

UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM

THESSALONIKI
KASTORIA
CORFU
IOANNINA
VOLOS
ZAKYNTHOS
ATHENS

RHODES

The Holocaust in GREECE



The Holocaust in GREECE

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Athens	3
Corfu.....	5
Ioannina	7
Kastoria.....	9
Thessaloniki.....	11
Volos.....	13
Rhodes	15
Zakynthos	17
Bibliography	19



I INTRODUCTION



One of the first Greek officers to die in WWII, Mordechai Frezis, a Jew from Chalkis. Compliments of Kehila Kedosha Janina Synagogue and Museum, N.Y.

The indigenous Jewish communities of Greece represent the longest continuous Jewish presence in Europe. These communities, along with those who settled in Greece after their expulsion from Spain, were almost completely destroyed in the Holocaust.

In the **spring of 1941**, the Germans defeated the Greek army and occupied Greece until **October of 1944**. The country was divided into three zones of occupation: Bulgaria annexed Thrace and Yugoslav Macedonia; Germany occupied Greek Macedonia, including Thessaloniki, Piraeus, and western Crete; and Italy occupied the remainder of the mainland and the islands. Where Jews resided determined not only their subsequent fate, but also their ultimate possibility of escape.



Members of ELAS Greek Resistance Movement
Compliments of Dr. Michael Matsas

Greek resistance groups, both communist and non-communist (EAM), battled the Axis occupiers in an effort, not only to save Greece, but also to save the Jews living there. Between 8,000 and 10,000 Greek Jews survived the Holocaust due in large part to the unwillingness of Greek people, including leaders in the Greek Orthodox Church, to cooperate with German

plans for their deportation. In addition, the Italian occupying authorities refused to facilitate or permit deportations from the Italian zone of occupation until Italy surrendered in **September 1943**.

Even though deportations did not start until **March of 1943**, Greece lost at least 81 percent of its Jewish population during the Holocaust. Between 60,000 and 70,000 Greek Jews perished, most of them at Auschwitz-Birkenau. Only 5,000 Jews presently live in Greece, mostly in Athens and Thessaloniki.



Deportations in Thrace, March 1943
Jewish Museum of Greece



A

THENS

Jews have lived in Athens since the **3d century B.C.E.**, and the remains of an ancient synagogue can be found in the Agora, at the foot of the Acropolis. The Jewish community in Athens is Romaniote, who speak Greek and have assimilated into the city's culture over time.

In **1940** the community numbered 3,500 and was dispersed throughout the city. With the occupation of Greece in 1941, control of the city was given to the Italians, and the Jews enjoyed three years of relative security. As in other regions under Italian control, Jews fleeing persecution in Thessaloniki sought safe haven in Athens.



Angelos Evert
Jewish Museum of Greece

The head rabbi, Barzelai, had strong connections with the municipal government and the EAM. These connections and the support of the Archbishop of Athens, Damaskenos, contributed to the rescue of 66 percent of Athens' Jews. Athens police chief, Angelos Evert, issued false identification cards and **Archbishop Damaskenos** ordered the church to issue false baptismal certificates to



Rabbi Barzelai
Jewish Museum of Greece

those threatened with deportation. In Athens and the port city of Piraeus, Jews were hidden in Christian homes. Both Police Chief Evert and Archbishop Damaskenos are honored at Yad Vashem, along with the mayor of Piraeus.

On **March 25, 1944**, German officials rounded up 1,690 Jews in Athens (many of them refugees from Thessaloniki) for deportation to Auschwitz-Birkenau. After the war, Athens became the main center of resettlement for Jews returning to Greece, and the Jewish population increased to 4,940. Today Athens is still the center of Jewish life in Greece, with a total population of 3,000 Jews.



Order issued by General Stroop
Jewish Museum of Greece

ARCHBISHOP DAMASKENOS

In contrast to many Catholic and Protestant religious leaders in Europe, who either supported the Nazi policy of extermination of the Jews, or did nothing to stop it, Archbishop Damaskenos of Greece formally protested the deportation of the Jews.

After learning of the deportation of the Thessaloniki Jews in March 1943, Damaskenos sent a letter of protest to the Germans. This letter was composed by the famous Greek poet, Angelos Sikilianos, and was signed by many members of the Athens intelligentsia. Damaskenos included this passage from the Bible, "There is neither Greek nor Jew," emphasizing that, in the Greek Orthodox religion, all people are the same.

