find housing, settled in area around it. Their commute to the city center was made difficult, as they had to cross the land of the necropolis. It was dividing the city into two parts. In July 1929, the Council of Ministers in Athens approved a joint proposal of the Ministers of Agriculture and Social Welfare that decided to expropriate an area of 6,850 square meters, for new building projects to house the refugees.¹²

The establishment of the University of Thessaloniki in 1926 revitalized efforts for the expropriation of land from the Jewish necropolis. Professor Periklis Vizoukidis, Provost of the University of Thessaloniki, in 1928, asked the Greek government to accelerate the expropriation of the land of the cemetery for the construction of new University installations.¹³ In 1929, the university asked from the Community 6,500 square meters of land to expand its buildings.¹⁴ The Government adopted a decree on August 4, 1930 to modify the city plan adjacent to the cemetery “for the foundation of a University Center.”¹⁵

In early November 1931, the General Governor of Macedonia, Stylianos Gonatas, met with the President of the Jewish Community and the Jewish Senator and Member of

¹⁰ Nora Lafi, “The Municipality of Salonica between Old Regime, the Ottoman Reforms and the Transition from Empire to Nation State: Questions and Research Perspectives,” in Dimitris Kairidis, ed., *Thessaloniki: A City in Transition, 1912–2012* (Greek) (Thessaloniki: Epikentro, 2015), pp. 111–112.

¹¹ For an overview of these arguments and how they were debated in the press see Naar, *Jewish Salonica*, pp. 247–251.

¹² Constantopoulou and Veremis, *Documents*, document 40, pp. 144–146. For the Jewish reactions, see also Vassilikou, “The Jewish Cemetery,” p. 120.

¹³ Pierron, *Jews and Christians*, p. 238.

¹⁴ Naar, *Jewish Salonica*, p. 246.

¹⁵ Government Gazette A 277 of August 9, 1930.

Parliament to enlist their help for the implementation of the government decree, at the request of the University Senate. Gonatas, in reporting these developments to the political office of the Prime Minister, noted the intransigence of the Jewish leadership, afraid of “the wrath of the Jewish masses,” if there were seen to compromise on the issue. However, he did not hide his sympathies for the university’s request as this move “would constitute a starting-point and precedent for the further use of the whole area in the future.”¹⁶ Jewish Community officials, as well as the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs, started inquiring about the fate of similar Jewish cemeteries located in city centers across Europe.¹⁷

The night between January 12 and 13, 1930, as a sign of protest, refugees destroyed seventy graves, after a decision of the Jewish Community to close the gates of the cemetery at 9 pm, making their daily commute much longer.¹⁸ A group of prominent Jews and Greeks visited the police chief, the mayor and the General Governor to request more security for the cemetery.¹⁹ Following the Campbell riots in June 1931, football fans destroyed fifty tombs at the end of a game.²⁰ As a result of these attacks, a police station was eventually established on the site.

The above efforts to rethink the place of the Jewish cemetery in the urban life of Thessaloniki during Venizelos’ rule were successfully opposed by Jewish community officials and activists. The Jews were able to count on their prominent role in the local economy and society, and support from abroad, mainly London and Paris.²¹ In addition, the tense inter-communal relations following the Campbell riots as well as the effects of the economic crisis of 1929, led the government to put a hold on any further plans.

However, the Metaxas dictatorship that followed—albeit sympathetic to the concerns of the Jewish community—changed the realities with regards to the cemetery. During this period, different prominent personalities of Thessaloniki joined the chorus of other

¹⁶ Constantopoulou and Veremis, *Documents*, document 60, pp. 198–199. Gonatas had written other letters in the past calling for the expropriation of the cemetery: “...the retention of such a large and disused area within the city was unfair.” Vassilikou, “The Jewish Cemetery,” p. 121.

¹⁷ Naar, *Jewish Salonica*, pp. 248–249 and Vassilikou, “The Jewish Cemetery,” pp. 124–125.

¹⁸ Salem, “The Old Jewish Cemetery,” pp. 69–70. Vassilikou says it was the night of January 9 to 10. Vassilikou, “The Jewish Cemetery,” p. 120.

¹⁹ Constantopoulou and Veremis, *Documents*, document 42, pp. 147–148.

²⁰ Pierron, *Jews and Christians*, p. 239.

²¹ Vassilikou, “The Jewish Cemetery,” pp. 122–124.

government officials, businessmen, journalists and residents living by the cemetery, requesting its transfer to another location.

One such individual was philosophy professor Avrotelis Eleftheropoulos, who served as the University's dean during 1937-38. In an open letter to Chief Rabbi Zvi Koretz²² and the Jewish community published in *Makedonia* in April 1936, Eleftheropoulos called for the area of the cemetery to be given the soonest to the city and to the university for the sake of the development of the university and the implementation of the city plan. He wondered whether, under these circumstances, political leaders in other European countries would call the Jews their "brothers," accusing the Jews of being "good exploiters of the political hardship of Greece, of its [political] party corruption."²³

Another loud voice against the cemetery was Georgios Loulis, the president of the Industrialists Association of Macedonia and Thrace between 1936 and 1940. At a meeting of the Chamber of Commerce in July 1936, Loulis raised the issue of the cemetery outside of the meeting's agenda by requesting the land for the construction of new science labs in order to make "the University of Thessaloniki [...] a prestigious research institution on a par with those in Europe."²⁴

The university leadership had already revived its efforts to claim the land of the Jewish cemetery for its purposes. In June 1936, the dean, Tryfon Karadasis, had travelled to Athens to lobby for the enlargement of the university grounds on cemetery land. The Jewish Community had informed its representatives in Athens to try and "neutralize" the dean's efforts.²⁵ Around the same time, the Minister of Education Nikolaos Louvaris, who was considered close to the Jewish Community of Thessaloniki, agreed to allow the teaching of

²² Rabbi Zvi Koretz (1894–1945) was born in Rzeszów, Poland (then in the Habsburg Empire) and studied in Vienna and Berlin. In 1933, he was appointed Chief Rabbi of Thessaloniki in an effort to modernize the community. His knowledge of German made him a principal interlocutor with the Germans, who appointed him president of the Community on December 11, 1942. After the war, survivors accused him of facilitating the German plans against the Jews. His role remains a subject of debate.

²³ Naar, *Jewish Salonica*, pp. 259–261, where also a partial copy of the article is provided.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 262–265.

²⁵ Salomon Bitti to Daniil Alhanati, June 4, 1936, in Archive of the Jewish Museum of Thessaloniki, Box 4, Subseries 4: Correspondence with Legal Advisors of the JCT, File 83.

French in the Alliance schools only if the Community would hand over a piece of cemetery land bordering the University.²⁶

All these developments led to a public discussion at the halls of the Chamber of Commerce of all concerned parties, under the auspices of the General Governor of Macedonia, on July 28, 1936. Interestingly, the event coincided with the Jewish holiday of *Tisha Be-av*, which commemorates the destruction of the Temples in Jerusalem. At the meeting, Dean Karadasis argued that “we cannot sacrifice the future for the past and stop the progress of life because of the dead.”²⁷ The views of the Greek participants, through the scientific, professional and social institutions of the city, was that the university had to expand and “no reason could stop this unavoidable need.”²⁸ The arguments of the Jewish participants failed to carry any weight. Virtually every association in the city followed-up with letters to Prime Minister Metaxas and all relevant Ministers to request the appropriation of the cemetery.²⁹

Matters developed with an increased pace. The day following the meeting at the Chamber of Commerce, on July 29, 1936, the University wrote to the General Governor of Macedonia asking him to proceed with the immediate expropriation of the land. The General Governor forwarded the letter the same day to the city planning office of Thessaloniki, which commenced the process of expropriation.³⁰ The Jewish Community tried in vain to block any action.³¹ These public consultations seemed to have been just a pretext. The speed of the actions that ensued showed that the decisions had already been agreed on, at the highest levels. The Jewish Community had no allies in the city on this issue.

The result was a 1937 law that gave part of the cemetery land to the university while the rest of the area would be turned into a park, where the existing tombs would remain

²⁶ Katerina Lagos, “Hellenism and Minority Education: the Promotion of Literacy and Cultural Assimilation,” paper presented at the MGSA, New York University, 2011, pp. 12–13.

²⁷ Naar, *Jewish Salonica*, pp. 265–267.

²⁸ Savaidis and Badelas, *Polis*, p. 78, which quotes a document of General Governor N. Tsipouras to the Ministry of Transportation, number 97472/3257 of September 4, 1936, summarizing the public consultations that took place in the city on the issue of the University and the expropriation of the cemetery.

²⁹ Naar, *Jewish Salonica*, p. 270.

³⁰ Savaidis and Badelas, *Polis*, pp. 67–73.

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 74–78.

untouched.³² Burials in the old cemetery would be prohibited after one year. Although a part was indeed given to the university, burials on the remaining land continued and a park was never created. This law was a temporary compromise: its stipulations were never fully implemented, the university requested—and received—further land and desecrations continued. Developments came to a halt with the outbreak of the Greek-Italian war, only to restart after the German army entered Thessaloniki in April 1941.

3. Call for Slave Labor

The first mass antisemitic measure after the German army occupied Thessaloniki in April 1941 was the compulsory assembly in Liberty Square of all Jewish males on Saturday, July 11, 1942, to be mobilized for forced labor. The “Black Sabbath,” as it became known, saw approximately 8,500 Jewish men aged 18–45 going through humiliating gymnastic exercises under a blistering sun. German soldiers beat those unlucky Jews who arrived late, smoked, or dared to sit down.³³ The purpose for forcibly drafting such a labor force was mainly for construction work,³⁴ overseen by the Todt organization. The only Jews excluded were those with a passport of certain Axis or neutral countries, mainly Spanish and Italian.³⁵

³² Law 890 of October 11, 1937 (Government Gazette, number 394, issue A, October 13, 1937). The Jewish community decided not to request compensation for this land of 12,300 square meters as a gesture of support to the University of Thessaloniki. For correspondence on the issue ahead of this law (1936–37), see Archive of the Jewish Museum of Thessaloniki, Box 4, Subseries 4: Correspondence with Legal Advisors of the JCT, File 82.

³³ Yacoel, *Memoirs*, p. 58.

³⁴ The post-war call court summons of Ioannis Miller, the civilian contactor in charge of the projects, provided a list of the different tasks and locations where Jews and some Greek villagers were dispatched: “gasoline tanks in Menemeni station, army barracks in Arsakli, airport works in SEDES, can factory in Thessaloniki, road construction Thessaloniki-Stavros, Strimonas bridge, hangers in Beh-Tsinar and in first Gymnasium of Thessaloniki, several other works of road and bridge construction, earthmoving works such as in Pouf station, in Piraeus carbon harbor, in chromium mines in Gomati Arnaias, and other works.” Archive of the USHMM, Collection of YDIP, Reel 7, Box 6, “Correspondence between YDIP and the Thessaloniki Special Court for collaborationists,” Summons document 1044 of February 26, 1946.

³⁵ For more details on the fate of Thessaloniki Jews with foreign passports, see the collections of Italian and German diplomatic documents: Daniel Carpi, ed., *Italian Diplomatic Documents on the History of the Holocaust in Greece (1941–1943)* (Tel Aviv: Diaspora Research Institute, The Chair in the History and Culture of the Jews of Salonika and Greece, Tel Aviv University, 1999) and Irith Dublon-Knebel, ed., *German Foreign*

This measure was the initiative of the German military headquarters based in Thessaloniki, “at the suggestion of the Department of Administration and Economy,”³⁶ “originat[ing] neither from Berlin nor from the Eichmann Referat [Department].”³⁷ Further proof of the local nature of the initiative is informed by the fact that the Liberty Square events took place without direct instructions from Berlin. *SS-Obersturmbannführer* Friedrich Suhr, the legal advisor in Eichmann’s office, who was probably not informed at the time of the events,³⁸ reported them to the Jewish Affairs Section of the Foreign Ministry only after several weeks. He credited the action to the German commander of Salonika-Aegean and mentioned the agreement of Vassilios Simonidis, the then General Governor of Macedonia, the most senior Greek official in the region.³⁹

The focus on the Jews may have been triggered by Colonel Athanassios Chrysochoou, an important and well-connected senior member of the Greek regional administration, who complained to the Germans that “the Jews—in contrast to the largest part of the population are not obliged to carry out labor work or to provide contributions in kind.”⁴⁰ This proposal

Office Documents on the Holocaust in Greece [1937–1944] (Tel Aviv: Goldstein-Goren Diaspora Research Center, Tel Aviv University, 2007).

³⁶ See Bundesarchiv/Militärarchiv RW 29/109, Report of October 30, 1942. For a rare eye-witness account of a bystander, see Antonis Doukas, “*A child of the Occupation remembers...*” (Greek) (Thessaloniki, 2008).

³⁷ Hans Safrian, *Eichmann’s Men* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press in association with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2010), p. 153.

³⁸ A telegram sent on the very same day, July 11, 1942, relating to Greek Jews, from Suhr to the Foreign Office in Berlin, did not mention the Liberty Square events. Dublon-Knebel, *German Foreign Office Documents*, Telegram T22, pp. 97–99. Daniel Carpi agrees that Suhr was probably unaware of the events. See Daniel Carpi, “Notes on the History of the Jews in Greece during the Holocaust Period: The Attitude of the Italians (1941–1943),” in Haim Ben-Shahar, ed., *Festschrift in Honor of Dr. George S. Wise* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University Press, 1981), p. 55, footnote 31.

³⁹ Dublon-Knebel, *German Foreign Office Documents*, Telegram S29, Suhr to Rademacher, August 18, 1942, p. 105. Suhr was not in Greece at the time. Italian Consul General in Thessaloniki Guelfo Zamboni cabled the Italian Diplomatic Mission in Athens on these events, on August 6, 1942. Zamboni made inquiries to Simonidis who told him that he was not aware of the German intentions regarding the Jewish problem and that he was just limiting himself to executing what was requested of him. Consul General Zamboni to Italian Diplomatic Mission to Athens, August 6, 1942 in Carpi, *Italian Diplomatic Documents*, telegram 1942.15, pp. 102–104.

⁴⁰ Hagen Fleischer, *Crown and Swastika: Greece during the Occupation and the Resistance 1941–1944* (Greek) (Athens: Papazisis, 1995), pp. 303–304. This important assertion, often quoted by historians (e.g., Irith Dublon-Knebel, *German Foreign Office Documents*, p. 25; Mazower, *Salonica*, pp. 395–396; Safrian, *Eichmann’s Men*,

should be seen in connection to the need to replace the 5,000 villagers who were already employed in these works but were now required for the harvest and other agricultural tasks,⁴¹ and the general shortage of labor due to the war situation and the creation of a guerilla movement. Indeed, some of the evidence seems to point in that direction. Initially, forced labor measures in German-occupied Thessaloniki targeted young males, irrespective of religion. Jews were granted several exemptions, including up to five people per congregation, needed for the daily prayer.⁴² However, due to their perception by the Nazis as enemies and supporters of the Allies, it is unclear how many Jewish men were actually called up in the early days.⁴³

In the following weeks until the end of August 1942, some 3,500 Jewish men were drafted and sent to different parts of Greece to build roads, railways, and airports, and work in mines. Most of these men had never been employed in heavy construction and they were far from qualified. Under a harsh regime of hard labor and limited food and hygiene, many

p. 153) alleges that the forced conscription of the Jews was first proposed by a senior Greek official. However, I have not been able to cross-reference it or find the original source (in postwar trial records in Germany). Andrew Apostolou calls the evidence “inconclusive.” See Andrew Apostolou, “‘The Exception of Salonika’: Bystanders and Collaborators in Northern Greece,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, vol. 14, n. 2 (Fall 2000), p. 178.

⁴¹ Report of Italian Consulate in Thessaloniki, July 11, 1942, quoted in Joseph Rochlitz, *The Righteous Enemy, Document Collection* (Rome, 1988), p. 123.

⁴² “Civil Mobilization of the Citizens of Thessaloniki for Guarding Railway Lines,” Thessaloniki History Center, General Records of the City of Thessaloniki, 1943, f. 2, sub. 3. The first order, posted at the streets of the city on January 11, 1942, concerned men aged between 23 and 25 to guard railway lines. For an overview, see the testimony of Athanassios Chrysochoou during the Merten trial, *Makedonia* (newspaper), February 18, 1959, pp. 1, 3.

⁴³ Hardly any Jewish names appeared on the lists of names for civil mobilization published in the local press. See for example, *Apogevmatini*, July 7, July 9 and December 5, 1942. In Italy, the exemption of the Jews from military service generated complaints on the grounds of favoritism: “the exemption of the Jews from military service on grounds of their unworthiness seems to have turned into a rather felicitous benefit for the cursed sons of Judas.” Also, “exempted from military service, not confined in concentration camps, free to conduct business at the expense of real Italians, the Jews are enjoying themselves, they’re having a great time.” As a consequence, in May 1942, a forced labor law for Jews was introduced. Valeria Galimi, “The ‘New Racist Man’: Italian Society and the Fascist Anti-Jewish Laws,” in Giulia Albanese and Roberta Pergher, eds., *In the Society of Fascists: Acclamation, Acquiescence, and Agency in Mussolini’s Italy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 158 and 161.

suffered. When the first bodies were returned to Thessaloniki, it caused an outrage in the Jewish community. The population demanded that its leadership improve the working and living conditions of the laborers.⁴⁴

To this situation, which went on for several months, there was no organized opposition from the Greek Christian society.⁴⁵ The city authorities, the Church or the professional associations “did not express any willingness to interfere, if not to suspend the pressuring measures against the Jews, to, at least, implement them more mildly.”^{46 47}

⁴⁴ Yacoel, *Memoirs*, p. 63.

⁴⁵ An exception seems to be a letter sent by Prime Minister Konstantinos Logothetopoulos to the General Governor of Macedonia on November 21, 1942. Logothetopoulos spoke of “oral and written complaints” with which he dealt with the issue of the civil mobilization of the Jews of Thessaloniki, “strongly and efficiently.” He claimed he succeeded in improving the condition of the Jewish laborers, a measure which took place without the knowledge of the government, and was able to achieve the replacement of the sick and unfit Jews and also to avoid the implementation of similar actions in the rest of Greece. See Konstantinos Logothetopoulos, *Here is the Truth* (Greek) (Athens, 1948), pp. 104–106. See also clandestine newspaper *Doxa*, Issue 7, July 1942, p. 3, in Association “Friends of PEAN,” *Secret Press of the Occupation* (Greek) (Athens: Diogenis, 2000) p. 49, which described the measure as “barbaric.”

⁴⁶ Yacoel, *Memoirs*, pp. 59–60. The lack of reactions by the Greek population has been attributed to “German terrorism and the anxiety of the Christian population that it would follow the fate of the Jews.” Sotirios Terzis, *Watching the trains of the Final Solution: The Jews of Thessaloniki and Metropolitan Gennadios Alexiadis* (Greek) (Thessaloniki: Barbounakis, 2017), pp. 138-139.

⁴⁷ A couple of weeks after the Liberty Square events, the German-controlled Athens radio spread the false rumor that “Those Salonika Jews who will not be sent to forced labor by the Nazi occupation authorities will be reported to a huge ghetto which is to be established on the German-held island of Crete. [...] The Jews residing in other Greek towns will be interned temporarily in local ghettos until they can be transported to Crete. [...] The deportation of the Jews to Crete is punishment for ‘Jewish responsibility for Greek resistance to the Axis and for Jewish intrigues that plunged Greece into war.’” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, July 26, 1942. German newspaper *Donau Zeitung*, published in Belgrade, repeated the news adding that “[Thessaloniki Jews] will be compelled to leave all their possessions behind them, as punishment for ‘making Greece fight the Axis.’” The information was picked up by the U.S. Office of Censorship, which monitored Allied and Axis press, and was reported back to the US. Office of Censorship U.S.A., Record No CH 5674, September 14, 1942, quoted in Alexandros Kitroeff, “Documents: the Jews in Greece, 1941–1944—Eyewitness Accounts,” *Journal of the Hellenic Diaspora*, Vol. XII, no. 3 (Fall 1985), p. 10.

On August 20, 1942, Ioannis Miller, the Greek-German civilian contractor in charge of most of the work projects,⁴⁸ asked the Community whether they would take charge of the issues concerning the workforce. A protocol was signed on August 29, which enabled some Jewish workers to be excluded from slave labor by paying a ransom.⁴⁹

Already from the beginning of 1942, in order to deal with the grave humanitarian situation that was emerging—the winter of 1941-42 was especially harsh and many people had died, Jews in higher rates than Greeks, especially among poorer children⁵⁰—a committee of prominent Jews was formed in order to reestablish *Matanoth Laevionim* [Gifts to the Poor], a philanthropic organization which provided meals for children in need, outside of the purview of the Jewish Community. It started its operations serving 200 children and by April 1942 it had reached 2,000, funded exclusively by Jewish charity, with the exception of assistance from the Greek and the International Red Cross.⁵¹

On September 11, 1942, Matanoth Laevionim asked the Community's Central Committee for the Coordination of Social Welfare Works for additional resources to respond

⁴⁸ Ioannis Petrou Miller, who had German origins from his father's side, had a car transportation company before the war. After the German invasion, he continued with car-related business activities and also entered into other sectors, such as construction and raw materials, for which he utilized forced labor. After the war, on February 26, 1946, he was summoned to court with his other partners in the Miller company. During the trial, which took place December 3–5, 1946, Col. Chrysochoou appeared as a defense witness claiming that Miller offered his services to Greece by hiring reserve officers in the road works and giving reservoir plans to the Army headquarters in the Middle East. He was convicted to five and a half years in prison and confiscation of half of his property. See Eleni Haidia, "Special Court of Thessaloniki (1945–1946): The case of the economic collaborators" (Greek), *Valkanika Symmeikta*, 1996, pp. 207–208 and footnote 16, available at <https://ojs.lib.uom.gr/index.php/ValkanikaSymmeikta/article/download/364/371>.

⁴⁹ Yacoel, *Memoirs*, pp. 65–66.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 50. Maria Kavala counted the deaths from hunger in 1942 as 1,785, 773 of which (or 43.3 percent) were Jews. Maria Kavala, "Thessaloniki during the German Occupation (1941–1944): society, economy, persecution of Jews," (Greek) Ph.D. thesis, University of Crete, Rethymno, 2009, pp. 182–191. Using different sources, the Jewish Museum of Thessaloniki spoke of Jewish mortality three times more than the Greeks in 1942. Exhibition "Divided Memories 1940–1950: Between history and experience," Macedonian Museum of Contemporary Art, Thessaloniki, December 2016–February 2017.

⁵¹ Yacoel, *Memoirs*, p. 51. Similar initiatives also took place in April 1942 by representatives of different Thessaloniki institutions such as the Lawyers' Association, the Association of War Handicapped, the National Union of Workers, etc. It is not clear whether these institutions also catered to the Jewish community. Kavala, "Thessaloniki during the German Occupation," p. 186.

to the needs of the children of those enlisted for forced labor. The kids fed in their soup kitchens were at the time 4,200 and they expected the number to rapidly rise to 6,000.⁵² If these challenges were not enough, a letter sent on the same day from A. Kamaras, the President of the Children Soup Kitchens of Thessaloniki, operating under the General Governor of Macedonia, informed Matanoth Laevionim that they did not have enough resources to feed all the children in need so they decided that the cost for the Jewish ones should be borne exclusively by the Jewish Community:

Gentlemen,

We have the honor to inform you that our committee in its meeting yesterday ascertained that its economic funds are not sufficient for the covering of the necessary charges for the feeding of 25-30,000 children, and decided that the Jewish Community is charged with the relevant amount for the feeding of the Jewish children.

Yours sincerely,
The President
A. Kamaras⁵³

A response from the community or further exchange on the issue could not be found in the archive. But it was clear that, as of September 1942, each community had to depend on its own resources.

As the winter approached, the hardships for the forced laborers further increased. The Community's legal counsel, Yomtov Yacoel, visited different sites on October 1 and saw

⁵² Archive of the Jewish Museum of Thessaloniki, Box 9, Subseries 2: Correspondence of Matanoth Laevionim, File 165: Correspondence regarding Mess Halls of Thessaloniki and related items, 1940–1943, September 11, 1942.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, Protocol number 66, September 11, 1942. See also Devin E. Naar, *Jewish Salonica: Between the Ottoman Empire and Modern Greece* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016), p. 87. Similarly, the City Council provided financial support to fourteen foundations and charities, including churches and orphanages, but none of them with Jewish character. Thessaloniki History Center, General Records of the City of Thessaloniki, 1943, f. 6, sub. 1b, Decision 20, January 19, 1943.

firsthand the miserable conditions of the workers. Approximately 100 Jews may have died by then.⁵⁴ On the conclusion of Yacoel's visit, Miller proposed replacing Jewish forced laborers with qualified Greek Christian ones, whose salaries the Jewish Community would pay. It was decided that Miller would propose the idea to the Germans, while Yacoel would further study the issue.

On October 13 a first meeting took place between the community elders and Dr. Maximilian Merten, the thirty-one-year-old German officer in charge of civilian affairs, at the Matanoth Laevionim basement. The amount Merten proposed for the replacement of the Jewish workers with others was three to five billion drachmas. The only hitch in the plan was the great sum of money requested, to be paid in such a short time.

The next day Chief Rabbi Koretz met the contractor Miller and asked him to help reduce the amount. The upshot of the meeting was that the community agreed to pay two billion drachmas, which it estimated as reasonable. At the second meeting with the community leadership, on October 15, Merten approved the two billion in cash deal,⁵⁵ but added a new stipulation: the destruction of the old Jewish cemetery of Thessaloniki,⁵⁶ the land of which he valued at one and a half billion drachmas.

⁵⁴ For the mortality rate, Yacoel gives the figure of 3% in two and a half months. This would be approximately 100 people. Yacoel, *Memoirs*, p. 71. Molho misquotes Yacoel and gives a rate of 12%. Michael Molho and Joseph Nehama, *In Memoriam: Dedication to the memory of the Jewish victims of Nazism in Greece* (Greek) (Thessaloniki: Jewish Community of Thessaloniki, 1974), p. 69. In fact, Molho must have confused it with number 12 that appeared close by in Yacoel's text but was unrelated. In his 1961 deposition to the Eichmann Trial, Max Merten said that there "was a high mortality rate, and I consider that the figure of twelve percent in two and a half months, given by Michael Molho in his book *In Memoriam*, is still too low." (The testimony of Max Merten, Part 1 of 3, May 7, 1961, The Nizkor Project, www.nizkor.org/hweb/people/e/eichmann-adolf/transcripts/Testimony-Abroad/Max_Merten-01.html). Merten may have claimed that the rate was even higher than 12% to bolster his humanitarian actions for his defense. We believe Yacoel's is a more plausible figure.

⁵⁵ For comparison, in December 1942, a daily salary of an ordinary worker was 3,000 drachmas and that of an artisan 5,000. The municipality paid Jews in forced labor in its road cleaning department 1,000 drachmas a day. So two billion drachmas amounted to around 700,000 daily salaries of an ordinary worker. Thessaloniki History Center, General Records of the City of Thessaloniki, 1943, f. 6, sub. 2, Division of Technical Services.

⁵⁶ In his deposition to the Eichmann Trial, Merten argued that the decision to destroy the cemetery "was in line with a Greek law of 1936." (Testimony of Max Merten, Part 2 of 3, May 7, 1961, The Nizkor Project, www.nizkor.org/hweb/people/e/eichmann-adolf/transcripts/Testimony-Abroad/Max_Merten-02.html.) Merten

4. Negotiations on the Cemetery

Merten's new demand caught the community leaders off guard and left them with little room for maneuver. The demand for the cemetery in addition to the ransom for the release of the Jewish laborers further complicated the discussion. Merten must have been informed from his briefings with the Greek authorities that, in Jewish tradition, a cemetery can never be removed. Nevertheless, he showed no signs of compromise and the Jewish leaders were left with no choice.

On October 16, the Community leaders met and after long deliberations agreed that the issue of the cemetery, purely of religious nature, could not become an object of negotiation in a financial exchange. Yet, "if for military purposes the usage or even destruction of the Jewish cemeteries is demanded, the Jewish community would always obey the orders of the occupation authorities and comply with them."⁵⁷ This painful decision was a desperate attempt to save the Jewish laborers who were in a very bad state. The Community leaders had no other choice but to succumb to the German blackmail. Quoting "military purposes," were the only grounds on which religious authorities could accept such an extraordinary measure.

On October 17, 1942, a protocol was signed between the Community and Merten. "Dr. Merten left after he bid farewell to each of the members of the central committee with a handshake."⁵⁸ At eight o'clock the next morning, Yacoel and Community officials went to work to prepare the lists of Community members and the amounts each should pay to raise the two billion needed.⁵⁹ A letter sent from the German military administration to different

probably meant Law 890 of October 11, 1937. It is noteworthy that Merten considered himself an implementer of prewar Greek legislation.

⁵⁷ Yacoel, *Memoirs*, pp. 74–75.

⁵⁸ Yacoel, *Memoirs*, p. 76. Italian Consul General Guelfo Zamboni, in reporting the agreement to his supervisors, remarked that it "has aroused ill feelings among the Greeks, who argue that Greek workers will be enslaved with the Jewish money." Consul General Zamboni to Italian Diplomatic Mission to Athens, October 22, 1942 in Carpi, *Italian Diplomatic Documents*, telegram 1942.23, pp. 115–116.

⁵⁹ The narration so far is based on Yacoel, *Memoirs*, pp. 61–83; On the ransom and the way it was paid, see Evangelos Hekimoglou, "Merten's 'Lost' Checks," (Greek) *Thessalonikeon Polis*, vol. 18 (September 2005),

German agencies in Athens and Thessaloniki and to apprise the Greek General Governor of Macedonia, summarized the agreement:

For the rest of the 1.5 billion drachmas, the religious [Jewish] community of Saloniki has put at our disposal the Jewish cemetery located in Saloniki itself which in the past had obstructed the organic development of Saloniki and which anyway would have to disappear in the interest of public order and safety in Saloniki. This measure resolves a problem that has preoccupied Greek public opinion for many years.⁶⁰

A few days later, a letter was sent from the General Governor of Macedonia to the Jewish Community:

[The document] called the Jewish community on the one hand to collaborate with the municipality for the relocation of the Jewish cemeteries and on the other to cooperate for the organization of two new Jewish cemeteries.⁶¹ ... Moreover, it specified a very brief deadline for the implementation of the orders, under the threat of the demolition of the [old] cemeteries by the municipality and removal of the materials from the [funerary] monuments. At the same time, the burials in the old cemeteries were immediately forbidden.⁶²

The Community rushed to implement these decisions—collection of the two billion drachmas and relocation of the cemetery—while coordinating the release of the slave

pp. 40–61. Today the Jewish Community of Thessaloniki continues to petition the German government for the repayment of the ransom money.

⁶⁰ Letter from Pramann to several, October 18, 1942, Testimony of Max Merten at the Eichmann Trial, Israel State Archives, 40-14-2-10. The document is also available in a different translation at www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsourc/Holocaust/salonika_release.html.

⁶¹ The two new sites would be in Zeitenlik and in Sedes, later changed to Ano Toumba. The Zeitenlik area is where the Jewish cemetery is located today.

⁶² Yacoel, *Memoirs*, p. 84.

laborers.⁶³ At the end of November, the Community set up a committee to oversee the issue of the cemetery chaired by Chief Rabbi Koretz.

The German military authorities transmitted their orders to the Greek Governor making him responsible for the demolition of the old cemetery and the preparation of the two new sites.⁶⁴ In a follow-up letter dated November 28, 1942, Merten instructed Simonidis: “A proposal for the establishment of a second substitute cemetery has to be handed in within a week ... We have to begin immediately with the flattening of the old cemetery.” Merten concluded his letter with a strong warning to Simonidis: “The immediate execution of this order is an obligation. Delays in the work will be punished by the occupying power.”⁶⁵

In order to implement all these orders on a practical level, a first meeting took place at the city hall to be followed by another the next day, on December 3, 1942. The meeting, chaired by the German commissioner of Civilian Affairs Bohlke,⁶⁶ brought together senior officials from the office of the General Governor of Macedonia,⁶⁷ the municipality of Thessaloniki⁶⁸ and the Jewish Community⁶⁹ to discuss the implementation of the issued orders.

During the meeting, the previous German orders were reiterated to the effect that

⁶³ *Oberberghauptmann* Oskar Gavel of the Economy Ministry protested the release of the laborers working in the chromium mines for “the loss of this urgently needed workforce.” Memorandum of discussion between Gavel (Ministry of Economy/Mines) and Major Dr. Baetz, October 31, 1942, German Federal Archives, R 7/890, quoted in Raul Hilberg, *Destruction of European Jews*, Volume 2 (New Heaven and London: Yale University Press, 2003), p. 739.

⁶⁴ Unfortunately, the fate of the archives of the General Governor of Macedonia from that period is unknown.

⁶⁵ Israel State Archives, Testimony of Max Merten at the Eichmann Trial, Letter from Merten to Simonidis, November 28, 1942, 40-14-3-10. This strongly phrased order is rather uncommon in a written document. The reasons for this are not clear. As the documentation is fragmented, some context may be missing here.

⁶⁶ Bohlke was working on civilian affairs within Merten’s division.

⁶⁷ Mihail Almeidas, director; Emmanouil Samaleas, legal counselor; Haritakis, sanitary counselor; and Athanassios Broikos, public works engineer.

⁶⁸ Georgios Malakis, chief engineer of the municipality and Antonios Ikonou, chief doctor.

⁶⁹ Chief Rabbi Dr. Koretz of Thessaloniki and Eli Modiano, engineer. Eli Modiano (1881–1968) was one of the most famous architects of Thessaloniki, who developed many landmark sites such as the Customs building at the port, the food market (bearing his family name) and several mansions.

it is necessary to immediately begin with the demolition of the tombstones, removal of the materials and flattening the area, allowing those Jews who are willing to collect and transfer the bones of their dead or the materials of the funerary monuments, provided that they themselves come in time to collect and transport them.

Dr. Koretz raised objections...and requested that, if possible, the graves of the old [existing] cemetery remain intact, according to the understanding up until now. If this is not possible, the deadline should be extended so that the Jewish community or its members could transfer the remains and the memorial stones to the new cemeteries. However, Commissioner Bohlke clearly stressed that the orders of the military administration explicitly command the flattening of the old Jewish cemetery and no one is in the position to bring about the slightest modification.⁷⁰

The exchange of letters and the official minutes of the meetings clearly show that the German officers were directing the whole project. The Greek authorities proposed no modifications and were tasked with the implementation of the decisions. The only voice against the plans came from Chief Rabbi Koretz, who tried to buy more time, but was quickly dismissed. Yacoel provides us with an insight into what probably took place at the December 3 meeting, which the official minutes did not record:

Wasn't the senior technical employee of the General Governor heard saying, in rebutting the request for a delay of the demolition works, put forth by the chief rabbi, for a few months because of the winter, even speaking in front of German officers, that this was aimed at gaining time until the British come to the assistance of the Jews?⁷¹

Yacoel was not present at the meeting, but a Community participant communicated this information to him. His account of the engineer's hostile stance and hateful words showed how much it resonated with the Jewish leaders. This will be examined later on.

⁷⁰ Archive of the Municipality of Thessaloniki, Minutes of the Municipal Council, vol. 40, December 23, 1942, pp. 847–850.

⁷¹ Yacoel, *Memoirs*, p. 87.

5. Destruction of the Cemetery

Despite the ongoing—but slow—negotiations, eventually the destruction process of the vast Jewish necropolis did begin on December 6, 1942, marked by a meeting of Merten, Simonidis, Koretz, and others on the cemetery grounds.⁷² Rabbi Michael Molho, who had studied the ancient cemetery, was an eyewitness and wrote an account of what took place.⁷³

Molho identified several tombs of significant historical value. Mihail Almeidas, the general secretary of the Greek Governor, argued for a complete expropriation of the land. The representatives of the Jewish Community pleaded to safeguard as much of the ancient cemetery as possible. Listening to both sides, Merten decided to expropriate the part of the old cemetery adjacent to the University and the populated areas and leave the rest intact. Even if Merten's new position seemed to be a compromise, in reality it was just an effort to temporarily appease the Jewish side while ultimately maintaining his previous firm stance. As Merten was getting into his car, the Greek authorities gave the order to demolish everything, even the historic and recent graves.

Five hundred workers were reportedly tasked by the municipality, with the city spending around 100,000,000 drachmas for the destruction of the graves and the gathering of the materials in piles.⁷⁴ Both Yacoel and Molho noted the remarkable speed and zeal with which the workers took to their task. "It is obvious from such a hasty manner and the excessive enthusiasm shown by the Greek authorities that it was not just the springs of the beautification of the city that motivated the authorities to quickly demolish the Jewish monuments."⁷⁵ Greek archeologists were present to catalogue the few tombstones with Greek or Latin inscriptions.⁷⁶

⁷² "Present: Dr. Merten, the general governor [Simonidis] and his general secretary [Almeidas], city engineer P., the main instigator of this vandalism which is about to be confirmed, Chief Rabbi Koretz, engineer Eli Modiano and the author of the present record [Molho], who was invited as an expert," Molho and Nehama, *In Memoriam*, p. 414. Brackets are mine.

⁷³ Molho and Nehama, *In Memoriam*, pp. 414–415. The description that follows is based on these pages.

⁷⁴ Archive of the Municipality of Thessaloniki, Minutes of the Municipal Council, Report of the Division of Technical Services to the Mayor of Thessaloniki, protocol number 15785/1436 of July 3, 1944, pp. 753–756.

⁷⁵ Yacoel, *Memoirs*, p. 87.

⁷⁶ Studies on these tombstones have been published in Haralambos Makaronas, "Archaeological Chronicles" (Greek), *Makedonika*, vol. 2 (1941–1952), published by the Society for Macedonian Studies, pp. 597–598;

In just a couple of weeks, wrote Molho, “the vast necropolis, scattered with fragments of stone and rubble, resembled a city that had been bombed, or destroyed by a volcanic eruption.”⁷⁷ Local Jews raced to save the remains of their loved ones, as the workers were destroying the cemetery.⁷⁸ Based on interviews with Jewish refugees who arrived in Istanbul, U.S. Consul Burton Berry, reported back to Washington:

Workers set about dismantling the tombs and disinterring the dead. The work of destroying the cemetery was done in such haste that very few Jews succeeded in finding the remains of their families and relatives. Recently buried dead were thrown to the dogs.⁷⁹

On December 9 *Apogevmatini*, one of the two dailies in the city published under the control of the German authorities, published a short report of the events on its front page under the title “The Transfer of the Cemeteries”:

The population of Thessaloniki felt relief with the news that, on the initiative of the German authorities, it was decided to transfer the Jewish cemetery from the center of the city to its boundaries. Thanks to this decision, the area where the Jewish cemeteries are located today will soon be beautified with the expansion of the central park of the city to this point and with the erection of the public buildings envisioned by the city plan. So both the city will be beautified in this sector, and the sanitary situation will be significantly improved since the vitalizing green will cover such a

Andreas Xigopoulos, “Relief of St. David of Thessaloniki” (Greek), *Makedonika*, vol. 2 (1941–1952), Society for Macedonian Studies, p. 143; Fotis Petsas, “Archaeological Chronicles” (Greek), *Makedonika*, vol. 7 (1966–1967), Society for Macedonian Studies, p. 297; and Vassilios Kallipolitis and Dimitrios Lazaridis, *Ancient Inscriptions of Thessaloniki* (Greek) (Thessaloniki: General Governor of Macedonia, Division of Historical Monuments and Archaeology, 1946).

⁷⁷ Molho and Nehama, *In Memoriam*, p. 415, translated in Mark Mazower, *Inside Hitler’s Greece: The Experience of Occupation, 1941–44* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), p. 240.

⁷⁸ Molho and Nehama, *In Memoriam*, p. 415.

⁷⁹ Cited in Michael Matsas, *The Illusion of Safety: The Story of Greek Jews during the Second World War* (New York: Pella, 1997), pp. 38–39.

large area. The people of Thessaloniki welcomed this initiative of the occupation authorities with gratitude.⁸⁰

The office of the General Governor published an announcement in the local press several days later calling on the Jews “to immediately attend to the collection of these [funerary] materials and the liberation of the space in the cemetery; otherwise, any possible damage or loss will be exclusively their fault.”⁸¹ The Jewish Community also made an announcement in the local press concerning the creation of the two new areas to be used as cemeteries.⁸² Molho was tasked by Chief Rabbi Koretz and the spiritual council, the *Mejlish Ruhani*, to compile a list of illustrious personalities in the literary and scientific fields who were buried there and to rebury their remains in the new cemetery.⁸³

Around the same time, Rabbi Koretz met with Metropolitan Gennadios of Thessaloniki, according to the diocese’s journal. While the content of their discussion was not reported, Vassilis Ritzaleos speculates that the issue of the cemetery was on the agenda.⁸⁴ Nevertheless, the Church released no statements—neither public nor private—on the issue.

On December 23, 1942, the Thessaloniki municipal council, sitting in a special session, adopted decision 507, which rubberstamped the decisions of the December 3 meeting and formally handed over two plots of municipal land to the Jewish Community to serve as

⁸⁰ *Apogevmatini*, December 9, 1942.

