

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

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

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

<sup>8</sup> Discussions by the author with Asher Moisses in Athens in 1972.

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

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

<sup>11</sup> See now my *Jewish Resistance in Wartime Greece* for details.

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

<sup>13</sup> His story is outlined in my *Jewish Resistance in Wartime Greece*.

## Book Review/Essay

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

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

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

The election of the first socialist government in 1980

(PASOK) removed most of the taboos covering the period of the occupation but the majority of these accounts and professional histories of this difficult period then concentrated on the politics of the resistance and on the civil war in 1943, 1944 and 1946-1949. To some extent this is understandable because the political dynamics of the resistance had remained taboo far too long and the left-right schism that haunted Greek society had to be exorcised.

Consequently, the military accounts of the Greek resistance, organized and non-organized, have been consigned to the dustbin of history, including the role in the resistance of Greece's Jewish communities. The omission was not the result of anti-Semitism but fear of dredging out the divisive past. Another important factor was that post-Junta governments feared that highlighting the accomplishments of Greek Jews would have alienated the votes of the Arab and Muslim states in the UN resolutions in favor of Cyprus.

In this respect, Steve Bowman's *The Jewish Resistance in Wartime Greece* is both a much-needed military history of the Greek resistance as well as a penetrating account of the role of Greek Jews in wartime Greece. Bowman's motivation as he states is "...to dispel the myth that Greek Jews did not fight." His greater concern is that "...the victimization of the Jews in the war (Second World War) has tended to supercede in historical memory the participation of the Jews in the armed conflict."

Within this context Bowman tackles the negative notions that some Holocaust commentators have put forward on Greek Jews and their Greek compatriots. One is the fabrication that the Greeks assisted the Nazis in the roundup and ultimate extermination of the Greek Jews. This is usually coupled with the equal falsehood that the Jews of Greece did not fight. Bowman's monograph dispels these myths, clearly demonstrating that the Greek Jews fought with grim determination and that their fellow Greeks were more than glad to

fight with them. Greeks such as the Archbishop of Athens, Damaskinos, and the head of the Athens police, Angelos Evert, as well as ordinary people risked their lives to save their Jewish neighbors as well as total strangers.

Bowman to his credit addresses the thorny issue of the reaction of Thessaloniki's population to the deportation of the Greek Jews by explaining that "the poor mass of Salonica's citizens whose constituents had witnessed or experienced death face to face through hunger, rape, and sword, let alone having been the brunt of continuous persecution throughout the preceding generation, looked upon the removal of the Jews as perhaps just another element in the misery of the world."

Historians have an obligation not only to reconstruct the past as accurately as possible but also to place it in context. The tensions between Jews and non-Jews in Thessaloniki (excluding the Muslims) revolved around two issues: economic rivalry and the linkage of the Jews with the Ottoman occupation. Often forgotten in the rush to point fingers at the Greeks of Thessaloniki is the degree to which the Jews were treated favorably by the same Ottoman authorities that oppressed and frequently brutalized the city's Greek Orthodox population. This latter issue had a lingering effect on Thessaloniki's Greeks even after the city was liberated from the Ottomans in 1912.

Another forgotten part of the tragedy of Thessaloniki's Jewish community is the disastrous role of Zvi Koretz, the city's Chief Rabbi. When the Germans occupied Thessaloniki, they informed Koretz that the Greek Jews would be re-settled in Germany and nothing worse would happen to them as long as the community collaborated with the occupation forces. Koretz chose to believe the Nazis and he along with the Jewish leadership convinced many young Greek Jews to return from the mountains (where many had gone to join the resistance) and others to stay put with their families. As

a result, ninety percent of Thessaloniki's Jews died in the Nazi death camps. Rabbis in other cities, with the exception of Ioannina, prudently did not believe the Nazis and with the help of the resistance, the Orthodox Church, the Greek police and the non-Jewish population in general managed to save most of their communities.

Bowman's comprehensive history not only incorporates the Holocaust of Greece's Jews and accounts of their participation in resistance but also of their role in fighting with the Greek armed forces against the armies of Mussolini and Hitler. A unique example is his description of the corps of Jewish doctors, who saved thousands of men in the Greek army by refusing to amputate frostbitten limbs, as was common practice by their non-Jewish colleagues. Approximately 13,000 Greek Jews fought in the Italian and German campaigns and afterwards many of these soldiers joined the resistance.

With the onset of occupation many Greek Jews left the army and almost immediately took up arms with the resistance. Bowman writes that some of them followed Dimitris Dimitriou, (a.k.a. "Nikiphoros") to the mountains. As was the case of many resistance fighters, Dimitriou began his career as an officer in the army in which he had served under Colonel Frizis on the Albanian front. The fact that Frizis was Jewish and held the rank of colonel in the Greek army and commanded a fighting unit on the Albanian front speaks volumes of the martial ardor of Greek Jews and of the status of Jews in Greek society. Frizis was killed leading his men in a successful counterattack against the Italians on the Albanian front.

After the collapse of Greece many soldiers such as Dimitriou chose to continue fighting and joined the ranks of ELAS (The National Liberation Front). According to Bowman, many Greek Jews also joined ELAS because of their association with Dimitriou. Jewish recruits in ELAS

were intermingled with non-Jews thus avoiding the creation of a segregated guerrilla army. ELAS furthermore made it a crime for anyone to turn Jews over to the Nazis as well as making it an offense not to provide assistance to Jews.

Bowman, however, takes us beyond the story of the guerrilla bands and into the lethal struggle of the resistance in the cities where opposition to the Axis took the form of sabotage and espionage. It is remarkable how Greek Jews overcame the natural instinct for survival and served their country by spying on the Germans and Italians, while the Nazis were hunting for Jews in every neighborhood and house across all of Greece's cities and towns. Equally remarkable is the account of the resistance of Greek Jews in Hitler's death camps, where under almost unbelievable conditions Greek Jews took part in an attack on the Nazi guards and for a brief moment stopped the industrial-scale murder at Auschwitz.

Suffice it to say Bowman's work is backed by solid documentation that also acknowledges the major contribution to the subject by Joseph Matsas in "The Participation of the Greek Jews in the National Resistance," which appeared in the *Journal of the Hellenic Diaspora* (1991). Consequently, Bowman has done great service to the specialist and non-specialist by bringing to light heroic aspects of a tragic chapter in the history of Greece, the Greek resistance and the Greek Jews.