He described the long history of the Jews in Greece, and how as exemplary citizens, they presented no threat to Germany. He warned that one day the world would hold those responsible accountable for their actions.

When General Stroop, high SS and police leader for Greece, found out who was behind the letter, he



Archbishop
Damaskenos

threatened to shoot Damaskenos. The archbishop bravely reminded the German that, "According to the traditions of the Greek Orthodox Church, our prelates are hung and not shot. Please respect our traditions!"

Unfortunately, the Germans proceeded with the deportations. Damaskenos called Police Chief Evert of Athens to his office and said, "I have spoken to God and my conscience tells me what we must do. The church will issue false baptismal certificates to any Jew who asks for them and you will issue false identification cards." Due to the courageous stance of Archbishop Damaskenos, thousands of Greek Jews were spared.



CORFU

Corfu, a charming island in the Ionian Sea, had been a home of Jews for over 800 years. When the Venetians annexed the island in the **fourteenth century**, the Jewish community was enclosed in a ghetto. The Jewish population of the island was a mix of Romaniotes (Greek-speaking), Sephardic (Ladino-speaking), and Italian-speaking Jews from Apulia and Sicily. The relationship between Jews and Christians on the island had been soured by a notorious "Blood Libel" investigation, which was conducted in **1891**.

The story of the Holocaust in Corfu is especially unfortunate, not only because it occurred late in the war. The Germans took control of the island in **1943**, after the fall of Italy, and promulgated antisemitic laws. Corfu's Mayor Kollas was a known collaborator.

In early **June 1944**, as the Allies bombed the island to divert attention away from the Normandy landing, the Jews of Corfu were forced out of their homes and imprisoned in the Old Fort. On June 10, 1944, German



Proclamation signed by Mayor Kollas, the prefect, and the chief of police on June 9, 1944, proclaiming that the Jews of the island had been rounded up and that the economy of the island will rightfully revert to the Christian citizens.

Jewish Museum of Greece



Last chief rabbi of Corfu, Rabbi Iakov Nechama
Jewish Museum of Greece

SS and police with assistance from Wehrmacht units, deported the Corfu Jews. Two hundred of the 2,000 Corfu Jews found sanctuary with Christian families; but 1,800 were deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau.

At Birkenau in **July 1944**, 435 men who had arrived with that transport chose immediate death rather than joining the Special Detachment (Sonderkommando) that helped the Germans destroy their fellow Jews.



Mayor Kollas
Jewish Museum of Greece

Today, a small community of 80 Jews live on Corfu and they try to maintain a semblance of Jewish life.



IOANNINA

Evidence dates the presence of Jews in Ioannina back **to 70 C.E.** The Ioannina Jews formed a Romaniote community, composed of Greek Jews already settled in the city, before the influx of Sephardim in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Unlike other Jewish communities of the period, the Jews in Ioannina preserved their Romaniote culture and maintain that culture and special liturgy to this day.

Initially Ioannina was occupied by the Italians, and the Jews did not experience any discrimination until Italy surrendered in **September 1943.**

After the Germans took over, Jewish leaders adopted a wait-and-see policy, hopeful that the Germans would leave them alone as well. The Germans told members of the communities that what had happened in Thessaloniki would not happen in Ioannina, because the Ioannina Jews, as Greek speakers, were not akin to the Ladino-speaking Jews of Thessaloniki.

In **March 1944**, however, the president of the Jewish community in Ioannina, Dr. Moses Koffinas, was arrested. While detained, he learned of German plans to deport Jews, and smuggled a note out to Sabetai Kabelis, a prominent member of the Jewish Community Board, advising the Jews to flee. Unfortunately, Kabelis chose not to relay the warning to the Jews of Ioannina, and on **March 25, 1944**, the entire Jewish community of 1,860 people, including Kabelis himself, was deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau. Kabelis realized too late his error in judgment.



Deportations, March 25, 1944
Kehila Kedosha Janina Synagogue and Museum



Holocaust Memorial
Marcia Haddad Ikononopoulos

Today only 35 Jews live in Ioannina; they are the only remnants of a once thriving Romaniote Jewish community.