⁸¹ Announcement by Simonidis, Protocol number 150718/6718, December 16, 1942, published in *Nea Evropi*, December 22, 1942, p. 2.

⁸² Announcement by Koretz, December 22, 1943, published in *Nea Evropi*, December 23, 1942, p. 1.

⁸³ “Un núcleo de amigos y simpatizantes,” *Homenaje a Don Michael Molho* (Buenos Aires: Typ. J. Kaufman, 1961), p. 17. The book also contains the names of those whose remains were reburied. Molho worked hard to document the old cemetery as late as February 4, 1943, when he requested a book with biographies of prominent Thessaloniki Jews from the library of Matanoth Laevionim. On February 10, he received the book with the approval of Rabbi Koretz. Jewish Community of Thessaloniki, *With the own words: Glimpses of Jewish life in Thessaloniki before the Holocaust* (Thessaloniki: Jewish Community of Thessaloniki, 2006), pp. 30–31.

⁸⁴ The other topic of discussion could have been Koretz’s appointment as president of the community on December 11, 1942. Vassilis Ritzaleos, “The Greek Orthodox Church of Thessaloniki and the Holocaust,” in Giorgos Antoniou, Stratos Dordanas, Nikos Zaikos, and Nikos Marantzidis, eds., *The Holocaust in the Balkans* (Greek) (Thessaloniki: Epikentro, 2011), pp. 322–323.

future burial grounds. What followed this decision is a revealing discussion among the city council members on the ownership of the land and the materials.⁸⁵

Some council members opposed the municipality's provision of the two new parcels of land while the area of the old cemetery would become state rather than city property. The main council member behind this opposition, Periklis Garofallou,⁸⁶ argued, "We must think of what we are going to ask in exchange. I am of the opinion that we must ask for part of the plot that is liberated by the demolition of the old Jewish cemeteries." Mayor Konstantinos Merkouriou agreed and proposed that either the state reimburses the municipality, or the municipality becomes the owner of the land of the old Jewish cemetery. City engineer Georgios Malakis responded that it was a responsibility of the municipality to provide its citizens with burial grounds. At the end of the meeting, the city council members deputed the city's legal advisor to examine, "posthaste," whether the municipality could lay claim to the old cemetery land and, if not, what it should receive from the state in exchange for the loss of the two new parcels.⁸⁷

In his response on May 18, 1943, the legal advisor Petros Iatropoulos argued that the municipality had neither a legal title over the land of the Jewish cemetery, nor the right to claim the site back. The holiness of the site should not be compromised since, according to Jewish law, the removal of the remains is prohibited. Last but not least, he argued that the

⁸⁵ The discussion was held between Mayor Konstantinos Merkouriou and council members Stylianos Valioulis, Thomas Vlahopoulos, and Periklis Garofallou. Senior municipality staff members were also present. Merkouriou (1864–1951) studied Greek literature and worked as a school teacher and later as director of a private school. He was appointed mayor in 1937 by the Metaxas dictatorship and the Germans kept him in that position until February 1943. He was founding member and first President of the Society for Macedonian Studies (June 1939–May 1942).

⁸⁶ Garofallou was the brother-in-law of Sotirios Gotzamanis, the high-profile finance minister of the collaborationist government in Athens at the time and together they had tried to establish a National-Socialist party in Thessaloniki at the beginning of 1943 but they failed. See classified report of Greek Army Information Agency, "Catalogue of National Organizations in Greece," F. 916/B/2b, Athens, May 1943 in Greek Army General Staff, Army History Directorate, *Archives of National Resistance (1941–1944)* (Greek), Volume 7: Domestic Resistance Organizations (Athens: Army History Directorate Publications, 1998), p. 64. Garofallou was the eldest member of Thessaloniki's city council and often substituted for the Mayor when he was away.

⁸⁷ Archive of the Municipality of Thessaloniki, Minutes of the Municipal Council, vol. 40, December 23, 1942, pp. 847–850. The request from the mayor to the legal advisor was sent on December 29, 1942. A reminder was sent on February 3, 1943.

Jewish Communities were responsible for their cemeteries and not the municipalities.⁸⁸ The procedure for the expropriation of the land in exchange for the two new locations was eventually put on hold on June 11, 1943, following the opinion of the legal advisor and the fact that “almost all the Jews [have] departed from our city.”⁸⁹

A few weeks after the destruction of the cemetery, the Jews of Thessaloniki were forced into ghettos and from there they were transported to the Nazi death camp in Auschwitz, in German-occupied Poland. The cemetery grounds became in effect a huge quarry. The Germans, the Church, the city, associations, theaters and many others used the marble stones and the bricks as construction materials. On October 14, 1943, the grounds of the old cemetery were formally registered as a public domain and the land came into the possession of the Greek state.⁹⁰ The Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, which is built on this land, thus became “proprietor of an exceptional plot, for its future use.”⁹¹

⁸⁸ Iatropoulos to Mayor, May 18, 1943 in Thessaloniki History Center, General Records of the City of Thessaloniki, 1943, f. 14, sub. 4a.

⁸⁹ Thessaloniki History Center, General Records of the City of Thessaloniki, 1943, f. 14, sub. 4a, Minutes of the Municipal Council, June 11, 1943. The meeting at the city hall was presided by Garofallou. Earlier, on January 23, 1943, following previous orders of the General Governor, the municipality budgeted 50,000 drachmas for the “drawing of sketches and the undertaking of photocopy works for the determination of the boundaries and position of the location for the relocated Jewish cemeteries.” Thessaloniki History Center, General Records of the City of Thessaloniki, 1943, f. 6, sub. 2, Division of Technical Services, Decision 43 of January 23, 1943.

⁹⁰ Greek Ministry of Finance, explanatory report for the draft law “Combating tax evasion, staffing of auditing services and other provisions under the purview of the Ministry of Finance,” February 22, 2011, article 45, paragraph 10. Salem wrote that with Ministry of Finance decree 5880 of October 14, 1943 (published in Government Gazette 488) “the Jewish cemetery was seized, using as pretext the fact that its users had deserted it.” Salem, *Old Cemetery*, p. 76. We could not locate such an issue of the Government Gazette. In his legal brief on the status of the Jewish cemetery after the war, Evangelos Hekimoglou concluded that its destruction and the plundering of its materials was an illegal act and that the terrain has never ceased to constitute a cemetery, with the University campus being built over an existing Jewish cemetery. See Evangelos Hekimoglou, “The destroyed Jewish Cemetery of Thessaloniki from the perspective of property law,” unpublished report which received an honorary mention from the Academy of Athens on December 20, 2016, available at <https://www.academia.edu/31286507>.

⁹¹ Vassilios Kyriazopoulos, “Aristotle University of Thessaloniki,” in Alexandros Letsas, ed., *Thessaloniki 1912–1962* (Greek) (Thessaloniki: Ministry of Northern Greece, [1963]), p. 243. With act 351 of June 8, 1946 of the Council of Ministers, the land of the old cemetery of approximately 150,000 square meters was given to the University. The Jewish community owned part of the land of the old cemetery and claimed it after the war. The issue was settled only in 2011, with Law 3943 of March 31, 2011 (*Government Gazette A 66* of March 31,

6. Tombstones as Building Materials

As the cemetery was being demolished, the building materials it provided became a commodity that was much in demand in those years of limited means, shortages of goods, and rising prices. Its marble stones and bricks were used to build and repair many public and private buildings, as well as churches, even for the needs of the German military cemetery. A modern visitor to Thessaloniki can still see stones with Hebrew inscriptions in parks and churchyards.

Molho describes what happened to the materials:

The memorial stones remain piled up, mixed up, in the old necropolis. They are at the disposal of the first passer-by. The marble merchants enrich their stock, delete the inscriptions and use the marble in various ways. Churches pave their courtyards with them. They are used to adorn and to repair the nearby houses. Some schools lay their courtyards, without even caring to erase the visible signs that betray the origin. The Nazis take them to construct a swimming pool. The whole city is full of them and the price of marble falls in the market. [...] [After the war,] the plunder continues and the venerable cemetery is transformed into a big marble quarry, from where all the buildings are supplied.⁹²

The authority that was initially in charge of the materials was the office of the General Governor of Macedonia, in particular, the public works division. Its work was supervised by the German military headquarters, which often had the last word, and which eventually became responsible in June 1944.⁹³ The municipality, the Church, and other agencies would play the role of the intermediary.

2011), by which the state reimbursed the Jewish community, in exchange for the community giving up its legal claims. For more on how the university became the owner of the land, see Savaidis and Badelas, *Polis*.

⁹² Molho and Nehama, *In Memoriam*, p. 417.

⁹³ Archive of the Agency for the Custody of Jewish Property, Collection of the Jewish Museum of Greece, Box 2, General Governor of Macedonia V. Simonidis to the Municipality of Thessaloniki, Protocol number 51745/2745, June 27, 1944, quoted in Gabriella Etmektsoglou, "The Holocaust of Greek Jews," in Christos

In the beginning of March 1943, the office of the General Governor approved the municipality's request for 100,000 bricks from the demolished Jewish cemetery "for the needs of the municipality." Accordingly, the city council adopted a budget of one million drachmas to transport the materials.⁹⁴ The plundering of the materials rapidly reached such a volume that the municipality's technical services division added, "There is already a need to immediately transport a quantity of bricks to the municipality's workshop before their supply is exhausted, so that they can be collected by the various services of our division for necessities that might arise."⁹⁵

The children's soup kitchens of the Ioannidis School and of the sailing club also requested building materials from the old Jewish cemetery. The Ioannidis School received 50,000 bricks and 100 square meters of marble "destined for the construction of toilets for the use of the children using the soup kitchen." In addition, the municipal council agreed to pay 900,000 drachmas for the transport of the said materials from the old cemetery to the school.⁹⁶

The sailing club wrote to the city council, informing them that in February 1942 they had created a soup kitchen to feed 250 poor children.

For the better operation of the soup kitchen a pavilion is required to house the small children using the soup kitchen because it is not possible to house them in a closed space and because both in the winter and in the summer the food is distributed

Hatziosif and Prokopis Papastratis, eds., *History of Greece of 20th Century: 2nd World War, Occupation, Resistance 1940–1945* (Greek) (Athens: Vivliorama, 2007).

⁹⁴ Thessaloniki History Center, General Records of the City of Thessaloniki, 1943, f. 13, sub. 3a, Division of Financial Services, Decision 216, April 13, 1943. The announcement for the tender was published in the daily press with a March 16, 1943 deadline that was later postponed to April 17 and then again to May 3, 1943. See *Nea Evropi*, March 16, 1943, April 14, 1943, and May 1, 1943. The tender finally took place on September 9, 1943, but with Decision 152 of October 11, 1943, it was cancelled, due to irregularities and because the required budget would be "colossal." See Thessaloniki History Center, General Records of the City of Thessaloniki, 1943, f. 17, sub. 2, Minutes of Municipal Council of September 20, 1943 and Decision 152, October 11, 1943.

⁹⁵ Thessaloniki History Center, General Records of the City of Thessaloniki, Division of Financial Services, 1943, f. 13, sub. 3a, Decision 216, April 13, 1943.

⁹⁶ Thessaloniki History Center, General Records of the City of Thessaloniki, 1943, f. 13, sub. 2, Division of Technical Services, Decision 315, May 29, 1943.

outdoors and the danger of catching a cold in the winter and of sunstroke in the summer is obvious.

For the said pavilion they had already received 30,000 bricks from the Jewish cemetery. However, they still needed wood and tiles, which they requested from the buildings being demolished, probably referring to Jewish neighborhoods being flattened after the deportations. The municipal council approved this request.⁹⁷

When the State Theater of Thessaloniki was established in August 1943, the director of the Theater “addressed the German administration, which responded willingly, and after a few days the Theater Square was laid with marble originating from the Jewish cemetery.”⁹⁸ On November 6, 1943, a tender was held “for the processing and laying of the sidewalk in front of the National Theater [utilizing] 250 square meters of plaques measuring fifty by fifty centimeters from marble of the ex-Jewish cemeteries.”⁹⁹

The nearby Christian cemetery of Agia Fotini also used materials from the destroyed Jewish cemetery. On May 15, 1943, the municipality decided to modify the plans of the small chapel that was being built, so that its interior elements, the iconostasis, the floor and the wall claddings be constructed “with marble from the old Jewish cemeteries being demolished.”¹⁰⁰ At the beginning of 1944, it requested marble, stones, and bricks “necessary for the continuing work on this cemetery (fence, buildings, courtyards, etc.)” This arrangement was beneficial for the municipality since “the cemeteries service believes that the municipality is going to profit several-fold from the value of these useful and necessary materials, charged only with the transport and processing of the marble and the other materials.” The city

⁹⁷ Thessaloniki History Center, General Records of the City of Thessaloniki, 1943, f. 13, sub. 2, Division of Technical Services, Decision 384, July 9, 1943.

⁹⁸ Katerina Kostiou, “State Theater of Thessaloniki,” *Epta Meres Kathimerinis*, September 21, 1997, p. 10. See also Thalís Dilezos, “The Theater in the Resistance,” (Greek) *Epitheorisi Tehnis*, Issue 87–88, March–April 1962, p. 460. Thessaloniki intellectual George Vafopoulos described Merten jumping up and down on these tombstones with his boots and quoted him as saying that “he was listening to squeaking of the bones of the Jews.” Georgios Vafopoulos, *Pages of Autobiography*, vol. 2 (Greek) (Thessaloniki: Paratiritis, 1971), p. 211. Some of these stones can be seen until today.

⁹⁹ Thessaloniki History Center, General Records of the City of Thessaloniki, 1943, f. 17, sub. 2, Decision 171, November 30, 1943.

¹⁰⁰ Thessaloniki History Center, General Records of the City of Thessaloniki, 1943, f. 12, sub. 1, Decision 297, May 15, 1943.

council adopted a budget of thirty-five million drachmas for the requested transfer and added extra funds “so that the transport of more materials can be made possible.”¹⁰¹

Similar requests also came from churches. Vassilis Ritzaleos counted seventeen such requests out of seventy churches in Thessaloniki, from January 16, 1943—two months before the start of the deportations—to October 18, 1943. Church councils would either make requests for the materials directly to the public works division of the General Governor of Macedonia or through the Metropolitan. The Metropolitan would forward the request a couple of days after its receipt and the said division would approve it a few weeks later. The reasons offered vary from the “need to expand the church” to “paving of the forecourt” and the “erection of a bell-tower.” It is interesting to note that quite a few churches requested material for future construction projects. Some of the churches would submit more than one request and others requested funds to transport the materials.¹⁰²

Some churches may have made their demands directly to the German city authorities. That seems to be the case with the Church of Kimisseos Theotokou (Dormition of Mary) in the Saranta Ekklisies Quarter, which bordered the cemetery area. The request of the head of the Church council of September 20, 1943, for 600 square meters of marble for the floor of the church was approved by the office of the German mayor of Thessaloniki, Dr. Blessing,¹⁰³ on October 1, 1943, with a copy sent to the Philanthropic Union of Ladies and Girls of the Saranta Ekklisies Quarter.¹⁰⁴

An interesting exchange followed the unanswered July 1943 request to the General Governor by the St. Demetrius Church, built over the grave of the patron saint of Thessaloniki, for 20,000 bricks from the Jewish cemetery. On September 18, 1943, they

¹⁰¹ Thessaloniki History Center, General Records of the City of Thessaloniki, 1944, f. 9, sub. 2, Decision 165, February 10, 1944.

¹⁰² Based on Ritzaleos, “The Greek Orthodox Church,” pp. 323–326. See also Terzis, *Watching*, pp. 150–159.

¹⁰³ A German mayor of the city was appointed on August 2, 1943, following the creation of the German administrative region of Macedonia in July 1943. Germany annexed the territory and Bulgarian army units were allowed to police several areas of Macedonia, but not Thessaloniki. Greek Mayor Georgios Seremetis, the former head of the Thessaloniki Bar Association who had replaced Merkouriou on February 24, 1943, continued serving as an advisor to the new German mayor. See *Nea Evropi*, August 10, 1943. At that time, Merten became the Governor with Simonidis as his advisor.

¹⁰⁴ Archive of Giannis Megas, Dr. Blessing to Head of Church Council of “Kimisseos Theotokou” Church, October 1, 1943. These stones can still be seen at the entrance of the church to this day.

wrote to the Metropolitan of Thessaloniki asking him to intervene and added a request for an additional 500 marble stones, “which are going to be useful during the future reconstruction of the church.” The Metropolitan’s assistant, Bishop of Olympus Kallinikos, forwarded the request on October 20, 1943, requesting the “satisfaction of the above request.”¹⁰⁵ Around the same time, another two churches made similar requests: Ypapantis for 100 square meters of marble and Fillyro for 3,000 bricks.¹⁰⁶ The public works division forwarded the request to the German authorities on November 5, only to receive a negative response on November 18 from Merten, now the General Governor of Macedonia. In its letter of November 25, the public works division informed the requesting churches of the negative response, explaining that, according to the German authorities, “the bricks have been consumed; the marble stones are required for other urgent needs.”¹⁰⁷ The German response may indeed reflect the rapidly declining quantity of available materials. It could also signal a wish to put an end to such requests, which were multiplying from all sides.

The newly established medical school of the University of Thessaloniki¹⁰⁸ also benefited from the destroyed Jewish cemetery. Tombstones were used as dissecting tables for the anatomy course. They also constructed three big pits with thick cement where they would

¹⁰⁵ Archive of Diocese of Thessaloniki, folder 6, Church of St. Demetrius, Church Council of the Church of the Grave of St. Demetrius to Metropolitan Council, October 18, 1943 and Kallinikos to Simonidis, October 20, 1943.

¹⁰⁶ Ritzaleos, “The Greek Orthodox Church,” p. 325.

¹⁰⁷ Archive of Diocese of Thessaloniki, folder 6, Church of St. Demetrius, Karamousoulakis, Director of Public Works of the General Governor to Diocese of Thessaloniki, November 25, 1943. Jewish tombstones were indeed used after the war for the reconstruction of the St. Demetrius Church.

¹⁰⁸ The medical school of the University of Thessaloniki was founded in 1942 at the initiative of Konstantinos Logothetopoulos who was a professor of gynecology at the University of Athens and Minister of Education in the first collaborationist government. Soon thereafter, Logothetopoulos became Prime Minister of the second collaborationist government. For his role in the establishment of the medical school, he was given an honorary doctorate degree in 1960. See Vassilis Kokkas, ed., *63 Years of Medical School of Thessaloniki* (Greek) (Thessaloniki: University Studio Press, 2005), pp. 14–15. There, it is also claimed that Logothetopoulos made this move in order to counter the danger of Bulgarian propaganda which aimed to establish a Bulgarian University in Thessaloniki. However, an earlier volume could not find any sources for this allegation. Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, *Medical School: 50 Years, 1942–92* (Greek) (Thessaloniki: University Studio Press, [1992?]), p. 11–12.

bring and place bodies from the destroyed cemetery in order to be used for the training of the students.¹⁰⁹

The detailed description of the fate of the tombstones, the other materials and even the bones demonstrates a cold, indifferent approach by the local Greek Christian population, without regard for the holiness and symbolism of the location. One could consider that the destruction of sacred space has a long tradition in that region and that the cemetery had come to symbolize certain problematic relations between Christians and Jews, with the Christians aiming to “Hellenize” the city and the Jews often identified with the former Ottoman rulers. Yet, the seemingly organized and legal manner by which the plundering of the cemetery materials was conducted is comparable to the plundering and distribution of the Jewish properties during the same period. The stones became an object of both necessity and greed, coupled with elements of convenience and antisemitism. The Jewish population, even as they were undergoing ghettoization and deportation, was present at the beginning of this process and could witness the fate of its ancestors.

Many actors were involved in the plunder of the cemetery—the state, the municipality, the Church, local associations, and businessmen—with complex relations, competing roles, and all aided by the lack of a clear hierarchy. The Germans kept the overall control, while the office of the General Governor, on behalf of the Greek state, would designate the agency responsible for the land of the former Jewish cemetery and its materials. The responsible government agency changed several times during the period of the Occupation.¹¹⁰ The municipality would execute some of the ensuing orders, such as designating funds for the transfer of the tombstones, regulating their allocation and paying the guards for the site. Other institutions would appeal to those actors to get a share of the materials, depending on their access or influence.

Due to its vast size and number of graves as well as limited means at the time, the destruction of the cemetery was not completed during the war and it continued after liberation. In fact, most of the heavy digging took place after the war, as the new University buildings were being constructed. The land dug from the old cemetery area was used for the

¹⁰⁹ Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, *Medical School*, p. 16, which quotes information from the memoirs of the first dean of the school, Karolos Alexandridis.

¹¹⁰ Archive of the Municipality of Thessaloniki, Minutes of the Municipal Council, Report of the Division of Technical Services to the Mayor of Thessaloniki, 15785/1436 of July 3, 1944, pp. 753–756.

enlargement of the sea front of Thessaloniki. The Jewish Community complained—to no avail—arguing that the land contained the physical remains of the Jews of Thessaloniki buried in this area.¹¹¹ A central street in the city was paved with Jewish tombstones.¹¹² At the same time, individuals would continue to grab tombstones to be used as building materials. The Jewish Community as well as foreign Jewish organizations made requests on this topic to the Greek authorities, with limited success.¹¹³ The bones of a Jewish grave that were discovered during excavation works in 1963 were thrown by the workers in a nearby ditch.¹¹⁴

Nowhere did we find any moral considerations around this issue. In July 1946, a Jewish delegation to Thessaloniki, which included Dr. Cecil Roth, Reader of Jewish Studies at Oxford University, “saw carts in the cemetery removing Hebrew tombstones, on the instructions of the Director of Antiquities for the province”¹¹⁵ and visited the church of St. Demetrius to witness the reparation works with the use of the said tombstones. They contacted Stylianos Pelekanidis,¹¹⁶ the curator of Byzantine antiquities for northern Greece and the main person responsible for the church’s restoration. He only saw the holy and positive sides of his actions: The utilization of the marble “for such a holy piece of work as the reconstruction of the St. Demetrius Church” was even a positive action when considering that “the stones of the Jewish cemetery had been...used for all sorts of purposes, even for

¹¹¹ For such a letter from the Jewish Community to the Port Authority, with a copy to the Metropolitan of Thessaloniki, see Archive of Diocese of Thessaloniki, folder 122, protocol number 527, April 3, 1949 and “Salonika Authorities Order Demolition of Jewish Cemetery; Use Tombstones for Wall,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, May 10, 1949, available at <http://www.jta.org/1949/05/10/archive/salonika-authorities-order-demolition-of-jewish-cemetery-use-tombstones-for-wall>.

¹¹² “The sacrilege continues,” *Evraki Estia* (Greek), July 20, 1947.

¹¹³ See for example *ibid*, and Archives of the Wiener Library, 1331/9, Letter of Max Gottschalk of the American Jewish Committee to Archbishop Damaskinos, December 9, 1946.

¹¹⁴ “Part of the old Jewish cemetery discovered near Kaftatzoglio [stadium],” *Makedonia* (Greek), December 22, 1963, p. 12.

¹¹⁵ Cecil Roth, “The Last Days of Jewish Salonica: What Happened to a 450-Year-Old Civilization,” *Commentary*, 10 (1950), p. 55.

¹¹⁶ Stylianos Pelekanidis (1909–1980) was born in Istanbul and studied in the Halki Theological School. In 1933, he went for post-graduate studies at the University Berlin, from where he received his PhD in 1939. In May 1943, he was appointed curator of Byzantine antiquities for northern Greece. See School of Philosophy of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, *Literary Memorial of Stylianos Pelekanidis* (Greek) (Thessaloniki, 1982).

pavements and toilets.” He also blamed the Jews for not indicating to his service the tombstones of historical value prior to the deportations and offered additional legalistic excuses, arguing that the Jewish community had no property deeds.¹¹⁷ According to another report, Pelekanidis “expressed amazement at Jewish protests against the use of the stones in a church. He claimed that some of the stones, those with Greek and Roman inscriptions, had originally been stolen from Christian graves,”¹¹⁸ although these constituted a very small percentage compared to the total number of tombstones.¹¹⁹

7. The Main Actors

Yacoel writes that “the satisfaction of a years-long demand of Christian public opinion led the Germans to get involved in this non-military, purely political issue.”¹²⁰ Indeed, “the rapidity and purposefulness with which the vast 350,000-square meter Jewish cemetery was destroyed, the fact that its bones were left in the ground, and that all traces of its existence are lost to contemporary memory”¹²¹ as well as the fate of its tombstones, all point in one direction. There were also no official reactions to this act of sacrilege, similar to the silence during the Liberty Square events.

Senior Greek leaders at the time of the German occupation openly stated that the wish of the people was to move the cemetery to another location. General Chrysochoou, testifying as a defense witness at Merten’s trial in 1959, said, “It was a general request from the Christians of Thessaloniki for the cemetery to leave the city center and be moved further away because it was now next to houses.”¹²² General Governor of Macedonia Vassilios

¹¹⁷ Vassilikou, “The Jewish Cemetery,” p. 128.

¹¹⁸ “Greek Authorities Defend Use of Ancient Jewish Tombstones to Reconstruct Church,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, October 18, 1946, available at www.jta.org/1946/10/18/archive/greek-authorities-defend-use-of-ancient-jewish-tombstones-to-reconstruct-church. More detailed memoranda can be found in the archive of the Wiener Library in London: Jewish Cemetery of Salonika, August 1946, file number 1232/10/1 and Memorandum from Dr. Cecil Roth, file number 1331/12/1.

¹¹⁹ See footnote 76 in this chapter which lists reports on the archeological findings in the area of the old Jewish cemetery.

¹²⁰ Yacoel, *Memoirs*, p. 87. Molho also blamed local individuals for the destruction of the cemetery. See Molho and Nehama, *In Memoriam*, p. 79.

¹²¹ Hesse and Laqueur, “Visible and Invisible Bodies,” p. 49.

¹²² *Makedonia*, February 18, 1959, p. 3.

Simonidis described the destruction of the cemetery as a “big beautifying project, which will have a beneficial influence on the development, by and large, of the city.”¹²³

The presence of the Germans altered the established *modus vivendi* with regards to the cemetery. The Jewish community, which had managed to resist efforts up until then, lost the domestic and international leverage it once enjoyed. Merten told the assembled Jewish community elders during their second meeting in the basement of the soup kitchen, “Many here are your enemies and they repeatedly lobby the German military administration for the destruction of the cemeteries and for the implementation of antisemitic measures.”¹²⁴

Claire Zalc and Tal Bruttman provided the following analysis on the role of the Thessaloniki authorities with regards to the destruction of the cemetery:

Local authorities ... used the German presence to implement their project; one could thus speak of the “opportunity effect” of anti-Semitic policy, which made it possible to disregard the protests of the Jewish community of Thessaloniki, in order to raze and obliterate their graves.¹²⁵

General Chrysochoou went further and testified during Merten’s trial that “the destruction of the cemetery was celebrated as a huge benefit,” causing the reporting journalist to add that this phrase stirred “emotions among the audience.”¹²⁶ Yacoel provided similar information. “Besides it became known that Christian representatives visited the German military commander to thank him on behalf of the city’s Greek population for the definitive solution of this issue.”¹²⁷ Furthermore, in reply to the presiding judge’s question, “Could you now tell us who dug it up and sold its marbles?” Chrysochoou stated, “It was said that what we wanted to do we did it through Merten.”¹²⁸

¹²³ Archive of the Agency for the Custody of Jewish Property, Collection of the Jewish Museum of Greece, Box 2, General Governor of Macedonia V. Simonidis to the Municipality of Thessaloniki, Protocol number 51745/2745, June 27, 1944.

¹²⁴ Yacoel, *Memoirs*, p. 74.

¹²⁵ Claire Zalc and Tal Bruttman, “Introduction: Toward a Microhistory of the Holocaust,” in Claire Zalc and Tal Bruttman, eds., *Microhistories of the Holocaust* (New York: Berghahn, 2016), p. 7.

¹²⁶ *Eleftheria*, February 18, 1959, p. 5.

¹²⁷ Yacoel, *Memoirs*, p. 87.

¹²⁸ *Makedonia*, February 18, 1959, p. 3.

When pushed by the prosecutor, Merten, in a “coarse manner,” stated, “The cemetery was destroyed by the Greeks for two reasons: To get rid of it, because it was next to their houses and to take the [gold] teeth of the dead.”¹²⁹

The person in the Greek administration who was in charge of the destruction of the cemetery was chief engineer Athanassios Broikos, working under Macedonia’s General Governor. Molho pointed to “city engineer P.” as the “main instigator of this vandalism.”¹³⁰ He added,

An architect, who it seemed was not that much absorbed by his official duties and who, seeking new endeavors, often visited the offices of *Befehlshaber* [Commander] Baelke,¹³¹ Abteilung Militärverwaltung Saloniki-Aegae [Military Administration, Department of Salonika-Aegean], was the most active protagonist of the definitive destruction of the big Jewish necropolis.¹³²

In his chronicle of the city’s history, Kostas Tomanas squarely names Broikos as the main actor. He wrote, “On 6 December [1942], following a proposal by engineer Athanassios Broikos, the destruction of the Jewish cemeteries commenced, which extended to the whole area where the university installations are today.”¹³³

In referring to the engineer, Molho provided a—mistaken—first initial while Yacoel provided no name at all. It could be that neither of them remembered his name at the time of

¹²⁹ *Makedonia*, March 1, 1959. During his Athens trial, Merten tried to portray himself as a friend of the Greek people. This statement is thus noteworthy because it identified the Greek population as the main instigators, exactly the people he needed on his side to claim his innocence. The destruction of the cemetery was among the charges brought against Merten. He was sentenced to six years in prison for the “malign destruction of a historic and religious monument.” Merten has been the only one ever to be charged and convicted for the destruction of the cemetery.

¹³⁰ Molho and Nehama, *In Memoriam*, p. 414. Molho made two minor mistakes here. First, he identified Broikos by the initial “P” of his surname. The sound of “P” is quite close to “B,” so it could be easily confused after several years. Second, he called him the “city architect.” Broikos had been the city engineer (1930–1932) but at the time worked for the General Governor. In any case, these are very small details that may have escaped people’s notice. The city engineer Georgios Malakis played a less central role compared to Broikos.

¹³¹ Most probably referring to Commissioner Bohlke.

¹³² Molho and Nehama, *In Memoriam*, p. 413.

¹³³ Kostas Tomanas, *The Chronicle of Thessaloniki* (Greek), vol. 2 (Thessaloniki: Nisides, 1992), p. 229.

writing. Or it could be that they were both cautious not to provide it, due to a fear of a lawsuit or possible intimidation. Under normal circumstances, such a position is plainly bureaucratic and very few people could name such an official. However, Broikos was not just any random person; rather, he was very well connected with the city leadership.

Born around 1900, Broikos studied civil engineering in Switzerland and did his Ph.D. at the University of Thessaloniki. He continued his studies in Mussolini's Italy in 1939, a year before the Italian attack against Greece. He returned to Thessaloniki where, between 1940 and 1945, he served as a public works engineer with the General Governor of Macedonia, in charge of, *inter alia*, "17 excavators."¹³⁴ In June 1944 Broikos was made responsible for managing the area of the old cemetery and the materials found there.¹³⁵

We have already discussed how Yacoel described the attitude of the engineer who is most probably Broikos attending the city hall meeting of December 3 chaired by Bohlke. It was Broikos who openly opposed Koretz's request for a postponement of the demolition of the cemetery due to the winter. The Jewish participant who related the discussion to Yacoel passed on Broikos' hostile stance and anti-British attitude.¹³⁶ From this, we can also glean hints about his ideological leanings.

An example of Broikos' standing in the Thessaloniki society of the time is his participation on the board of the State Theater of Thessaloniki. In the first months of 1943, Metropolitan Gennadios and General Governor Simonidis took the initiative to establish a Greek theater, reportedly to undermine Bulgarian efforts to bring a theatrical group to Thessaloniki for propaganda reasons. The first board of the theater consisted of Broikos, together with Stilpon Kyriakidis, Alexandros Letsas, Ioannis Vasdravelis, and Dimitrios Panou.¹³⁷ Most of them were the founding leaders of the Society for Macedonian Studies,¹³⁸

¹³⁴ Historical Archive of the Polytechnic School of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, file DEP-160, Athanassios Broikos, curriculum vitae, Thessaloniki, May 1955. His involvement in the destruction of the cemetery is not mentioned in his CV.

¹³⁵ Archive of the Agency for the Custody of Jewish Property, Collection of the Jewish Museum of Greece, Box 2, General Governor of Macedonia V. Simonidis to the Municipality of Thessaloniki, Protocol number 51745/2745, June 27, 1944.

¹³⁶ Yacoel, *Memoirs*, p. 87.

¹³⁷ Ekaterini Kilesopoulou, "The Beaux Arts in Thessaloniki during the Period 1912–1967" (Greek), Ph.D. diss., Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, 2006, p. 206. For more on the establishment of the State Theater of Thessaloniki, see Katerina Kostiou, "State Theater of Thessaloniki," pp. 9–12; Vafopoulos, *Pages of*

and part of the city's Greek elite.¹³⁹ As we saw, the theater's building was paved with Jewish tombstones.

Broikos was accountable to General Governor Simonidis, the most senior Greek official in the region. Simonidis' role is quite controversial as he was a key facilitator of German commands.¹⁴⁰ Simonidis acted independently of the Athens government, which gave him the latitude to exercise his own initiative.

Simonidis sent regular, almost daily, reports to Athens on the situation in his region. However, as Andrew Apostolou found, "none specifically mentions any persecutions of the Jews." With regards to the cemetery, "the report for December 21, 1942, mentions the fact that workmen had found a carbine in the southern part of the Jewish cemetery. The report does not, however, explain what the workmen were doing there in the first place."¹⁴¹

8. Conclusion

Hesse and Laqueur concluded,

The story of the destruction of the Jewish cemetery from the landscape of modern Thessaloniki lies...in the temporal convergence of three narratives: that of the Holocaust; that of modernization and a shift in the places of the dead away from the living; and finally that of Greek national integration. Nowhere else, in no other great

Autobiography, pp. 193–195, 212–219, 234–236; and Vorioelladitis, "The Reason Why a Greek Theater Group Was Established in Thessaloniki during the Occupation," (Greek) *Makedonia*, December 3, 1961. Merten hosted a reception at his home to express his support for the Theatre. "Dr. Merten held a reception for the Administration and Artists of the State Theatre" (Greek), *Nea Evropi*, November 16, 1943, p. 2.

¹³⁸ The Society for Macedonian Studies was established in Thessaloniki in 1939 "from select members of Thessaloniki society who belonged to the intellectual and commercial worlds of the country." Its primary goal was "the defense and the promotion of Greek Macedonia." During the German occupation, many of the leaders of Thessaloniki were serving on its board. See http://media.ems.gr/ems/ems_palaia_ds/ems_ds_palaia.pdf.

¹³⁹ Kyriakidis was the dean of the university, Letsas the president of the Traders Association, Vasdravelis a senior executive at the port, while Panou was a senior bank official and liaison between Simonidis and the Germans.

¹⁴⁰ For more on Simonidis' role during this period, see Apostolou, "'The Exception of Salonika,'" pp. 176–181.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 178.

city, did the imperatives of modernity and of nation-building telescope so decisively with the crisis of occupation and genocide.¹⁴²

And as for Georgios Vafopoulos, a Thessaloniki intellectual contemporary with the events, he wrote, “And this damned German occupation had to come, when, with the collaboration of an ironic fate, this old unsolvable problem of Thessaloniki found its dramatic solution.”¹⁴³

The timing of the destruction of the Jewish cemetery of Thessaloniki, three months before the deportations, serves as a unique case study to examine the status of the Jewish community at this crucial historical juncture. This period begins with the call for slave labor at Liberty Square in July 1942, the first massive antisemitic measure in the city, and ends on the eve of the arrival of Eichmann’s men, in January 1943. During this time, the main initiators were the resident German officers, with the contribution of local Greek Christians, against the local Jews, without any instructions or involvement from Berlin. Consequently, and although unrelated to the “Final Solution,” the deliberations on the fate of the cemetery served as a bridge between these two periods and helped prepare the ground for what was to come next.

As the antisemitic measures were multiplying and intensifying, the Jews felt as a separate element in the city, more isolated than ever before, whose plight did not concern the Greek Christian majority.¹⁴⁴ Never before in the city’s history had they felt so much pressure, uncertainty, and hostility. The destruction of the cemetery made them realize that they had few friends to side with them. Yacoel must have understood this when he concluded his diary for 1942 with the following sentence: “In the above atmosphere of anxiety and fear for the future does the end of the year 1942 and the beginning of 1943 find the Jewry of Thessaloniki.”¹⁴⁵

The presence of the Germans accelerated developments that had been in motion for decades but hidden just below the surface. They were the enablers, the catalysts. It is clear that they were responding to a local demand, willing to accommodate certain wishes of the

¹⁴² Hesse and Laqueur, “Visible and Invisible Bodies,” p. 55.

¹⁴³ Vafopoulos, *Pages of Autobiography*, p. 212.

¹⁴⁴ See Odette Varon, “A ‘silence’ of the written sources” (Greek), *Sychrona Themata*, Special Issue on the Jews in Greece, Issue 52–53, (July–December 1994), p. 81.

¹⁴⁵ Yacoel, *Memoirs*, p. 99.

local Greek Christian population and its leaders, and they took it upon themselves to oversee the cemetery destruction project. They had the main role in all of the events, issuing the orders, chairing the meetings and even regulating the allocation of tombstones.

Although just a few months in Thessaloniki, Merten quickly realized that the cemetery was a “wedge issue” between the Greek authorities and the Jewish community.¹⁴⁶ Only in his early thirties, he was ambitious, sociable, and popular in the prominent circles of the city’s social life. His decision to bring the cemetery into the negotiations must have come from these interactions. Merten tried to please his interlocutors with an issue that meant little to him but much to them.

During this time, there were no official reactions from the Greek authorities or the Christian population, either for the Liberty Square events, the forced labor or the destruction of the cemetery. In a certain way, the extensive use of the tombstones of the destroyed cemetery by all sectors of Thessaloniki’s society, including the Church, gave this action a sense of legality and invited every ordinary citizen to participate. It legitimized the anti-Jewish actions and solidified the clientele relations between the Germans and the Greek authorities, creating at the same time a “moral barrier” between the two communities.¹⁴⁷ Parts of the cemetery were already in ruins when the plunder of the Jewish properties started, days before the deportations began. The role of the city’s Greek Christian elite during this period is crucial: in their *realpolitik* view of the situation, they realized that the Germans were their best bet to safeguard and promote what they considered their priorities at the time. Helping the Jews was not at the top of the list.¹⁴⁸ The whole operation was also full of symbolism, that the sign of Thessaloniki’s future, the University that would educate the future generations of Greeks, would be built on the land which hosted the generations-old remains and historical monument of the “other.”

Yacoel and Molho were aware of this reality and hinted at it in their books. However, they fell short of pointing fingers. Yacoel writing from a safe house in 1943 and Molho from

¹⁴⁶ K. E. Fleming, *Greece: A Jewish History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), p. 241, footnote 51.

¹⁴⁷ Timothy Snyder, *Black Earth: The Holocaust as History and Warning* (New York: Tim Duggan Books, 2015), p. 245.

¹⁴⁸ For an overview of the Thessaloniki elite at the time, see Stratos Dordanas and Vaios Kalogrias, ““The Capital of the North’: Political and Social Forces in Thessaloniki in the 40s,” (Greek) in *Thessaloniki, Scientific Yearbook of the Thessaloniki History Center of the Municipality of Thessaloniki*, volume 7 (Thessaloniki: 2008), pp. 363–379. However, the article does not discuss their approach towards the Jewish community.

Buenos Aires in the 1950s, both refrained from naming the people who did not help the Jewish population in their time of need or even exploited their distress. Why did they decide not to record these names?¹⁴⁹

Two months before Eichmann's men, Dieter Wisliceny and Alois Brunner, arrived in Thessaloniki to execute the so-called "Final Solution," the city's Jews saw their historic cemetery destroyed by an alignment of interests and ideology and a disoriented moral compass. The Jews lost their connections to their roots as they themselves were about to be uprooted. They were met with neglect, indifference, and—worse—hostility by the authorities, the same people who should have protected them during those difficult times.

¹⁴⁹ Molho made a strong statement to this effect, without however mentioning any names: "[The people of] Israel has a stubborn memory. It will not forget easily the names of those who did not hesitate in front of the horror of a petitioning its executioners, who were also executioners of the whole of the Greek people, in order to commit an act of unholy destruction." Molho and Nehama, *In Memoriam*, p. 80.

Chapter III: What People Knew: Contemporary Sources on the Holocaust

1. Introduction

The high percentage of loss of Jewish lives in Thessaloniki is coupled with the relative absence of any coordinated efforts to rescue the Jews, let alone organized demonstrations or open expressions of solidarity by the city's institutions. To put these questions in context, it is important to ascertain the perceived gravity in the eyes of the local population of the Nazi anti-Jewish measures and the ensuing deportations of the Jews to the Nazi death camps. Only then will we be able to offer a new perspective on the role of the local Greek Christian population and its leadership, and examine their actions or lack thereof.