Torahs
Marcia Haddad Ikononopoulos



KASTORIA

Kastoria is located in the mountains between Thessaloniki and Ioannina, on an ancient trade route. The city became famous for manufacturing fur and leather items, an occupation in which many of Kastoria's Jews were employed. Kastoria was a Sephardic community, although there is evidence that a Jewish community existed there before the **fifteenth century**.

Like Thessaloniki, the city was part of the Ottoman Empire until the Balkan Wars in the early **twentieth century**, when it was liberated by Greece.



Jewish family before deportations
Jewish Museum of Greece



Dedication of Holocaust Memorial, 1996
Jewish Museum of Greece

There were 900 Jews in Kastoria in **1940**. On **March 25, 1944**, 763 Jews were rounded up for deportation, first to Thessaloniki and then to Auschwitz-Birkenau. Prior to their deportation, they were enclosed in an abandoned school for days, with no food or water, and the young girls were raped by German soldiers. Thirty-five Jews survived the Holocaust in Kastoria, and only one Jewish family remains after 500 years of a Jewish presence in the city. Recently a Holocaust memorial was erected in Kastoria to acknowledge the loss of the city's Jews.



T THESSALONIKI

For centuries Thessaloniki, honored with the title "La Madre de Israel," was the most populous city of Sephardic Jewry in the world.

In the **summer of 1942**, the persecution of the Jews of Thessaloniki started. All men between the ages of 18 and 45 were conscripted for forced labor, during which they were forced to stand for hours in the hot, summer sun, and were beaten and humiliated. The Jewish community was depleted of its wealth and pride, and Jews were ordered to wear the "Yellow Star." Moreover, all Jews were forced to move into an enclosed ghetto adjacent to the rail lines, called Baron Hirsch.



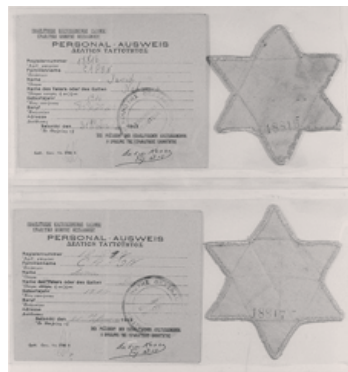
Persecutions, summer 1942
Jewish Museum of Greece

On **March 15, 1943**, the Germans began deporting the Jews from Thessaloniki. Every three days, freight cars crammed with an average of 2,000 Thessaloniki Jews headed toward Auschwitz-Birkenau.

By the **summer of 1943**, German authorities had deported 46,091 Jews.

Several factors contributed to the loss of such a large number of Jews from Thessaloniki. Thessaloniki was under direct German occupation. The Jewish community was highly concentrated in the city. Jews had no idea that they were going to killing centers; they believed the German subterfuge that they were going to work in Poland. Moreover, the controversial head rabbi, Koretz, reportedly assisted the Germans in organizing efficient roundups. Because the Jews of Thessaloniki spoke Ladino, their spoken Greek was easily distinguishable. While the possibility of escape existed, most Jews, fearing separation from their families, did not take advantage of the available escape options.

Thessaloniki lost 94 percent of its Jews in the Holocaust. Only 1,200 live there now, a mere shadow of the once glorious "La Madre de Israel."



Identification cards and "Yellow Star" issued by Germans and signed by Rabbi Koretz
Jewish Museum of Greece

The Joy of Jaco

David Saltiel

ORIENTE Musik

Come on Jaco to weddings and
berish
Don't look faint
You've got costumers at hand
As a taverna musician
I never stop singing
I stick to them like a flea
To reach their pockets

Come on Jaco to weddings and
berish
Don't look faint
You've got costumers at hand
As a taverna musician
I never stop singing
I rock like a ship
Jaco is my name

Come on Jaco to weddings and
berish
Don't look faint
You've got costumers at hand
As a taverna musician
I'm quite smart
I get what I want from he drink's
I sing for him as he deserves

Producer: Nikos Tzannis-Ginnerup

Orchestra

Vocals: David Saltiel

Ud: Markos Skoullos

Qanun: Giorgos Mavromatis

Violin: Giorgos Psaltis

Frame drum: Lefteris Pavlou

Lira: Nikos Tzannis-Ginnerup

Translations of lyrics from Ladino to Greek and
English: Nikos Tzannis-Ginnerup
Musical supervision/arrangements: Giorgos
Mavromatis, Markos Skoullos, Nikos Tzannis-
Ginnerup

Sound engineer: Giorgos Xanthis

Recording and digital processing: Agrotikon
studio, November 1996–May 1997



V VOLOS

Volos, an important port city on the Aegean Sea, south of Thessaloniki, has known a Jewish presence since the **fourteenth century**. There is evidence that Jews have existed in the surrounding areas since ancient times.