This chapter hopes to address these issues and to document the possibility of knowledge about the Nazi measures against the Jews of Thessaloniki through the lenses of the city's Christian population. As people's perceptions of events differ, this also affects possible courses of action. Determining the significance of the antisemitic measures in the minds of the bystanders will allow us to better weigh what they knew and understood at the time in relation to the Holocaust with that they actually did.

2. European Context

The question of "what people knew" was first asked concerning the German people.¹ Other works dealt with the United States² or the United Kingdom but very few have tried to deal

¹ Friedlander considered the extermination of the Jews a "hidden but perceived fact" by the Germans. Dominique LaCapra, *Representing the Holocaust. History, theory, trauma* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), p. 62, quoted in Remco Ensel & Evelien Gans, "We know something of their fate. Bart van der Boom's history of the Holocaust in the Netherlands," December 2014, p. 7, available at https://www.academia.edu/9835819/We_know_something_of_their_fate._Bart_van_der_Boom_s_history_of_th

with this issue in detail in other parts of occupied Europe. The country in Europe where this debate was waged recently and rather vibrantly is the Netherlands. In trying to explain why seventy-five percent of the Dutch Jews were killed during the Holocaust—the highest figure in Western Europe—and in a country where the Jews were very well-integrated with little antisemitism,³ Dutch historian Bart van der Boom published “*We Know Nothing of Their Fate*”: *Ordinary Dutchmen and the Holocaust* in 2012.⁴ Historians in the country discussed this issue in great detail during the years 2012-2014. In applying the Dutch discussion to Poland, Jan Grabowski called the issue of people who had to decide “how to respond to the mass murder that, quite literally, was going on in front of their eyes [...] [as] one of the most contentious and hotly debated fields of contemporary historical research.”⁵

Van der Boom studied 164 diaries kept during the war for information regarding the fate of the Jews. While he found a lot of sympathy towards the persecuted Jews, he explained the indifference or inaction in trying to do something more due to a lack of “subjective

e_Holocaust_in_the_Netherlands. In reviewing the relevant literature, van der Boom concluded that “we cannot know with any precision what ordinary Germans knew and thought of the Holocaust at the time.” Bart van der Boom, “Ordinary Dutchmen and the Holocaust: a summary of findings” in Wichert ten Have, ed., *The Persecution of the Jews in the Netherlands, 1940–1945* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012), pp. 33–35. Nevertheless, Moishe Postone wrote of a German newscaster who said on German TV that he had known about Auschwitz even while serving in a German submarine in the Atlantic. Moishe Postone, “Anti-Semitism and National Socialism: Notes on the German Reaction to ‘Holocaust,’” *New German Critique* 19, no. 1 (Winter 1980), p. 99, footnote 4.

² See for example discussion around the telegram of Gerhart Riegner of August 1942, the report by Josiah DuBois et al to the Secretary of the Treasury, Henry Morgenthau, Jr., “on the acquiescence of this government in the murder of the Jews” of January 1944 and the decision of the War Department not to bomb the railways to Auschwitz in June 1944.

³ See also Marnix Croes, “The Holocaust in the Netherlands and the Rate of Jewish Survival,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, V20 N3, Winter 2006, pp. 474–499 and Pim Griffioen & Ron Zeller, “Anti-Jewish Policy and Organization of the Deportations in France and the Netherlands, 1940–1944: A Comparative Study,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, V20 N3, Winter 2006, pp. 437–473.

⁴ The book appeared in Dutch as Bart van den Boom, ‘*Wij weten niets van hun lot af.*’ *Gewone Nederlanders en de Holocaust* (Amsterdam: Boom, 2012).

⁵ Jan Grabowski, “The Role of ‘Bystanders’ in the Implementation of the ‘Final Solution’ in Occupied Poland,” *Yad Vashem Studies*, Vol. 43:1 (2015), p. 113.

certainty” that deportation meant “immediate death,” “murder upon arrival.”⁶ He also argued that while “[c]ontemporaries understood the genocidal intention of deportation [,] [w]hat they did not understand, was the genocidal practice.”⁷ They were also ill-prepared for the brutal reality of the deportations.⁸

According to this line of thought, while deportation was understood to be “harsh, perhaps unbearable, and probably fatal in the long run,” getting caught in hiding meant “a quick and certain death.”⁹ Or the “choiceless choice” for the Dutch Jews between “the reality of death upon arrival and the expectation of death in the long run.”¹⁰ Resistance could only make matters worse.¹¹ As Grabowski summarized it, “[t]he underlying argument would suggest that had the Dutch known about the fate of the Jews, they would have acted differently, and they would have offered more help.”¹²

In effect, van der Boom, “aims to deconstruct a myth that [...] has in recent decades portrayed Dutch wartime society as a nation of ‘guilty bystanders.’”¹³ This thesis, while containing many innovative elements, caused a big debate among Dutch historians. Critics have dubbed the book “a problematic study”¹⁴ or “a sort of anti-book.”¹⁵ Nevertheless, “the book’s actual contribution to the issues at hand seems to be obscured by the smoke stirred in public controversy.”¹⁶

⁶ Bart van der Boom, “Ordinary Dutchmen and the Holocaust: a summary of findings,” in Wichert ten Have, ed., *The Persecution of the Jews in the Netherlands, 1940–1945* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012), pp. 42–43.

⁷ Van der Boom, “Ordinary Dutchmen,” p. 44.

⁸ Van der Boom, “Ordinary Dutchmen,” p. 38. For a similar argument in Poland, see Grabowski, “The Role of ‘Bystanders,’” p. 126.

⁹ Van der Boom, “Ordinary Dutchmen,” p. 46.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 47

¹¹ *Ibid.* p. 48.

¹² Grabowski, “The Role of ‘Bystanders,’” p. 116.

¹³ Christina Morina, “The ‘Bystander’ in Recent Dutch Historiography,” *German History*, Vol. 32, No. 1, p. 102.

¹⁴ Ensel & Gans, “We know something of their fate,” p. 29. See also Dan Michman, “Dutch Society and the Jewish Fate: A Puzzling Record,” Paper presented at international conference marking the 70th anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, Warsaw, April 21–23, 2013.

¹⁵ Morina, “The ‘Bystander,’” p. 103.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 104.

It is true that it is very hard to pinpoint to exact “knowledge” of the “fate” of the Jews during World War Two. Propaganda, misinformation, rumors clearly confused both the victims and the observers. Let alone that there was no historical precedent for them to base their judgement on.

An alternative way to approach the issue is to examine the reactions of the bystanders not with regards to the knowledge of the fate in the final destination, but based on the scenes of roundups and deportations of the Jews that we going on in front of their eyes. Thus, examining popular reactions to the actual deportations of the Jews in several countries provides us with useful insights and comparative tools. When confronted with the brutality of the anti-Jewish tactics, the local population felt a strong indignation and sympathy towards the persecuted Jews. This, in contrast to their previous stance of indifference and silence when the initial antisemitic measures started to get implemented. Nevertheless, it appears that these emotions and subsequent efforts did not last for too long.

In the Netherlands, the roundup of 400 young Jews in Amsterdam on February 22-23, 1941 caused a protest in the city. “The action was carried out in public with brute force by German policy, with many non-Jewish witnesses. This violent German action provoked a general protest strike in Amsterdam and surrounding towns, organized by the underground Communist Party.”¹⁷ Because of the public reactions, “The German rulers realized that brute force against the Jews in public should be avoided because, clearly, this could lead to serious unrest and economic damage.”¹⁸

In Italy, during the roundups in Rome of October 16, 1943, “The scene of children, half asleep and clutching the skirts of their mothers, grandmothers and grandfathers, ordinary people being dragged out of their homes and bundled onto trucks, deeply moved all he witness of the horror. The tragic images sparked off a new solidarity.”¹⁹ Because of the

¹⁷ Pim Griffioen and Ron Zeller, “Comparing the persecution of the Jews in the Netherlands, France and Belgium, 1940–1945: similarities, differences, causes,” in Wichert ten Have, ed., *The Persecution of the Jews in the Netherlands, 1940–1945* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012), pp. 61–62. See also Van der Boom, “Ordinary Dutchmen,” pp. 37–38.

¹⁸ Griffioen & Zeller, “Comparing,” p. 62.

¹⁹ Liliana Piccioto, “The Italians and the Jews During the Fascist and German Persecutions,” in David Bankier and Israel Gutman, eds., *Nazi Europe and the Final Solution* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2003), p. 514.

ensured outrage, Italian police changed tactics and arrested Jews in small numbers in the early morning hours.²⁰

In France, the Vel d'hiv roundup in Paris in July 1942 took place under the very eyes of a large number of people. Eyewitnesses spoke of the wrenching scenes causing "great emotion among the French," "universal disgust and outrage over the treatment inflicted on the Jews," "indignation" and "compassion."²¹ "People judged the measures taken against the Jews to be inhumane and were shocked by the brutality of their application." This had caused positive emotions from the part of the French public, with the effect that now "[t]he persecuted Jew was becoming likable."²²

Indeed, the horrific scenes of the roundups, the indiscriminate gathering of the Jews, regardless of age, gender and physical aptitude, as well as the long journey under inhuman conditions, should have left few doubts about the true intentions of the Nazis, hiding behind the alleged explanation of forced labor. As Renée Poznanski concluded in the case of France,

The transfers of Jews were carried out in full view of the French authorities, who knew perfectly well what conditions deportees had to suffer during their journey. The types of people loaded on to the deportation trains allowed them to question seriously the forced labor story.²³

What is common in the three cases is that while the scenes of the deportations stirred a lot of public emotion, regrettably they did not escalate in a mass and sustained manner in order to hinder the Nazi plans. As time went by, expressions of solidarity wended down. Poznanski remarked that "A nerve had been struck in the public's conscience, but the effect was in several ways short-lived, particularly with respect to public outrage."²⁴ They were not "generalized" and were characterized by "indifference."²⁵ In this chapter, we will discuss for the first time in such an extent the perception of the Greek population on the fate of the Jews.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 517.

²¹ Renée Poznanski, *Jews in France during World War II* (Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press, 2001), p. 293

²² Ibid., p. 294.

²³ Ibid., p. 289.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 481.

²⁵ Piccioto, "The Italians and the Jews," p. 517.

We will apply the different elements discussed above, the Dutch debate as well as the awareness of the roundups and deportations, through several case studies, to the case of Thessaloniki.

3. Contemporary Sources of Information

Publishing in 1985 a collection of some twenty eyewitness accounts on the Holocaust of the Greek Jews from U.S. government sources, Alexandros Kitroeff observed that “These descriptions [we]re among the very few contemporary records of how ordinary people experienced the Nazi extermination of Greek Jews.”²⁶ Archival research since then has revealed a great wealth of such accounts from a wide variety of sources, including governments, relief agencies, resistance groups and ordinary people.²⁷

The premise of “what people knew” at the time comes with major complexities and research hurdles. Actors like the German soldiers,²⁸ their Italian²⁹ and Bulgarian allies,

²⁶ Alexandros Kitroeff, “Documents: The Jews in Greece, 1941–1944—Eyewitness Accounts,” *Journal of the Hellenic Diaspora*, Vol. XII, no. 3 (Fall 1985), p. 6. Most of these accounts are narrations of the events by eyewitnesses who reported on what they saw after they fled Greece.

²⁷ From a Jewish perspective, a rare and priceless account written during the Holocaust in Greece is that of Yomtov Yacoel, the legal counsel of the Jewish Community of Thessaloniki and one of its leaders at the time of the German occupation. He wrote his memoirs during the war but it remained unfinished as he was deported and died in Auschwitz. Yomtov Yacoel, *Memoirs 1941–1943* (Greek) (Thessaloniki: Paratiritis, 1993).

²⁸ See for example a German officer visiting the store of Jewish merchant Salvator Kounio and warning him, *Makedonia*, February 13, 1959, p. 5, or a German officer warning the Jewish family with which he was staying, Janine Ingram, *Unaccounted for* (London, 1989), p. 32.

²⁹ The Italians were following closely what was happening to the Jews of Thessaloniki and were reporting it to Rome and Athens. For a good overview, see Daniel Carpi, ed., *Italian Diplomatic Documents on the History of the Holocaust in Greece (1941–1943)* (Tel Aviv: Diaspora Research Institute, The Chair in the History and Culture of the Jews of Salonika and Greece, Tel Aviv University, 1999). The diary of Italian officer Lucillo Merci who was posted in Thessaloniki during this period also contains very important information on this matter. See Joseph Rochlitz and Menachem Shelach, “Excerpts from the Salonika Diary of Lucillo Merci (February–August 1943),” *Yad Vashem Studies*, Issue 18 (1987), pp. 293–323. Capri warns of “many serious errors [...] in this publication,” as the article was based on “a later and extensively corrected version” and not on the original diary. See Daniel Carpi, “A New Approach to Some Episodes in the History of the Jews in Salonika during the Holocaust—Memory, Myth, Documentation,” in Minna Rozen, ed., *The Last Ottoman Century and Beyond: The Jews in Turkey and the Balkans 1808–1945* (Tel Aviv: Goren-Goldstein Diaspora Research Center,

diplomats from neutral countries, as well as the Red Cross delegates³⁰ and the Greek Government-in-Exile in Cairo³¹ had their own channels of information, different from those of Greece-based officials or the wider public. How much did they tell the local Greeks and Jews and to what extent their audience took their words seriously?

As we saw in the Dutch debate, an important point is to distinguish between what the wider public knew of what was happening to the persecuted Jews in Greece and the actual fate that awaited them in Poland. How well informed were the ordinary Greek citizens of the true Nazi intentions and their consequences to the Jewish community? And separately, did the people in Greece know of the concentration camps and the Nazi industry of death?

During the Nazi occupation in Thessaloniki, most radios were confiscated and only the German-controlled press was in circulation. A car with loudspeakers circulated the central streets broadcasting news. In addition, there were sources like the Greek service of the BBC and other foreign radio stations and their broadcasts to the country. The degree of their impact is difficult to verify.

At the same time, there were many rumors going around. These rumors would circulate rapidly but verifying the truth at the time would have been impossible. How believable were they? Even to document them historically poses a great challenge, since it heavily depends on anecdotal, circumstantial and unpublished sources.

Geography and time also played a role. Greece was divided into three different zones, German, Italian and Bulgarian, and communication between them was controlled and limited. Did the Greek leaders and public in Athens know what was happening to the local Jews? At

Tel Aviv University, 2002), Volume 2, pp. 271–272, footnote 23. The original diary can be found in the Yad Vashem archives, file number O.31/40.

³⁰ The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in Geneva was well-informed about developments in Thessaloniki through their delegate Rene Burkhardt. Senior ICRC official Jean-Etienne Schwarzenberg wrote on March 31, 1943 that “they were aware of the situation in Salonika: mass deportations as in all the occupied countries [...] Unfortunately they no longer had any way of stopping these deportations, or rather the ICRC did not wish to make any move over this.” See Jean-Claude Favez, *The Red Cross and the Holocaust* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 168–171.

³¹ A credible eyewitness had informed the Greek General Consulate in Istanbul of the “tragic” fate of the Jews of Thessaloniki. “It is a fact widely known in Thessaloniki, confessed also by the Germans themselves, that the Jews abducted to Poland are not transferred there for labor but for a certain and under horrific conditions death.” Kapetanidis to Foreign Ministry in Cairo, Ankara, April 19, 1943, in Archive of the Greek Foreign Ministry, History of Greek Jews, 1943, folder 5, subfolder 2.

which point in time did they begin to know? Similarly, did they know what the Thessaloniki Jews were going through? Were they aware of their final fate?

Lastly, it was not just information that was scarce, erroneous and confusing. It was also the ability of the audience to perceive it as real and act upon it. Perception is a factor that can be hard to assess but severely affects any decision-making process and affects the reading a person gives to a certain piece of information. Did the Greek citizens of Thessaloniki understand the gravity of the situation based on what they were witnessing? Did the unprecedented nature of the events that were unfolding before their eyes and the historical experiences that many of them went through as refugees from Asia Minor skew their judgement?

To tackle the above questions, it is important to identify the appropriate documentation. However, there is a general lack of sources in Thessaloniki coming from ordinary citizens and offering their perspective and thoughts.³² There are hardly any diaries and other ego-documents from the non-Jewish population.³³ Only three Jewish families survived the war in their entirety hiding in Thessaloniki, but as they were in constant hiding confined in their quarters, their memoirs offer us little information on the wider context and attitudes of the non-Jewish population.³⁴

In order to provide a foundation of what people knew, this chapter will rely upon the written clandestine press of resistance organizations and their printed proclamations,³⁵ as well

³² Only one such reference has been identified in a letter between two friends. On March 29, 1943, Viron [last name unknown] writes from Athens to his friend, Takis Germanos: “How are our friends the Jews? Here it is as if nothing has happened.” Thessaloniki History Center, Takis Germanos collection, folder 4, subfolder 3.

³³ The author put an ad in a major Thessaloniki newspaper soliciting such documents. The ad appeared each Sunday for three months from October to December 2015 with no success.

³⁴ These families were Algava, Assael and Pardo. Regarding the story of the first, a play called “Safe Harbor” was written and was performed in Chicago in 1999. However, it is a fictionalized account, loosely based on the actual story and contains many inaccuracies. A daughter of the second family published her memoirs after the war. Janine Ingram, *Unaccounted for* (London, 1989). Finally, a daughter of the third family published the diary she was keeping as a young teenager. Rozina Asser Pardo, *548 Days with Another Name* (Greek) (Athens: Gavriilidis, 1999), also in English as *548 Days with Another Name: Salonika 1943: A Child's Diary, An Adult's Memories Of War* (New York: Bloch Publishing Company, 2006).

³⁵ For a discussion on Jews and the Resistance, see Steven Bowman, *Jewish Resistance in Wartime Greece* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2006), Rika Benveniste, *Those who survived: Resistance, Displacement, Return, Thessaloniki Jews in the 40s* (Greek) (Athens: Polis, 2014), Part I and Giorgos Margaritis, *Unwanted*

as the collaborationist press. These materials were printed and, up to an extent, accessible, widely circulated and discussed, although there is no way to ascertain their exact reach and readership. Moreover, they were contemporary at the time of the events, thus offering a very good idea of the prevailing understanding of the period.

This premise also poses problems: there were hundreds of publications by resistance groups. Not all of these publications, or their issues, have survived to this day. The paper will thus rely on case studies that can provide light into the knowledge and perceptions of ordinary citizens during this timeframe.

The available materials of two resistance groups referring to the Jews of Thessaloniki will be examined, the National Liberation Front (EAM) and the Panhellenic Union of Fighting Youth (PEAN). Having said that, the issue of the plight of the Jews is mostly absent from the clandestine press, making historians speak of “a silence of the written sources.”³⁶ Finally, representative articles from the Nazi collaborator-run newspaper of Thessaloniki *Nea Evropi* [New Europe] will be discussed.

4. National Liberation Front (EAM)

The National Liberation Front (EAM) was the largest resistance organization in Greece and was affiliated with the Communist Party of Greece (KKE). Two proclamations of EAM have survived, which seemingly refer to the persecution of the Jews of Thessaloniki.³⁷

Compatriots: Data on the Destruction of the Minorities of Greece: Jews and Chams (Greek) (Athens: Bibliorama, 2005), pp. 69–89. For the relations between the Greek Resistance and the Jews in Palestine in order to help rescue the Jews of Greece during the War, see Karina Lampsas and Yacov Schibi, *The Rescue: The Silence of the People, the Resistance in the Ghettos and the Camps, Greek Jews during the Occupation* (Greek) (Athens: Capon, 2012).

³⁶ Odette Varon, “A ‘silence’ of the written sources” (Greek), *Synchrona Themata*, Special Issue on the Jews in Greece, Issue 52–53 (July–December 1994), pp. 79–84.

³⁷ A third proclamation by the “Communist Organization of Athens” relating to persecution of the Jews of that city from autumn 1943 was found in the British Archives in translation (Public Record Office, SOE Papers, HSS/231) and reprinted in Richard Clogg, ed., *Greece 1940–1949: occupation, resistance, civil war: a documentary history* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p. 107. The proclamation stated that “[t]he Jews are Greeks just as much as we are,” and “[a] more capable or clever race does not exist.” It concluded: “we shall fight with every possible means against the persecution of the Jews,” including offering help to the Jews, hiding their children and imposing sanctions on the traitors.

The first, dated January 22, 1943, was issued by EAM in Athens and was signed by its member organizations in all Greek regions as well as its organization “of Jews.” It was addressed to “the whole people of Greece, the people of Athens” and called them to action to “help for the rescue of the Jews,” “with mass protests, big committees and general mobilizations to call off the awful pogrom that is in preparation.” The proclamation included details such as concentration camps, executions of women and children, and mass slaughters.³⁸

The date of the document, two months before the start of the deportations of the Jews of Thessaloniki, indicates that it referred to this case. This is what Philip Carabott assumed when he studied it, calling it of a “preventive character.”³⁹ Yet, this could not have been the case for two main reasons. First, there is no way that the Greek population knew of the intentions of the Nazis in January 1943, even before Adolph Eichmann’s envoys, Dieter Wisliceny and Alois Brunner, arrived in Thessaloniki on February 6, 1943, in order to implement the “Final Solution.” Second, the document was printed in Athens, was addressed to the people of Athens and quoted Thessaloniki, together with Germany and Poland, as places where anti-Jewish atrocities had already taken place.

The most plausible explanation with this proclamation is that it must be dated wrongly. Since it was printed in the beginning of January, the year must have been written erroneously. It is a common mistake to keep on using the old year in the first weeks after the change of the calendar, due to inertia. The correct date must have been January 22, 1944 and this proclamation aimed to protect the Jews of Athens whose persecution had commenced at the time.⁴⁰

If it was related to the events about to unfold in Thessaloniki, then it is surprising that after such a strong proclamation there was little subsequent call for action, let alone any

³⁸ This proclamation was first published in *Chronika*, November–December 1989, pp. 12–13. For an English translation of the document, see Proclamation by the Greek National Liberation Front (EAM) to Rescue Jews, January 22, 1943, available at http://www.yadvashem.org/odot_pdf/Microsoft%20Word%20-%205112.pdf. The document was found hidden in an old electricity meter, discovered during the renovation of a store of a Jewish businessman in Athens.

³⁹ Philip Carabott, “Actions and reactions of the Greek Orthodox society regarding the persecution of their Jewish compatriots during the German Occupation,” in *The Holocaust in the Balkans*, eds. Giorgos Antoniou, Stratos Dordanas, Nikos Zaikos, and Nikos Marantzidis (Greek) (Thessaloniki: Epikentro, 2011), p. 282.

⁴⁰ Many thanks to Yacov Schibi for discussing this document with me and making this point.

mention of the issue, in EAM's newspaper in Thessaloniki or other statements, as we will see further on. Moreover, there was no reflection of this kind of early knowledge in any of the post-war memoirs of the leaders of the resistance or Jews involved with the resistance. One would assume that they would forcefully address this fact in their testimonies or writings, especially if they possessed a two-month advance notice.⁴¹ The fact that it was also found hidden within an old electricity meter in a Jewish store in Athens casts doubts as to whether it was ultimately widely circulated or not.

The second proclamation is undated and was issued by the organization "National Solidarity" of Athens, which was affiliated with EAM. It was found in the KKE archives and was displayed as part of the exhibit "Synagonistis: Greek Jews in the National Resistance" of the Jewish Museum of Greece.⁴² The curator of the exhibit estimated the date in April 1943.

The proclamation clearly referred to events that were taking place against the Jews of Thessaloniki at the time. The document spoke of "massacres of Jewish men, women, children and the elderly," and went on:

A persecution without a precedent in Greece, is wiping out a defenseless race. A persecution that the Neros of all centuries would be envious of.

Hundreds packed in transportation wagons to Poland. But the wagons did not reach their end. They stopped somewhere, where something unimaginable continued, within ten days. People, in an unmovable mass, lived the martyrs of hunger, thirst and asphyxiation, drop by drop, witnesses of a horrific death of the people next to them who remained there, inside the sealed wagons. Whoever did not meet death, lost their sanity in this Hitlerist hell. After they were thrown away like trash. Others had to assume their position.

The document concluded by urging all Greeks to protest against the martyrdom of the Jews, as "the pain of persecuted race is felt as our own pain."

⁴¹ Rika Benveniste, *Those who survived: Resistance, Displacement, Return, Thessaloniki Jews in the 40s* (Greek) (Athens: Polis, 2014), pp. 53–57. Benveniste concluded that "the leadership of the Resistance, during at least the period of the deportations of the Jews [in Thessaloniki], was not more visionary than the Jewish leadership."

⁴² For more information, see http://www.jewishmuseum.gr/en/exhibitions/upcomming_exhibitions/item/8.html. The exhibition was curated by historian Iasonas Chandrinou.

What is interesting with this second document is that, although based on eyewitness accounts from Thessaloniki, it was published—and presumably circulated—in Athens. No such proclamation has been discovered in Thessaloniki.⁴³ Moreover, its call to action is much more moderate compared to the first document we have discussed.

The narration correctly labels Poland as the final destination but the informants never reached it. They probably stopped somewhere on the way where they witnessed this long wait with Jews stuck in train wagons. The deportation trains leaving Thessaloniki had Greek drivers who narrated their experience when they returned. One such driver could have been the source of the information to National Solidarity.

This description could very well have been the story of the first train, which left Thessaloniki on March 15, 1943. It matches a similar narration that was recorded by Thessaloniki writer Giorgos Ioannou, whose father was such a train driver. Ioannou narrated what happened one evening when his father returned from work:

One evening, late, he returned especially bitter. He had driven a train with Jews till Nis. “A great evil occurs with the Jews,” he said. “They take them with commercial wagons completely sealed, without food and water. Even without air. The Germans force us to stop the train in the middle of nowhere, for the plunder to take place. From inside the wagons, they kick and shout. It is not only for water and air, but also to remove the dead. They took out of the wagon a child like our Lakis,” he said and caressed my brother. At this point, he started crying. Loud cries with sobs. “The Germans cannot walk from the watches, the bracelets and the necklaces, which they collect holding the gun in their hand. They threw these to me, to the lokführer [engine driver].” They were some useless watches, which did not work, and maybe I still have them somewhere.

⁴³ The Macedonian office of the Communist Party of Greece (KKE) was in a possession of a mimeograph, formerly owned by the Jewish Community, which was used to print its newspaper *Laiki Foni* (Popular Voice). For the story of how it ended from the former ghetto of Baron Hirsch, close to the train station (which had become a depo of Jewish possessions) to the hands of the KKE, see Vassilis Ioakimidis, *Twenty Thousand Days* (Greek) (Athens: Exandas, 1983), Chapter 8, also available at http://www.snhell.gr/testimonies/content.asp?id=387&author_id=129.

He made more such trains later, with the same always commotion. He was telling us with horror about the hell of the camp at the station. The Germans were greatly molesting the women. The Jews of the Station were enfeebled. Hunger, dirt, diseases, brutality. Now we read that the Jews of Greece arrived quite emaciated and most of them were heading directly to the ovens...⁴⁴

EAM's branch in Thessaloniki had its own clandestine newspaper, *Eleftheria* [Liberty],⁴⁵ dubbed as "the first illegal newspaper in the then Nazi occupied Europe."⁴⁶ As Odette Varon noted, there were only a few references to Jews in the paper and only one that indirectly mentioned their plight.⁴⁷ In a published letter, an anonymous employee from Social Services complained on April 24, 1943 that:

In a few words, the so-called popular refugee committees are waiting for the Jews to be exterminated to loot not only their furniture but also their land with certain employees of the Social Services as their accomplices. Because before the exile of the Jews there were no advisory housing committees but rather 6-7 Social Services employees were running around to find a room to house the newly arrived refugees. Now that the dead body has dropped, namely the Jewish properties, everyone has fallen on it like ravens.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Giorgos Ioannou, "During those days..." in *The Capital of Refugees* (Greek) (Athens: Kedros, 1984), also available at http://www.sarantakos.com/kibwtos/mazi/iwannou_hmerais.htm.

⁴⁵ For background see Spyros Kouzinopoulos, *Eleftheria: The Unknown History of the First Illegal Organization and Newspaper of the Occupation* (Greek) (Thessaloniki: 1985), Manolis Kandylakis, *The Clandestine Press of National Resistance in Northern Greece* (Greek) (Thessaloniki: University Studio Press, 2006), Educational Foundation of the Union of Journalists of Daily Newspapers of Macedonia and Thrace, *National Resistance 1941–1944: The Illegal Press in Northern Greece* (Greek) (Thessaloniki: 2009).

⁴⁶ Spyros Kouzinopoulos, "The Clandestine Press of the Resistance in Macedonia (1941–44) and the Newspaper *Eleftheria*," in Educational Foundation of the Union of Journalists of Daily Newspapers of Macedonia and Thrace, *National Resistance 1941–1944: The Illegal Press in Northern Greece* (Greek) (Thessaloniki: 2009), p. 95.

⁴⁷ Varon, "Silence," p. 80. It is noteworthy that a Jewish girl who had escaped Nazi persecutions was also involved in the redaction of the newspaper. Kouzinopoulos, *Eleftheria*, p. 78.

⁴⁸ *Eleftheria*, Issue 13, April 24, 1943, pp. 2–3, reprinted in Kouzinopoulos, *Eleftheria*.

Interestingly, the letter speaks of the “extermination” of the Jews in passing without providing any further details on what was actually taking place. The only concern of the author—and the editors who published this letter—is that people connected to the Occupation authorities received the Jewish apartments and not the refugees from Bulgarian-occupied Macedonia and Thrace. One plausible explanation is that what was taking place against the Jews in Thessaloniki was common knowledge and the author did not need to specify any further.

Other references to Jews can be found in passing. For example, on February 15, 1943, when the SS officers in Thessaloniki had already commenced their murderous work, the newspaper called “Greeks, Macedonians, Jews, Vlachs, Unite. Not slaves to the occupier.”⁴⁹ From the next issue, March 25, 1943, when trains full of Jews had already departed from the city and the rest were concentrated in the ghettos, until July 1943, there was no mention of the Jews.⁵⁰

Similarly, in the publications of the left-wing youth organization United Panhellenic Youth Organization (EPON), very active in Thessaloniki’s University, the plight of the Jews was absent completely.⁵¹

5. Panhellenic Union of Fighting Youth (PEAN)

The Panhellenic Union of Fighting Youth, known as PEAN by its Greek acronym, was an Athens-based youth resistance organization, founded in October 1941. It was of liberal, democratic and anti-communist orientation, friendly towards the “National Unity Party” of Panayiotis Kanellopoulos. It did not, however, have any links with political parties. Its members were high-school and university students as well as young professionals, from the Athens middle-class. No Jew is believed to have been a member of the organization.⁵²

⁴⁹ *Eleftheria*, Issue 11, February 15, 1943, p. 4, reprinted in Kouzinopoulos, *Eleftheria*.

⁵⁰ Varon, “Silence,” p. 80.

⁵¹ Varon, “Silence,” pp. 79–80. See also the memoirs of Giorgos Kaftantzis, an EPON activist at the University of Thessaloniki, where the mention of the plight of the Jews is also minimal and mostly in passing. Giorgos Kaftantzis, *The University of Thessaloniki at the time of the Occupation* (Greek) (Thessaloniki: Epikentro, 2008).

⁵² Association “Friends of PEAN,” *Secret Press of the Occupation* (Greek) (Athens: Diogenis, 2000), pp. 7–8, Evanthis Hadjivassiliou, ed., *Panhellenic Union of Fighting Youth (PEAN), Secret Press of the Occupation:*

PEAN became well known for the successful bombing of the Athens headquarters of the Greek pro-Nazi organization ESPO on September 20, 1942, which killed twenty-nine of its members and injuring several others, including German soldiers. Six of its top cadres, including its founder, Konstantinos Perrikos, an air force officer, were arrested and executed for this act.⁵³

The newspaper of PEAN was called *Doxa* [Glory],⁵⁴ while a related organization, Army of Enslaved Victors (SSN), published its newspaper *Megali Ellas* [Great Greece]. According to Odette Varon, *Doxa* is the only exception to the silence of the resistance press to the Holocaust of the Greek Jews, displaying “a sensitivity on the issue.”⁵⁵

PEAN, though based in Athens, was the only resistance organization that was both well-informed about what was happening against the Jews of Thessaloniki and reported it in its publications. It also showed great compassion for the plight of the Jews and called its members to action. In the July 1942 issue of *Doxa*, under the column “News and Comments,” one reads about the enlisting of the Thessaloniki Jews to slave labor works:

The wave of antisemitism has reached Thessaloniki. Jews are arrested by hundreds and are used in fortification and road works. It goes without saying that this measure is barbaric.⁵⁶

Special Part: Publications-News Bulletins-Proclamations (Greek) (Athens: Society for the Study of Greek History, 2005), pp. 11–24 and Varon, “Silence,” p. 79. See also Evanthis Hadjivassiliou, *PEAN (1941–1945)* (Greek) (Athens: Association for the Promotion of Useful books, 2004). We could not find any documents relevant to this study in the volume with PEAN’s additional publications and proclamations.

⁵³ Odette Varon, *Greek Youth Press (1941–1945): Collection* (Greek) (Athens: Historical Archive of Greek Youth, General Secretariat for Youth, 1987), Volume One, Introduction, 37–39. See also Introduction, pp. 45–47.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 36–49.

⁵⁵ Varon, “Silence,” p. 79. The volume published by the Friends of PEAN reproduced all issues of PEAN’s newspaper *Doxa*, as well as those of *Megali Ellas*. Varon did not have access to this volume at the time she wrote her article and was not aware of some of the issues. More recently however, Varon republished this article in a volume with selected works, Odette Varon, *The Emergence of a Difficult Memory* (Greek) (Athens: Estia, 2012), pp. 19–30. Although she updated a couple of the footnotes, the article remained the same.

⁵⁶ *Doxa*, Issue 7, July 1942, p. 3, in PEAN, *Secret Press*, p. 49.

This reference, very close to the actual date of events—the first gathering for registration took place on July 11, 1942—is both timely and well-informed. It is also a rare—maybe unique—public condemnation of this event, as no other official or organization spoke out against it.

Doxa remained interested in developments in Macedonia and in its August 1942 issue reported:

Central and Western Macedonia are under the German boot. [...] At the same time, they don't forget their antisemitic hatred, and this is the reason they systematically provoke the mocking of our side towards the Jewish element and the hatred of the latter towards the Greeks. In this way, they think they will distract the attention of our brothers which is turned towards the national liberation struggle, while with terrorism and execution of hostages they think they will shake down their morale which has been and will always be flourishing. Because the morale of all Greeks is rooted in their Greek and pan-human faith which has as its basis the idea of freedom and social justice.⁵⁷

In September, *Doxa* reported on an attack against the synagogue in Athens:

The evening of August 12, a team leader of a traitor organization named Gogos with some forty paid gestapo sympathizers entered inside the Jewish Synagogue and looted everything. Five Jews who were found inside were beaten ruthlessly.⁵⁸

When the ghettoization and deportations of the Jews of Thessaloniki commenced, newspaper *Megali Ellas* reported the following in its March 1943 edition:

THE PERSECUTION OF THE JEWS

The occupier with unprecedented rage exterminated the European peoples. Where his destructive mania has gone to the limits of real sadism is the persecution of the Jews.

⁵⁷ *Doxa*, Issue 8, August 1942, p. 3, in PEAN, *Secret Press*, p. 53.

⁵⁸ *Doxa*, Issue 10, September 1942, p. 4, in PEAN, *Secret Press*, p. 62.

Before some time, the Jews of Thessaloniki were forced to wear in a visible spot a special badge to be distinguished from the natives. Forced labor, beatings and executions were almost daily news. Lately, however, as we are informed, they have been kicked out of their homes and concentrated in concentration camps where they were only given bread, around 40 drams per day.⁵⁹ A few days ago their deportation to Poland was decided, inside closed wagons. The first train of 3,500 persons departed from Thessaloniki to Poland around March 15. To get an idea of the trip, it is sufficient to mention that from 40 Jews that were placed in a closed wagon for a trip from France to Poland, only 10 came out alive.⁶⁰

What is noteworthy in this text is not only the accuracy and detail of the information and the description, and the reporting close to the actual time of the events, but also the contextualization. The author made a point to put the news item in context for the readers and stated that in similar deportations from France, only 25 percent survived. In this way, he stressed the urgency and magnitude of the problem. The fact that people in Athens were aware of the deportations from France is also an important fact in its own sake. This will be discussed further on.

Doxa published a long piece on the persecution of the Thessaloniki Jews in its April 6, 1943 issue, in which it urged the Greek people to action:

GREEKS! SAVE OUR BROTHERS ISRAELITES

In June 1942 the German authorities declared in Thessaloniki the civil mobilization of the Israelites there, aged 18-45, without any distinction of employment. From 8,000 people, 6,000 were forced to build roads or to dig trenches. After five months of hard work many died from the deprivations and the hardship, while for the rest their health was shaken irreparably. The Germans later accepted for the Israelites to redeem the forced labor by paying 3.5 billion, from which two were paid cash and the remaining 1.5 billion was offset with the value of the expropriated old cemetery.

⁵⁹ Around 71 grams.

⁶⁰ *Megali Ellas*, Issue 17, March 1943, p. 2, in PEAN, *Secret Press*, p. 293.

This heavy tax was paid until February 15, 1943. Later, however, the Greek Israelites of Thessaloniki, together with their coreligionists from the Bulgarian-occupied places, some 50,000 souls, were ordered to abandon their homes and to be concentrated in specific zones of the city, from which they forbade their exit. Then their shops, offices and businesses were closed, the properties were registered and then confiscated. Handicapped Israelites were even banned from bearing the handicapped sign.

For a week now, the Jewish neighborhood “Baron Hirsch” (one of the concentration zones) which numbered 3,500 persons (men, women, elderly and children) was shaken. All the citizens were informed to supply themselves with food for a 6-day trip to an unknown destination. After three days, they were put in sealed wagons and they are travelling now, unknown to where, but outside of Greece. More of these envoys are ready to follow the first.

All the Greeks regardless of religion cannot be indifferent towards this crime that takes place against the Greek Israelites. Even more so when this rogue act appears as a wish of the Greek people, as the Thessaloniki newspaper “Nea Evropi” writes.

The Greek people must make this issue as their own, because it is also theirs, and to fight for the liberation of our brothers. The Greek Jews who showed during the war how well they know to fight for the honor of Greece must be saved from the German beasts.

Church and people must make their duty. Quickly though, because otherwise it would be too late. The Greek people showed up until now how they succeed in a thing they fight for.

Murderers! Down your dirty hands from the Greek Jews!⁶¹

This article deserves some extensive commentary. First, it surprises the reader with its detail and accuracy of information. The events are described from their beginning, with all

⁶¹ *Doxa*, Issue 18, April 6, 1943, p. 2, in PEAN, *Secret Press*, p. 112.

the crucial dates and facts, in a correct sequence. Second, its purpose was to encourage the Greek people to act in defense of the persecuted Jews. In this sense, its tone is positive and complimentary, with a strong call to action. Yet, between the lines one can read the disappointment of the author that the Church and the authorities had shown little interest and had not spoken out or taken any concrete action.

Third, the informant was probably an Athens-based Greek Jew, who was closely following developments in Thessaloniki and was regularly liaising with the Greek government, the resistance organizations, and the members of the Jewish community there. The use of the term “Israelite,” which is preferred by the Jewish community, also points to that direction. The informant may have initiated the publication of this piece, due to the emergency of the situation, and either wrote the text himself or passed on the information to the authors.

There were two more mentions in *Doxa* concerning the Jews of Athens,⁶² as well as a thank you letter after the war from the Jews of Athens who were saved due to the help of Christian Greeks,⁶³ but these go beyond the scope of the present chapter.

6. Collaborationist Press

While the majority of the resistance press clearly displayed “silence” vis-à-vis the persecution of the Jews, the situation was completely different in the Nazi-controlled press that was in circulation in Thessaloniki. The journalists of *Nea Evropi* [New Europe] and *Apogevmatini* [Evening] did not mince their words and openly attacked, threatened, slandered and defamed the local Jews.⁶⁴ There was little doubt in their intentions and their inflammatory writing was used to prepare the local public opinion for the persecution of the Jews that followed.⁶⁵

⁶² *Doxa*, Issue 19, April 18, 1943, p. 2, in PEAN, *Secret Press*, p. 120 and Issue 28, October 28, 1943, p. 5, in PEAN, *Secret Press*, p. 167.

⁶³ *Doxa*, Issue 58, October 26, 1944, p. 2, quoted in Varon, “Silence,” p. 80.

⁶⁴ For background on the collaborationist press in Thessaloniki, see Alexandra Patrikiou, “A ‘new’ historical period under creation: Aspects of the public speech of newspapers *Nea Evropi* and *Apogevmatini* in occupied Thessaloniki,” in Educational Foundation of the Union of Journalists of Daily Newspapers of Macedonia and Thrace, *National Resistance 1941–1944: The Illegal Press in Northern Greece* (Greek) (Thessaloniki: 2009), pp. 138–140. For information of the post-war trials of the journalists involved, see Stratos Dordanas, “The

For example, on February 27, 1943, Michail Papastratigakis, the editor of *Nea Evropi*, published a front-page article entitled “The Time Has Come!...” In a long hateful text, the author attacked the Jews, accusing them of being “enemies” of Greece, “evil guests,” and blaming them from siding with the Turks in the take-over of Constantinople in 1453 to starting the War and causing the starvation and death of children during the winter 1941-42. He concluded:

But now has come the time of repayment. Now they are the people with the yellow stars. We know our enemies. But now that we see them, that we know them, now we all feel, all, every Greek, a compelling need to get rid of them. The Greek soul does not tolerate them any longer. They have to leave far. Where? Wherever they want. Let them find another place, other people to take advantage of, other victims. The Greek land wants to get rid of them. It wants to get expurgated. The people with the yellow star have no more a place on this land. Getting rid of them will be a day of true redemption, which will be celebrated by the people and will not be forgotten by the Greek generations.