In **1940** there were 882 Jews living in Volos. With the occupation of Greece, Volos was placed in the Italian zone of occupation, and the Jews of the city lived in relative safety until the Germans took over in September of **1943**.

While the Italians were in power, Jews fleeing Nazi persecution in Thessaloniki sought sanctuary in Volos.

The resistance movement was very active in Volos. Head Rabbi Pessah worked with Archbishop Ioakim and the EAM to find sanctuary for the city's Jews in the mountainous villages of Pelion.



Rabbi Pessah

Compliments of Raphael Frezis, President of the Jewish Community of Volos

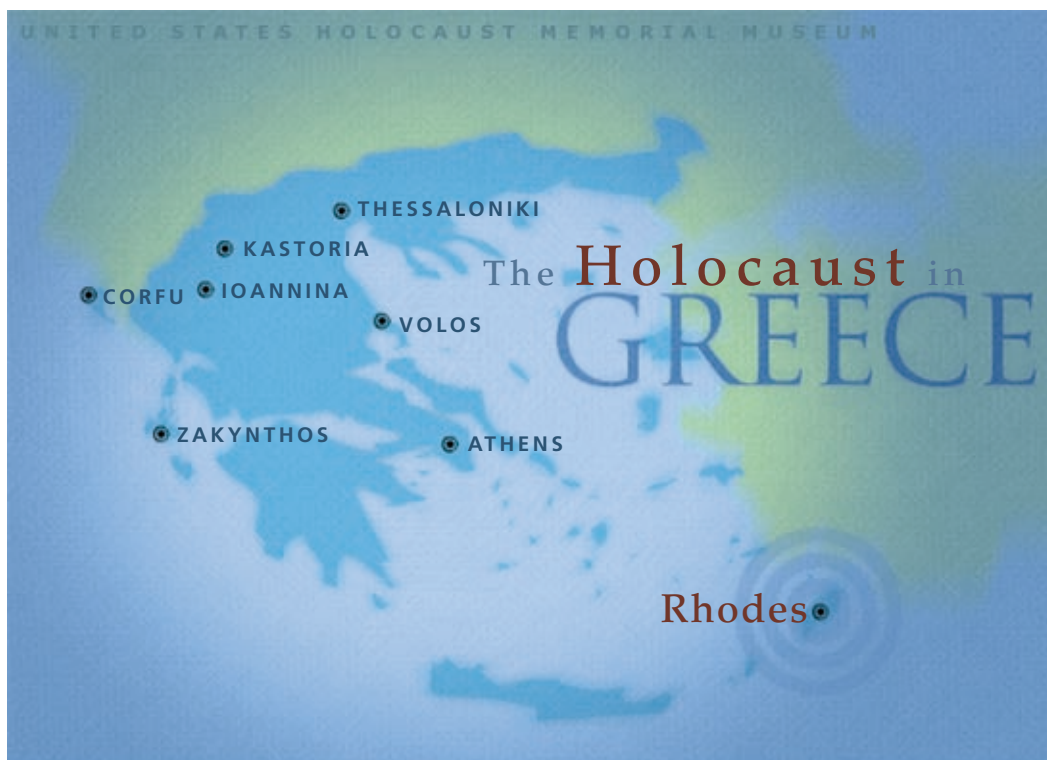


Bishop Ioakim

Compliments of Raphael Frezis, President of the Jewish Community of Volos

The Germans chose **March 25, 1944**, Greek Independence Day, to deport the Jews of Volos, and any Jews remaining on the Greek mainland. Due to the valiant efforts of Rabbi Pessah, Archbishop Ioakim (honored at Yad Vashem as "Righteous Among Nations"), and the EAM, 74 percent of Volos' Jews were saved. Of more than 1,000 Jews living in the city in **March 1944**, only 130 were deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau.