The time has come. The profane can go...⁶⁶

Similarly, on the Sunday, March 14, 1943 issue of *Nea Evropi*, a day before the first train departed from the city, journalist Nikolaos Kammonas celebrated a city “Without Jews.”

I don’t know how Saloniki looks to me prettier, tidier, quieter, cleaner. One walks in the streets with more convenience and pleasure. This hard-to-describe raff is missing, which did not know how to walk and got tangled between your feet. You can find finally a seat on the tram. The ride becomes more comfortable. And more importantly, you don’t get off carrying away lice. Then, this clamor is missing, made in the streets

enemy with the pen’: The trial of the journalists of *Nea Evropi* and *Apogevmatini*,” in the same volume, pp. 150–163.

⁶⁵ See Patrikiou, “A ‘new’ historical period,” p. 145 and Andrew Apostolou, “‘The Exception of Salonika’: Bystanders and Collaborators in Northern Greece,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, vol. 14, n. 2 (Fall 2000), pp. 175–176.

⁶⁶ *Nea Evropi*, February 27, 1943, p. 1.

by flocks of grimy kids, blaring “tsiyaricos” and “pastelicos,”⁶⁷ with which they poisoned the people unpunished. And this ugliness disappears, which was created by these repulsive beggars, ragged men, who in every step blocked your way. In the cafes decency and quiet prevails. The trouble-making and noisy patrons have disappeared. Saloniki finally has got the look of a tidy and proper city, where everyone does his job orderly and noiselessly or goes for a stroll quietly, without being bothered from anything, and without bothering anyone. Those insolent and provocative figures are absent, whose appearance provoked a general irritation, when they did not provoke with their dirtiness, disgust and aversion.

But you meet from time to time in the street a “little canary,”⁶⁸ to remind you of all this hideousness [...] Canaries are birds...migratory ones. The movie that started to be shown will not end here. [...]⁶⁹

Apart from the hatred and humiliation against the Jews shown in the two representative excerpts provided above, another element is very clear: that the people were very aware of the measures against the Jews, their impact, and what was to follow: their deportation from their native city. Very few could have any doubts that this deportation was going to be a smooth and humane process, especially after the first trains departed and the news spread throughout the city.

7. Conclusion

The Nazi measures against the Jews did not target an isolated and distant population. Rather, the Jews of Thessaloniki were well-integrated in the city life, residing in central areas and sharing the daily routine with their fellow Christian citizens. Their plight must have been known to all, either as eyewitnesses, a news item, or a subject of conversation.

The collaborationist press in the city did not hide its strong animosity against the Jews. It slandered them continuously, repeating centuries-old antisemitic prejudices and

⁶⁷ Cigarettes and small pies in Judeo-Spanish, the mother tongue of the Sephardic Jews of Thessaloniki.

⁶⁸ Jews were called mockingly canaries because of the yellow star they were obliged to wear.

⁶⁹ *Nea Evropi*, March 14, 1943, p. 2.

stereotypes together with modern Nazi accusations. The dozens of articles that appeared as the antisemitic measures were being implemented described very accurately the developments and did not hide their wish to see the Jews removed from the city.

At the same time, even though the clandestine press did not show the same interest in the case of the Jews, articles and proclamations did refer to them, showing a clear knowledge of what was occurring. The newspapers of PEAN and SSN, although based in Athens, reported on the events in a timely and accurate manner, and also provided context. Explaining why the conditions of the deportations were ruthless with a high degree of casualties demonstrated the significance and urgency of the situation.

In the case of the communist resistance, it is also clear that they were aware of the events in Thessaloniki. The only proclamation found concerning the Jews of Thessaloniki correctly described the inhumane conditions in the deportation trains, which, although printed in Athens, had a good understanding of developments. Moreover, the lack of direct mention of the plight of the Jews in the Thessaloniki newspaper *Eleftheria* raises the questions whether this silence was due to the fact that everyone knew so no further explanations were necessary.

Another element that is becoming clear is that people, Jews and non-Jews alike, although aware of Poland as the final destination, were not aware of Auschwitz or the death camps that existed there. Yet, the brutality in the ghetto and the inhumane conditions during the deportations left very few to wonder about the real intentions of the Nazis. As *Megali Ellas* explained, only twenty-five percent would arrive alive. Similar information on the harsh conditions of the trip we can find in the National Solidarity proclamation as well as the protest note by Bishop Gennadios of Thessaloniki,⁷⁰ a telegram by the Italian Consul General

⁷⁰ “The possible implementation of the measure of deportation would bring about fatally the destruction and death of most of [the Jews of Thessaloniki] due to their extreme poverty.” For more on this, see chapter 5.

in Thessaloniki Guelfo Zamboni⁷¹ and a letter from the Jews of Athens to the Rescue Committee of the Jewish Agency in Istanbul.⁷²

The European debate discussed earlier can offer us some important context. As in the Netherlands, France and Italy, people did show indignation to the first deportations scenes they were witnessing. The network of the adoptions or the memo of the lawyers or the other steps discussed in this study may all point to this direction. Nevertheless, these efforts were not sustained and did not reach a critical mass. After a couple weeks, while the deportations were ongoing, they seem to have reached a halt.

People also recognized the historical significance of the events they were witnessing, their historicity. One fourth of the city was being removed from their homes, while their businesses and properties plundered and reassigned. The death and suffering of the Jewish community surpassed that of the Christian population and expectedly caused their repulsion. In the letter sent to Greek Prime Minister Konstantinos Logothetopoulos on March 23, 1943, Archbishop Damaskinos and twenty-eight other Greek notables of Athens stressed that:

No one, we believe, is entitled to forget that all the acts of this difficult period, even those which lie beyond our wishes and our power, will one day be investigated by the Nation for the due apportioning of the judgement of history. And in the moment of judgement, the side of the moral responsibilities which the rulers have shouldered even for the acts of the powers that be will weigh heavily in the conscience of the Nation if they omitted to express, by a noble-minded and courageous gesture, the entirely reasonable indignation and the unanimous protest of the Nation at actions

⁷¹ “The manner in which [the deportation] is performed, 60 people in a cattle car with little food and clothing, arouses the fear that many will not survive the hardships of the journey.” Telegram of Consul General Zamboni to the Italian Diplomatic Mission to Athens, Salonika, March 18, 1943, in Daniel Carpi, ed., *Italian Diplomatic Documents on the History of the Holocaust in Greece (1941–1943)* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 1999), document 1943.16, pp. 138–139.

⁷² “Until today we do not know where [the Jews of Thessaloniki] have been sent and what has happened to them. We cannot describe the conditions of their transport. We are afraid that only twenty percent of the passengers will be alive when they reach their destination.” Jews of Athens to the Rescue Committee of the Jewish Agency in Istanbul, around the beginning of August 1943, quoted in Karina Lampsas and Yacov Schibi, *The Rescue: The Silence of the People, the Resistance in the Ghettos and the Camps, Greek Jews during the Occupation* (Greek) (Athens: Capon, 2012), p. 196.

which vitally affect its unity and honor, such as the displacement of the Jews now beginning.⁷³

Similar references on the historic nature of the events that were unfolding can be found in many other sources, such as diplomatic memos or civil society organizations' minutes. Related to that, we have not been able to find any references to or comparisons with the exchange of populations of 1922 and the hardships the Greek refugees had to go through. The unprecedented and indiscriminate level of brutality they were witnessing is one possible explanation.

It is also interesting to stress that organizations in Athens seem to have been very well-informed about the developments in Thessaloniki, in real time, despite the division of the country into two separate administrative regions with internal borders and very difficult means of communication. If Athens had information in such detail, there is little doubt that people in Thessaloniki shared similar knowledge, if not better.

The last point, which will be addressed briefly, relates to the reactions of the Greek leadership in Thessaloniki at the time, the Metropolitan, the General Governor of Macedonia, the Mayor, the Dean of the University and the other notables, heads of different organizations and associations. Nobody can claim that they did not know or were not able to comprehend the historic moments and significance of what they were witnessing. Yet, there was very little protest in Thessaloniki in support of the Jews, either in the form of petitions, proclamations, letters or street action and other symbolic moves. Were they not troubled by the "judgement of history" in the words of Archbishop Damaskinos? In contrast, the Greek leadership in Athens was more forceful and demanding in support of the Jews in Thessaloniki, compared to the leaders in their own native city.⁷⁴

The deportations only started in mid-March 1943 and they went on till August 1943, thereby going on for around six months. With the information on the plight of the Jews widely available and the great impact of the antisemitic measures on the Jewish civilian

⁷³ Archbishop Damaskinos and other eminent Greeks to C. Logothetopoulos, Quisling Prime Minister in Photini Constantopoulou and Thanos Veremis, eds., *Documents on the History of the Greek Jews: Records from the Historical Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs* (Athens: Kastaniotis, 1999), Document 90, pp. 250–253.

⁷⁴ This point was made by Yacoel, *Memoirs*, p. 60. Apostolou addressed the same point with his choice of title, "The Exception of Salonika."

population known to all, new questions arise about the choices, duties and potential responsibilities of the Greek leaders of Thessaloniki.

CHAPTER IV: The Reactions of the City Authorities

1. Introduction

When researching the Holocaust in greater detail, the roles of local decision-making and bureaucracy become key. So far, little research has been conducted in a systematic way on how local actors with power and influence operated and reacted during the Holocaust in different countries in occupied Europe, and Greece in particular.¹ It was often they, the civil servants, government employees, city clerks and local administrators, and also mayors, heads of the associations and unions, who were entrusted with implementing the Nazi orders.

Studying the issue of decision-making at the local level can answer many of the questions that are lost in broader approaches. This chapter will study the limits of complacency, complicity and collaboration, a common theme related to the Holocaust, where the distinction is often unclear. Moreover, it can answer whether state institutions acted as a kind of “protective screen” against the persecution of the Jews, in the words of Jacques Semelin,² by using, for example, bureaucratic “tricks” to delay the implementation of the Nazi orders.³

This chapter will analyze how the Thessaloniki city authorities dealt with the unprecedented antisemitic measures of the Nazis, the stigmatization and isolation of the Jews, their deportation to Poland and the consequences of genocide. The municipality is an

¹ For a Dutch perspective, see Peter Romijn, “The ‘Lesser Evil’-the case of the Dutch local authorities and the Holocaust,” in Wichert ten Have, ed., *The Persecution of the Jews in the Netherlands, 1940–1945* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012), pp. 13–28.

² Jacques Semelin, *Unarmed against Hitler: Civilian Resistance in Europe, 1939–1943* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1993), p. 141.

³ For a manual with such “disruptive actions” by ordinary citizens, prepared by the OSS in 1944, see Office of Strategic Services (OSS), *Simple Sabotage Field Manual*, available at <https://www.cia.gov/news-information/featured-story-archive/2012-featured-story-archive/simple-sabotage.html>.

appropriate case study for several reasons: first, it counted the biggest number of Greek Jews in their jurisdiction, more than one fifth of the total population. Second, these Jews were not isolated but rather centrally located and a significant element of the city's life. Third, the members of the municipal council were significant local personalities or prominent businessmen, being active in civil society organizations and connected to national political figures, thus being a central part of the city's Greek Christian elite.

The first mayor during this period was Konstantinos Merkouriou (1864-1951). He studied Greek literature and worked as a school teacher, and later as director of a private school. He was appointed mayor in 1937 by the Metaxas dictatorship, and the Germans kept him in that position until February 1943.⁴ He was founding member and first President of the Society for Macedonian Studies (June 1939-May 1942), an organization that brought together many influential personalities of the time. Georgios Seremetis (1879-1950) succeeded Merkouriou as the second mayor after the first became sick. Seremetis was until that point a prominent lawyer and President of the Lawyers Association. Other members of the city council included Periklis Garofallou,⁵ and industrialist Stylianos Valioulis.

⁴ On July 27, 1942, it was announced that Dimitrios Th. Iliadis would assume the office of Mayor of Thessaloniki. *Nea Evropi*, July 28, 1942, p. 4. Iliadis, forty-five years old at the time, had studied politics and economics in Belgium and had served briefly as general secretary of the General Governor of Macedonia during 1934–35. Later he became representative of the German firm “Krupp” and after the German invasion of Greece became the owner of the *Nea Evropi* collaborationist newspaper. See weekly report of Italian Consulate in Thessaloniki, July 28, 1942, in Joseph Rochlitz, *Righteous Enemy: Document Collection* (Rome, 1988), pp. 137–138. In August 1942, he also became the owner of the *Apogevmatini* newspaper, the only other newspaper in circulation, making him “the absolute master of the press of Thessaloniki.” His appointment as mayor seemed to have been blocked by Minister Gotzamanis, who considered him as a not the “right person.” News bulletin of the Italian Consulate in Thessaloniki, September 3, 1942, in Rochlitz, *Righteous Enemy*, p. 167.

⁵ Periklis Garofallou was the brother-in-law of Sotirios Gotzamanis, the high-profile finance minister of the collaborationist government in Athens at the time and together they had tried to establish a National-Socialist party in Thessaloniki at the beginning of 1943 but they failed. See classified report of Greek Army Information Agency, “Catalogue of National Organizations in Greece,” F. 916/B/2b, Athens, May 1943 in Greek Army General Staff, Army History Directorate, *Archives of National Resistance (1941–1944)* (Greek), Volume 7: Domestic Resistance Organizations (Athens: Army History Directorate Publications, 1998), p. 64. Garofallou was the eldest member of Thessaloniki's city council and often substituted for the Mayor when he was away. His name was also circulated as a potential replacement of unpopular Merkouriou after the German army had entered Thessaloniki, but the issue was dropped due to the deteriorating food situation. See weekly report of Italian Consulate in Thessaloniki, July 28, 1942, in Rochlitz, *Righteous Enemy*, p. 137.

In the last years, the role of Greece's authorities has come into the focus of historians in a more comprehensive fashion. For example, two researchers, who also studied the Municipal Archive, recently queried "whether the Greek authorities exhausted their strictness on a part of population which was plummeting to the last step of the social ladder." As an example, they provided the following city council decision to fire a Jewish municipal employee, Mordoh Kamhi:

Having in mind the report of the Municipal Cleaning Service number 84 of February 15, 1942, in which Mordoh Kamhi, cart-driver of the Municipal Cleaning Service, presents that, on February 14, 1942, he went with his son to a location where useless meat, unsuitable for eating, had been buried, he removed them but they were confiscated and buried again. During his examination, he testified that he proceeded to this act in order to sustain his family, which is hungry. The same date, the above-mentioned departed arbitrarily from his position, and asks that this person is fired from the Service. We decide: We fire for the above reasons from the Service Mordoh Kamhi, cart-driver of the Municipal Cleaning Service. The Mayor K. Merkouriou.⁶

Using files from the Municipal Archive of Thessaloniki and several other sources, most never used before, five case studies will be presented: the use by the city of Jewish slave labor; the renaming of the streets with Jewish names prior to the deportations; the city's involvement with the destruction of the Jewish cemetery; the replacing of the Jewish employees in the Municipality of Thessaloniki; and the acquisition of Jewish property. These case studies highlight how the local decisions-makers dealt with the unprecedented process and consequences of genocide, as well as deepen our understanding of the role of city authorities in the European context.

⁶ Anna Maria Droumbouki and Iasonas Chandrinou, *Thessaloniki during the German Occupation* (Greek) (Athens: Potamos, 2014), p. 46, quoting Thessaloniki History Center (THC), General Records of the City of Thessaloniki (GRCT), 1942, f. 2, sub. 6, Decision number 6239 of March 4, 1942.

2. Benefiting from Jewish Slave Labor

The lives of the Jews of Thessaloniki changed irreversibly on Saturday, July 11, 1942, when, under instructions from the local German army headquarters, all Jewish males were called to gather in Liberty Square, located in the city center. This event marked the first mass antisemitic measure after the German army occupied Thessaloniki in April 1941. The “Black Sabbath,” as it became known, saw approximately 8,500 Jewish men aged 18–45 going through humiliating gymnastics under a blistering sun. German soldiers beat those unlucky Jews who arrived late, smoked, or dared to sit down.⁷

The reason for this compulsory assembly was to mobilize them for forced labor, mainly for construction work, overseen by the Todt organization. In the following weeks and until the end of August 1942, some 3,500 Jewish men were drafted and sent to different parts of Greece to build roads, railways, and airports, and work in mines. Most of these men had never been employed in heavy construction and they were far from qualified.⁸

With its document of September 11, 1942, the city’s finance division asked the municipal council whether it should continue paying the salaries of the city’s Jewish employees who had been drafted by the Germans for forced labor and were thus unable to show up for work. The city’s legal advisor, Petros Iatropoulos, opined that the city should continue to pay their salaries. However, as a law did not cover this case, a decision of the city council would be required. The members of the city council agreed that it was “lawful” to continue to pay the salaries of the Jewish municipal workers for so long as they are enlisted for forced labor by the occupying authorities.⁹

Two hundred and thirty of these Jews, “drafted for forced labor,” were given by the Germans to the Thessaloniki city authorities for use at the cleaning services. The city officials noted their “limited productivity.” They received a daily salary of 1,000 drachmas, equal to the pay of the Christian workers in that division. Ten Greek non-commissioned army officers were appointed as supervisors.¹⁰

⁷ Yomtov Yacoel, *Memoirs 1941–1943* (Greek) (Thessaloniki: Paratiritis, 1993), p. 58.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 62

⁹ Minutes of the Governing Committee of the City of Thessaloniki, Decision 416 of November 5, 1942.

¹⁰ THC, GRCT, 1943, f. 6, sub. 2, Document from the Finance Department, Protocol number 5731 of December 7, 1942.

The gathering of Liberty Square and the enlistment for forced labor became a traumatic experience for the city's Jews for several reasons: it was the first antisemitic measure that effected the totality of the community; the workers were treated very harshly with around one hundred losing their lives;¹¹ and their ordeal was met with almost total silence from the authorities and the city's Greek majority. The community leaders negotiated hard from a weaker position and finally managed to free the workers paying a high premium, a large amount in cash as well as the destruction of the city's ancient Jewish cemetery.¹²

It seems that the Germans offered these workers to the municipality without the city authorities requesting them in the first place. Although it is unclear how these workers were treated, one could argue that these 230 Jews were much better off engaged in cleaning tasks in their own city rather than being far away and working under inhumane conditions like the rest. The city council also agreed to keep on paying the salaries of its Jewish employees, even though they were not able to come to work. While these may be true, yet, the municipality of Thessaloniki did not protest the forced enlistment for harsh labor of its Jewish citizens at a time it also benefitted from their labor. Its silence and acquiescence must have been regarded as a disheartening sign, at the time when the city's Jews needed all the support they could get.

3. Erasing the City's Jewish Topography

As Jewish forced laborers were suffering under a regime of hard work, fear, poor nutrition, and limited hygiene, the first deaths were reported and their relatives in the city demanded action by the Jewish community officials. While the Jewish community was negotiating with the Germans their dismissal, the Thessaloniki municipal authorities, under German orders, were implicated in the removal of two important symbols of the city's Jewish character: its Jewish street names¹³ and the centrally-located and vast Jewish cemetery.¹⁴

¹¹ For the mortality rate, Yacoel gives the figure of 3% in two and a half months. This would be approximately 100 people. Yacoel, *Memoirs*, 71. For more, see relevant discussion in Chapter II.

¹² For more details, see section below "Destruction of the old Jewish cemetery."

¹³ For guidelines on the renaming of "barbaric" Turkish or Slavic names of villages in Greece in the inter-War period, written by a professor of the University of Thessaloniki and circulated by the Greek government, see Stilpon Kyriakidis, *Instructions for the Renaming of Communities and Neighborhoods with a Turkish or Slavic Name* (Greek), Ministry of Interior, Department of Local Authorities (Athens: National Printing House, 1926).

¹⁴ The issue of the cemetery is detailed in Chapter 2.

On November 19, 1942, the city council established a committee for the renaming of the streets that bore Jewish names. At its meeting of February 16, 1943, only a few days after the Nazi antisemitic laws were announced to the Jewish community, the committee submitted a first proposal for the renaming of the streets with Jewish names, fourteen in total. Those of “insignificant locations, and in particular in Jewish districts and neighborhoods” will be given names of “Macedonian rivers, mountains, lakes, etc.,” whereas the others will be renamed “relevant to their location and based on their importance for traffic, length and format.”¹⁵

Yomtov Yacoel, the Jewish community’s legal advisor and one of its leaders at the time, lamented this decision of the city council in his diary:

And this municipality of the city, who knows under whose suggestion, considered appropriate to make a decision to rename some (very few) streets of the city, which since long time ago have been named after prominent Israelites, whose actions in support of the city were significant. This decision by the municipality, when implemented, resulted in the resignation of the only Jewish member of the municipal council, rightfully.¹⁶

The individual in question is Gavriil Safarana, who resigned around September 1942.¹⁷

On March 26, 1943, ten days into the deportations of the city’s Jews, the municipal council adopted the proposals of the committee and proceeded with the renaming of the street names as proposed with its decision 185.¹⁸ Some of the streets took new names of heroes of the Greek revolution against the Ottomans of 1821, or of a famous novelist, Penelope Delta, who committed suicide the day the German army entered Athens. The German authorities may have gotten the hint and were unsatisfied with the proposal. With their document of March 16, 1943, forwarded to the city by the General Governor of Macedonia in mid-April 1943, they modified the streets named after individuals. They kept those of mountains, lakes,

¹⁵ Archive of the Municipality of Thessaloniki, Minutes of the Governing Committee, Volume 41, Decision 185 of March 26, 1943, 194–195. Also in THC, GRCT, 1943, f. 18, sub. 2, Division of Technical Services.

¹⁶ Yacoel, *Memoirs*, p. 99.

¹⁷ Yacoel, *Memoirs*, p. 99 and THC, GRCT, 1942, f. 17, sub. 3.

¹⁸ Minutes of the Governing Committee of the City of Thessaloniki, Volume 41, Decision 185 of March 26, 1943, pp. 194–195.

or rivers unchanged. The new names were confirmed the city council with its decision 322 of May 31, 1943¹⁹ and approved by the General Governor on June 22, 1943.²⁰

Table III: Changes of streets with Jewish names

Streets with Jewish names	New Name Feb 16, 1943 (decision 185/Mar 26, 43)	Change March 16, 1943 (decision 322/May 31, 43)
Allatini	Kanari	Notias
Misrahi	Georgaki Olympiou	Evropou
Morgentau	Bishop of Kitros Makarios	Livadion
Saias	Baron Bellios	Gallikou
Modiano	Anaktoron ²¹ [Palace]	Anaktoron
Roussel	Kon. Kammonas	Faonos
Saadi Levi	Pinelopis Delta	Elimias
Matalon	Arneas	Arneas
Baron Hirsch	Loudia	Loudia
Gatenio	Holomontos	Holomontos
Dr. Perrera	Axioupoleos	Axioupoleos
Karasso	Halastras	Halastras
Molho	Zihnis	Zihnis
Saoul Modiano	Volvis	Volvis

On July 14, 1943, when most of the Jews had already departed, the city architect estimated the relevant street plaques to be 124. They would be removed from the building walls and the new names will be painted on them by “solid watercolor.” On August 2, 1943, the city council approved the requested budget of 110,000 drachmas for the new street name

¹⁹ THC, GRCT, 1943, f. 13, sub. 2, Decision 322 of May 31, 1943. Relevant correspondence is also quoted in Decision 254 of April 29, 1943, f. 13, sub. 2. In the beginning of April 1943, the Germans added the request to rename American Red Cross Street to Orestou.

²⁰ THC, GRCT, 1943, f. 12, sub. 1, Division of Technical Services, Decision 476 of August 12, 1943.

²¹ The decision to rename Modiano street to “Anaktoron” was a result of a dedicated order. It was the only one announced in the press, *Nea Evropi*, February 27, 1943.

signs, “due to its urgent nature.” Part of the work would be done by the city’s technical staff and part by outside contractors.²²

In a related move, a columnist of pro-Nazi daily *Nea Evropi* [New Europe] took issue with the signs of Jewish stores in the city and published the following, after the Jews were deported:

THE SIGNS

The Jews have left. But strangely the signs of several of their stores remain, to remind an era of Jewish exploitation. Let the city get rid of them like it got rid of the Jews. The signs must go at any rate...²³

The German occupation brought with it not only violence, fear, food shortages and other challenges for the local population but also changes on their daily routine. The renaming of the streets with Jewish names was driven by the need to erase the Jewish character of the city and obliterate its Jewish past. It is unclear what triggered this whole process, the Germans or their local collaborators. As far as the Jewish presence was concerned, it was in the interest of both, Nazis and Greek collaborators, to try to minimize it and erase it when possible. In any case, the Germans maintained the overall control and followed the process closely.

Was the choice of Penelope Delta and Greek revolution heroes an effort of passive resistance by elements of the Greek bureaucracy? It is definitely true that the Nazis were not pleased with the initial name selection. To be aware of nuances, they must have relied on local expertise. Another interesting fact is that the process started quite early, before the anti-Jewish measures intensified and took almost a year to be completed. Was this also a case of deliberate delaying or, to the contrary, time needed for normal bureaucratic procedures? One may never know for sure.

At the same time, the changing of street names affected the daily lives of the ordinary citizens in very symbolic way. Streets where people lived, worked or went shopping were not called by that name any more. For many of them, the name of street where their home was

²² THC, GRCT, 1943, f. 12, sub. 1, Division of Technical Services, Decision 476 of August 2, 1943.

²³ *Nea Evropi*, June 15, 1943.

located was something very familiar to them, a name they would hear from the time they were born. In addition, its change had a very practical element attached to it, other than the sentimental and symbolic aspects. The local residents needed to communicate the address change to their business partners, family and friends. The issue was a topic for conversation at the coffee shop or during dinner.²⁴

In parallel to the developments above and as the leadership of the Jewish community remained engaged in negotiations with the Germans to release the Jews from the forced labor works, an agreement was found: the payment of a ransom of two billion drachmas and the flattening of the centuries-old Jewish cemetery in the center of the city.²⁵

The cemetery, with a size of 350,000 square meters (86.5 acres) and nearly 500,000 graves, was probably the largest Jewish necropolis in Europe. As the city was growing, this large plot of land right in the center prohibited a plan of modern urban development. City plans after the big fire of 1917 envisioned the creation of the university campus on its surface. Locals were also complaining about how this vast area inhibited transportations and attracted illegal and immoral activities at night. The Jewish community was resisting such efforts by arguing that, in the Jewish religion, cemeteries can never be removed.

Following the agreement for the release of the laborers, a meeting took place at the city hall, on December 3, 1942. The meeting, chaired by German commissioner of civilian affairs Bohlke, brought together senior officials from the office of Vassilios Simonidis, the General Governor of Macedonia, the municipality of Thessaloniki and the Jewish community. The municipality was obliged to provide the community with two new plots for its future burials. Although Jewish community officials tried to buy more time, the destruction process of the vast Jewish necropolis began on December 6, 1942. Five hundred workers were tasked by the municipality, with the city spending around 100,000,000 drachmas for the destruction of the graves and the gathering of the materials in piles.²⁶ On December 23, 1942, the Thessaloniki municipal council, sitting in a special session, adopted

²⁴ For a discussion on related themes, see Saskia Coenen Snyder, "An Urban Semiotics of War: Signs and Sounds in Nazi-Occupied Amsterdam," *Studies in Contemporary Jewry* (forthcoming in Volume 30, 2016). In Amsterdam, the changing of the streets with Jewish names was the initiative of the local mayor.

²⁵ For a more detailed narration, see Chapter 2.

²⁶ Archive of the Municipality of Thessaloniki, Minutes of the Governing Committee, July 1944, Report of the Division of Technical Services to the Mayor of Thessaloniki, Protocol number 15785/1436 of July 3, 1944, pp. 753–756.

decision 507, which rubberstamped the decisions of the December 3 meeting. Two plots of municipal land were given to the Jewish community to serve as future burial grounds, one in the east and one in the west side of the city. Following this decision, a revealing discussion ensued among the city council members on the ownership of the land and the materials.²⁷

Some council members opposed the municipality's provision of the two new parcels of land while the area of the old cemetery would become state rather than city property. The main council member behind this opposition, Periklis Garofallou, argued, "We must think what we are going to ask in exchange. I am of the opinion that we have to ask for part of the plot that is liberated by the demolition of the old Jewish cemeteries." Mayor Konstantinos Merkouriou agreed and proposed that either the state reimburses the municipality, or the municipality becomes the owner of the land of the old Jewish cemetery. City engineer Georgios Malakis responded that it was a responsibility of the municipality to provide its citizens with burial grounds. At the end of the meeting, the city council members requested the legal advisor to examine, "posthaste," whether the municipality could lay claim to the old cemetery land and, if not, what it should receive from the state in exchange for the loss of the two new parcels.²⁸

In his response on May 18, 1943, the legal advisor Petros Iatropoulos argued that the municipality had neither a legal title over the land of the Jewish cemetery, nor the right to claim the site back. The holiness of the site should not be compromised since, according to Jewish law, the removal of the remains is prohibited. Last but not least, he argued that the Jewish communities were responsible for their cemeteries and not the municipalities.²⁹ The procedure for the expropriation of the land in exchange for the two new locations was eventually put on hold on June 11, 1943, following the opinion of the legal advisor and the fact that "almost all the Jews [have] departed from our city."³⁰

²⁷ The discussion was held between Mayor Konstantinos Merkouriou and council members Stylianos Valioulis, Thomas Vlahopoulos, and Periklis Garofallou. Senior municipality staff members were also present.

²⁸ Archive of the Municipality of Thessaloniki, Minutes of the Governing Committee, volume 40, December 23, 1942, pp. 847–850. The request from the mayor to the legal advisor was sent on December 29, 1942. A reminder was sent on February 3, 1943.

²⁹ THC, GRCT, 1943, f. 14, sub. 4a, Iatropoulos to Mayor, May 18, 1943.

³⁰ THC, GRCT, 1943, f. 14, sub. 4a, Minutes of the Governing Committee, June 11, 1943. The meeting at the city hall was presided by Garofallou. Earlier, on January 23, 1943, following previous orders of the General Governor, the municipality budgeted 50,000 drachmas for the "drawing of sketches and the undertaking of

During the months that followed, the municipality would request or serve as an intermediary for building materials from the demolished Jewish cemetery, such as bricks and marble stones, for its different departments and supervised institutions, even for future needs. These institutions included schools, clubs, and churches. For example, in the beginning of March 1943, it was decided to gather 100,000 bricks “for the needs of the municipality.” Accordingly, the city council adopted a budget of one million drachmas to transport the materials.³¹ As these materials were coveted by many in the city, the municipality’s technical services division warned, “There is already a need to immediately transport a quantity of bricks to the municipality’s workshop before their supply is exhausted, so that they can be collected by the various services of our division for necessities that might arise.”³²

The city gave the elementary school Ioannidis (named after its donor) 50,000 bricks and 100 square meters of marble “destined for the construction of toilets for the use of the children using the soup kitchen,” budgeting an additional 900,000 drachmas for the transport of the said materials from the old cemetery to the school.³³ The sailing club also requested materials from the city council for the soup kitchen pavilion it had created to feed 250 poor children in February 1942. For this structure they had already received 30,000 bricks from the Jewish cemetery but they still needed wood and tiles, presumably from the Jewish buildings demolished after the deportations. The municipal council approved this request.³⁴

On May 15, 1943, the municipality decided to build a small chapel at the Christian cemetery of Agia Fotini, which was located nearby the old Jewish cemeteries. For its construction, “marble from the old Jewish cemeteries being demolished” was used.³⁵ In the

photocopy works for the determination of the boundaries and position of the location for the relocated Jewish cemeteries.” THC, GRCT, 1943, f. 6, sub. 2, Division of Technical Services, Decision 43 of January 23, 1943.

³¹ THC, GRCT, 1943, f. 13, sub. 3a, Division of Financial Services, Decision 216 of April 13, 1943. The announcement for the tender was published in the daily press with a March 16, 1943 deadline that was later postponed to April 17 and then again to May 3, 1943. See *Nea Evropi*, March 16, 1943, April 14, 1943, and May 1, 1943. The tender finally took place on September 9, 1943, but with Decision 152 of October 11, 1943, it was cancelled, due to irregularities and because the required budget would be “colossal.” See THC, GRCT, 1943, f. 17, sub. 2, Minutes of the Governing Committee of September 20, 1943 and Decision 152 of October 11, 1943.

³² THC, GRCT, 1943, f. 13, sub. 3a, Division of Financial Services, Decision 216 of April 13, 1943.

³³ THC, GRCT, 1943, f. 13, sub. 2, Division of Technical Services, Decision 315 of May 29, 1943.

³⁴ THC, GRCT, 1943, f. 13, sub. 2, Division of Technical Services, Decision 384 of July 9, 1943.

³⁵ THC, GRCT, 1943, f. 12, sub. 1, Decision 297 of May 15, 1943.

beginning of 1944, it requested additional marble, stones, and bricks “necessary for the continuing work on this cemetery (fence, buildings, courtyards, etc.)” This arrangement was beneficial for the municipality since “the cemeteries service believes that the municipality is going to profit several-fold from the value of these useful and necessary materials, charged only with the transport and processing of the marble and the other materials.” The city council thus adopted an additional budget of thirty-five million drachmas for the requested transfer and added extra funds “so that the transport of more materials can be made possible.”³⁶

The destruction of the Jewish cemetery, the role of the city as well as the fate of its materials is key in understanding the setting in which the deportation of the Jewish community took place three months after. By initiating and playing a central role in such an anti-Jewish measure, the municipality not only failed to protect its Jewish citizens but also demonstrated that they were a separate element in the city, with a different fate from that of the Christian majority.

4. Replacing Jewish Civil Servants

As the Jews of Thessaloniki were placed in ghettos and the first deportation train left the city on March 15, 1943, the question emerged on what would happen with the Jewish civil servants, who were unable to show up for work. On March 24, 1943, Thessaloniki Mayor Georgios Seremetis wrote to the General Governor of Macedonia Vassilios Simonidis, the highest-ranking Greek government official in the region, “regarding the Jewish municipal employees.”³⁷ The mayor argued that:

We still lack the required instructions, on the position of the Jewish municipal employees, nor do we have formal knowledge of how this issue was regulated in the public sector.

³⁶ THC, GRCT, 1944, f. 9, sub. 2, Decision 165 of February 10, 1944.

³⁷ THC, GRCT, 1943, Division of Technical Services, f. 6, sub. 2, Confidential Document 24, March 24, 1943, also published in Thessaloniki History Center, *Thessaloniki 1917–1967: The Identity of the City through the Municipal Archive* (Greek) (Thessaloniki, 1995), p. 66.

In our Municipality, except from the Jews serving as workers in the Cleaning Department, we have around 15 who possess organic positions of the main organization.

And for the first ones, whoever was not able to offer their service was fired, the rest are kept in their positions because of the existing needs. For the second ones however, the ones who do not show up to their posts because of their confinement, it is important to receive your instructions or be informed on the taken decision of the Jewish public servants. In that way, we can regulate in a similar manner the position of the municipal ones, since it is unknown to us whether their deportation from Thessaloniki will be belated or not.

It is primarily essential to inform us whether their salaries will be paid until a decision regulating their positions is taken.

On March 30, 1943, two weeks into the deportations of Thessaloniki's Jews, Governor Simonidis sent a circular to "all Organizations of Public Law and the Several Insurance Funds and Foundations of Thessaloniki," some twenty-one recipients in total.³⁸ In it, Simonidis asked that within eight days, all agencies should submit,

very quickly and without another reminder, a list of names of Jewish wageworker employees who departed from your departments, with the job description each one is executing, their qualifications and their monthly or daily salaries, so that in their place to position unemployed Greeks, appointed pertinently by the Special Committee for the search and appointment of employees in Jewish companies, established by us.

These lists should be compiled with the biggest detail and under the responsibility of the directors of Presidents of each Organization so that the Committee, in knowledge of the real conditions of each case, can fill the emptied positions by Greek employees.

³⁸ Historical Archive of Macedonia, Autonomous Agency of Provisions of Macedonia, f. 9, sub. 1, Protocol Number 51418, March 31, 1943.

The social purpose of the above Committee, which will undertake the settlement of the mentioned task, is huge and does not require special explanations since it is known to all that thousands of young Greeks graced with adequate qualifications remain unemployed for many years, continuously enlarging the classes of the intellectual proletariat, to the detriment of the society.

Not many seem to have complied with the demand of the General Governor. On June 7, 1943, Simonidis sent a reminder to some twenty-two agencies, recalling the previous circular and asked them “once more” to hand the requested list to Nissim Papazoglou, the employee in charge from YDIP, the Greek Agency for the Custody of Jewish Properties.³⁹

Acting Mayor Periklis Garofallou, responded on behalf of the Municipality on June 30, 1943, attaching a list of sixteen “withdrawn Jews.”⁴⁰ In his note, Garofallou explained that the position of Dr. Ovdia Beza was temporary and since the “withdrawal of the said person from the service,” the position should be considered as suppressed.⁴¹ The positions of attachés Solomon Sevi and Menahem Benveniste⁴² needed to be replaced by a competition among high-school graduates. The position of cleaner Liza Menahem was filled by another employee, due to the urgent needs of the agency. The positions of the other twelve municipal employees were reserved for war victims and injured, according to Law 1799/42, to be appointed by the Ministry of National Defense. Garofallou concluded that the municipal services were conducted normally and no new staff was required, especially after the

³⁹ Historical Archive of Macedonia, Autonomous Agency of Provisions of Macedonia, f. 9, sub 1, Protocol number 76711, June 7, 1943.

⁴⁰ Thessaloniki History Center, *Thessaloniki*, Protocol number 23599, June 30, 1943, p. 67.

⁴¹ Dr. Ovdia Beza survived the war and on May 13, 1952 requested from the Mayor a copy of decision 169 of 1945 of the Municipal Committee of the City of Thessaloniki which cancelled decision 78/1943 of the same Committee that fired him on July 23, 1943 “due to absence.” Dr. Beza requested this document for his retirement and his demand was approved on May 18, 1952. Archive of Nestor Kavadas, Municipality of Thessaloniki, Protocol number 20921, May 13, 1952.

⁴² On February 27, 1943, a discussion on whether Benveniste should get promoted took place at a meeting which brought together the division heads of the municipality. Although Benveniste had the necessary qualifications, the Director of Financial Services, St. Papasarantopoulos, expressed the view that he should not be promoted because he was “Jewish,” although he was an able employee. In the end, Benveniste was promoted. Archive of Nestor Kavadas, Municipality of Thessaloniki, Minutes of February 27, 1943.

detachment of more than fifty employees from Bulgarian-occupied municipalities. The only personnel they needed were street cleaners and cart drivers.

Similarly, on June 31, 1943, Alexandros Krallis, the President of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Thessaloniki, responded to the Minister's circular. He indicated that the Chamber's removed Jewish employees were four, Abravanel Al., Pessah Mari, Saltiel Dario and Asser Sam. Two had already been replaced by disabled war veterans, while the other two by previously temporary employees who would now become permanent. Krallis concluded his letter by saying:

From the above, one can deduce that no empty positions were created by the withdrawal of the Jewish employees. Even though we fully recognize the highly useful social purpose of your Committee, we are however sorry not to be able to provide you with any empty positions in our organization, because there are not any. In addition, the finances of our Chamber are not in such a flourishing situation, following of course the deletion of the Jewish companies and, because of that, the significant reduction of the income, which is burdened by the additional salary costs of a significant number of employees, apart from the ones mentioned above, which were placed in our organization as extras, based on different laws.⁴³

In the meantime, in May 1943, the municipality proceeded with the dismissal of Jewish employees who were "absent arbitrarily." After they were placed in the ghetto and unable to appear to work, they were put on normal or medical leave. When this leave expired, the city officials would fire them. Five Jewish clerks had requested a fifteen-day normal leave that ended on March 23 and they had not appeared for work again.⁴⁴ On March 30, the Division of Health Issues wrote to the mayor to say that ten Jewish employees had requested a fifteen-day sick leave but "no one of them fell sick recently nor needs a medical leave."⁴⁵

⁴³ Archive of Nestor Kavadas, Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Thessaloniki, Protocol number 3423, June 31, 1943 and Evagelia Varela, *The Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Thessaloniki: Chronicle 1919–1994* (Greek) (Thessaloniki, 1994), p. 18.

⁴⁴ THC, GRCT, 1943, f. 26, sub. 6, City Clerk to the Mayor, May 14, 1943.

⁴⁵ THC, GRCT, 1943, f. 26, sub. 5, Division of Health Services to the Mayor, March 30, 1943.