Devastating earthquakes in **1955–57** forced many of the remaining Jews to leave Volos, and most immigrated to the United States and Israel. Only 100 Jews remain in the city today.



RHODES

For 2,300 years, Jews have lived on the beautiful island of Rhodes at the southern tip of the Aegean Sea. The community became Sephardic in the **sixteenth century**, and was among the most renowned Sephardic communities in the world. The synagogue in Rhodes, Kahal Shalom, was built in 1575 and is the oldest functioning synagogue in Greece.

Rhodes was part of Italy during World War II, having been ceded to the Italians after World War I. As with other areas under Italian occupation, the Jews of Rhodes remained relatively safe until the Germans occupied the island in **September 1943**.



Kahal Shalom Synagogue, built 1575
Compliments of the Jewish Community of Rhodes

In 1944 there were close to 2,000 Jews living on the island, 50 of whom, as Turkish citizens, fell under the protection of the Turkish Consulate. The rest were deported on **July 20, 1944**.

The timing of the deportation is especially painful, since less than three months later, the Germans were forced to leave Greece. Deportations from Rhodes were the last conducted by the Germans in Greece.

On **July 20, 1944**, the Jews of Rhodes and the neighboring island of Kos, were sent by boat to the Greek mainland. Crammed into boats in the hot summer sun, without food and water, 23 Jews died on the voyage to the mainland. After landing on the mainland, they were incarcerated in

the SS-operated transit camp Haidary, from whence they were deported by train to Auschwitz-Birkenau. Only 151 Jews from Rhodes survived the Holocaust.

Today there are only 35 Jews living in Rhodes. Kahal Shalom still stands in the "Juderia," a testimony to the thriving community that once lived there.



Yehuda Levy family, 1928.
Yehuda and his wife, Miriam Notrica,
died at Auschwitz- Birkenau, August 1944.
Compliments of Stella Levy and Aron Hasson, Rhodes



Yodef Levy and Dona
Habif, April 1944. Both
died at Auschwitz-
Birkenau.

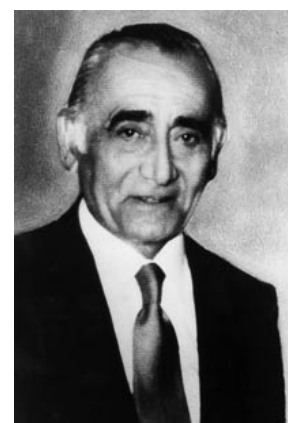
Aron Hasson, Rhodes
Historical Society



ZAKYNTHOS

The Jews of Zakynthos share a similar history with the Jews of the Ionian islands, except that all 275 Jews of Zakynthos survived the Holocaust. The courageous actions of Bishop Chrysostomos and Mayor Loukas Carrer in helping those individuals led Yad Vashem to include them in the "Righteous Among the Nations."

In **1944** Mayor Carrer was ordered at gunpoint to hand over a list of Jews residing on the island. The list was presented to the Germans by Bishop Chrysostomos containing only two names: Mayor Carrer and Bishop Chrysostomos. The bishop bravely told the Germans, "Here are your Jews. If you choose to deport the Jews of Zakynthos, you must also take me and I will share their fate."



Mayor Carrer
Jewish Museum of Greece



Mordos family preceding World War II

Kehila Kedosha Janina Synagogue and Museum

In the interim, all the Jews of the island were safely hidden in the mountainous villages. While the whole island knew what was happening, not one person revealed their whereabouts.

There is evidence that Chrysostomos actually communicated with Hitler himself, to beg for the lives of the Jews on the island. Unfortunately, a devastating earthquake in

1953 destroyed all

archives on the island,

making proof of the correspondence impossible. Historians do know that a boat was never sent to deport the Jews of Zakynthos and that all 275 of the island's Jews survived the Holocaust.

The first boat to arrive with aid to the victims of the **1953** earthquake was from Israel, with a message that read, "The Jews of Zakynthos have never forgotten their Mayor or their beloved Bishop and what they did for us."



Bishop Chrysostomos

Jewish Museum of Greece

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Marcia Haddad Ikonopoulou

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of occupation
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