On March 10, the Division of Financial Services requested the dismissal of David Zakai and Isha Hanika as “they stopped providing their services to the Municipality since the 6th of this month, and consequently, please approve their dismissal from their position.”⁴⁶ On March 26, Solomon Sevi asked from his division to go on paid leave from March 8 onwards, “because for reasons beyond my wishes I was not able to appear to my duty station.”⁴⁷ On May 14, 1943, the municipality fired twelve Jewish employees who were “absent arbitrarily.”⁴⁸ Another two Jewish employees were fired by decision 72 on May 31, 1943.⁴⁹

In the municipal archives one can find two lists of some 265 Jews who were working for the city as street cleaners, cart drivers and stable keepers and who were fired around April-May 1943. It is unclear whether the 250 street cleaners among them were more or less the same as the 230 street cleaners offered to the city as part of the forced labor call.⁵⁰

The discussion above reveals how the municipality dealt with their absence and eventual deportation of its Jewish employees, targeted on grounds of their religious affiliation by a foreign occupying force. From studying the available documentation, there were no efforts to stand up for, or at least express solidarity with, the Jewish staff members facing this colossal challenge. Rather, the language used by the city officials is cold, formal, removed, without any feeling of sympathy for the Jewish employees, their colleagues for many years.

5. Acquiring Jewish Property

As the Jews were confined in ghettos and, from March 15, 1943, deported to the death camps, their properties became the target of organized and unorganized plunder. The Greek collaborationist government, under German orders, set up an organization to manage Jewish properties—homes, businesses, merchandise, etc.—and to appoint Greek Christian custodians. There were also several instances of plunder of the empty Jewish homes by the

⁴⁶ THC, GRCT, 1943, f. 26, sub. 4, Protocol number 1164/251, March 10, 1943.

⁴⁷ THC, GRCT, 1943, f. 26, sub. 2, “Solomon Sevi,” Protocol number 12664, March 26, 1943.

⁴⁸ THC, GRCT, 1943, f. 26, sub. 3, “Dismissal of Jewish Municipal Employees,” Decision 21681 of May 14, 1943. Ironically, the dismissal notes bear the handwritten inscription “Was not delivered due to deportation.” See THC, GRCT, 1943, f. 20, sub. 1a, “Hiring and Dismissal of Municipal Employees.”

⁴⁹ THC, GRCT, 1943, f. 26, sub. 3, “Dismissal of Jewish Municipal Employees,” Decision 72 of May 31, 1943.

⁵⁰ THC, GRCT, 1943, f. 20, sub. 1a, “Hiring and Dismissal of Municipal Employees,” Decision 19085 of April 15, 1943 and 22238 of May 28, 1943.

neighbors, shortly after the Jews were removed from them. These events have marked the social and economic structures of the city until today.

The Thessaloniki city authorities also eyed the vacated Jewish properties. For example, some municipal services were housed in former Jewish stores and offices. The jewelry store of Haim de Botton, which on May 22, 1943 was originally given to the National-Socialist party of Georgios Poulos, was later passed on to the municipality.⁵¹ On April 1944, the mayor requested a former Jewish building, located on Menexe 2, to house its municipal registrar service.⁵² Another Jewish building, belonging to the Jewish Community at Ermou 32, was also used as the registrar.⁵³

After the Jewish neighborhoods were vacated, the city destroyed them. Under German orders, the city destroyed the Rezi Vardar complex, as its houses had become “sources for infections dangerous for the health of the Occupying Army.”⁵⁴ The municipal neighborhood of “6” had also a similar fate. On April 6, 1943, it was vacated by its Jewish inhabitants. In the following weeks, the area was guarded by the police until the dishes and furniture “left behind” by the former Jewish residents could be sorted out. Four additional guards were hired to stop the looting. The city council decided to destroy its fifty-two buildings and sell the materials, the money of which would be used to settle old debts of the municipality.⁵⁵ At the same time, the buildings were in such a bad and decaying state, that the city had to get rid of this “abomination,” so that the area could be turned into a park, for the benefit of the health of the citizens.⁵⁶

⁵¹ THC, GRCT, 1943, f. 19, sub. 1d, October 28, 1943. This was most probably one of the two jewelry stores of brothers Isaac and Robert de Botton, sons of Haim. After Poulos emptied them of their precious contents, he did not need the empty stores any more. See Stratos Dordanas, *Greeks versus Greece: The world of the Security Battalions in Occupied Thessaloniki 1941–1944* (Greek) (Thessaloniki: Epikentro, 2006), pp. 402–403.

⁵² Thessaloniki History Center, *Thessaloniki*, Protocol number 10114, April 27, 1944.

⁵³ Archive of Jewish Museum of Thessaloniki, Agency for the Custody of Jewish Properties (YDIP), folder 9.

⁵⁴ Minutes of the Governing Committee of the City of Thessaloniki, Decision 451 of July 26, 1943. Same decision also at THC, GRCT, 1943, f. 12, sub. 1.

⁵⁵ An announcement for the auction for the materials scheduled for May 4, 1943 appeared on the *Nea Evropi* of May 1, 1943. The offers were unprofitable and a new auction date was set for June 10, 1943. *Nea Evropi*, June 6, 1943. Ads for the selling of materials from “6” by private contractors appeared in *Nea Evropi*, August 7, 1943, and August 18, 1943.

⁵⁶ THC, GRCT, 1943, f. 5, sub. 7, decision 238 of April 17, 1943. However, the plundering continued. On April 20, the city hired ten laborers to carry the joinery as “they were taken by several crooks.” THC, GRCT, 1943, f.

An interesting case study is the fate of a Jewish house, which we will study in some detail. Avraam or Albertos Yahel, was a home-owner in a central residential area, populated by Jews and non-Jews alike, on 4 Misrahi street. Even before 1929, the city authorities had their eyes on his real estate, “for the implementation of the city plans in the said area, by opening a street absolutely necessary for the communication of Misrahi and Miaouli streets.” On February 1, 1929, the Municipality proceeded to an act of expropriation, “of an urgent nature,” which, however, until 1943 remained unimplemented.

The confinement of Yahel, and probably his family, to the ghetto and later his deportation to Poland, “gives a chance to the Municipality to proceed completely free of charge” in the settlement of this case.⁵⁷ On May 31, 1943, with decision 324 under the presidency of Periklis Garofallou, the Municipality decided to expropriate his land and house, using the rates that were set with the 1929 act, i.e. 250 drachmas per cubic meter for the house and 220 drachmas per cubic meter for the fence, albeit the high inflation during all the years in the meantime. “Already a unique opportunity is presented to the Municipality to deposit the above sum of 205,342 drachmas, which under today’s currency conditions is insignificant, to the Loan and Consignment Fund in favor of Avraam Yahel or any else who could be a true beneficiary by a court decision, and to become owner of the above house and fence, only the material of which exceed the amount of 4,000,000 drachmas.”⁵⁸

In its decision, the city council made sure to stress that the house in question would not fall under the jurisdiction of YDIP. “Taking into consideration that the particular case could have no relation with the one of regulating the property of the Jews, since its, by any means, settlement in no way stops the Municipality to become the only owner of the specific house, in accordance with the existing legislation, by depositing its value as discussed

13, sub. 3a. In July 1943, they decided to double the guards. THC, GRCT, 1943, f. 12, sub. 3b, decision 444 of July 26, 1943. The synagogue was exempted from the flattening and was used to house the 17th Elementary School. THC, GRCT, f. 13, sub 3b, decision 296 of May 15, 1943. Some poor Jews of foreign nationality were the only ones who remained there for a few weeks more.

⁵⁷ Based on THC, GRCT, 1943, f. 13, sub. 2, Division of Technical Services, Decision 324, May 31, 1943 and Announcement of Mayor G. Seremetis, July 29, 1943, *Annex of the Government Gazette*, Issue 54, August 12, 1943, p. 509.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

above.”⁵⁹ The role of YDIP was the reason why an earlier decision, 246 of April 29, 1943, decided to postpone the consideration of the issue.⁶⁰

As with the case of the Jewish cemetery, the willingness of the city authorities to follow the Nazi occupying forces and the Greek collaborationist government on the issue of the Jewish properties made them accessories to this immoral act. When property and material interests become a priority over human lives, the path to isolation, dehumanization and ghettoization—necessary precursors to genocide—is enabled.

6. Conclusion

On May 9, 1943, the Thessaloniki City Council issued decision 276, which today raises eyebrows if one reflects on the events that were happening during that period. The Nazi envoys charged with the “Jewish Question,” i.e. the deportation of the city’s Jews, had orally asked the Mayor for sixty-five kilos of olive oil and he had agreed. The said decision formalized this request and gave to the Nazi officers the requested olive oil during a time that were Jews of the city were sent in cattle carts to Auschwitz.⁶¹

This decision by itself reveals the difficult and ironic situation in which the Thessaloniki authorities found themselves during the German occupation. As the Jewish inhabitants were being deported, they had no choice but to provide to the German SS with the requested olive oil. Yet, combined with the case studies described above, it reveals a pattern of accommodation of the Nazi demands that was coupled with absolute silence. The city authorities did not raise any public protest against the Nazi antisemitic measures targeting the city’s Jews.

As the first Jews of Thessaloniki were leaving their native city in cargo trains, under inhumane conditions, to an unknown destination, the city authorities did take a public stance. However, that was to “denounce with abhorrence the antinational movements of the heinous

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ THC, GRCT, 1943, f. 13, sub. 2, Decision 246 of April 29, 1943.

⁶¹ THC, GRCT, 1943, f. 12, sub. 3a, Decision 276 of May 9, 1943. In the decision, the seat of the Nazi unit is referred to as 95, Vasilisseos Olgas avenue. This could be related to the Sipo/SD headquarters on 129, Vasilisseos Olgas avenue.

communist and anarchist elements,” asking its citizens “to display discipline, peaceful works and faith in the destiny of the race.”⁶²

The Germans appeared to be the ultimate decision-makers. The Greek authorities had to run the affairs of a city with few resources and big challenges. Yet, in dealing with the situation, the city officials used innocent, technical terms to describe the unprecedented developments. They chose to deal with the issues that arose in a rational and legalistic way. In effect, these prominent individuals comprising the city council turned a blind eye to the well-being of their Jewish constituency, who did not make it on their list of priorities.

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The past does not mark only those who lived at the time, but also those who are alive today. This chapter adds new materials and sources on the actions of the municipality at the time, with factual and contextualized analysis. The issue of the complicity—or not—of the occupation city authorities in the Holocaust and other atrocities demonstrates also a shift in local perceptions of this period and opens the door for a franker and open debate that goes beyond the academic framework.

On April 11, 2014, Triantafillos Mitafidis, an opposition member of the Thessaloniki city council, in a highly symbolic move, removed the portraits of the two mayors who served during World War Two from a wall in the city hall with the lineup of past mayors. In his list of accusations against the two, Mitafidis charged Merkouriou with responsibility for the destruction of the Jewish cemetery, and Seremetis with removing the Jewish street names.⁶³ This act caused many reactions in the local society, with several points of view and arguments being presented, ranging from history and memory to politics and education.⁶⁴

⁶² *Nea Evropi*, March 20, 1943, p. 1. The resolution was adopted by all members of the city council present on March 16, 1943.

⁶³ “Thessaloniki: Disagreement on the deposition of ‘collaborationist mayors,’” (Greek) *TVXS*, April 12, 2014, available at <http://tvxs.gr/news/topika-nea/thessaloniki-apokathilosi-portreton-dosilogon-dimarxon&dr=tvxsmrstvxs> (accessed February 7, 2016).

⁶⁴ See for example, Evangelos Hekimoglou, “‘Deposition’ of images in the Municipality of Thessaloniki,” (Greek) *Makedonia*, April 13, 2014 and Nikos Iliadis, “The battle of the portraits,” (Greek) *Makedonia*, June 21, 2015, pp. 23-24 and pp. 49–50.

The mayor of Thessaloniki Yannis Boutaris has also been keen to reconcile the city with its Jewish history. He has been a vocal voice on the issue, even wearing a yellow star on his lapel as he was taking the oath for his second term in office, in protest to the neo-Nazi and Holocaust denying Golden Dawn party.⁶⁵

When a monument was inaugurated on the grounds of the destroyed Jewish cemetery on November 9, 2014, Mayor Boutaris spoke for the first time of “shame for this unjust and guilty silence.” While coming short of an open apology, the Mayor expressed shame for the actions of the Greek officials of the time arguing that the Holocaust “stole the future” of the city.⁶⁶ During a local TV discussion on Holocaust Remembrance Day on January 27, 2016, a journalist for the first time publicly posed the question of “an apology” to the city’s Jews to a panel of three academics.⁶⁷

As the city leadership is slowly coming to terms with the city’s turbulent and controversial past this opens the way for regular citizens to be educated and informed. The process that has started, to reconcile the citizens with the city’s Jewish history and in extension with the Jewish community, must continue. While the dead can never return, at least the living can pledge to keep their memory alive and never repeat the mistakes of the past.

⁶⁵ “Boutaris: Why I wore the star of David at my swearing,” (Greek) August 29, 2014, available at <http://www.iefimerida.gr/news/168260/Μπουτάρης-Γιατί-φόρεσα-το-άστρο-του-Δαβίδ-στην-ορκωμοσία-μου-εικόνες> (accessed February 7, 2016).

⁶⁶ “Boutaris: The city is ashamed for its guilty silence towards the Jewish community,” (Greek) November 11, 2014, available at <http://news.in.gr/greece/article/?aid=1231362780> (accessed February 7, 2016).

⁶⁷ See “The Holocaust of the Jews of Thessaloniki,” part II, “Ta En Dimo”, TV 100, January 27, 2016, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7rkFUfBOTkg&t=660s>.

Chapter V: Reactions from the Institutions: The Church, the Courts, the University

This chapter will discuss the actions and reactions of three main institutions of Thessaloniki to the persecution of the city's Jews: the Church, the Courts and the University.

These three institutions are very important in every society. During a time of peace and democratic rule, they play a constructive role, providing the citizens with moral guidance, protecting them against the abuses of government power and cultivating the next generation. In the period of the German occupation, these institutions were severely limited. They had to deal with a myriad of problems that the new situation presented, such as the extreme hardships imposed by the occupation authorities; the increase of violence, fear and reprisals; the limitation of the powers and division of the Greek state; and the breakdown of the legal order and personal liberties.

Nevertheless, because of these extreme circumstances, institutions can rise to the occasion and become a representative of the common people before the authorities. This was definitely the case for the Church of Greece, which because of historic and cultural reasons, became a key interlocutor with the German and Greek authorities, playing a very important role in the developments of the period. This role is further reinforced by the main message of the Church, guided by moral and ethical notions, as these are engraved in the holy books and the religious teachings.

The Courts and University also carried with them prestige and influence. Through the institution, they could reach out to a lot of people and use the concept of law and justice, as well as the principles of education and enlightenment to help guide the population and soften some of their suffering.

Using archives from the University Senate of Thessaloniki and the Church of Greece, some made public for the first time, this chapter will map the actions, reactions and motivations of these three important institutions and their leadership during this period. The

role of the Church has already started to be discussed but this chapter brings to light new sources and discussion. The role of the University is discussed for the first time to such an extent from the perspective of its leadership. Finally, the study of the Courts, an unlikely choice if one considers the breakdown of the Greek legal order and the rule of law, provides an unexpected finding: the only organized and sustained local initiative to provide a way out for some of the persecuted Jews of the city.

Subchapter I: The Church

1. Introduction

The most important institution in Nazi-occupied Greece was probably the Greek Orthodox Church. The country was divided into three administrative zones and ruled by outside powers—Germany, Italy and Bulgaria—with the Axis powers appointing a puppet government in Athens. This government did not enjoy wide respect among the population, not only due to its subordination to the foreign occupiers but also because of its limited means and lack of effective control of the whole territory. It needed to submit its ministers for approval to the Germans and Italians and did not have a foreign minister. In addition, for centuries, especially during the period of the Ottoman empire, the Church was the representative of the Greek *millet*, solidifying the links between Orthodoxy and Greekness. Thus, the only actor which could become a symbol of unity for the whole country was the Church.

The Church provided the local population with much needed spiritual guidance, humanitarian relief and protection. Church leaders and local bishops used their bully pulpit to speak out against abuses against civilians. They also brought together all the other political, civic and business leaders and government officials in order to coordinate the everyday affairs and respond to the challenges that would arise.

It is thus very pertinent to examine the role of the Greek church vis-à-vis the Jews, during the tragic period of the Second World War. There are several Greek bishops who have been recognized as “Righteous Among the Nations,” the title that the Israeli government and Yad Vashem bestows upon persons who saved Jews during the Holocaust, while risking their lives. Among them, one can find Archbishop Damaskinos of Athens,

Bishop Chrysostomos of Zakynthos (Zante), Bishop Gennadios of Thessaloniki and Bishop Ioakim of Volos.¹

The role of the Church in Greece, and in particular in Thessaloniki, has been examined by historians although many questions still remain open. This section will try to shed some light into this discussion. The most comprehensive discussion on the role of the church in Greece is an article by Vassilis Ritzaleos, who studied the church archives both in Athens and in Thessaloniki.² Other relevant chapters have been published by Panteleymon Anastasakis³, Athanassios Karathanassis,⁴ Giorgos Margaritis,⁵ official publications by the Church of Greece⁶ as well as a recent publication looking at this exact topic.⁷

Ritzaleos noted the fact that a big part of the archives of the Church of Thessaloniki, including meeting minutes and correspondence, that covers the crucial period

¹ For a full list of the Greek Righteous Gentiles, see

<http://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/righteous/statistics/greece.pdf>. It is interesting to note that no lower Greek Orthodox clergy were awarded this title, although there are a few cases of Catholic clergy.

² Vassilis Ritzaleos, “The Greek Orthodox Church of Thessaloniki and the Holocaust,” in Giorgos Antoniou, Stratos Dordanas, Nikos Zaikos, and Nikos Marantzidis, eds., *The Holocaust in the Balkans* (Greek) (Thessaloniki: Epikentro, 2011), pp. 295–330.

³ Panteleymon Anastasakis, “Church of Greece under Axis Occupation (1941–1944),” Ph.D. Thesis, University of Minnesota, August 2009, Chapter VIII: The Path of Passive Resistance and Protest: The Response of the Church of Greece to Bulgarian Occupation Policies and the Holocaust, pp. 280–330.

⁴ Athanassios Karathanassis, “The relations between the Jewish Community and Metropolitan Gennadios of Thessaloniki (1912–51),” in I. K. Hassiotis, ed., *The Jewish Communities of Southeastern Europe. From the fifteenth century to the end of World War II* (Thessaloniki: Institute for Balkan Studies, 1997), pp. 223–228.

⁵ Giorgos Margaritis, “The Greek Orthodox Church and the Holocaust,” *Unwanted Compatriots: Data on the Destruction of the Minorities of Greece: Jews and Chams* (Greek) (Athens: Bibliorama, 2005), pp. 91–132, based on his lecture with the same title in English at the conference “The Holocaust in Greece,” at the University of Haifa, December 2002.

⁶ Publishing Department of the Information and Educational Service of the Church of Greece, *Memories and Testimonies from 1940s and the Occupation: the Role of the Church in 1940–1944* (Greek) (Athens, 2000). A recent publication by the Greek Foreign Ministry, Fotini Tomai, ed., *The Greek Righteous Among the Nations* (Greek) (Athens: Militos, 2015) had a chapter entitled “The role of the Greek clergy in the rescue of the Jews,” written by Spyridon Kontogiannis, Professor Emeritus of the University of Athens, pp. 71–88. The chapter, which has many historical inaccuracies, made no reference to the role of the clergy in Thessaloniki, where the great majority of the Jews of Greece lived.

⁷ Sotirios Terzis, *Watching the trains of the Final Solution: The Jews of Thessaloniki and Metropolitan Gennadios Alexiadis* (Greek) (Thessaloniki: Barbounakis, 2017).

of beginning of September 1942 to the end of 1944, is missing.⁸ Karathanassis, a professor at the University of Thessaloniki, found some important documentation in this archive but when he sought to reexamine it, it had been reclassified and became unavailable.⁹

2. Archbishop Damaskinos of Athens

Archbishop Damaskinos of Athens (1891-1949) emerged as the indisputable spokesperson of the nation. His imposing stature and charismatic personality made him the natural leader of the occupied Greek people. It is not a coincidence that following the liberation of the country from the Nazis, he took very high political offices until his death.¹⁰

Archbishop Damaskinos must have been the author of a letter sent to the delegation of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in Athens a few days before the first deportation train left Thessaloniki on March 15, 1943. In his letter, Damaskinos, after detailing the antisemitic measures implemented so far, referred to rumors that circulated and spoke of mass deportations of the Jews of Thessaloniki. He also stressed the grave food situation of the population, urging the ICRC to take action, “so as not to let die of inanition 50,000 human beings who tend their hands towards [the ICRC] and implore it.”¹¹

During the persecution of the Jews of Thessaloniki, Damaskinos, having received requests from Jewish and Greek groups,¹² met with German Ambassador Altenburg

⁸ Ritzaleos, “Greek Church,” p. 298. Terzis, in his recent study, is using a book of minutes from the period in question found in the Church archives.

⁹ “This paper was originally to have been titled ‘The Jews’ Tribulations during the Nazi Occupation and Metropolitan Gennadios Alexiadis of Thessaloniki.’ I had seen a file on this subject in Thessaloniki’s Diocesan Archive and had been shocked by what I read therein of events so recent and so tragic. Unfortunately, when I looked for it again, the file was nowhere to be found: the archive’s contents had been reclassified, the file in question had apparently been given a new number, and for the time being at least it is unavailable.” Karathanassis, “Relations,” p. 223.

¹⁰ On Archbishop Damaskinos, see Ilias Venezis, *Archbishop Damaskinos: The years of slavery* (Greek) (Athens: Vivliopolion tis Estias, 1981). The part about his role in support of the Jews of Greece in pp. 259–270.

¹¹ The cover letter of the ICRC delegation in Athens was dated March 15, 1943 and the text of the letter can be found in the ICRC archives, G. 59/8/53-341, in French translation.

¹² According to an eye-witness, the Greek Jewish wife of Giorgios Politis appeared before a secret gathering of Damaskinos and representatives of several institutions in Athens and pleaded with them for support and help to

expressing “the discomfort of the Greek People to this inhuman and unchristian act and asking his intervention for the end of the persecution.”¹³

As the deportations were continuing and the requests for action were multiplying, Damaskinos spearheaded two letters of protest, the first to Greek Prime Minister Konstantinos Logothetopoulos,¹⁴ on March 23, 1943 and the second to the German Ambassador Altenburg, the next day, on March 24, 1943.¹⁵ Together with Damaskinos,

the persecuted Jews of Thessaloniki. See letter of Theodoros Moridis, representative of the Greek actors’ association at the time and one of the three people charged with delivering the letter to the Greek Prime Minister, in *Kathimerini*, July 19, 1988, republished in *Chronika*, September 1988, p. 23.

¹³ Venezis, *Archbishop*, p. 261.

¹⁴ Greek Jewish leader Aser Moisis claimed that he visited Prime Minister Logothetopoulos twice, on March 13 and 14, 1943, to urge him to oppose the measure of the deportations of the Jews of Thessaloniki. During the first meeting Logothetopoulos said that he was not aware of the issue. At the second meeting, according to Moisis, “Logothetopoulos was standing and was found alone on his seat, swept by my words.” Moisis was escorted in both meetings by Greek political figure Konstantinos Tsaldaris. In the evening of March 14, Tsaldaris called Moisis to his office and told him that Logothetopoulos had decided to resign but only after ten days so as not to show to Hitler that he resigned due to the deportations. See Rafail Moisis, “Aser Moisis,” *Chronika*, Volume 34, Issue 231, January–March 2011, pp. 9–10. Logothetopoulos, after a series of oral representations, sent two protest letters to German Ambassador Gunther von Altenburg on March 18 and 22, 1943, showing his “patience and courage,” with which he dealt with the “extermination measures” [language as included in the letters] against the Jews of Thessaloniki. The letters are available at Konstantinos Logothetopoulos, *Here is the Truth* (Greek) (Athens, 1948), pp. 96–102. There, he also decried the collaboration granted to the Nazis by the Greek Governor of Macedonia Vassilios Simonidis. The first letter was drafted by K. Mathopoulos, the second by G. A. Farmakidis, and no answer was received from the German authorities. See G. A. Farmakidis, *Actions of the Correspondence Service of the Prime Minister to the German Authorities during the Occupation* (Greek) (Athens, 1957), p. 10. According to a telegram from the Greek Embassy in Ankara in May 1943, some of the sources quoted attributed Logothetopoulos’ resignation to the “unanimous demand of Political Leaders and the Archbishop of Athens as an act of protest for the situation in the Bulgarian occupied lands and the group deportations of the Jews of Thessaloniki to Poland.” Archive of the Greek Foreign Ministry, 1943, f. 15, subf. 1, quoted in Thanos Veremis and Maria Sabatatakaki, “The role of the collaborationist governments and the Police,” in Greek Foreign Ministry, Fotini Tomai, ed., *The Greek Righteous Among the Nations* (Greek) (Athens: Militos, 2015), p. 96. Logothetopoulos was finally replaced by Ioannis Rallis on April 7, 1943. Logothetopoulos mentioned only in passing his protests against the deportation of the Jews of Thessaloniki as a reason for his “removal” from the post of Prime Minister, among others which he noted as more important or discussed in more detail. Logothetopoulos, *Here is the Truth*, pp. 160–163.

¹⁵ For the text of these letters in English, see “Archbishop Damaskinos and other eminent Greeks to C. Logothetopoulos, Quisling Prime Minister” and “Archbishop Damaskinos and other eminent Greeks to Gunther

twenty-eight representatives of civil, professional and other groups also signed both letters. In addition, Damaskinos continued his efforts to provide extra portions of food for the ghettoized Jews with the help of the ICRC and transferred funds from the Jews of Athens to the Jews of Thessaloniki via Bishop Gennadios.¹⁶

When the Nazis tried to implement similar antisemitic laws in Athens, Damaskinos with the help of Athens police chief Aggelos Evert, set up a network to provide the Jews of Athens with fake baptismal papers and identity cards with Greek names.¹⁷

3. Reactions to first Antisemitic Measures in Thessaloniki

In Thessaloniki, the head of the Church was Metropolitan Gennadios (1868-1951). He was born in Prousa, nowadays in Turkey, and became Bishop of Thessaloniki in 1912, shortly before the arrival of the Greek army in the city. Gennadios had good relations with the city's Jews and the Community leadership. The two communities lived side by side but avoided intimate relations. When such a case would arise, Bishop Gennadios and the Chief Rabbi would meet and try to quiet the situation. Bishop Gennadios also became the de facto leader of the city during the period of the German occupation, chairing the National Council, which grouped the city's leaders.

When the first antisemitic measures were implemented by the Nazis in Thessaloniki, on July 11, 1942, namely the gathering in Liberty Square of all Jewish males for forced labor, there was no public condemnation from the side of the Greek population, including the Church. When the destruction of the Jewish cemetery started a few months later, on December 6, 1942, there was again a lack of any condemnation. However, as we saw in

von Altenburg, Ambassador, the Reich Plenipotentiary for Greece” in Photini Constantopoulou and Thanos Veremis, eds., *Documents on the History of the Greek Jews: Records from the Historical Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs* (Athens: Kastaniotis, 1999), Documents 90 and 91, pp. 250–256. Margaritis called these declarations “ineffectual,” since they did not come with concrete steps to oppose the deportations, such as resignations of senior figures or severing ties with the German authorities. Margaritis, *Unwanted*, p. 12.

¹⁶ Venezis, *Archbishop*, pp. 268–269.

¹⁷ On a discussion on how many such identity cards were issued, see Alexander Kitroeff, “On the Jews in Athens during World War II: A Clarification,” *Journal of the Hellenic Diaspora*, Volume 26.2 (2000), pp. 117–119.

chapter 2, many churches took advantage of this situation and gathered marble and bricks from the destroyed necropolis. Ritzaleos counted seventeen such requests out of seventy churches in Thessaloniki, from January 16, 1943—two months before the start of the deportations—to October 18, 1943, which also included the Metropolitan Church of Thessaloniki, seat of Gennadios.¹⁸ Church councils would either make requests for the materials directly to the public works division of the General Governor of Macedonia or through the Metropolitan. The Metropolitan would forward the request a couple of days after its receipt and the said division would approve it a few weeks later. The reasons offered vary from the “need to expand the church” to “future paving.” Some of the churches also requested funds to transport the materials.¹⁹

According to Terzis, these actions by Church officials, with the acquiescence of Gennadios,

exculpated, morally, the Nazi decisions and sealed the immoral act of the occupying powers with the informal “validation” by the Christian community. [...] Necessary precondition for the completion of the Jewish Genocide was the material complicity, the indifference of the then local authorities and of the co-existing Christian populations.²⁰

Some days before the Nazi antisemitic laws were instituted in Thessaloniki, which included the wearing of a yellow star of David for all Jews above the age of six, some solidarity was expressed to the Jews of Thessaloniki. Yacoel reported that “the Church showed, by appropriated speeches from the pulpit to its flock, the human duty of Christians toward their troubled townsmen.”²¹

¹⁸ Terzis, *Watching*, p. 157

¹⁹ Based on Ritzaleos, “Greek Church,” pp. 323–326. See also Terzis, *Watching*, pp. 150-159.

²⁰ Terzis, *Watching*, p. 220.

²¹ Yomtov Yacoel, *Memoirs 1941–1943* (Greek) (Thessaloniki: Paratiritis, 1993), p. 111.

4. Letter of Protest by Bishop Gennadios

On the eve of the deportations, Gennadios sent a letter in support of the Jews most probably to Max Merten, the German officer in charge of civilian affairs. This one-page letter was probably written around March 13, 1943 and was passed on to SS officer Dieter Wisliceny, as it bears his signature on the back side. It is not clear how this letter ended up in the U.S. Archives and a copy could not be found in the Church archive in Thessaloniki.²²

In the letter, Gennadios expressed the request and wish “that if possible to avoid additional thorough [and] strict measures against [the Jews].” Gennadios recalled “the leniency and magnanimity of the Courageous and Christian German Nation towards those Greeks of different religion in the spirit of Christian love.” In conclusion, Gennadios warned the German recipients that the implementation of the measure of the deportations would lead to the “destruction and death” of many of these Jews due to their poverty, “something that is not the wish of the Courageous German Nation and its Magnanimous Leaders.”²³

This is a rare protest document in the context of Thessaloniki.²⁴ The answer Gennadios received from his German interlocutors was that this request “went beyond their jurisdiction.”²⁵ It probably had no follow-up action. Mazower contrasts this letter to those of Archbishop Damaskinos of Athens, arguing that “By contrast [to Damaskinos of Athens], Gennadios appears to have confined himself to a private protest.”²⁶

5. Meeting between Chief Rabbi Koretz and Prime Minister Rallis

Maybe the most significant event where Gennadios was involved was the meeting between the head of the Jewish community, Chief Rabbi Zvi Koretz, and the visiting Greek Prime

²² Ritzaleos, “Greek Church,” pp. 316–317. The original reference is National Archives and Records Administration, RG 226, Entry 16, Box 1320, R 115705, Report of November 21, 1944.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Reports about “a number of priests from German-occupied Greece who were arrested for refusing to preach racism” appear to be inconclusive. Steven Bowman, “Jews in Wartime Greece,” *Jewish Social Studies*, Vol. 48, No. 1 (Winter, 1986), p. 57 and footnote 41.

²⁵ Archive of Diocese of Thessaloniki, Gennadios to the Ministry of Religion and National Education, protocol number 2974, August 30, 1945, p. 7.

²⁶ Mark Mazower, *Salonica City of Ghosts: Christians, Muslims and Jews, 1430–1950* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), p. 410.

Minister, Ioannis Rallis.²⁷ According to Jewish sources, Rallis travelled to Thessaloniki shortly after his appointment in order to address the plight of the Jews. Michael Molho claimed that Rallis came to the Thessaloniki “under pressure of the Jews of Athens [...] in order to try to stop the deportations.”²⁸ Molho further wrote that Rallis was driven by “benign emotions.”²⁹ Michael Matsas made a similar claim: “Greek Prime Minister Ioannis Rallis was persuaded by the Jews of Athens to go to Salonika and attempt to stop the deportations.”³⁰ Dimitrios Panou, a high-ranking Greek official at the time and liaison between the Greek authorities and the Germans, testifying as a defense witness during the trial of Max Merten, said that Rallis came to Thessaloniki “following demarches by the Chief Rabbi.”³¹

However, German sources give us a different picture. The narration that follows comes from the interrogation of Koretz by SS officer Dieter Wisliceny after the event, described in a memo sent by Wisliceny to Merten on April 15, 1943.³² Some twenty days into the deportations, on April 5, Koretz realized that they would continue unabated. He thus tried to reach out to Greek authorities for their intervention. On April 7, Koretz learned that the Greek Prime Minister Rallis would visit Thessaloniki on April 11. He made a request to meet with the visiting Prime Minister to local Greek government official Dr. Panou as well as during a telephone conversation with Bishop Gennadios on April 10.

On Saturday, April 11, both Panou and Gennadios informed Koretz that he should come to the Bishop’s office at 14:30. When Koretz arrived, he waited in a room for the arrival of the Prime Minister, together with the Bishop and the Dean of the University. In another room, there were a number of other officials also in waiting. When the Prime Minister entered, Koretz was left alone in the room and was kept waiting by himself until all

²⁷ Ioannis Rallis had replaced Konstantinos Logothetopoulos as Prime Minister on April 7, 1943.

²⁸ Michael Molho and Joseph Nehama, *In Memoriam: Dedication to the memory of the Jewish victims of Nazism in Greece* (Greek) (Thessaloniki: Jewish Community of Thessaloniki, 1974), p. 119.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 195–196.

³⁰ Michael Matsas, *The Illusion of Safety: The Story of Greek Jews during the Second World War* (New York: Pella, 1997), p. 65.

³¹ *Makedonia*, February 19, 1959, p. 5.

³² Wisliceny to Merten, April 15, 1943. The document is provided in Greek in Polychronis Enepekidis, *The Holocaust of the Jews of Greece 1941–1944* (Greek) (Athens: Vivliopolion tis Estias, 1996), pp. 34–36. For the original in German see Archive of the Memorial de la Shoah in Paris, documents CDXLVIII-34 and CDXLVIII-36.

the other meetings were finished (most probably it was a meeting of the National Council). When he finally was able to see the Prime Minister, he pleaded with him in tears to intervene with the German authorities so that the 2,000-years-old Jewish community of Thessaloniki could be spared from destruction. The Prime Minister only answered with “some unimportant evasions.”

When the German Consul in Thessaloniki, Fritz Schönberg, wrote to the German Ambassador in Athens, Gunther Altenburg, informing him of the above-mentioned episode, he added some information coming from an eye-witness. According to this additional report, Koretz put Rallis in a difficult situation. Rallis responded that “it does not depend on his powers to call off the deportation of the Jews,” as the Prime Minister “can only make recommendations to the Occupation Powers.”³³ The eye-witness added that, after the unsuccessful meeting, as Bishop Gennadios was walking Koretz to the door, he told him “You see for yourself that the Prime Minister cannot do anything for this matter.”³⁴

We are confronted with opposing narrations: First, Molho who claimed that Rallis came to Thessaloniki in order to specifically address the plight of the Jews, lobbied by the Jews of Athens. Second, Panou who testified of Koretz’s initiative for this visit. Third, German reports according to which Rallis came to Thessaloniki for other reasons and Koretz was able to get an appointment with him. All account could be potentially problematic. Molho may have tried to downplay Koretz’s initiative for the meeting. Panou may have tried to show his own efforts in assisting the Jews. Lastly, German officers may have downplayed some important details, in an effort to minimize the efforts of Rallis or Gennadios, when reporting to their superiors, not wanting to show that they are not in full control of developments in their region.

More documentary evidence could help solve this question. Having said that, following the meeting between Rallis and Koretz, Rabbi Koretz was imprisoned by the Nazis and removed from his position as President of the Jewish Community of Thessaloniki. At the same time, Wisliceny wanted to arrest Simonidis and Panou for their involvement and Merten had to hide them in his office until the next morning.³⁵ Panou confirmed that he was arrested

³³ Schönberg to Altenburg, April 16, 1943 in Enepekidis, *Holocaust*, p. 37.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ The testimony of Max Merten, Part 1 of 3, May 7, 1961, The Nizkor Project, www.nizkor.org/hweb/people/e/eichmann-adolf/transcripts/Testimony-Abroad/Max_Merten-01.html.

following the meeting between Rallis and Koretz.³⁶ From these, we surmise that the German account is the most plausible one, that is that Rallis came to Thessaloniki to preside over a meeting of the National Council and Koretz used the opportunity to meet with him and make a last effort to save his community.

If the minutes of the April 11, 1943 meeting of the National Council could be found, they would shed a lot of light into the dilemmas, priorities and actions of the Greek authorities vis-à-vis the deportation of the Jews. This meeting brought together the Greek Prime Minister, the Metropolitan of Thessaloniki, and all presiding officers of the local authorities, institutions and associations. They had a unique opportunity to take a stance; but they failed to do so.

6. Actions regarding Christianized Jews, Baptisms, Jewish Properties

The Church of Thessaloniki reported to the Greek authorities after the war that it took action in support of Christianized Jews.³⁷ Ritzaleos was able to find three such letters from Metropolitan Gennadios to the German Military commander. These letters are quite late into the deportations, with the first dated May 3, 1943 and the last one July 22, 1943, and only concerned individual cases.³⁸

It is well documented that Max Merten issued certificates of exemption for Jews who were married to Greeks.³⁹ This must have happened in consultation with Gennadios, so as not to disrupt Greek Christian families. Matarasso reported this number to be sixteen people.⁴⁰

³⁶ *Makedonia*, February 19, 1959, p. 5.

³⁷ Archive of Diocese of Thessaloniki, Gennadios to the Ministry of Religion and National Education, protocol number 2974, August 30, 1945, p. 7.

³⁸ Ritzaleos, "Greek Church," pp. 321–322.

³⁹ As the civil wedding was instituted in Greece only in 1982, these mixed couples either related to weddings with converted Jewish partners, or weddings that took place abroad. There were three Greek Jews married to German women and a case of a German Jewish man married to a Greek woman.

⁴⁰ I.A. Matarasso, *And yet not all of them died* (Greek) (Athens, 1948), p. 34, footnote 1. The memoir is also available in English in Steven Bowman, ed., *The Holocaust in Salonika: Eyewitness Accounts* (New York: Bloch, 2002), pp. 123–236.

However, three of these spouses, all husbands, were eventually sent to Poland, due to “betrayal, hatred and revenge.”⁴¹

Matarasso also provided the case of a Greek Jewish man who was married to a gentile woman. In the beginning of 1944, the woman died during labor and thus, with his justification for exemption removed, he was immediately deported by the Germans, leaving his eight-day old baby on its own in the city.⁴² This example shows the limits in the efforts to save Jews and how easy or arbitrary one could lose this exemption, after not being related to the Christian population any longer.

On the issue of baptisms, the Nazi persecution of the Jews in Germany and elsewhere and the advancement of the war had frightened the Jews in Greece, many of whom had reached out to the Church authorities seeking a potential conversion. Up until then, changing one’s religion was not very common and was seen with suspicion from both sides.⁴³ This phenomenon must have alerted the Greek government and the Church authorities. On September 21, 1940, the Vice Ministry of Public Security asked the Holy Synod of the Church of Greece, the representative body of all senior clergy, to take all appropriate measures in this regard.⁴⁴ A week later, the Synod issued the following circular addressed to all Bishops in the country confirming the government’s requests:⁴⁵

Athens, September 27, 1940

Having in mind document number 8411/88/3 of September 21 from the Vice Ministry of Public Security (Directorate of Foreigners-Department C) announcing that many Jews are submitting applications to their local church authorities in order to convert to Christianity, because of the extraordinarily abnormal international conditions which

⁴¹ Molho and Nehama, *In Memoriam*, p. 128.

⁴² Matarasso, *And yet*, p. 52.

⁴³ Ritzaleos counted eighty-six Jews applying to become Christian in Thessaloniki during 1925–1940, twenty-three of whom were exclusively women who applied between 1938–1939. Ritzaleos, “Greek Church,” p. 305.

⁴⁴ For the text, Ritzaleos, “Greek Church,” pp. 305–306.

⁴⁵ Archive of Diocese of Thessaloniki, Circular of the Holy Synod of the Church of Greece, number 306, September 27, 1940. However, there were just four such applications for conversion during 1940, significantly less than the previous years. Ritzaleos, “Greek Church,” p. 306.

we are living through. We urge you from now on and as long as the foreign unstable situation persists, to avoid including within the Church Jews of foreign nationality who apply to you. For those Jews who have the Greek nationality, proceed with their catechism and baptism only after prior consultation with the Vice Ministry of Public Security and its approval for each specific name.

Ritzaleos spoke of the possibility that the church authorities in Thessaloniki issued fake baptismal papers.⁴⁶ A recent official Church publication, quoting a church document, provided the following account:

With the cover of Bishop Gennadios, “more than 500 Jews became Orthodox... They hide. Supplied with fake identity cards, baptized with different names and names of their parents. At least 3,000 Jews rush to all the neighborhoods, all the suburbs, they get settled and spend their time reading, without poking around... The examples of true brotherhood are countless... The largest part of these acts of outmost kindness will never become known.”⁴⁷

Our research could not locate such instances. The small number of registered baptisms as well as mixed marriages during this period also points towards that direction. There were though cases of actual baptisms that took place in the crucial period around the deportations, however not sanctioned from the top echelons, but more like a local initiative. The process could not be described as “fake” as the Jews in question went through the actual baptismal process. The Church authorities did not just issue the certificate in an effort to save the persecuted Jews and maybe enable him or her to get fake identification papers. Rather, they went through the whole ritual. Nevertheless, these ad hoc baptisms did not have any effect and the Nazis deported the Jews in question with the rest of their families.

Such is the case of a fourteen-year-old Jewish girl called Sheila Cohen. She lived in the area of Agia Triada, a central neighborhood where many Jews lived together with Greeks. Her neighbor was a Greek policeman who learned that the next day they had orders to arrest

⁴⁶ Ritzaleos, “Greek Church,” p. 321.

⁴⁷ Publishing Department of the Information and Educational Service of the Church of Greece, *Memories and Testimonies*, p. 378.

all the Jews from the neighborhood and move them to the Baron Hirsch transit camp. The policeman had informed the Cohen family and the girl herself and she agreed to the conversion, in order to save the Jewish girl. That night, two priests came to the policeman's apartment, conducted a shortened baptismal ceremony and handed to her a baptismal certificate dated two years in advance. However, this did not save her life and she was deported with her family the next day.⁴⁸

All in all, the cases of Christianized Jews concerned only a handful of Jews and there were no organized efforts in Thessaloniki to provide Jews with fake baptismal certificates or identity cards. On the second issue, there may have been some efforts but they were on an individual basis and not very successful.

As the Jews were confined into ghettos on their way to deportation to Poland, an agency was created, as part of the Greek government, in order to administer their properties, both business and residential, both real estate and material possessions. The Church of Thessaloniki has a controversial record in this regard. A couple of days after the first train left the city, on March 17, 1943, Gennadios wrote a letter to the General Secretary of the Greek Governor of Macedonia, Christos Tentsos, recommending a particular person as a custodian for a Jewish store, "as a personal commitment."⁴⁹ The Church also took chandeliers and furniture from Jewish buildings.⁵⁰ After the war, Gennadios asked the President of the reconstructed Jewish Community, as a personal favor, for a further delay in the relocation of a restaurant that was housed in a synagogue, which the latter rejected because it considered the operation of a restaurant within a synagogue "a big insult to our religion."⁵¹

⁴⁸ Father Konstantinos Halvatzakis, "The Story of Sheila: The drama of a Jewish girl and the soup-kitchens," in Brotherhood of Men of Thessaloniki in Support of the Poor, *German Occupation (Greek)* (Thessaloniki: 2012), pp. 35–57.

⁴⁹ Jewish Museum of Greece, Archive of YDIP, Box 9, "Applications by Christians to become custodians in Jewish stores," Gennadios to Tentsos, March 17, 1943.

⁵⁰ For the discussion of several cases involving Jewish assets, see Ritzaleos, "Greek Church," pp. 326–327, Terzis, *Watching*, pp. 159–161 and Iosif Vaena, "History and Microhistory: The adventures of the chandelier of the Sarfati synagogue before and after its plunder during the period of the Occupation" (Greek), available at <https://www.academia.edu/26515381>.

⁵¹ Minutes of the Jewish Community of Thessaloniki, February 18, 1945, displayed in the exhibition of the Jewish Museum of Thessaloniki "The Day After the Holocaust," January 27, 2017. See also Hal Lehrman, "Greece: Unused Cakes of Soap," *Commentary*, 1 (1945/1946), p. 52.

On this issue Ritzaleos remarked that “the stance of Metropolitan Gennadios on the issue of the Jewish cemetery of Thessaloniki and of the deserted Jewish properties constitutes the most controversial issue during the period of the Occupation.” Moreover, the Church’s active involvement with the disposition of Jewish property, “gave additional arguments to the Nazi propaganda in order for the majority of the population of Thessaloniki to accept the deportation measures of the of the Greek Jews.”⁵²

7. Motivations of Behavior by the Thessaloniki Church authorities

The war-time actions of Gennadios vis-à-vis the Jews have been criticized by modern historians. Ritzaleos remarked that the actions by Gennadios “did not assume a public and mass character [...] being characterized by gradual de-escalation and personalization.”⁵³ Carabott asked why the Bishop did not launch a public protest in the city, gathering around him the legal organization and associations of the city,⁵⁴ while Anastasakis noted the “limits of [Gennadios’s] leadership” as “he could have provided more assistance to the Jewish community due to his status as the moral and religious leader of the city.”⁵⁵ Indeed, as Semelin remarked, public protests (such as “a bishop’s pastoral letter read in the churches of his dioceses”) had much greater impact than a confidential protest (such as “a secret letter addressed to the authorities”).⁵⁶

Gennadios at the time was also serving as the head of the National Council, which brought together the city’s leaders, senior government officials, important businessmen and civil leaders, without any Jewish members.⁵⁷ From that position, he did not launch any coordinated protests or organize active efforts to stop the deportations. There seems to have been no follow-up from his initial private letter of protest.

⁵² Ritzaleos, “Greek Church,” pp. 329–330.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 328.

⁵⁴ Philip Carabott, “Actions and Reactions of the Greek Orthodox Society in the persecution of the Jews,” in Giorgos Antoniou, Stratos Dordanas, Nikos Zaikos, Nikos Marantzidis, eds., *The Holocaust in the Balkans* (Greek) (Thessaloniki: Epikentro, 2011), p. 289.

⁵⁵ Anastasakis, “Church of Greece,” pp. 313–314.

⁵⁶ Jacques Semelin, *Unarmed against Hitler: civilian resistance in Europe, 1939–1943* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1993), p. 142.

⁵⁷ For more on the National Council, see discussion in Chapter 1, Part 3, Section 2.

Gennadios must have been definitely touched by the drama of his Jewish compatriots that was unfolding before his eyes. His morality and ethics may have pushed him to speak out in support of the Jews.⁵⁸ More sources and access to archives may shed more light into these issues. A series of other considerations may have frustrated any additional efforts:

- The main preoccupation of the Thessaloniki authorities at the time was to undermine any efforts by Bulgaria to annex the city and the surrounding region. According to this thinking, the Germans were the “lesser evil,” in contrast to Bulgarians, who had an open expansionist agenda with regards to Thessaloniki and there were long-time adversaries with the Greeks.⁵⁹ The Bulgarians had already committed great massacres against the Greeks in the areas they had annexed, including many among the Greek Orthodox clergy. The Germans were seen as an occupier from afar, who at one point would leave from the region whereas the Bulgarians had a long history and expressed desire to take over Thessaloniki.

- Gennadios, as a leader of the Greek Christian population, had to balance the wishes of his community. Many were keen to see the Jews be removed from the city, for economic, political and other reasons. No one really in Thessaloniki lobbied Gennadios in

⁵⁸ Interesting parallelisms could be made in this case with the situation in France. Semelin tried to explain the change from a passive attitude of the French when the round-up of the Jews started. “...it was probably because people got scared. Scared for the Jews: we cannot doubt the humanitarian feelings that some experienced in agreeing to help them. But also scared for themselves, since the nature of the roundup was indeed frightening. Its massive, brutal, conspicuous character spectacularly demonstrated the power of a country that seems out of control. Who could say that tomorrow or in a year, for one reason or another, it might not be my turn to be taken? The powerful emotional shock provided by this unprecedented, monumental roundup quickly made it a symbol. [...] At the same time that the roundup marked the peak of the victimization process of the Jews in France, it also led to a growing mobilization of a part of French opinion in favor of the Jews. [...] After having condoned the entire process of Jewish exclusion, influential voices took up their defense just when the French police were preparing to lead them to their deaths.” Semelin, *Unarmed*, p. 146. Or as Wladimir Rabi has observed, the Catholic hierarchy in France “became indignant only in July and August 1942 because it suddenly realized that discrimination led to physical persecution.” Quoted in Semelin, *Unarmed*, p. 146.

⁵⁹ Giorgos Karagiannis, *The Church from the Occupation to the Civil War* (Greek) (Athens: Proskinio, 2001), p. 29. See also a similar argumentation around the foundation of the School of Theology at the University of Thessaloniki in 1942. Theodosios Tsironis, “The Church of Greece and the convocation of national expediency for the operation of the Theological School of Thessaloniki” (Greek), unpublished conference paper.

support of the Jews, as they did in Athens, in particular non-Jews.⁶⁰ One of the reference points of Gennadios was that of the *Genos*, or nation in a broader sense. This ideology combined the notions of Greek Orthodox Christianity with the Hellenic identity.⁶¹ The Jews were seen as a foreign element and their protection was not a priority of the Greek authorities or elites. Margaritis described the Holocaust in Thessaloniki as “probably the only important decision of the Occupation powers that was met with so little resistance, so much silence and social passivity in occupied Greece. Within this general climate, no one could expect the Church to do something more than the very little it did.”⁶²

- Bishop Gennadios and his entourage often expressed anti-communist views and were also skeptical of the growing communist resistance movement. In his speeches and articles, Gennadios described communism as “anti-religious, anti-ethnic, and anti-societal propaganda,” which aims to “abolish religion, morality, family, borders, meaning the motherland.”⁶³ This brought the Church priorities closer to the ones of the Germans as they shared a common enemy, which was often dubbed in the propaganda press as “Judeo-bolshevism.” At the same time, it decreased any chances of cooperation between the Church and the communist resistance (EAM-ELAS) for the rescue of the Jews.

- Damaskinos became Archbishop of Greece in 1941, after the removal of the previous Archbishop, Chrysanthos, who did not accept to install the new collaborationist government. Chrysanthos had lost the appointment by Damaskinos in 1938 but won a legal appeal. Gennadios was one of the last and loyal supporters of Chrysanthos and tried to frustrate the recognition of Damaskinos by the other Bishops.⁶⁴ It is not known if this created a lack of coordination or missed opportunities as both senior clergymen with strained relations were faced with the deportation of the Jews of Thessaloniki.

⁶⁰ On this issue, see a discussion in Margaritis, *Unwanted*, pp. 113–114, footnote 20.

⁶¹ Ritzaleos, “Greek Church,” pp. 298 and 329.

⁶² Margaritis, *Unwanted*, p. 119.

⁶³ “The Church against Communism: the dangerous enemy of the national ideals,” *Nea Evropi*, May 31, 1942. On February 28, 1943, the assistant of Gennadios, Bishop Kallinikos of Olympus, delivered a speech through loudspeakers installed around the city against Bolshevism. A brief summary was published the next day, *Nea Evropi*, March 1, 1943, p. 4. Gennadios delivered a virulent attack against communism during the March 25, 1943 national day celebration. See articles in *Apogevmatini*, March 25, 1943 and *Nea Evropi*, March 26, 1943.

⁶⁴ Theodosios Tsironis, *The Church in Politics: The political speech and role of the Church of Greece (1913–1941)* (Greek) (Thessaloniki: Epikentro, 2010), pp. 425–426.

Unfortunately, with their passive stance, the Church authorities of Thessaloniki did not elevate the Holocaust as a crucial, topical issue for the nation. Rather, the way they dealt with it made it of secondary importance in the eyes of the ordinary Greek Christian citizen of Thessaloniki. It related to some third person, to a foreigner, to someone else, not to people belonging to their community, their compatriots. Margaritis noted that after the war no one saw the Holocaust as a national failure. No one attributed any responsibilities, pointed any fingers or paid any penalties.⁶⁵

At the same time, the way the Church dealt with the issue of the old Jewish cemetery or the Jewish properties gave to the whole affair a sense of legitimacy. The Church, with the moral and value systems that it brings with it, removed any second thoughts or remorse from the plunder that followed the ghettoization and deportation of the Jews.⁶⁶ These moral and ethical issues are the new areas of consideration that the new historical research on Holocaust brings to the leadership of the Greek Church of Thessaloniki.

8. Bishop Gennadios: Righteous Among the Nations

Metropolitan Gennadios was named a Righteous Gentile by Yad Vashem in 1969, six years after the launch of this program. In the relevant file, the only substantive part is a one-page recommendation letter by Ino Tiano, dated January 20, 1969. Tiano was the honorary consul of Israel in Thessaloniki. The decision to award the title to Gennadios was made on May 27, 1969⁶⁷ and communicated to Tiano on September 24, 1969. The rest of the file contains documents relevant to the organization of the ceremony and the invitation of Gennadios's niece to receive the distinction.⁶⁸ Archbishop Damaskinos and Athens police chief Evert also got the distinction the same year.

According to Yad Vashem's reasoning:

⁶⁵ Margaritis, *Unwanted*, p. 130.

⁶⁶ Margaritis, *Unwanted*, p. 132, Ritzaleos, "Greek Church," pp. 329–330 and Terzis, *Watching*, p. 164.

⁶⁷ The minutes of the internal committee discussions are not yet public.

⁶⁸ Archive of Righteous Among the Nations, Yad Vashem, file of Bishop Gennadios, number M.31.2/546.

During World War II, Yiorgios Alexiadis Gennadios, Metropolitan of Thessaloniki (b.1868), distinguished himself as one of the leading figures in the resistance to the German occupation. As a Greek clergyman of high rank, he protested against the persecution of Greek Jewry, and when he realized that the Germans would not stop the deportations of the Jews to the death camps in Poland, he tried to help the deportees. Funds collected in Athens were delivered to the deportees and to Jews who went into hiding or who escaped. While his actions put Gennadios in jeopardy, in no way did he hesitate to act on behalf of the persecuted Jews of his city. He first learned about the coming tragedy of the Jews of Thessaloniki from several representatives of the advocates association in Thessaloniki. They had turned to the Greek governor general of Macedonia, Vassilios Simonidis, and requested that he deliver their protest to the German military government. For some time, rumors were circulating to the effect that some 50,000 Jews were to be deported to an unknown destination from which there was no return. Since the protest and call to stop the implementation of the German plan failed, Gennadios, one of the most respected personalities in Thessaloniki, was asked to intervene on behalf of the Jews. He consented immediately and began to act. Gennadios approached Max Merten, the adviser on civilian affairs of the military government and appealed to his Christian faith. In the course of these attempts, he also helped Chief Rabbi Zvi Koretz meet Ioannis Rallis, the puppet prime minister. But all was to no avail. Orders came from higher authorities in Germany, and they were executed systematically. All attempts on the part of the local Greek community to stop them were doomed to failure. Nevertheless, Gennadios continued to cooperate with Archbishop Damaskinos from Athens, and Greek Red Cross representatives, in order to save as many Jews as possible. They had to act in secrecy, so as not to jeopardize the operations, but it was a known fact.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ Profile of “Gennadios, Yiorgios Alexiadis” in the Yad Vashem database of Righteous Among the Nations, available at <http://db.yadvashem.org/righteous/family.html?language=en&itemId=4015148>. As the name of the Jews he rescued, the website lists “Koretz, Zvi.” See <http://db.yadvashem.org/righteous/righteousName.html?language=en&itemId=4015148>. Terzis quoted the testimony of Max Merten during Eichmann’s trial in which he claimed that the intervention of Metropolitan Gennadios together with Chief Rabbi Koretz saved from a public execution the women and children of two

According to Yad Vashem, the title of Righteous Gentile is bestowed:

when the data on hand based on survivor testimony or other documentation, clearly demonstrates that a non-Jewish person *risked his or her life, freedom, and safety*, in order to rescue one or several Jews from the threat of death or deportation without exacting monetary compensation or other rewards.⁷⁰

From the above, one can deduce that the awarding of this title was done in the early days of the Righteous program, with insufficient documentation available, some political motives and without fully complying with the stipulation to put one's life at risk. This is all more important as this decision is often presented as a definite historic judgment, thus inhibiting serious research and discussion into the role of the Church of Thessaloniki during the Holocaust.⁷¹

Subchapter II: The Courts: Efforts to Save Jewish Children by Adoptions

As we have seen with the other case studies in this thesis, the institutions that could have helped the Jews of Thessaloniki as they were going through a momentous challenge, the state officials, the city authorities, the Church, the representatives of associations or unions, did little to help. Apart from some individual cases of action or assistance, the findings of Mark Mazower concerning the reactions of city's professional associations, that of a "deafening silence,"⁷² can be true for the wider society.

At the same time, there were no organized efforts to save Jews by the resistance or other groups.⁷³ As we saw in chapter 3, the suffering of the Jews was completely absent from the clandestine press of Thessaloniki. It was also absent from the demands of the

families who were arrested while trying to escape. Only the two men were shot. Terzis, *Watching*, p. 178 and 205.

⁷⁰ Information available at http://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/righteous/how_to_apply.asp (emphasis added).

⁷¹ See for example Bishop Anthimos of Thessaloniki, "Christians and Jews," Letter to the Editor, *Kathimerini*, June 18, 2008, point 4.

⁷² Mazower, *Salonica*, pp. 409–410.

⁷³ Karina Lampsas and Iakov Schibi, *Life from the beginning* (Greek) (Athens: Alexandria, 2010), p. 112.

student protests that shook Thessaloniki during March 1943. One could claim that Athens did more to save the Jews of Thessaloniki than their native city.

The Courts, the justice system, is an important element in a democratic society. It balances the powers of the executive, controls the legality of the laws and protects the citizen from abuses of authority. At the time of the Second World War, there was a functioning legal order in Greece though with severe limitations. One should keep in mind not only the great control over society imposed by the German occupation but also the immediately previous period that included a war situation and the Metaxas dictatorship, which severely limited personal freedoms.

Yet, albeit these restrictions, the Jews sought to use the court system to respond to their increased stigmatization and victimization. This was the case when, around March 23, 1943, Rabbi Koretz filed a complaint with the Office of the Prosecutor, complaining about the lies published and spread by the Nazi mouth-piece *Nea Evropi* in its pseudo-historic articles. The newspaper dismissed the move as an attempt to prosecute “Greek Patriots,” and indicated that with the new Nazi measures, such practices would end.⁷⁴ Any follow-up actions of this legal case are not known but it would be safe to assume that it was discontinued after the confinement in ghettos and deportation of the plaintiffs.

Another important event that our research was able to shed light into, which was relatively unknown up until now, is that of a network of adoptions. This was set up by Greek judges and lawyers, who worked hard to facilitate the adoptions of Jewish children as a way to save them, during the crucial period of the deportations. This effort seems to be the only grass-roots effort, initiated and organized by the citizens themselves, to offer a helping hand to the persecuted Jews.

There are quite a few mentions in different sources or narrations of efforts to save Jews during this time. However, they tend to lack important details, appear fragmented and without correlation from other sources. This network of adoptions can be verified from several sources, such as personal testimonies, articles in the collaborationist press, the Italian diplomatic archives, even in testimonies by German war criminals. These additional sources complete the narration and add important information. So much so, that it remains a mystery why such a network became relatively unknown after the war and why the main protagonists did not try to claim any credit for it.

⁷⁴ *Nea Evropi*, March 23, 1943, p. 1.

It is important to note from the outset that this network was eventually discovered by the Nazis and all the adoptions were canceled. The children followed their parents to the death camps in Poland. Yet, its existence was the most important rescue effort that has been discovered in Thessaloniki and, as such, it deserves a detailed presentation.

One of the big dilemmas of Jewish parents about to be deported with their families to Poland was what to do with their children. The strong bonds in the Jewish families have been well-documented and have been used as a reason to explain in part the high number of losses in Thessaloniki.⁷⁵ These bonds were tested during the period of the deportations and families preferred to stay all together, young and old, in order to help each other with the hurdles that laid up ahead.

John Thomas was a young Thessaloniki lawyer at the time and he was one of the lawyers facilitating this network. He spent a couple of pages in his memoirs describing the structure and the main people behind it. Thomas speaks of 400 adoptions that were arranged in a period of fifteen days. The scheme was facilitated by the President of the Court of First Instance, Aggelos Koutsoumaris, who appointed extra judges in two shifts daily (morning and evening) to expedite the process. The lawyers who dealt with the formalities often paid the fees themselves. The legal processes lasted briefly, with the consent of the Jewish parents. The results were swiftly published and transferred to the registrar, so the children could be exempt from the deportations in time.⁷⁶ The families that would adopt these children would either be Greek or Jewish with foreign nationalities, and thus exempt from the deportations.

However, these efforts were made known to the German authorities. Thomas claimed that this happened due to Greek collaborators who informed the German authorities. In an urgent order to the Court's president, the Germans requested that the adoptions end, that he submit within five days a detailed list with the names and addresses of the natural and adoptive parents, as well as of the facilitating lawyers, judges and secretaries and that he legally reverse the adoptions.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ See for example, Molho and Nehama, *In Memoriam*, p. 127. See also Carabott, "Actions and Reactions," pp. 272–273.

⁷⁶ John Thoma, *Contribution to the history of the Lawyers Association of Thessaloniki (1914–1960)* (Greek) (Thessaloniki: Lawyers Association of Thessaloniki, 2001), pp. 39–40.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

According to the narration, Judge Koutsoumaris appeared on his own before German officer Max Merten, and took full responsibility of his actions, claiming he acted in order to save innocent children. The Germans were so surprised by his “courage, honesty, candidness and his presentation” that they shook his hand, escorted him to the elevator and ensured him that the issue has been settled since he acted on human principles.⁷⁸

Even if this narration exaggerates in some points, the stance of the Germans, a first reading of which shows “a human face,” should not be of a surprise. The Germans, on the local level often showed *realpolitik*, looking after their wider interests and not wanting to disrupt the local balances, especially if the latter were not opposing them. When the efforts of the illegal adoptions were discovered and annulled, Judge Koutsoumaris did not constitute a threat for them anymore and a tougher punishment could prove counter-productive, provoking the ire of the local society, which the Germans wished to keep on their side.

After the operation of this organized network was revealed, several announcements appeared in the collaborationist newspaper *Nea Evropi*. On 30 March 1943, the newspaper published an article which called for these adoptions to end. If the adoptions started shortly after the Jews were informed about the displacement to Poland—Rabbi Koretz made this announcement at the synagogue on March 14, 1943—then the plan must have been uncovered around March 30, which matches the date of the article’s publication. The announcement read:

GREEKS BEWARE!
THE ADOPTION OF JEWISH CHILDREN

It has been noted that many of our townsmen, forgetting what the Jews have done to us, motivated by a supposed sense of charity, behind which of course are hidden motives completely different from the rightful meaning of charity, are adopting several Jewish children.

⁷⁸ Ibid. In his narration, Thoma is confusing Merten with his interpreter Meissner.

Thus the following become known pertinently:

- 1) The [German] Military Administration Thessaloniki-Aegean has full knowledge of the adoptions that have taken place.
- 2) All these adoptions are legally null and void, because they go against the explicit issued orders of the Occupation Authorities with regards to the Jews.
- 3) Nevertheless, if someone tries to adopt children of Jews or participates as the Authorities, as a Lawyer or as a notary in one such adoption, he will not be punished, but will be sent to the Pavlos Melas camp, not for a limited amount of time, but for an unlimited amount.

It is hoped that after this categorical warning, this observed ugliness will end, which not only is an insult to the order of the Occupation Authorities, but also to the national sentiment of every genuine Greek patriot.⁷⁹

Considering the content and language used in the announcement, and the fact that it is not signed, it is fair to assume that it was drafted by the editors of the newspaper with only basic input from the Germans. The newspaper did not stop here though. In a more aggressive front-page editorial the next day, entitled “Crime,” it wrote:⁸⁰

CRIME

So there are Greeks willing to adopt Jewish children with compensation? That would have been unbelievable if there were not safe and credible confirmations of this fact. And because the truth needs to be said clearly, it does not even concern real adoptions. It concerns, simply, the appointment with compensation to a Greek of A or B Jewish child. And the bad Greek receives the money and the Jewish parent places with him his child, with the hope of returning!

⁷⁹ *Nea Evropi*, March 30, 1943, p. 1.

⁸⁰ *Nea Evropi*, March 31, 1943, p. 1.

So there are so bad Greeks as not to feel ashamed for such despicable acts? And there are still Greek who forget all the things that the Jewry committed against us? We do not know if this crime is committed by love for the money or some guilty and anti-Greek sensibility towards the Jews. In any case, it concerns an unforgivable act, contrary both to the orders of the German Authorities and also the great interests of the country. For this reason, those who invented this way of unfair bribing and expression of sympathy towards the Jews have heavy responsibilities, as the Jews have always been enemies of the Greek motherland and the people, ruthless and unrepentant.

Another important piece of information which relates to these adoption efforts comes from the archive of the Italian Consulate of Thessaloniki. It speaks of similar efforts that were discovered by the Germans. In a telegram, the Italian Consul in Thessaloniki, Guelfo Zamboni, described a meeting that took place on March 31, 1943. SS Officer Dieter Wisliceny gathered the heads of the Jewish families with Spanish citizenship. The reason was that it had come to his attention that they were providing assistance to Greek Jews by several means, such as to accept items for safekeeping, like money and precious objects, even their children. Wisliceny threatened them that if they did not stop these practices, he would impose severe punishments. The Italian Consul added that during the last few days many Jewish children had been adopted by “Greek citizens” (probably meaning Christians) and “foreigners” (probably meaning Jews of foreign citizenship). As a result, the German authorities had threatened with harsh consequences.⁸¹

In an interesting development, after the war, Max Merten claimed full credit and initiative behind this action. While asking the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in Geneva for a certificate showing his positive actions during the German

⁸¹ General Consul Zamboni to Italian Embassy in Athens, April 3, 1943, in Daniel Carpi, ed., *Italian Diplomatic Documents on the History of the Holocaust in Greece (1941–1943)* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 1999), pp. 151–153. The description of the events in the telegram came from an eye-witness, a Jew with Spanish citizenship.

occupation of Thessaloniki, Merten provided several details about what happened to the Jews of Thessaloniki and offered his assistance to clarify the destiny of other individuals.⁸²

In his letter, Merten gave the number of 500 to 600 adopted Jewish children and presented their case as a special category, implying that they were saved as they had met a different fate from that of the rest of the Jewish population. In addition, he claimed that it was his initiative to demarche for these adoptions by Greek families, and that “under his orders, these adoptions were legalized by the Greek courts.”⁸³

Merten’s letter to the ICRC is one of his earliest testimonies on his actions in Thessaloniki. In that sense, it has to be studied carefully. Yet, Merten has very little credibility. First, we need to keep in mind that he was requesting a certificate of good actions from the Red Cross and that is why he would tend to exaggerate things. Merten at the time was undergoing interrogations in Germany about this war-time actions.⁸⁴ Second, during his trial in Greece in 1959 and his deposition to the Eichmann trial in 1961, Merten did not always tell the truth. In fact, in one moment, he even acknowledged this fact.⁸⁵ Third, Merten did not make any mention of these adoptions and his claims to have played a pivotal role in them during his trial in Athens in 1959. Thus, other than an added element of proof, Merten’s argumentation is not convincing.”⁸⁶

⁸² Archive of the ICRC, B G072 CP, file of Max Merten, Merten to the ICRC, March 10, 1947.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ The testimony of Max Merten, Part 1 of 3, May 7, 1961, The Nizkor Project, www.nizkor.org/hweb/people/e/eichmann-adolf/transcripts/Testimony-Abroad/Max_Merten-01.html.

⁸⁵ “What is, however, correct is that, in substance, what I am saying today does not entirely coincide in every detail with what I said in my defence speech before the Greek court. [...] I would say about this that the reasons for the discrepancy are not only the lack of documents, but more particularly the fact that in the proceedings in Greece I was the accused and was making a speech for the defence, where the main object was to incriminate myself as little as possible. Moreover, my counsel was most insistent in his recommendation that I dissociate by every possible allegation the Wehrmacht from the Head Office for Reich Security; I was told I should bear in mind the fact that senior professional army officers were judging me, and I had to address them in ‘military’ terms. Today I am in a different situation, since today I am a witness and have to give testimony on oath.” The testimony of Max Merten, Part 2 of 3, May 7, 1961, The Nizkor Project, http://www.nizkor.org/hweb/people/e/eichmann-adolf/transcripts/Testimony-Abroad/Max_Merten-02.html. Yet, in this testimony Merten would lie again claiming that Adolf Eichmann had visited Thessaloniki twice before the deportations.

⁸⁶ The Red Cross forwarded the information it had received from Merten to the World Jewish Congress (WJC) office in Geneva on April 29, 1947. In their letter, the Red Cross did not mention the name of Merten and gave a

It is noteworthy how this network of adoptions, which probably had no less than one hundred people implicated, did not become more known by its initiators after the war. For example, there is regular reference of a petition of 150 lawyers of Thessaloniki asking to deport the Jews to a Greek island.⁸⁷ Maybe the character of Judge (and later member of the Supreme Court) Koutsoumaris, maybe the fact that he had no children, maybe the historical circumstances after the war, or even the fact that these efforts were fruitless in the end, could explain why those who participated did not share this story more widely.

The detailed discussion of the case of the network of adoptions of the Jewish children in Thessaloniki, based on all the available sources to this day, shows the extent to which the courts, or in general the different institutions or professional associations, could have come to the assistance of the Jews if they so wanted. Driven by humanitarian principles, they could have taken a stance and provided much needed assistance to the persecuted Jews. Nevertheless, this case is the only widely organized effort that has been discovered when the overall attitude was silence or even complicity.

The solution of the adoptions discussed above must have been followed by wealthier families, who had some financial means, contacts with Greek lawyers and spoke adequate Greek. Families from the lower social strata appear to have opted for another method of saving their children, that is to leave them at an orphanage.

This was the case for the Agios Stylianos Municipal Nursery. A research into the nursery's registers showed several such cases in the first three months of 1943, and in particular the middle of March. Regrettably exact numbers are not known. There are few references on the religion of these babies, but for some there is an indication that they came

vague reference of a German official who had served in Thessaloniki at the time. ICRC to the WJC, April 29, 1947, located in the archive of the US Holocaust Memorial Museum, Microfilm 68.045M of World Jewish Congress Geneva office archive, Reel 54, section 407, pp. 326–328. The WJC forward the letter to the Central Board of the Jewish Communities of Greece on May 5, whose President, Ascher Moissis, responded with a strong letter on May 20, 1947, which was forwarded to the ICRC. In it, Moissis correctly assumed that Merten was the source of the information and refuted all of his allegations. On the issue of the adoptions, Moissis wrote: “It is not true that 500 Jewish children were adopted by Greek (Christian) families following demarches by a German. Only few dozen Jewish children of Thessaloniki were adopted by sisters of charity and by Christian families, but without the intervention of anyone, but only by the spirit of charity and human solidarity of the sisters and families in question.” Archive of the ICRC, B G072 CP, file of Max Merten, Central Board of the Jewish Communities of Greece to the World Jewish Congress, May 20, 1947.

⁸⁷ Molho and Nehama, *In Memoriam*, p. 139. A copy of this document has not been found.

from Jewish families. Two of these babies were requested by their mothers the next day and probably followed the parents to Poland.

After the war, the Municipal Nursery informed the Jewish Community that four infants who had been circumcised had survived. These were returned to surviving family members after the war or were sent to Palestine in 1946. There is no information about female infants.⁸⁸ For the rest, those ones who managed to survive the hardships of the war—there was a 70 percent mortality rate—were baptized and were given up for adoption, probably without even knowing the fate of their natural parents.⁸⁹

Subchapter III: The University

1. The Foundation of the University

The University of Thessaloniki, the primary academic institution of the city, was founded in 1925. At the time of its inception, the goals of the University were to promote the economic development of the so-called New Lands (the territories added to the Greek state after the Balkan Wars) as well as to be a balance to the University of Athens, which was considered to be too old-fashioned.⁹⁰

In the interwar period, the relations of the University to the Jewish community could be considered as ambivalent. There were elements of competition but also accommodation. On the one hand the University was presented as the Institution which would contribute to the Hellenization of the Jewish community, which was seen as a separate element and did not even speak Greek properly.⁹¹ Moreover, the authorities were eyeing the area of the Jewish

⁸⁸ Yiota Mirtsioti, “It is 1943 and ‘I gift you my child...’,” *Kathimerini*, September 12, 2016.

⁸⁹ Aigle Brouskou, “‘Every stone you may lift’: the Municipal Nursery ‘Agios Stylianos’ and its relations with the Jewish community of the city,” *Thessalonikeon Polis 2* (2000), p. 206, as well as private conversation with the author. See also, Aigle Brouskou, “*Because of the Crisis I Gift you my Child*,” (Greek) (Thessaloniki: Entomo-Synepe, 2015), pp. 157–158 and footnote 51.

⁹⁰ Spyros Marketos, “The foundation of the University of Thessaloniki: Critique to the University of Athens,” *Minutes of the International Conference “University: Ideology and Education”* (Greek) (Athens: General Secretariat of Youth, 1989), pp. 403–404.

⁹¹ Spyros Marketos, “The foundation of the University of Thessaloniki: a political choice,” speech at conference “University and reforms in Greece: Historical approaches,” Athens, June 7–8, 2007, pp. 4–5 available at

cemetery, in the center of the city, to be used as the university campus. This would be also in accordance with the Hebrard plan, created in the aftermath of the big fire of 1917.⁹² On the other hand, the University created a chair of Jewish studies⁹³ and hoped to facilitate the integration of the Jewish community to the Greek state, serving as a bridge.⁹⁴

2. Dean Stilpon Kyriakidis

The dean of the University during the period in question was professor Stilpon Kyriakidis. Kyriakidis was born in 1887 in Komotini and, in 1926, was named professor at the School of Philosophy, with the specialization in the religion of ancient Greeks and folklore. He served as dean in 1934-35 and again in 1942-43.

Kyriakidis was close to the conservative and nationalistic ideologies of the time, which often had antisemitic connotations. In 1940, he was writing for the monthly journal, *To*

http://www.archive.uoa.gr/fileadmin/archive.uoa.gr/uploads/IA.EKPA_conf_June2007_MARKETOS.pdf. The same argument was used to reject the request of the Spanish Embassy in Athens to finance a Chair of Spanish language and literature at the University in the summer of 1930. See Giorgos Giannopoulos, "The Poetry of History," (Greek) *Eneken*, Issue 16 (May–June 2010), pp. 6–7, also available at

<http://enekenperiodiko.blogspot.ch/2010/04/h.html>. For a copy of the discussion at the School of Philosophy of the University of Thessaloniki on January 10, 1931 against this proposal, see Dimitris Filippis, "Greek-Italian Relations 1919/20–1940 and the Involvement of Spain," Ph.D. Thesis, Pantion University, Athens, 2005, p. 293.

⁹² The first plan for the rebuilding of the city by French urban planner Ernest Hebrand was approved in March 1919. Paraskevas Savaidis and Anthimos Badelas, *Polis Panepistimiou Polis* [City of University, University City] (Greek) (Thessaloniki: Adelfon Kyriakidi-University Studio Press, 2000), pp. 96–106. Hebrand has been described as an ideologist of "the project of (re)hellenization of the city," who was "against its Jewish, Turkish and Slavic urban components." Nora Lafi, "The Municipality of Salonica between Old Regime, the Ottoman Reforms and the Transition from Empire to Nation State: Questions and Research Perspectives," in Dimitris Kairidis, ed., *Thessaloniki: A City in Transition, 1912–2012* (Greek) (Thessaloniki: Epikentro, 2015), pp. 111–112.

⁹³ The Chair of "Hebrew language and literature" was established in 1929, occupied by Hebraic scholar and Corfu native Lazarus Belleli. The same year the University approached the Jewish Community demanding an area of the Jewish cemetery to be used for the expansion of the University. See Devin Naar, "The Boundaries of Hellenism: Language and Loyalty among Salonican Jewry, 1917–1933," (Greek) in Dimitris Kairidis, ed., *Thessaloniki: A City in Transition, 1912–2012* (Greek) (Thessaloniki: Epikentro, 2015), p. 215.

⁹⁴ Marketos, Critique to University of Athens, p. 415, footnote 55.

Neon Kratos (the New State),⁹⁵ which was close to the Metaxas regime and had an anti-communist and anti-liberal orientation.⁹⁶ In issue 30 of February 1940, alongside an article of Kyriakidis, there was an article by Panayotis D. Iliadis, entitled “Christianity and Hellenism,” which connected Jews to communism in a derogatory manner:

In our time, many embittered Jews, who were also disappointed by the derogation of their race, embraced vindictively the Marxist theories and declared religion “the opium of the peoples.” Their theory reached also our land, during the fifteen years before the August [Metaxas] regime, and poisoned the soul of Greek youth. It was the time of our national derogation, from which there is no turning back.⁹⁷

Writing in the winter of 1942, Kyriakidis used the only openly antisemitic reference we have found from a member of the Thessaloniki elite of the time. It is unclear if this was influenced by the Nazi ideology and propaganda, which was very widespread during that time:

The Jews constitute the typical example of a parasite people, since the time the Roman emperor Titus destroyed their homes and scattered them around the world.⁹⁸

In 1942, the year that Kyriakidis was serving as Dean and wrote the above words, he became the second president of the Society of Macedonian studies, a position that he held till his death in 1964.⁹⁹ During the same period, Kyriakidis was included in committees created

⁹⁵ See his articles in issue 30, February 29, 1940 and issue 34, June 30, 1940.

⁹⁶ For more on the journal see Giorgos Kokkinos, *The Fascist-like Ideology in Greece: The case of the journal “Neon Kratos” (1937–1941)* (Greek) (Athens: Papazisi, 1984).

⁹⁷ Panayotis D. Iliadis, “Christianity and Hellenism,” *To Neon Kratos* (Greek), Issue 30 (February 29, 1940), pp. 388–389.

⁹⁸ Stilson Kyriakidis, *The Greek Living Space from Antiquity to Today* (Greek) (Thessaloniki: Triantafyllou, 1945), p.10. Kyriakidis noted that the term “living space” that he used had nothing to do with the term as defined by “the predator states, which love the power only of weapons and violence and which defamed it.” See p. 7, footnote 1.

⁹⁹ The Society for Macedonian Studies was established in Thessaloniki in 1939 “from select members of Thessaloniki society who belonged to the intellectual and commercial worlds of the country.” Its primary goal

under Colonel Athanassios Chrysochoou, the Inspector General of Prefectures, whose main task was to monitor and counter “Bulgarian propaganda,” which was aimed at gaining the allegiance of the Slavic-Macedonian population of the region. In October 5, 1942, Kyriakidis was appointed as an advisor to Chrysochoou at the “Agency for the Popular Enlightenment.”¹⁰⁰

Kyriakidis had a very nationalistic approach of the role of the University vis-à-vis the city’s Jews. That was in contrast to the vision of Alexandros Papanastasiou, who as Prime Minister first put forward the idea of the foundation of a University in Thessaloniki in 1924. Papanastasiou saw the University in more humanistic and democratic terms, as a bridge between the Greek state and the Jewish community, that would have Jews both as students and professors, cultivate an enlightened community leadership and create strong societal links.¹⁰¹

On the other hand, Kyriakidis saw the role of the University in more confrontational terms, that is to solidify the Greek control of the region and challenge the other competing narratives and interests. In an undated response (around 1941) of the University Senate to the Minister of the Education, arguing against the merging of the Schools of Philosophy of Athens and Thessaloniki, Kyriakidis argued:

But also other particular reasons advocate for the existence of the School of Philosophy [of Thessaloniki], necessary for raising the level of education in general in Macedonia and Thrace [Northern Greece], in the districts which, as it is known, are not adequately structured and placed within the Greek intellectual framework. That is because there are many foreign high academic institutions and the effects of

was “the defense and the promotion of Greek Macedonia.” During the German occupation, many of the leaders of Thessaloniki were serving on its board. See http://media.ems.gr/ems/ems_palaia_ds/ems_ds_palaia.pdf.

¹⁰⁰ Decision of October 5, 1942, protocol number 8310 in Greek Army General Staff, Army History Directorate, *Archives of National Resistance (1941–1944)* (Greek), Volume 5: Resistance Groups (Athens: Army History Directorate Publications, 1998), pp 120–121. Another member of these committees under Chrysochoou, was Vassilios Exarhos, Professor of Theology of the University of Thessaloniki, with declared Nationalist-socialist ideas, who had served as interpreter for the Special Kommando [Detachment] Rosenberg, which came in Thessaloniki between May and November 1941 in order to plunder Jewish libraries and archives. See Stratos Dordanas, *Greeks against Greeks* (Greek) (Thessaloniki: Epikentro, 2006), pp. 103–116.

¹⁰¹ Marketos, *A political choice*, pp. 4–5.

allogeneic [foreign] minorities, not unimportant and with very developed academic organization, obfuscate the national horizon.¹⁰²

One is to assume that these minority groups with an advanced educational organization referred to the Jews. Kyriakidis, at his inaugural speech as dean on the University said:

You know of course the particular importance of the operation of the University of our city during this period for Hellenism and Macedonia, which is eyed by our centuries-old and ruthless enemies.¹⁰³

3. Student protests of March-April 1943

The National Day of March 25, 1943, marking the revolution of the Greeks against the Ottomans in 1821, became a rallying point for the student movement in Thessaloniki, especially for those affiliated with the communist resistance.¹⁰⁴ It signified the first act of mass protest in occupied Thessaloniki. Already from the night before, there were some protests in the central streets which ended only after the German forces started to shoot and injure a few of the protesters.

On the day itself the rallying points were two main churches of Thessaloniki. After the morning sermon, large groups of students descended to the water front, singing patriotic songs, and gathered around the statue of Admiral Nikolaos Votsis (a Greek hero of the Balkan wars who torpedoed a Turkish war ship in the Gulf of Thessaloniki), located next to

¹⁰² Archive of the School of Philosophy of the University of Thessaloniki, Archive of Stilpon Kyriakidis, document 480. The document has many hand-written notes by Kyriakidis which shows he was a primary author. For more on Kyriakidis' archive, see Sotiris Souloukos, "The archive of Stilpon Kyriakidis in the Museum of Folklore and the Archive of the School of Philosophy of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki: Categorizing the indexing the material," (Greek) Master thesis, School of Philosophy and Archeology of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Thessaloniki, 2007.

¹⁰³ Archive of the Senate of the University of Thessaloniki, Meeting 579, September 16, 1942, p. 124.

¹⁰⁴ The narration of the events is based on Giorgos Kaftantzis, *The University of Thessaloniki at the period of the Occupation* (Greek) (Thessaloniki: Epikentro, 2008), pp. 134–143. Kaftantzis was an eyewitness to these events.

the White Tower. After laying a wreath and singing the Greek national anthem, the group of students walked towards the University and then to the government office building Dioikitirio. The German army was watching closely their moves with only minor incidents taking place. Giorgos Kaftantzis who was present explained why: “So grandiose was the manifestation, so popular the support, that the Germans startled did not dare to commit other agitations.”¹⁰⁵

According to the minutes of the University Senate around those dates, the University authorities tried to calm the situation ahead of the National Day, cancelled all classes and decided that the students should not participate at the celebrations. However, the students participated on their own initiative. Dean Kyriakidis informed the body that “fortunately, no serious disturbances were caused. On the contrary we can say that the behavior of the students during that day was generally good and caused good impressions by the public of the city.”¹⁰⁶

During the days that followed, the situation among the student body remained tense, leading Dean Kyriakidis to ask whether they should close down the University for a period of time. Following discussions among the members of the Senate, they agreed to keep the University open “at all costs,” for “national issues” but also to contain the student protests within the University grounds in order to avoid the danger of an intervention by the German police. Nevertheless, to maintain order and to guard the University’s “prestige,” they decided to keep the option of the University closure open, while urging the students “to avoid noise and riots and to behave in a manner that fits to students.”¹⁰⁷

The protests in Thessaloniki did not quiet down. Around the same time, in February 1943, the Germans had resumed their efforts for the mobilization of the Greek civilian population for different activities related to the war effort. These measures were met with strong protests by the population.¹⁰⁸ Instigated by the communist resistance, large popular demonstrations took place in all the neighborhoods of the city on April 16, 1943. “Protest

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, pp. 141–142.

¹⁰⁶ University Senate records, Meeting 603 of March 27, 1943.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ In Athens, the German plans for forced mobilization of the civilian population were met with a general strike and violent protests with at least six dead, on March 5, 1943. For more, see Thanassis Hatzis, *The Victorious Revolution that was Lost*, volume 2 (Greek) (Athens: Dorikos, 1983), pp 34–37.

memoranda were drafted, resolutions were approved, speeches took place everywhere. The city was boiling from rage and indignation.”¹⁰⁹

One of the largest demonstrations took place in front of the office of the General Governor, in downtown Thessaloniki. According to reports, thousands came, albeit the threat of armed policemen. The students were not allowed to join the demonstrations, as they were met with Greek police forces, auxiliary to the German ones. Riots followed and the students barricaded themselves in the University cafeteria. But the German police arrived soon afterwards, broke into the building and arrested some 150 students.¹¹⁰

In the next days, many efforts were made to release the students by appealing to the German and Greek authorities—even to Hitler—and also providing food, medicine and blankets for the arrested students, gathered through a popular collection. All but one of the students were released on Good Friday, April 23, 1943 and the German efforts for civil mobilization were put on a definite hold.¹¹¹

Already from April 8, 1943, the Dean of the University had information that the students were planning to abstain from classes and meals, protesting against the civil mobilization, which coincided with the anniversary of the entry of the German army in Thessaloniki. He decided to close down the University and spoke with General Governor Vassilios Simonidis who dismissed these rumors and called an article that was published in a city newspaper on this topic “an irresponsible act of the anticommunist propaganda.”¹¹²

When Kyriakidis went to inform the students at the University restaurant, some “troublemaking elements” submitted a memo with different demands. The Senate answered to these demands, such as evening meals, financial subsidies, medical care, reduction of tuition, etc., including “enlightenment of the public by the professors,” which caused the Senate’s sadness that “Greek students make such a request to Greek professors.” In addition, the Senate decided to tell the students to return to classes “decently,” in light of “today’s crucial conditions and the national importance of the functioning of the University.” The

¹⁰⁹ Kaftantzis, *University*, pp. 151–152.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 153–154.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 155.

¹¹² University Senate records, Meeting 606 of April 10, 1943.

Dean confided that the recent events had tired him “mainly psychologically” and possibly he would have to be substituted from his responsibilities as Dean.¹¹³

In the morning of April 16, 1943, General Governor Simonidis telephoned Dean Kyriakidis to ask him, by order of the German authorities, to urge the students not to demonstrate against the rumors of civil mobilization. The Dean threatened to resign but was finally dissuaded by Simonidis. At their meeting at the University restaurant, some 300 students were not convinced by the assurances of the Dean and, making noise and standing on the tables, wanted to go all together to the Governor. In the end, they agreed to appoint a representative committee, which however could not exit the building, as the door was locked and they were surrounded by Greek and German police forces. The University Dean and the other professors who were in the room were detained.¹¹⁴

After the detention, German officer Max Merten arrived at the University and told the Dean that they would not be arrested but they had to be interrogated. After the interrogation of all the professors, an affair which lasted a total of nice hours, they were released.¹¹⁵

The University Senate met the next day to discuss the “woeful” events of the previous day, at the home of the Dean, due to his illness. The Dean’s proposal to resign was met with the solidarity of most of the other professors, who also offered to resign. At the end of a long discussion, the Senate asked the Dean to reconsider his decision to resign and take some time off instead.¹¹⁶ In the end, all classes until the end of the academic year were cancelled, the student meal allowance would be taken to their homes, and some of the Dean’s duties would be passed on to the Vice-Deans.¹¹⁷

4. Conclusion

The in depth examination of the actions of the University during the crucial period of the deportation of the Jews allows us to get a unique insight into a large segment of the society of Thessaloniki at this time. The University brought together on the one hand the professors

¹¹³ Ibid. Kyriakidis was absent of the next meeting of April 14, 1943. During that meeting, it was announced by the Ministry of Education that a Chair of German literature would be created at the University.

¹¹⁴ University Senate records, Meeting 608 of April 17, 1943.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ University Senate records, Meeting 613 of May 5, 1943.

and on the other the student body, which was young in age and more representative of the society.

The body of professors constituted the intellectual elite of the city. It was led by Dean Kyriakidis who through this position and his chairmanship of the Society of Macedonian Studies was very close to all the important personalities of the city: the local Greek government and city authorities, the Bishop and the heads of the professional associations. His conservative and nationalist ideology made him a key and well-connected player among the city elite.

Dean Kyriakidis and the other university professors were charged by the Greek authorities with quieting down the student protest movement which was very active. These orders put them in difficult position vis-à-vis the students, they lost their respect and got in trouble themselves.

Having said that, nothing during this period indicated that the university professors stood up as intellectuals for the suffering of their fellow Jewish citizens, some of whom were among the student body of the University. Intellectuals often have the ability to speak out, without political or other considerations. Consequently, during times of crisis, they become the de facto representatives of the society. However, other than their academic duties and dealing with the student uprising, the world view of the University professors of Thessaloniki was influenced by nationalistic interests such as keeping Macedonia safe from Bulgarian control, fencing against foreign propaganda efforts and Hellenizing the population. This meant that the suffering of the Jews did not concern them.

The University also brought together the student body, where they could meet and organize. On several levels they were different from the professors. They were young, vibrant and often left-leaning. They had the courage to manifest against the German occupation and against the wishes of the political, church and academic elites which were discouraging any open confrontation with the occupiers.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁸ Anastasiadis wrote that “When the confinement of the Jews in the ghettos started, the student group of the University of the city created a special team with a mission to smuggle-save Jewish students. Few, of course, were saved, but the solidarity links between the Greek and the Jews students acted as a consolation in these tragic instances.” Giorgos Anastasiadis, “The University of Thessaloniki and the Resistance (1941–44),” (Greek) in *Macedonia and Thrace, 1941–1944: Occupation-Resistance-Liberation, International Conference Proceedings* (Thessaloniki: Institute for Balkan Studies, 1998), p. 267.

The city was shaken by demonstrations such as the ones on March 25 and April 16, 1943. During this exact time period, trains full of Jews were departing Thessaloniki to an unknown destination. Neither of these demonstrations had the plight of the Jews even as a minor preoccupation. In the students' eight-point memorandum of demands of April 8, 1943, there is no demand concerning the Jews. Not only demands to stop the deportations but ever minor ones, such as to alleviate their suffering, exclude women and children or provide them with better living conditions and food.

Other than a reexamination of the priorities of both the city elite and the communist resistance leadership, this discussion also brings up issues of morality and ethical principles. It is clear that the preoccupation of the city leaders and the ordinary citizens were their own issues, their own problems and concerns stemming from the German occupation. Yet, the University also profited from Jewish properties during this period. It was not only the issue of the old Jewish cemetery, which the University was eyeing since the previous decades in order to build and expand its buildings. The University was also given a Jewish building on Athinon street, in order to house the medical school which was founded at the time, as the University buildings were taken over by the Germans. The University accepted this offer unanimously.¹¹⁹ So not only the University was silent on the issue of the deportations, but also profited from Jewish properties.

Both for the old elite and for the young activists the Jews were not a priority. Each had their own issues, their own preoccupations. They may have co-existed in the same city but their suffering was not of their concern. Changes in a society often come from the intellectuals or the youth. As both were disinterested with other events happening in the same city in a parallel universe, the Jews of Thessaloniki had few allies to hope for.

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The discussion of these three important institutions is a case study of balancing competing priorities during a time of crisis. The Church, the Courts and the University had to deal with the suffering of the common people as well as what they perceived to be the national dangers at the time: communism and the Bulgarian threat.

¹¹⁹ University Senate records, Meeting 634 of October 27, 1943 and Meeting 635 of October 30, 1943.

The Church took action—albeit limited—to help the persecuted Jews. Nevertheless, the existing evidence and the historical analysis agrees that it could have done more, in intensity but also duration. Keeping in mind its primary role during this time and the prestige and influence it enjoyed, this failure is particular troubling.

The University leadership ignored the plight of the Jews completely as if it was not an important part of the local population. At the same time, the student body and its leaders, who were in touch with the communist resistance, also ignored the plight of the Jews. Massive demonstrations shook the city during the period of the deportations, but none had the Jews even as a minor demand. This finding, combined with the discussion on the local resistance press, gives the impression that the city was living in two parallel universes: The Greek Christians and the Jews.

An element that is important to stress is that of morality. A leader of an institution has the means and leverage to speak out against an injustice committed against a large part of the population. Moral failure is what could characterize the reactions of both the Church and the University. But beyond this, the failure to mount any credible opposition, combined with the fact that both institutions profited from the Jewish cemetery and other deserted Jewish properties, displays also a collapse in ethics, values and sound leadership. It would also be regarded as complicity, encouraging the local population to follow their steps, profiting from the disappearance of the Jewish community and turning a blind eye to their plight.

On the contrary, the actions of the Courts show an example of enlightened leadership during times of crisis. Although severely limited, a significant number of judges, lawyers and ordinary citizens took part in a large-scale effort to adopt Jewish children and thus save them from deportation. This scheme does not seem to have been orchestrated from above, showing that institutions, associations or ordinary citizens had the means to act, if they would so choose. The people implicated were able to go beyond their individualities and stand up for the rights of the vulnerable compatriots. Such positive examples that push the limits of leadership and initiative, also expose the shortcomings and failures of their contemporaries.

CHAPTER VI: The Reactions of the Professional Associations

1. Introduction

This chapter will focus on one aspect of the implementation of the Nazi measures against the Jews of Thessaloniki, namely the order to remove all Jews from the membership of professional associations.¹ Using archives from four professional associations,² never before used in Holocaust research, this chapter will document how local civil society leaders and decision-makers dealt, in a “rational” and “legal” manner, with the unprecedented process and consequences of marginalization, during a period preceding but also coinciding with the ghettoization and the start of the deportations of the city’s Jewish population.

Authors have already examined the behavior of some of Thessaloniki’s institutions during the Holocaust. Andrew Apostolou looked at the press and the provincial administration, while alleging that professional associations “had publicly criticized the

¹ For a study on how Hungary’s professional associations of Lawyers, Engineers and Doctors implemented antisemitic measures, see Mária Kovács, *Liberal professions and illiberal politics: Hungary from the Habsburgs to the Holocaust* (Washington D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press; New York, Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1994).

² The Associations discussed are the Journalists Union of Macedonia and Thrace, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Thessaloniki, the Lawyers Association of Thessaloniki and the Industrialists Association of Macedonia and Thrace. The author would like to thank the Directors and the staff of the Journalists Union and the Chamber of Commerce as well as the archive of Nestor Kavadas for the access and the ability to consult the relevant documents in his possession. The archives of the Professionals’ Chamber of Thessaloniki and the Traders Association were also consulted but nothing relevant to the topic of this study could be located. The books of minutes for the Thessaloniki Chamber Of Small & Medium Industries for the period 1940-47 are missing. Evgenia Dragoumi and Nikos (Kolias) Marantzidis, eds., “Thessaloniki Chamber Of Small & Medium Industries 1925-2015: The first Ninety Years (Thessaloniki: Thessaloniki Chamber Of Small & Medium Industries, 2016), p. 77.

deportations.”³ However, in describing the reactions of the professional classes, Mark Mazower spoke of a “deafening silence,”⁴ while Giorgos Margaritis said that the general rule in Thessaloniki seemed to have been “silence and ‘neutrality.’”⁵ This chapter will go beyond this basic description and show how the leadership of these professional associations, comprising the city’s business and social elite, well-connected with the political and intellectual segments and with access to the German authorities, showed a passive stance and did not use their “political weight” in support of their Jewish compatriots.

2. Order to Remove Jews from Professional Associations

On February 6, 1943, Adolf Eichmann’s men, SS officers Dieter Wisliceny and Alois Brunner, arrived in Thessaloniki in order to implement the “Final Solution.” One of the measures they took was to order the removal of all Jews from the city’s unions and associations. The order, dated February 25, 1943, was signed by Maximilian (Max) Merten, the German officer in charge of civilian affairs, and sent to the office of the Greek General Governor of Macedonia and the Jewish Community.⁶

Such measures, part of the Nazi antisemitic “handbook,” were aimed at the isolation of the Jewish population and its political, social and economic marginalization, or its “social death.”⁷ For many decades, Jews were at the center of the city’s life, often leading several of its professional associations. A quick glance at the board members in several associations shows many Jewish names. This was also a reflection of the community’s economic

³ Andrew Apostolou, “‘The Exception of Salonika’: Bystanders and Collaborators in Northern Greece,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, vol. 14, n. 2 (Fall 2000), p. 173.

⁴ Mark Mazower, *Salonica City of Ghosts: Christians, Muslims and Jews, 1430–1950* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), pp. 409–410.

⁵ Giorgos Margaritis, *Unwanted Compatriots: Data on the Destruction of the Minorities of Greece: Jews and Chams* (Greek) (Athens: Bibliorama, 2005), p. 110.

⁶ A copy of the order is provided in Michael Molho and Joseph Nehama, *In Memoriam: Dedication to the memory of the Jewish victims of Nazism in Greece* (Greek) (Thessaloniki: Jewish Community of Thessaloniki, 1974), p. 169. The original document is located in the Yad Vashem archives, folder O.51/328.

⁷ Marion A. Kaplan, *Between Dignity and Despair: Jewish Life in Nazi Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 232–237.

influence, which although in decline,⁸ continued to be significant even during the German occupation and the first mass antisemitic measures of Liberty Square on July 11, 1942, when all Jewish males aged 18-45 were gathered to register for forced labor.⁹ So much so, that the German Consul in Thessaloniki, Fritz Schönberg, wrote to the German Ambassador in Athens, Gunther Altenburg, to complain that:

the Jews of Salonika [Thessaloniki], I can tell you clearly, have remained untouched in their stores and still exert the same influence on the financial life of Greece to this day. It is amazing that even today the Jews of Salonika hold the lion's share of the import of German goods.

Schönberg attached two lists with German companies trading with Jewish firms in Thessaloniki and went on to explain how “the German economy ... is helping the local Jews earn millions even now.”¹⁰

The community's legal counsel, Yomtov Yacoel, explained the significance of the measure to delete the Jews from the professional associations, which had “an impact on their essential economic and living conditions,” with “destructive” consequences. Jewish industrialists, small factory owners, merchants and other professionals could neither acquire raw materials and other merchandise nor import them from abroad. Jewish retirees could not receive their pensions and they and their families became deprived of medical and pharmaceutical care.¹¹ What Yacoel did not know was that these measures were part of the organized Nazi plan for the further marginalization of the Jewish community, ahead of its deportation to the death camps a few weeks later.

The Nazi-controlled press of the city welcomed these measures:

⁸ Orly C. Meron, *Jewish Entrepreneurship in Salonica, 1912–1940: An Ethnic Economy in Transition* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2011), pp. 211–216.

⁹ For more details, see relevant part in Chapter II.

¹⁰ Report of German Consul in Thessaloniki to Ambassador in Athens, August 17, 1942, in Irith Dublon-Knebel, *German Foreign Office Documents on the Holocaust in Greece [1937–1944]* (Tel Aviv: Goldstein-Goren Diaspora Research Center, Tel Aviv University, 2007), document T28, pp. 103–105. The two lists are reproduced in pp. 250–261.

¹¹ Yomtov Yacoel, *Memoirs 1941–1943* (Greek) (Thessaloniki: Paratiritis, 1993), pp. 117–118.

Defense Measures

The measure of the expulsion of Jews from the unions, the organizations, the associations etc. is worthy of every praise. The Jews, who for many centuries betrayed us, robbed us and perpetrated all kinds of dishonesties against our country, do not have a place within Greek organizations.

They are the hurtful, the undesirable, the foreigners who conspire against us, from whom we must be separated by a distance. We have suffered enough. The time has come to recover and proceed with purpose to the liberating task of the cleansing of our country from the Jewish miasma. The measures taken against the Jews are measures of basic defense, measures that have to be obeyed in all their strictness.¹²

3. The Journalists Union of Macedonia and Thrace

The first group to expel all its Jewish members was the Journalists Union of Macedonia and Thrace. Already from the first days of the German army's entry into Thessaloniki, most newspapers were forced to shut down, including all of the numerous Jewish ones.¹³ Only two dailies were allowed to be published, *Nea Evropi* [New Europe] in the morning and *Apogevmatini* [Afternoon] in the afternoon, both run by Greek collaborators with the Germans.¹⁴ In the summer of 1942, the German propaganda agency *Propagandastaffel* had been established in Thessaloniki. It confiscated the merchandise of all the Jewish paper stores

¹² *Apogevmatini*, March 5, 1943, p. 1.

¹³ For an overview of the Jewish press in Greece see Gila Hadar, "Jewish Journalism in Salonika and Greece," in Rifat Bali, ed., *Jewish Journalism and Press in the Ottoman Empire and Turkey* (Istanbul: Libra Kitap, 2016), pp. 301–354.

¹⁴ For more background on the collaboration press of Thessaloniki see Alexandra Patrikiou, "A 'new' historical period under creation: Types of the public speech of the newspapers *Nea Evropi* and *Apogevmatini* in occupied Thessaloniki," and Stratos Dordanas, "'The Enemy with the pen': The trial of the journalists of *Nea Evropi* and *Apogevmatini*," both in Educational Foundation of the Union of Journalists of Daily Newspapers of Macedonia-Thrace, *National Resistance 1941–1944: The Illegal Press in Northern Greece* (Greek) (Thessaloniki, 2009), pp. 138–163.

and printers, which made up the largest share of the market, and managed these paper supplies through an office comprised of Greek journalists.¹⁵

Nevertheless, Jews continued to be members of the Journalists Union. This changed on September 8, 1942, when the visiting director of the Press Office of the German Embassy in Athens, Herbert Schwörbel, expressed his “astonishment” that Jews were members of the Union. Following this remark, and “ascertaining that the Jewish newspapers will not be republished,” the board unanimously decided to remove the Jewish members from its records, namely Lazar Eliezer, Barouch Schibi, Zak Ventoura and associate member Mendes Matarasso.¹⁶

The next reference to Jews in the union’s records is found several months later, in the board meeting of March 14, 1943. President Ryginos, while announcing a scheme of the Journalists Union to provide loans to its members, said that he was being harassed by many, including [Jewish journalist] Barouch Schibi, “who mobilized a lot of people aiming to also receive money.” Board Member Eleftheriadis simply replied that “these gentlemen have been erased based on a decision of the German Occupation Authorities.”¹⁷ No other mention of the Jews is recorded in this meeting, which took place one day before the first train full of Jews left for Auschwitz.

It is important to note that the removal of the Jews took place before the enforcement of the Nazi antisemitic laws in February 1943. In that sense, the Thessaloniki Journalists Union showed a harsher stance towards its Jewish members, compared to the other professional associations. One possible explanation is that the only journalists who were employed at the time of the Nazi occupation were those working for the collaborationist, pro-Nazi press. Under those circumstances, Jewish journalists could find the least sympathy among their own peers.

¹⁵ Yacoel, *Memoirs*, pp. 97–98.

¹⁶ Archive of the Journalists Union of Macedonia and Thrace, Minutes of the Board, Number 22, September 8, 1942. Members present: Sifakas (President), Yiannios, Kosmatopoulos, Ryginos, Ziras, Karageorgopoulos, Eleftheriadis, Koutoupis. The record under Ventoura Zak, founding member of the Journalists Union, concludes without a reference to this decision: “Kidnapped by the Germans during the year 1943 sent to Germany did not return since, erased.”

¹⁷ Archive of the Journalists Union of Macedonia and Thrace, Minutes of the Board, number 39, March 14, 1943.

4. The Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Thessaloniki

A significant part of the 50,000-strong Jewish community was involved in commerce and related activities, comprising thirty-eight percent of the city's major merchants in 1938, 234 out of 601.¹⁸ Since the founding of the Thessaloniki Chamber of Commerce and Industry in 1919, fifty-three Jews had served in its leadership positions.¹⁹ In 1943, there were as many as 2,300 Jewish stores and companies in Thessaloniki,²⁰ most of which were members of the Chamber of Commerce.

The Chamber of Commerce, a semi-state legal entity, was the most important professional association in town. At the time, it served important functions such as registering every new company and issuing certificates necessary for trade.²¹ Through the Chamber's book of minutes, one is able to see how the February 25 order to expel all Jews from its membership was implemented in one of the city's most prominent institutions.²²

At the beginning of the Chamber's executive committee meeting of February 27, 1943,²³ chaired by its President Alexandros Krallis,²⁴ it was brought to the attention of its

¹⁸ Joseph Nehama, *History of the Jews of Thessaloniki*, vol. 3 (Greek) (Thessaloniki: Jewish Community of Thessaloniki and University Studio Press, 2000), p. 1605. The book appeared first in French as Joseph Nehama, *Histoire des Israélites de Salonique* (Thessaloniki, 1978).

¹⁹ Evaggelia Varella, *The Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Thessaloniki: Chronicle 1919–1994* (Greek) (Thessaloniki, 1994), p. 18. For more on the Chamber's history, see Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Thessaloniki, *A Century: Links of Trust* (Greek) (Thessaloniki: Thessaloniki Chamber of Commerce and Industry, 2016) and Paris Papamichos Chronakis, "The Greek, Jewish, Muslim and Donme Merchants of Thessaloniki 1882–1919: Class and Ethnic Transformations in a Track of Hellenization" (Greek), Ph.D. Thesis, University of Crete, 2011, pp. 124–131.

²⁰ Stratos Dordanas, "Extermination and plunder: Agency for the Custody of Jewish Properties," in Giorgos Antoniou, Stratos Dordanas, Nikos Zaikos, Nikos Marantzidis, eds., *The Holocaust in the Balkans* (Greek) (Thessaloniki: Epikentro, 2011), p. 337.

²¹ For more on the responsibilities, see the law establishing the Chamber of Commerce, Law 184 of March 26, 1914, Government Gazette 87 of March 29, 1914.

²² We are aware that the minutes kept by official bodies are often "sanitized" and do not reflect accurately what took place. Yet, the documents we were able to study, even toned down, are quite revealing.

²³ Members present, Alexandros Krallis (President), Ioannis Ioannidis, Al. Anastasiadis and the Director Konstantinos Pimenidis.

²⁴ Alexandros Krallis (1884–1973) was born in Thessaloniki. His family had recently moved there from a northern region. He became a merchant in the pharmaceutical sector and since 1919 served in leadership

members that the newspaper *Nea Evropi*²⁵ had published that day an announcement by the General Governor of Macedonia saying that, following an order by the German Military Commander, all Jews would cease to be members of unions and associations by February 25, 1943. “The above-mentioned unions, organizations etc., are thus not allowed to include Jews as members from now on and to support their interests,” read the announcement.²⁶

The committee immediately decided to cease any services to Jews and remove all Jews from its members. The only two clarifications they agreed to ask from the General Governor concerned companies of mixed ownership and Jews of foreign nationalities.²⁷ The Board went on to discuss the other items on its agenda.

From the swiftness and smoothness of the discussion and the ensuing decision, one can deduce that the Nazi order was already known to Board members and that they had discussed its practical implementation prior to the beginning of the meeting, even though it had not been sent to them directly through official channels. The four Jewish businessmen who were serving on the Board, Sam Arditti, Albert Arditti, Benico Saltiel and Albert Tsenio, were all removed, as were the Chamber’s four Jewish employees, Al. Abravanel, Mari Pessah, Dario Saltiel and Sam Asser.²⁸

positions in the Thessaloniki Chamber of Commerce and Industry. (Efrosini Roupa and Evangelos Hekimoglou, “Interview of Henry Ford by Vassili Kralli,” (Greek), *Thessalonikeon Polis*, 10 (April 2003), pp. 22–23). After the War, he was arrested by the Communist authorities of Thessaloniki on charges of profiteering and black market. He wrote the book *Why I Was Accused and Remained in “Detention” for 17 months* (Greek) (Thessaloniki, 1947) in an effort to prove his innocence.

²⁵ The announcement appeared on the last page (p. 4) of *Nea Evropi* that day. It also appeared on the front-page of *Apogevmatini*.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Archive of the Thessaloniki Chamber of Commerce and Industry (EBETH), Minutes of the Executive Committee, Number 96, February 27, 1943, p. 15.

²⁸ Nikos Vourgoutzis, *Merchants in Thermaikos* (Greek) (Thessaloniki: University Studio Press, 2003), p. 174 and Varella, *The Chamber*, p. 18. For the bios of the four Jewish members, see Chamber of Commerce, *Century*, p. 434, footnotes 124–127. The four Jewish employees were laid off on May 26, 1943, since “these employees are absent from their duties from the beginning of March, not been able to offer their services anymore.” The Greek Ministry of National Economy approved this decision, four years later, on May 23, 1947. Chamber of Commerce, *Century*, p. 125.

At the next meeting of March 4, 1943, the General Governor responded to the clarification request. On the first point, all Jewish companies should be deleted.²⁹ On the second, the Chamber should request information from the Jewish Community. Krallis asked former board member Tsenio to do so. Following that, the committee decided to delete all Jewish companies from its membership.³⁰ Their number was at least 1,052 companies, 785 of which were personal, 235 partnerships and thirty-two of limited responsibility.³¹

A special stamp was produced to be printed on the membership books in order to delete from the Chamber any business owned by Jews. The stamp read:

Act of deletion

In implementation of the order of the Military Commander of Thessaloniki-Aegean number 2014 of February 24, 1943, the relevant notification in the press by the General Governor of Macedonia and document 43868 of March 3, 1943 of the General Governor of Macedonia and the decision of March 4, 1943 of the Governing Committee of the Chamber, the above business is deleted as ceasing to be member of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry from February 25, 1943.

Thessaloniki, March 4, 1943

The Director

[Signature] Pimenidis³²

As the issue of the membership of Jews of foreign nationalities was still open, without a response from the General Governor, Director Konstantinos Pimenidis sent an employee to its division of internal affairs to ask in person on April 14, 1943. The answer of the senior

²⁹ According to a German order of February 17, 1943, signed by SS officer Dieter Wisliceny, a business or a store was described as “Jewish” if one or more of the owners, partners or managers were Jews. Molho and Nemaha, *In Memoriam*, pp. 86–87 (original order in p. 168). Yacoel wrote that a business was Jewish if more than twenty percent was owned by Jews. Yacoel, *Memoirs*, p. 117.

³⁰ Archive of EBETH, Minutes of the Executive Committee, Number 97, March 4, 1943, pp. 17–18.

³¹ Chamber of Commerce, *Century*, p. 125.

³² A copy of the stamp is provided in Antonis Godis, “Escape in time: the Swiss clock of Nimfeo and the unknown story of Samouil Bourla,” (Greek) available at <http://www.godis.gr/omega>.

employee of the General Governor was that “there is no reason to respond in writing as the issue of the Jews will automatically expire within a few days by their departure from Thessaloniki.”³³ A clarification document from the German Military Administration clarified that Jews “irrespective of nationality” were banned from being members of organizations or associations. Following this information, the Chamber decided to remove also the Jews of foreign nationalities from its membership on April 14, 1943.³⁴

After this decision was finalized, and for several months, the Chamber of Commerce discussed the issue of the appointment of custodians for the companies of the deported Jews.³⁵ Krallis argued that the Chamber would receive the membership fees owned by the Jews for the years 1942-43 during the liquidation of their companies.³⁶

It is noteworthy that the board made its decision to delete the Jewish members quite quickly, and did not raise any legal, procedural or other issue, let alone express any solidarity or compassion with their Jewish colleagues. Yacoel lambasted this stance by stating:

The sad symptom in particular was the total absence of collegial solidarity, mainly in the commercial and professional classes. Because, as much as the author is in a position to know, the managements of these organizations did not proceed to any display or action towards the Greek administrative authorities, in support of the deleted Jewish members, the longstanding cooperation with whom should have solidified their links.³⁷

Around the same time, in late February or early March 1943, Yacoel and “two prominent members of the Jewish commercial world” met secretly at the home of the president of the “largest and most official of the economic associations of the city, a well-known merchant and businessman, connected closely with many Jewish commercial houses,

³³ Chamber of Commerce, *Century*, p. 129.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

³⁵ A government body, the Agency for the Custody of Jewish Properties (YDIP), was established to manage the Jewish properties, businesses, and homes being deserted by their rightful owners and passed on to “custodians.”

³⁶ Archive of EBETH, Minutes of the Executive Committee, Number 98, March 10, 1943, p. 25.

³⁷ Yacoel, *Memoirs*, p. 118.

to the degree that he himself spoke the Judeo-Spanish dialect.”³⁸ Yacoel most probably referred to Krallis³⁹ and he provided a first-hand account of the meeting:

During this meeting, the terrible situation of the Jewish element was raised and we asked for his contribution to deal with the situation. With justified surprise, the author discovered the cold and passive stance of this official towards what was stated, and whose only positive expression was to refer the delegation to persons friendly with the Military Commander of Thessaloniki-Aegean, for their intervention.⁴⁰

The decisions of the leadership of the Thessaloniki Chamber of Commerce and Industry were rather swift. But this did not have to be the case. In order to put their reactions in context, three other cases will be examined briefly: one showing how the Chamber dealt with another matter around the same time, one on a public appeal issued by the business associations of Thessaloniki and a last one on actions of the business associations of Athens regarding the plight of the Jews of Thessaloniki.

a) On August 19, 1942, Konstantinos Pimenidis, a senior staff member of the Chamber, presented himself before the executive committee and announced that, by decision of the Ministry of National Economy, he was named director of the institution. The president, Alexandros Krallis, who presumably was not in favor of this appointment, responded that they should wait until the appointment was published in the Government Gazette. Pimenidis objected and said that he was obliged to take over his new position as ordered by the Minister. In conclusion, the committee decided that the appointment would not be finalized until its publication in the Government Gazette and pending an opinion by the legal advisor.⁴¹

At the next meeting of August 22, 1942, the legal advisor presented his opinion that Pimenidis should take over the position of director, even prior to the publication of the

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Krallis was indeed a speaker of Judeo-Spanish. Chamber of Commerce, *Century*, p. 434, footnote 116.

⁴⁰ Yacoel, *Memoirs*, p. 118.

⁴¹ Archive of EBETH, Minutes of the Executive Committee, number 57, August 19, 1942, p. 259.

decision in the Government Gazette. With this in mind, the committee agreed with the appointment, to begin the following Monday, August 24, 1942.⁴²

When the Jews were in need of intervention a few months later, Krallis and the committee members could have used the same delaying tactics; but they chose not to and instead proceeded with the implementation of the anti-Jewish measures upon reading them in the morning newspaper.

b) On March 11, 1943, an extraordinary meeting of the Chamber's full board was held, with the participation of the presidents of other business associations. The only topic on the agenda was the appointment of custodians for the Jewish companies. During the long discussion that followed, the senior leaders of the Thessaloniki business community took the floor to express their views on the issue.

At the conclusion of the meeting, they did issue a joint statement. However, it was not in support of the Jews about to be deported, but rather against the Communist guerillas, "an issue of probably greater importance" than that of the Jewish properties.⁴³ The statement, signed by Alexandros Krallis for the Chamber of Commerce, Dimitrios Hatzopoulos for the Industrialists Association and Alexandros Letsas for the Traders Association, "denounced with indignation the treasonous activities of these mercenary instruments of communist propaganda which forget [...] the urgent need for all to remain united around the idea of the common and only national interest which requires calmness, obedience and respect toward the Public Authorities..."⁴⁴

The leaders of the main professional associations did come together to make a joint statement on a current issue, unrelated to their functions. Yet, they turned a blind eye to the plight of their Jewish colleagues, many of whom were long-time members of said associations.

⁴² Archive of EBETH, Minutes of the Executive Committee, number 58, August 22, 1942, p. 263.

⁴³ Archive of EBETH, Minutes of the Board, March 11, 1943, pp. 154–164.

⁴⁴ The full announcement has published as the main headline of *Nea Evropi* on March 14, 1943, a day prior to the departure of the first train full of Jews to Auschwitz.

c) On March 20, 1943, the chairmen of four Athens-based business associations⁴⁵ sent an appeal to the Greek Minister of Finance and of the National Economy Sotirios Gotzamanis. arguing that “we believe it to be our duty not only as Greek fellow-citizens but also as organizations [...] to express our warm sympathy towards these fellow-citizens.” They went on to propose a plan according to which, instead of being deported, Thessaloniki Jews “should be concentrated and remain on Greek soil in specific centers to be determined by the Occupation Authorities.” They asked Minister Gotzamanis to “favorably accept [this] proposal and duly put it before the Prime Minister.” In such a case,

the cruel expatriation of thousands of Greeks whose very existence may be endangered by the inevitable hardships of displacement will be avoided, while, on the other hand, the objective pursued by the Occupation Authorities is ensured.⁴⁶

Unfortunately, such a proposal was not interesting for the Germans and it is unknown whether Gotzamanis pursued it further. Yet, the heads of the Athens business associations took a stance on a matter that their Thessaloniki colleagues persistently refused to consider.⁴⁷ They also joined other “eminent Greeks,” spearheaded by Archbishop Damaskinos, in sending two letters to Prime Minister Konstantinos Logothetopoulos on March 23, 1943 and to German Ambassador Gunther Altenburg on March 24, 1943, in support of the Jews of Thessaloniki.⁴⁸

Comparing the swift decision of the Chamber of Commerce of Thessaloniki with the other examples shows that the implementation of the Nazi order was not a one-way street.

⁴⁵ These were Apostolos Pouloupoulos, Chairman of the Commercial and Industrial Chamber of Athens, Ioannis Terzakis, Chairman of the Association of Greek Industrialists and Craft Industrialists, T. Lekatsas, Chairman of the Association of Joint Stock Companies and Dimitrios Vassilopoulos, Chairman of the Commercial Association of Athens.

⁴⁶ Photini Constantopoulou and Thanos Veremis, eds., *Documents on the History of the Greek Jews: Records from the Historical Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs* (Athens: Kastaniotis Editions, 1999), pp. 249–250.

⁴⁷ For the perspective of the Athens Chamber of Commerce and why their efforts were in vain see Athens Chamber of Commerce and Industry, *Chronicle of the Six Years 1941–1947* (Greek) (Athens: 1948), p. 80.

⁴⁸ Constantopoulou and Veremis, *Documents*, pp. 250–256.

Efforts could have been made to show some solidarity with their Jewish members, their colleagues and business partners for many decades.

5. The Lawyers Association of Thessaloniki

The Lawyers Association of Thessaloniki also learned of the Nazi decision to remove the Jews from its membership through the local press, namely *Nea Evropi* of March 3, 1943, which republished the February 25 order. While a book of minutes could not be located to find out the context or reveal a discussion around this subject, the Association sent a letter to the Ministry of Justice in Athens on March 29, 1943 to seek clarifications. The letter, signed by the Association's acting president Ioannis Tsitsiklis,⁴⁹ inquired:

Following the publication of the announcement by the General Governor in the Thessaloniki local newspaper *Nea Evropi* dated March 3, 1943 [...] we have the honor to request to be informed if by only this announcement should we remove from the membership records of our association the Jewish lawyers or following a specific decree by the Ministry.⁵⁰

A response by the Ministry was not found in the archive, nor any follow-up discussion on the issue.⁵¹ A list of deleted members from association's membership for 1943 indicates twenty-two members, of which the following seventeen Jewish lawyers: Yomtov Yacoel, Ilias Kamhi, Avraam Koen, Alfredos Koen, Ilias Koen, Lazaros Koen, Simantov Koen, Iosif Krispi, Avraam Levi, Alvertos Masarano, Saoul Moisis, Samouil Nahmia, Ilias Ovadia, Iosif Revah, Alvertos Siaki, Isaak Siaki and Menaem Farantzi. Next to their names is indicated as date of deletion "February 25, 1943" and as the reason "Order of the Military Administration of Thessaloniki-Aegean." Saoul Moisis had been serving on the board of the

⁴⁹ The Lawyers Association was without a formal head as its previous President, Georgios Seremetis, was appointed Mayor of Thessaloniki at the end of February 1943. See the article announcing Seremetis as the new mayor, *Nea Evropi*, March 7, 1943, p. 4.

⁵⁰ Archive of Nestor Kavadas, Thessaloniki Lawyers Association, Protocol number 126, March 29, 1943.

⁵¹ The author did not inquire whether the archive of the Greek Ministry of Justice is available and accessible to researchers.

association since 1938.⁵² The reason the remaining five non-Jewish members were removed was either due to death or moving to Athens.⁵³

The Lawyers Association, unlike the Chamber of Commerce, seems to have used some delaying tactics: They waited twenty days since they read the announcement in the press and then asked for clarifications from the Ministry of Justice, to gain even more time.⁵⁴ Using these procedural means, they were able to delay the implementation of the decision for several weeks, even though eventually they had to comply with the Nazi order.⁵⁵ As a well-connected lawyer and prominent Jewish leader, Yacoel may have played a role in this delay although he does not indicate anything in his memoirs. In addition, the nature of the profession, dealing with the law and legal norms, could have made the lawyers more willing to oppose unjust legislation and support their Jewish colleagues. Unfortunately, a clearer picture of the context and the outcomes is missing as further material is not available.⁵⁶

⁵² Archive of Nestor Kavadas, Thessaloniki Lawyers Association, List of Members of the Board of the Lawyers Association of Thessaloniki since 1938, May 20, 1943. A survey of 1938, had found that fourteen of the city's 345 lawyers were Jews. Nehama, *History*, p. 1605.

⁵³ Archive of Nestor Kavadas, Thessaloniki Lawyers Association, List of Deleted Lawyers from the Associations Records in 1943. In another document, there are some small differences: Koen Lazaros is changed to Koen Rafail, Siaki Alvertos is missing and we find the addition of Moisis Asir [Asher], still seventeen lawyers in total. Archive of Nestor Kavadas, Thessaloniki Lawyers Association, Protocol number 199, June 1, 1943.

⁵⁴ The lawyers of Thessaloniki seem to have made additional efforts to help the Jewish community. A group of prominent lawyers made representations before General Governor Simonidis and Bishop Gennadios. Molho and Nehama, *In Memoriam*, p. 138. Some 150 lawyers reportedly wrote to the Prime Minister in Athens to propose that the Jews do not get deported but rather be moved to an island in the Aegean. Molho and Nehama, *In Memoriam*, p. 139. However, a copy of this letter has not been found. In addition, several lawyers and judges took part in a scheme to facilitate adoptions of Jewish children in order to save them from the deportations but it was uncovered by the Germans and the adoptions were cancelled. See Chapter 5, Part II.

⁵⁵ In the case of Italy, it was also the members of the bar association that “engendered greater solidarity in their non-Jewish colleagues than in other professions.” However, “There has been no comprehensive study of the forms of solidarity Italians may have expressed toward their Jewish colleagues after they had been removed from the various professional guilds.” Valeria Galimi, “The ‘New Racist Man’: Italian Society and the Fascist Anti-Jewish Laws,” in Giulia Albanese and Roberta Pergher, eds., *In the Society of Fascists: Acclamation, Acquiescence, and Agency in Mussolini's Italy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 155–156.

⁵⁶ In an official letter of the Lawyers Association to the author, he was informed that “the Association does not possess the archives of 1942–1943.”

6. The Industrialists Association of Macedonia and Thrace

Another important agency in the city was the Industrialists Association of Macedonia and Thrace. Founded in 1914, the Association was active in many areas of economic and industrial development of the region. Three Jews were among its founding members and several had served on its boards.⁵⁷

The Industrialists Association discussed the issue of the removal of its Jewish members on March 10, 1943. The president, Dimitrios Hatzopoulos, said that for the limited liability companies (S.A., *Société Anonyme*) this was not an issue since as legal entities they were considered of Greek nationality. However, the legal advisor, Dimitrios Dingas,⁵⁸ argued that members of the Association are physical persons, according to its charter. Therefore, Dingas proposed that a letter be sent to all its Jewish members that, according to the decision of the Occupation Authorities, they could not be members of the Association, nor can their companies be represented by Jewish proxies. Thus, the Board decided to “delete Jewish companies in the form of a general partnership [ομόρρυθμες] registered in the Association’s records, and to send a letter to the ones of limited liability, which they asked Mr. Dingas to draft in a legal manner.”

The thirty-four Jewish companies that were deleted that day were: Levi Benouzilio, Alvo Brothers, Mois Iosif Beza, I. Karasso and Co., Saltiel Angel and Son, Alber Nissim, S. Avagiou and Brothers, Ammir and Mevorah, Bernard Landau, EBEM, Solomon Koen, David Gatenio, EBGY, S. Beraha, Molho Salem, D. Gatenio, I. Sevi, Hassid-Coenca, M. G. Hassid, NAKE, I. Serrero Sons, Beza Brothers, Angel Brothers, P. Coenca and Co., M. Paladino, H.

⁵⁷ For more information, see Evangelos Hekimoglou, *Industrialists Association of Northern Greece: The First 100 Years 1915–2015* (Greek) (Thessaloniki, 2015) and Paris Papamichos Chronakis, “Merchants of Thessaloniki,” pp. 234–252.

⁵⁸ Dimitrios Dingas was a prominent lawyer and former government minister and during the period of the German occupation he was actively involved in the affairs of the city. General Governor Simonidis was a former trainee of his, while Jewish lawyer Alfredos (Freddy) Koen was his partner in his law practice. For more see Giorgos Anastasiadis and Evangelos Hekimoglou, *Dimitrios G. Dingas (1876–1974): The life and work of the first Macedonian minister* (Greek) (Thessaloniki: University Studio Press, 2002).

Matia, Leon Angel, M. A. Bensousan, D. I. Assael, Sabetai Yiouda Sons, L. Beza, A. Geyirman, S. Sarfati and Co., and M. Starodinski.⁵⁹

Based on the available information, one could conclude that while the Association took around ten days to consider the German order, it did not come up with any legal or other obstacles. Rather, the legal advisor used this period to prepare his ruling and the Association decided to delete all of its Jewish members on the day of the discussion.

7. Conclusion

This chapter has tried to detail the process through which the Jews were removed from Thessaloniki's professional associations, as ordered by the SS in the end of February 25, 1943, a few weeks before the deportation to Auschwitz of the near totality of the Jewish population. What is of particular interest is the use of bureaucratic and legal procedures to justify and implement such a measure.

During this period, there were some mass protests organized by communist youth groups with the participation of regular citizens. These were unrelated to the deportations that were going on at the same time and were mostly directed against the Bulgarians. Nevertheless, most of the common people were living under a Nazi climate of fear, terror and hunger. On the other hand, the political, religious and civic leaders of Thessaloniki had the ability to stand up for the rights of Jewish citizens. Indeed, they could hide behind the very institution they represented and try to undermine or even oppose the Nazi plans, acting like a “kind of protective screen against the increasing victimization of the Jews,” in the words of Jacques Semelin.⁶⁰

This, however, was not the pattern in the case of Thessaloniki, but rather the exception. Instead, the Jewish professionals were met with neglect, indifference and—worse—hostility, by their colleagues and partners for many years. This is even more

⁵⁹ All the information comes from Hekimoglou, *Industrialists Association*, p. 132. When the author tried to access the archive of the said Association, he was told it was “private.”

⁶⁰ Jacques Semelin, *Unarmed against Hitler: civilian resistance in Europe, 1939–1943* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1993), p. 141.

significant if one considers that the heads of these professional associations were distinguished individuals, prominent in their trade and well-connected with the city's leadership. They had access to government officials and carried a certain political and social weight.

The silence and passive stance of the professional associations is indeed true for the Thessaloniki Chamber of Commerce and Industry, which counted the greatest number of Jewish members—more than 1,000 Jewish businesses—and the Industrialists Association of Macedonia and Thrace, whose thirty-four Jewish companies were deleted rather smoothly ten days after the Nazi order was issued. The Journalists Union removed its four Jewish colleagues very quickly and rather early, whereas the Lawyers Association seems to have tried to use some delaying tactics in support of its seventeen Jewish members.

Some may argue, in an apologetic spirit, that the local decision-makers had no room to maneuver and had to follow the Nazi orders under coercion and threat. With regards to Thessaloniki's professional associations, studying all the available archival material and post-war testimonies, no evidence of threats could not be found. The Thessaloniki Chamber of Commerce could have used the tactics of the Lawyers Association or even the pro-active stance of their Athens counterparts, and displayed more solidarity to their Jewish colleagues.

When studying the exploitation of Jewish properties in the Greek city of Ioannina, Margaritis remarked that following bureaucratic procedures carefully created a “strong alibi” for the arbitrariness and illegality of the antisemitic measures, creating a “ritual of legitimacy.” These processes created a sense of normalcy, of “business as usual,” at a time when many of the established political, social and moral rules were being torpedoed. This is one aspect of the general climate of neutrality or indifference displayed throughout Nazi-occupied Europe.⁶¹

At the same time, it is telling that the business community in Athens showed greater compassion and interest in their Thessaloniki Jewish colleagues than did their colleagues from their hometown. Mazower speaks of “different priorities and sentiments of the elites in Greece's two main cities,”⁶² Athens and Thessaloniki. Overall, one can argue that Athens did more to save the Jews of Thessaloniki, than did their native city.

⁶¹ Giorgos Margaritis, *Unwanted Compatriots*, pp. 55–57 and pp. 129–132.

⁶² Mazower, *Salonica*, p. 411.

The period of the Holocaust was a constant tension between a harsh reality with conflicting interests, choices and priorities. It is evident that a large segment of the population did witness or was confronted with the expulsion of the Jews from the city's economic and social life. However, in dealing with these dilemmas, the professional associations of Thessaloniki opted for letting down their Jewish colleagues.

Chapter VII: Conclusions-Aftermath

1. Conclusions

Thessaloniki is a textbook case of a cosmopolitan city which moved from an empire to the nation state and from multicultural it became homogenous, through war, forced migration and genocide. The Christians and Jews of the city had complex relations, of both coexistence and competition, which were in addition influenced by the wider political and economic context. During the Holocaust, Thessaloniki lost more than ninety percent of its Jews, the bitter end of a love affair with that city that had lasted for almost 450 years. In the preceding chapters, we tried to understand how this tragedy could have happened.

First we outlined, in a concise manner, the general framework of relations before the war, as well as the historical context of Greek-Jewish relations in the city. Then, we looked with great detail into the actions, or lack thereof, of the city's main institutions vis-à-vis the ongoing drama of the Jews: the city authorities, the Church, the professional associations, the University, the Courts, and, by extension, the wider public. Lastly, we also examined the backdrop of these stances, what the authorities and citizens knew and understood at the time, witnessing the events in question. Certain elements become clear:

- During the period of the German occupation, most of the common people were living under a Nazi climate of fear, terror and hunger. Nevertheless, there were mass demonstrations and protests on the issues that the population and its leadership perceived to be of primary importance to them. Evidently, the deportation of the Jews was not.
- A group of some twenty individuals emerged as the unequivocal representatives of the Greek population. They were all distinguished individuals, prominent in their trade and inter-connected among themselves and with the political leadership. They all met

at the National Council, the different boards and associations. They had access to government officials and carried a certain political weight.

- The authorities used bureaucratic and legal procedures to justify their involvement in the implementation of the Nazi measures against the Jews and innocent, technical terms to describe the unprecedented developments. They chose to deal with the issues that arose in a rational and legalistic way. These processes created a “ritual of legitimacy,” a sense of “business as usual,” at a time of a severe moral, ethical and legal breakdown.¹

The political, religious and civic leaders of Thessaloniki had the ability to stand up for the rights of the Jewish citizens. Indeed, they could hide behind the very institution they represented and try to undermine or even oppose the Nazi plans, acting like a “kind of protective screen against the increasing victimization of the Jews,” in the words of Jacques Semelin.² This, however, was not the pattern in the case of Thessaloniki, but rather the exception. Instead, the Jews were mostly met with neglect, indifference and—worse—hostility, by the state and city authorities, and their colleagues and partners for many years.

The silence and passive stance of the Greek authorities is indeed true for the Municipality, the University and several of the professional associations. The Church has a mixed record, but its positive steps were not met with continuity, consistency and rigor. A few of the professional associations may have tried to use some delaying tactics in support of their Jewish membership, but that also was short-lived. The scheme of adoptions was the only bright exception in this very dark constellation, notwithstanding its regrettable end.

Some may argue, in an apologetic spirit, that the local decision-makers had no room to maneuver and had to follow the Nazi orders under coercion and threat. Studying all the available archival material, some positive examples could be identified, even though they proved to be inadequate to cause any great impact. Nevertheless, they show that had the population and its leaders wanted, there were available paths for meaningful solidarity with their Jewish neighbors.

¹ Giorgos Margaritis, *Unwanted Compatriots*, pp. 55–57 and pp. 129–132.

² Jacques Semelin, *Unarmed against Hitler: civilian resistance in Europe, 1939–1943* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1993), p. 141.

The Greek authorities had to run the affairs of a city with few resources and big challenges. Yet, these prominent individuals, on the leadership of local institutions, turned a blind eye to the well-being of their Jewish constituency, who did not make it on their list of priorities. It is telling that the political, ecclesiastical and civil leadership in Athens, as well as the business community, showed greater compassion and interest in their Thessaloniki Jewish colleagues than did their colleagues from their hometown. Mazower spoke of “different priorities and sentiments of the elites in Greece’s two main cities,”³ Athens and Thessaloniki. Overall, one could argue that Athens did more to save the Jews of Thessaloniki, than did their native city.

Issues of geography,⁴ timing and culture (such as a Spanish accent) may have played a negative role for the Jews. Yet, one could only speculate how the events would have played out had there been more solidarity by the authorities, the professional associations and the wider public toward the city’s Jews.

2. Legacy of *Millet* System

The German occupation with its severe and inhumane policies constituted a clear departure from the previous period. At this time of crisis, with the breakdown of many norms, both communities, Greeks and Jews, went back to their millet mentality, putting their community first, trying to solve their own issues, elevating their own interests as a priority.

Thessaloniki had entered into the Greek state in 1912, after centuries of Ottoman administration. The case studies described in this thesis, which displayed a consistent failure of most parts of the Thessaloniki society to effectively stand up for the Jews, show that the thirty-year transition from Ottoman rule until the start of the persecution of the Jews were not sufficient in order to solidify the links and consolidate the co-acceptance between the two communities.

The Greek population had organized itself at the National Council, grouping together all the notable personalities under the guidance of the Metropolitan. This body tried to deal

³ Mazower, *Salonica*, p. 411.

⁴ Hilberg characterizes as “geographic fate,” the fact that the majority of Greece’s Jews, those of Thessaloniki, fell under German control. Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of European Jews* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1961), p. 738.

with the challenges of the period and address the urgent issues that emerged. No Jews were part of this group. At the same time, the Jewish community also created and strengthened its own coordinating bodies. Proposed by Yacoel, several prominent members of the Jewish community set up, in April 1942, a “Central Committee for the Coordination of the Works of Social Welfare.”⁵ This committee eventually became a primary organ, even an interlocutor of the community with the German authorities.

The result was that each community had developed elements of introversion and self-government. The case of the soup kitchens is a characteristic example, where each had its own structures to feed their own poor, organize the meals and collect charity. We discussed the letter of September 11, 1942 which asked the Jewish Community to take care of its own soup kitchens, as it was already doing. It is clear that during these difficult times, each community had to depend on its own resources, with the official state structures catering for the Greek Christian population.

This sense of separate fortunes could be traced to the legacy of the Ottoman millet system. Millet was the system under which a confessional community (Muslims, Christians or Jews) was allowed to rule itself, with minimal intervention from the central authorities. Their everyday lives may have been intertwined, but not their sense of community and perceptions in the larger picture. As we saw, both communities put strong pressure to their members against intermarriage and conversion, and these events were quite rare.

The controversies and violence between the Jews and Greeks of Thessaloniki during the interwar period had been addressed to some extent by the community leaderships and the authorities, but not fully. As Aristotle Kallis noted, this “atmosphere of mutual suspicion [...] was never alleviated.” These feelings lingered during the critical time of the German occupation. Kallis continued: “one can argue plausibly that the local non-Jewish population’s evident lack of interest in offering protection had something to do with the poisoned relations of the previous decade.”⁶

During the Greek-Italian war, thousands of Thessaloniki Jews fought and many were killed for their motherland. However, these heroic events of 1940 were not enough to solidify the links between the two communities during the crucial period of 1942-43. Not enough

⁵ Yacoel, *Memoirs*, pp. 51–52.

⁶ Aristotle A. Kallis, “The Jewish Community of Salonica under Siege: The Antisemitic Violence of the Summer of 1931,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, Volume 20, Issue 1 (Spring 2006), p. 18.

time had passed since 1912, and the Ottoman-born generation was still alive. At the time, they held prominent positions and were heads of their family households. The Ottoman mentality was still in the back of their heads.

This shortage in time is also evident in the number of Jews in jobs such as doctors, lawyers, journalists and senior administrators, occupations that could cross through communities and serve as bridges. For example, out of 345 lawyers in Thessaloniki in 1938, only fourteen were Jews. Out of 446 doctors, only twenty-six were Jews. Out of 105 dentists, only sixteen were Jews and out of fifty-six journalists only nine were Jews.⁷ The reason for this low number, less than the percentage of the Jews in the total population, is also the fact that the professional Jews could not yet speak fluent Greek in order to interact with the Greek state in such a senior level. Some, like the journalists, only worked for newspapers directed to the Jewish community. It is interesting to note that Yacoel and other prominent Jewish lawyers were born in the “Old Greece,” were educated in Greek and moved to Thessaloniki after 1912. As the same time, there were just a handful of Jewish senior administrators who worked for state or semi-state institutions and it has also been observed that the Jewish politicians were less interested in a more active involvement with the central political scene, as they were operating in community terms.⁸

While the Jews were facing their own challenges going through the integration processes within the Greek state, so were many of the city’s Greeks. Much of the Greek population was also in transition, or even “Hellenization,” a process meant to integrate to the central state all the new comers and the existing citizens of the new lands. These state consolidation policies were far from being completed when the German army invaded Greece.

When the Jews got stigmatized and separated as a distinct group by the Nazi policies, they stopped being a part of the Hellenization process or of the Greek collective. In addition, they were targeted by ethnic/nationalistic and anti-communist ideologies, as well as the antisemitic daily propaganda in the collaborationist press. The challenges of World War Two and the breakdown of societal norms did not help create emotions of altruism. Both for the

⁷ Joseph Nehama, *History of the Jews of Thessaloniki*, vol. 3 (Greek) (Thessaloniki: Jewish Community of Thessaloniki and University Studio Press, 2000), p. 1605.

⁸ Dimosthenis Dodos, *Jews of Thessaloniki in the Elections of the Greek state 1915–1936* (Greek) (Athens: Savvalas, 1995), p. 207.

native Greek population and for the refugees and other new-comers, the Jews were a separate segment of the population.

As Margaritis notes, “the Greek society did not follow the antisemitic attitudes of the Nazis but, more simply, it assumed that the problems the Germans had with the Jewish communities was an ‘internal’ issue and not a national issue, for the Greeks and Greece.”⁹ They were Greeks and Jews living in the same city but they were not “compatriots.” The Jews remained the “other,” an ethnic group co-existing with the Greek majority but not part of it.¹⁰

3. The Question of Antisemitism

The impact of antisemitism in the behavior of the Greek population and its leaders has to be examined carefully. When the Nazis arrived in Greece, they reported that they did not find a “Jewish question,” a racially motivated antisemitism:

For the average Greek, so far there has practically been no Jewish question. He does not see the political danger and the connections of world Jewry, and believes that, because of their relatively low quantitative strength and his own natural commercial abilities, which is at least equal to the same attribute of the Jews, he is safe from having the Jews treat him as an economic and cultural ward.¹¹

Rene Burkhardt, the Red Cross delegate in Thessaloniki during the period of the deportations, was a keen observer of local developments. He was familiar with the local society, having lived and worked previously in Thessaloniki and being married to a Greek lady. He highlighted some anti-Jewish attitudes that he saw in the city’s elites:

⁹ Margaritis, *Unwanted*, p. 122.

¹⁰ For a discussion of this point, see Odette Varon, “A ‘silence’ of the written sources” (Greek), *Synchrona Themata*, Special Issue on the Jews in Greece, Issue 52–53, (July–December 1994), pp. 82–83.

¹¹ Final Report on the Activity of the Rosenberg Special Assignment Detachment in Greece, Athens, November 15, 1941, pp. 16–17.

In a general manner, the Greek is not anti-Jewish and the scenes of bad treatment only increased their hatred of the occupier. The anti-Jewish sentiment can be found more concentrated in the higher classes of the population.¹²

Antisemitism in Thessaloniki was mostly based on differentiation, on religious, linguistic and cultural grounds, and did not have the racial elements of Nazi antisemitism. It was influenced by centuries-long contacts, prejudices and stereotypes, religious teachings and elements of economic competition. Very rarely did antisemitism get political motivations, such as, for example, when the Jews were seen as siding with the Ottomans during the Balkan wars or conspiring against Greek Macedonia in 1931.¹³

The Nazis tried to change this perception by launching a virulent antisemitic propaganda in the two newspapers that were in circulation in the city, *Nea Evropi* and *Apogevmatini*. The Greek journalists that were hired for the task were a diverse group of well-known members of the local society, with anti-communist and nationalist ideological beliefs, enriched with racial elements, some of them having open antisemitic feelings. This was the case of Nikolaos Fardis, the editor-in-chief of *Makedonia* who, in 1931, published a series of antisemitic articles which instigated the Campbell riots of the same year.¹⁴ In the Nazi propaganda articles, the Jews were portrayed as the absolute evil, sympathizers of the Bolsheviks and communism, supporters of England and capitalism, long-time enemies of Greece, killers of Christ, etc. As these were the only two newspapers allowed in the city, they had a certain influence among the population, reinforcing deeply held prejudices.

These emotions were not new among the Greek population but had been lingering for centuries. Certain Christian religious teachers had strong attacks against the Jews in their sermons and writings. There were cases of blood libel in Greece and certain targeted attacks against Jewish notables, such as the Don Pacifico Affair of 1847.¹⁵ The success in Greece of

¹² Archive of the ICRC, G3/27C, Report of Rene Burkhardt of October 28, 1942.

¹³ For an overview of antisemitism in Greece see Giorgos Margaritis, "Greek Antisemitism: A Tour, 1821, 1891, 1931," in *Unwanted Compatriots*, pp. 27–47.

¹⁴ Kallis, "The Jewish Community of Salonica under Siege," p. 47.

¹⁵ See Katherine Fleming, "Burning Judas: Nationalism, Transnationalism and Antisemitism in Nineteenth-Century Greece," *Pe'amim: Studies in Oriental Jewry*, Issue 105–106 (2005), pp. 29–55.

the antisemitic forgery, *the Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, is another such example.¹⁶ Some of the antisemitism was thus imported from abroad, and mixed with local perceptions.

As the Thessaloniki society was experiencing the effects of the German occupation, the Greek and Jewish communities started to deal with their own affairs, mostly separately from one another. The propaganda in the press was in full operation, and so was the Greek nationalist and anti-communist discourse from the authorities. This reality strengthened even more this sense of differentiation and separation and reduced the common space. In this respect we can see the initiation of measures such as the slave labor of all Jewish males or the destruction of the Jewish cemetery, both of which we analyzed in chapter 2. The Jews were targeted as the non-Greek, the foreigner, the “other.”

A big part of the city’s Christian population was for many years in “social, commercial and political confrontation” with the Jewish community,¹⁷ as policies were implemented to advance Greek interests, hiding motives of “a nationalist economic discrimination,”¹⁸ or even “antisemitism ‘by other means.’”¹⁹ This ideological antisemitism was given a last push when utilitarian aspects were added to it. As the Jews or Thessaloniki were put into ghettos and deported, their properties were plundered and given to thousands of custodians. The residents of Thessaloniki, not only they could profit from the real estate, enterprises, merchandise and possessions of the Jews, but could also get rid of business rivals.

These interests did not limit themselves with material possessions but also involved holy sites. The cemetery was destroyed, religious scrolls thrown away, synagogues plundered and robbed of their ornaments. Timothy Snyder observed that “such a major property transfer [of the land of the cemetery] generated a sense of material complicity between Germans and locals as well as a new moral barrier between non-Jewish Greeks and Greek Jews.”²⁰

¹⁶ Dimitris Psarras, *The best seller of hatred: the “Protocols of the Elders of Zion” in Greece, 1920–2013* (Greek) (Athens: Polis, 2013).

¹⁷ Bernard Pierron, *Jews and Christians in Modern Greece* (Greek) (Athens: Polis, 2004), p. 283.

¹⁸ Orly C. Meron, *Jewish Entrepreneurship in Salonica, 1912–1940: An Ethnic Economy in Transition* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2011), p. 216.

¹⁹ Andrew Apostolou, “‘The Exception of Salonika’: Bystanders and Collaborators in Northern Greece,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, vol. 14, n. 2 (Fall 2000), p. 171.

²⁰ Timothy Snyder, *Black Earth: The Holocaust as History and Warning* (New York: Tim Duggan Books, 2015), p. 245.

The desecration of the “other’s” religious sites has a long tradition in the region. Muslim cemeteries and mosques were met with a similar fate after the exchange of populations. Yet, these reactions, coupled with latent and old-rooted antisemitic prejudices and economic profit, can explain the passive or indifferent stance of the local population, the silence of the authorities and even the complicity of some. Thessaloniki could become a homogenous, purely Greek city. There was no one willing to stop the genocidal intent of the Nazis.

4. Priority of Interests

When the Nazis were implementing their first anti-Jewish measures, they were also “testing the water” with regards to the reactions of the local Christian society. In the case of Thessaloniki, the failure to stand up in support of the Jews was coupled with silence and a passive stance. The priorities of the Greek elites of Thessaloniki were to maintain the present state structures and their pre-war leadership position,²¹ to keep the menacing Bulgarians out and to complete the city’s “Hellenization.”²²

The Bulgarian factor was looming heavily on the priorities of the Greek authorities and elites of Thessaloniki. The Bulgarians, allies of the Nazis who had already annexed a significant part of Northern Greece, were eyeing control of Thessaloniki, which they had failed to capture during the Balkan wars. For the local Greeks, the Bulgarians were a bigger threat than the Germans. They had an open expansionist agenda with regards to Thessaloniki and the wider region. Several thousands of Greeks had already been massacred by the Bulgarians in the regions they controlled, with many more fleeing the area.

The city’s authorities and the rest of the senior Greek leaders of the time, had crystalized their own priorities. In particular, they considered the Germans to be the “lesser evil,” in contrast to the communist threat of the partisans or the Bulgarians.²³ The Germans

²¹ Stratos Dordanas and Vaios Kalogrias, “‘The Capital of the North’: Political and Social Powers in Thessaloniki in the 40s,” *Thessaloniki*, Scientific Yearbook of the Thessaloniki History Center of the Municipality of Thessaloniki, 7th volume (Thessaloniki: 2008), p. 363.

²² Mazower, *Salonica*, p. 425. It is telling that Mazower entitled the third part of his book, dealing with the period 1912–1945 as “Making the City Greek.”

²³ See Giorgos Karagiannis, *The Church from the Occupation to the Civil War* (Greek) (Athens: Proskinio, 2001), p. 29.

used the Bulgarian card as a “carrot and stick”: they tolerated the Greek anti-Bulgarian propaganda efforts, but regularly threatened with the expansion of the Bulgarian occupation zone.²⁴ In this cost-effective way, they were able to maintain the cooperation of the local authorities in order to keep the peace in the city and to serve their wider goals. Mazower concluded: “No senior Greek political figure in [Thessaloniki] was thus prepared to forfeit [German officer Max Merten’s] support and waste valuable political capital by speaking out on behalf of the Jews.”²⁵

At the same time, the Greek elites advocated against any resistance actions against the Germans. They hoped for a rapprochement of German policies with Greek interests, arguing that “every conflict with the Germans [was] harmful for the Greek interests.”²⁶ Practical efforts in support of the Jews would have definitely threatened such efforts and were thus seriously discouraged. Instead many argued for a “flexible approach” with regards to the Nazis, which they hoped would turn the Germans against the Bulgarians.²⁷

The extreme Nazi antisemitic policies created an additional layer of complication in the inter-communal relations. The Jews became the target of vicious propaganda, dehumanization and exploitation, making them a “fair game.” As the measures were escalating gradually, with the death camps not yet known, some of the Greek elites saw an opportunity to consolidate the Greek character of the city, which was still dominated to a large extent by the Jews. The Jews were the only “foreign” element left in Thessaloniki, which only thirty years before had fallen under the control of Greece. Some of the policies of the Greek authorities gave away a wish to obliterate completely the city’s Jewish past and remove any of its visible marks. The destruction of the cemetery in the city center, the renaming of the streets with Jewish names, the complete flattening of the Jewish neighborhoods and the replacement of the Jewish businesses with Greek ones meant that city would become from then on unquestionably Greek.

A considerable part of the Greek population of Thessaloniki saw an opportunity to expand their economic base by profiteering and getting rid of their Jewish business

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Mazower, *Salonica*, p. 411.

²⁶ Petros Papapoliviou, “The first efforts of resistance actions in Thessaloniki before the founding of EAM,” in Thessaloniki History Center, *Thessaloniki after 1912* (Greek) (Thessaloniki: Thessaloniki History Center, 1986), pp. 220–221.

²⁷ Papapoliviou, “First efforts,” p. 217, footnote 34.

competitor. In the interwar period, there were sustained actions by the Greek side to curtail Jewish economic influence. The awarding of Jewish business and homes, still full with merchandise, furniture and possessions, to thousands of Greeks on the eve of the deportations reinforced the blind-eye attitude of the authorities, the elites and the ordinary bystanders.

5. Aftermath

By the end of the war, only a tiny fraction of the pre-war Jewish population of Thessaloniki was still alive. The return of the Jews from hiding or the death camps was complicated in several levels. At the personal level, they had to cope with the trauma of what they had gone through and the loss of almost all of their family and friends. At the community level, Jewish life had to be reestablished and all the institutions had to start to function again. Lastly, at the political level, they had to fight an uphill battle, often with limited means, in order to claim back their businesses, homes and properties, against a state and a population which was, in general terms, not very forthcoming.²⁸

The Greek collaborators who had facilitated the Nazi antisemitic plans had now become respectable citizens of the country, as they were opposing the communist forces during the brutal civil war that had ensued. These were the same communists who had formed the partisan units resisting against the Nazi occupation, where many Jews had found shelter. No Greek was ever tried and convicted for crimes against Jews, apart for some collaborators who were Jewish themselves. There was no clear sense of justice for the victims.

The issue of the return of the properties is another controversial issue that remains little researched. Although official Greece gave up any legal claims against heirless Jewish property, this did not mean that it actually happened in practice. Many Jews had to struggle in the courts to prove that a particular property belonged to a relative of theirs. Many Greeks living or working in former Jewish properties actively campaigned against their return, often

²⁸ See Eleni Haidia, "Greek Jews of Thessaloniki: From the concentration camps to the court rooms," Eleni Haidia, "Greek Jews of Thessaloniki: From the concentration camps to the court rooms," Society for the Study of Greek Jewry, Rika Benveniste, ed., *The Jews of Greece during Occupation* (Greek) (Thessaloniki: Vaniak, 1998), pp. 43–53.

enlisting the support of politicians. The branding of the Jews as communists, during the period of the civil war, was also used as an additional inflammatory argument.

As a result of further hostility and uncertainty, many of the survivors decided to leave Thessaloniki and seek a better future somewhere else. Today, there is a well-organized Jewish community in the city, running schools, elderly homes, synagogues, summer camps and museums and playing an active role in economic, cultural and political life. There has also been a great shift from the attitudes of the past, with many prominent politicians, historians and intellectuals willing to openly discuss controversial issues that were hidden for far too long. Yet, with less than a thousand Jews living there now, and limited economic prospects for the youth during the current economic crisis, its long-term challenges remain.

Appendix I: Short biographies of key individuals

Athanassios Broikos

Born around 1900, Athanassios Broikos studied civil engineering in Switzerland and did his Ph.D. at the University of Thessaloniki. He continued his studies in Mussolini's Italy in 1939, a year before the Italian attack against Greece. He returned to Thessaloniki where, between 1940 and 1945, he served as a public works engineer with the General Governor of Macedonia. He was the main engineer responsible for the destruction of the old Jewish cemetery of Thessaloniki and eventually became in charge of managing the area and the materials found there. After the war, he became university professor in Athens and head of the land-owners' association of Greece. In this capacity, he participated in many international conferences, praising "the national job of the revolutionary government [the regime of the Colonels] for the political, social, administrative and economic consolidation of the country."¹

Athanassios Chrysochoou

Colonel Chrysochoou (1890-1967) was born in Ioannina. He enlisted in the army and fought in the Balkan wars of 1912-13 and the Greek-Turkish war of 1922. During the Greek-Italian War (1940-41), he served as Chief of Staff of General Georgios Tsolakoglou, Commander of the Third Army Corps and later the first Quisling Prime Minister in Athens. Since the autumn of 1941, Chrysochoou served as Inspector General of Prefectures, having as his main task to monitor and counter "Bulgarian propaganda," which was aimed at gaining the allegiance of the Slavic-Macedonian population of the region. From this position, he became very involved in the affairs of Thessaloniki and the wider region. The last month of the German occupation, he served as General Governor of Macedonia. After the withdrawal of the German army, he was arrested by the EAM authorities of Thessaloniki, was condemned to death and underwent a fake execution with blank shells. He wrote a five-volume work entitled *The Occupation in Macedonia*, published by the Society for Macedonian Studies.

¹ "Greek participation in international conference on real estate," (Greek), *Makedonia*, October 5, 1968, p. 3.

Archbishop Damaskinos

Archbishop Damaskinos (1891-1949) was born as Dimitrios Papandreou in a mountainous region of Nafpaktos. He studied law and theology and fought in the Balkan wars. In 1917, he became a priest and quickly rose in the hierarchy. In 1938, Damaskinos was elected Archbishop of Athens and the whole of Greece with one vote difference. Supporters of his opponent, backed by the Metaxas regime, challenged the result and the Court cancelled the election on procedural grounds. The regime appointed his opponent, Chrysanthos, as Archbishop, whereas Damaskinos was kept confined until the Greek-Italian war of 1940. Chrysanthos denied to confirm the collaborationist government, after the German invasion, was removed from his position and replaced by Damaskinos. During the period of the German occupation, Damaskinos took many initiatives in support of the civilian population, including the Jews, both in Athens and Thessaloniki. After the war, he continued his political involvement, being appointed as Vice-King.

Periklis Garofalou

Periklis Garofallou was the brother-in-law of Sotirios Gotzamanis, the high-profile finance minister of the collaborationist government in Athens at the time and together they had tried to establish a National-Socialist party in Thessaloniki at the beginning of 1943 but they failed.² Garofallou was the eldest member of Thessaloniki's city council and often substituted for the Mayor when he was away.

Metropolitan Gennadios

Bishop Gennadios (1868-1951) was born as Georgios Alexiadis in Prousa. He worked as a religious school director and secretary of the Patriarchate in Istanbul. In 1912, some months before the entry of the Greek army, he was appointed as Metropolitan of Thessaloniki. He

² See classified report of Greek Army Information Agency, "Catalogue of National Organizations in Greece," F. 916/B/2b, Athens, May 1943 in Greek Army General Staff, Army History Directorate, *Archives of National Resistance (1941–1944)* (Greek), Volume 7: Domestic Resistance Organizations (Athens: Army History Directorate Publications, 1998), p. 64.

became a leading figure of the Greek population of the city, and developed good relations with many important figures in Athens, as well as the Jewish community in Thessaloniki. During the period of the Nazi occupation, he became the de facto representative of the civilian population, as head of the National Council.

Sotirios Gotzamanis

Sotirios Gotzamanis (1884-1958) was born in Giannitsa, a town outside of Thessaloniki, in a Slavic-speaking family. After studying medicine in Italy, he moved to Thessaloniki where he was elected a parliamentarian several times and eventually became a government minister. During the first collaborationist government of Tsolakoglou, he was appointed Minister of Finance, a position he kept also during the next government of Logothetopoulos, eventually gathering even more responsibilities. He resigned at the end of March 1943 and moved to Italy and then to Germany. After the war, he was convicted to death as a collaborator but a few years later he was given amnesty and returned to Greece. In 1954, he ran for mayor of Thessaloniki unsuccessfully. In 1958, he passed away and the Society of Macedonian Studies paid the expenses of his funeral.³

Zvi Koretz

Rabbi Zvi Koretz (1894-1945) was born in Galicia. He concluded his Ph.D. studies in Vienna, writing his thesis on “The Description of Hell in the Quran and its Prototypes in Jewish Literature.” In 1933, he was appointed chief rabbi of Thessaloniki, in an effort to modernize the community. He quickly learned Greek and Judeo-Spanish and developed good relations with the King, Metaxas and other personalities of the country. Shortly after the Germans entered Greece, he was imprisoned and sent to Vienna. In February 1942, he was released and returned to Thessaloniki, only to be arrested again in June 1942, until August 1942. In December 1942, he became head of the Jewish Community and had to supervise the

³ For a positive biography, see Iakovos Michailidis, *Sotirios Gotzamanis: the man, the politician, the legend* (Greek) (Thessaloniki: Vantias, 2001). For a more critical one, Spyros Marchetos, “A Slav Macedonian Greek Fascist? Deciphering the Ethnicophrosyne of Sotirios Gotzamanis,” in Alexandra Ioannidou and Christian Voß, eds., *Spotlights on Russian and Balkan Slavic Cultural History* (Munich-Berlin: Sagner, 2009), pp. 67–96.

implementation of the antisemitic laws in the city. After his meeting with Greek Prime Minister Rallis in April 1943, he was imprisoned and eventually sent to Bergen Belsen with his family. He died a few weeks after liberation. Many of the survivors accuse him, until today, for collaboration and even treason.⁴

Alexandros Krallis

Alexandros Krallis (1884-1973) was born in Thessaloniki. His family had recently moved there from a northern region. He became a merchant in the pharmaceutical sector and since 1919 served in leadership positions in the Thessaloniki Chamber of Commerce and Industry.⁵ After the War, he was arrested by the Communist authorities of Thessaloniki on charges of profiteering and black market. He wrote the book *Why I Was Accused and Remained in "Detention" for 17 months*⁶ in an effort to prove his innocence.

Stiplon Kyriakidis

Stiplon Kyriakidis (1887-1964) was born in 1887 in Komotini and, in 1926, was named professor at the School of Philosophy of the newly established University of Thessaloniki, with specialization in the religion of ancient Greeks and folklore. He served as dean during 1934-35 and again during 1942-43. In 1942, he became the second president of the Society of Macedonian Studies, a position that he held till his death in 1964. During the period of the German occupation, Kyriakidis served in committees created under Colonel Athanassios Chrysochoou and was appointed as one of his advisors.

⁴ For a detailed study on this issue, see Minna Rozen, "Jews and Greeks Remember Their Past: The Political Career of Tzevi Koretz (1933–43)," *Jewish Social Studies*, 12, no. 1 (Fall 2005), pp. 111–166. See also Devin E. Naar, *Jewish Salonica: Between the Ottoman Empire and Modern Greece* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016), pp. 131–132.

⁵ Efrosini Roupa and Evangelhos Hekimoglou, "Interview of Henry Ford by Vassili Kralli," (Greek), *Thessalonikeon Polis*, 10 (April 2003), pp. 22–23.

⁶ Alexandros Krallis, *Why I Was Accused and Remained in "Detention" for 17 months* (Greek) (Thessaloniki, 1947).

Konstantinos Merkouriou

Konstantinos Merkouriou (1864-1951) was the first mayor during the period of the German occupation. He studied Greek literature and worked as a school teacher, and later as director of a private school. He was appointed mayor in 1937 by the Metaxas dictatorship, and the Germans kept him in that position until February 1943. He was founding member and first President of the Society for Macedonian Studies (June 1939-May 1942), an organization that brought together many influential personalities of the time.

Maximilian Merten

Max Merten (1911-1971) was a German attorney. He initially worked for the Justice ministry. In January 1942, he was called for military service and around the end of August 1942, he was transferred to Thessaloniki, where he took the portfolio of civil affairs. As such, he was the contact person for the local population and dealt with the issues affecting the civilians as well as the Jewish Community. With the arrival of the SS in February 1943, Merten facilitated their plans for the Holocaust of the Jews of Thessaloniki. In July 1943, he became General Governor of Macedonia, head of the Greek government structures, after the change of the region's status. In March 1944, he was transferred to different positions in Yugoslavia and was captured by the Americans after the war but later released. In 1957, during a trip to Greece, he was arrested and charged with war crimes. In 1959, he was tried and convicted to 25 years in jail, the only non-Jew to be tried in Greece, charged with the Holocaust. In November 1959, he was given amnesty and was extradited to Germany. He continued to generate headlines and political turmoil in Greece after he accused the then Greek Prime Minister, Konstantinos Karamanlis, of being a German collaboration, accusations that proved to be libelous.

Michael Molho

Rabbi Molho (1891-1964) was a Thessaloniki-born intellectual and rabbi. He worked as a journalist, teacher and was active in different organizations. He showed great interest and documented the ancient Jewish cemetery of Thessaloniki, which was destroyed during the

war.⁷ He survived in hiding in Greece. In 1950, he moved to Buenos Aires, Argentina where he died. He was the first editor of *In Memoriam*, the first publication that tried to document the terrible events of the Holocaust of the Jews of Greece.

Georgios Seremetis

Georgios Seremetis (1879-1950) succeeded Merkouriou as the second mayor of the period of the German Occupation, after the first became sick. Seremetis was until that point a prominent lawyer and President of the Lawyers Association of Thessaloniki.

Vassilios Simonidis

Vassilios Simonidis (Serres 1899 – Athens 1960) studied engineering and agronomics. He received a Ph.D. in Law from the University of Athens and went to Paris for further studies. He worked as a Division Director at the Ministry of Agriculture and as Director of the Autonomous Raisin Organization. In 1941, he was appointed senior economic advisor to the General Governor of Macedonia with the rank of vice-minister. In end of November 1941, with the insistence of the Germans, Simonidis was appointed General Governor, with the rank of Minister, a post he held until the end of the war. Technically he was answerable to the Greek Prime Minister in Athens, but due to the distance and the fact that Thessaloniki was under German control, his real bosses were the Germans. His ideological leanings are unclear and many crucial details about him are still missing.

Yomtov Yacoel

Yomtov Yacoel (1899-1944) was born in Trikala and studied law in Athens. In 1923, he moved to Thessaloniki and opened a law practice. He became active with community organization and served as the legal advisor of the Jewish Community for twenty years. During the German occupation, he became a leader of the Jewish community. In March 1943,

⁷ For more, see Devin E. Naar, *Jewish Salonica: Between the Ottoman Empire and Modern Greece* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016), pp. 225–235.

he escaped to Athens, where he started writing his memoirs. He was arrested in Athens, sent to Auschwitz where he was murdered in April 1944.⁸

⁸ Fragiski Abatzopoulou, "Introduction," in Yacoel, *Memoirs*, pp. 11–21.

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Αρχείο Δικηγορικού Συλλόγου
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Δίκη Μέρτεν

Δίκη Άιχμαν

VI. Εφημερίδες-Περιοδικά-Ειδησεογραφικά Πρακτορεία

Απογευματινή

Εβραϊκή Εστία

Εφημερίδα της Κυβερνήσεως

Ελευθερία (Μεταπολεμική)

Καθημερινή

Μακεδονία

Νέα Ευρώπη

Το Νέον Κράτος

Χρονικά

Jewish Telegraphic Agency