

The Holocaust in Greece: Genocide and its Aftermath

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The Holocaust experience in Greece has occupied a peripheral role within academic scholarship, often overshadowed by the more frequently documented narratives of Central-Eastern Europe. On 21 November 2014, the city of Thessaloniki played host to a workshop entitled, 'The Holocaust in Greece: Genocide and its Aftermath', a collaborative venture between the Journal of Genocide Research and the International Hellenic University. The choice of location was fitting given the city's large pre-war Jewish community that was decimated by the Holocaust. This one-day symposium provided a platform for scholars from many countries to share their research and evoke further discussion on Greece's involvement during this period and the range of themes that emerge from such histories.

The sessions began with the keynote lecture, delivered by MARK LEVENE (Southampton), chaired by Cathie Carmichael (East Anglia). Levene's provocatively titled paper, '„The Bulgarians Were the Worst!": Situating the Holocaust in Salonica in a Broader Context', re-examined established notions on the Axis occupation of Greece by suggesting that Nazi predominance throughout the Balkans was 'not the ultimate cause for understanding the longer-term problems of Greek-Jewish and other communal relationships in Salonica and its hinterlands'. Central to Levene's discussion was a questioning of the degree to which 'everything in the Balkans and Eastern Europe during the Second World War can be blamed on the Nazis, in favour of an analysis of independent state population policies and the degree to which those piggy-backed on the German opportunity'. Drawing on recent wartime studies of Romania and Croatia, which have furthered the premise of a 'culturally homogenising ethno-national frame of reference' towards

minorities, Levene proposed a comparative examination of Bulgarian and other nationalist programmes during the occupation against ethno-national communities.

The traditional framing of Bulgaria's somewhat 'heroic' experience during the war, as a protector of Jewry, was examined in light of the known violent massacre of Macedonian Greeks in the city of Drama in late 1941. Such narratives were contrasted with the atrocities committed by Greeks towards Bulgarians a generation earlier during the Balkan Wars of 1912-13. 'What is clear', Levene concluded, is that all communities were treated by the Bulgarian state according to the same 'one dimensional, ethno-national formula as by the Greek state'. Thus, the German occupation merely afforded the Bulgarians a pretext or incentive to implement an already established and active mind-set towards nationalising minorities. Following this stimulating address, the paper drew to a close on a somewhat optimistic note, which suggested that perhaps an evaluation of historical instances of positive intercommunal relations in the Balkans, where minorities resided separately but alongside one another, could help harness an ethnically inclusive future. The subsequent discussion raised insightful questions, which included topics ranging from problems with 'biased' national historiographies to the question of future research on the histories of minorities in the region.

The opening of the first panel by LEON SALTIEL (Macedonia), addressed the topic of 'Local decision making' and bureaucracy with reference to the implementation of Nazi antisemitic policies in the case of Thessaloniki. Saltiel's analysis was focused on a number of distinct events, namely the Nazi desecration of the Jewish cemetery of Salonica, the re-naming of Jewish street names, the dismissal of Jews from institutions such as the chamber of commerce and municipality of Thessaloniki, and the expropriation of Jewish property. Saltiel's final case study concerned the plight of a group of Athenian lawyers who attempted to save hundreds of Jewish children, by hurriedly approving adoptions to Christian families on the eve of deportations. The question of whether local governmental officials could have to some extent, acted as

a 'protective shield' against the Nazi occupation's antisemitic agenda, was central to the analysis of each of these events. For Saltiel, the case of Thessalonica reveals tragic instances of indifference and Greek-German complicity within the upper echelons of the civil administration towards the deportation to Europe's death camps of Salonican Jewry. As Saltiel aptly concluded, 'Athens did more to save the Jews of Thessaloniki than their native city'; ultimately the Jews were met with 'neglect and worse hostility by the authorities, the same people who should have protected them'.

Continuing the subject of the wartime experience of Salonican Jewry, STRATOS DORDANAS' (Macedonia) paper on the dissolution of the Baron Hirsch Ghetto reflected instances of economically incentivised German-Greek collaboration to the detriment of Thessalonian Jews. Due to its close proximity to the local train station, the Baron Hirsch Ghetto worked as a transit centre for Jews out of Thessaloniki to Nazi concentration camps. Dordanas' analysis of the role played by Greeks in facilitating the destruction of previous Salonican Jewish settlements and selling of their possessions, revealed that respective individuals were later acknowledged as 'caretakers' of Jewish properties whilst being heralded after the war as 'good Greek patriots'. Furthermore, the conclusion by state officials that economic cooperation with the Germans was the 'smallest offence' committed by Greeks during the war, Dordanas argued, reflects the often indifferent post-war attitude towards the fate of Salonican Jewry, even after the Holocaust.

The panel's final paper was delivered by PHILLIP CARABOTT (Athens/London) and MARIA VASSILIKOU (Berlin). '„One for all but not all for one?": Greek Jewish Leftist voices in the open 1945-46,' presented a content analysis of various Jewish publications as a means of challenging the established notion of 'Greek-Jewish harmony' in post-war Greece, particularly in Salonica. This evaluation of public discourse centred mainly on the 'Israelite Tribune', a Salonican-Jewish newspaper. Such publications reflected ardently leftist, anti-governmental sentiments that called for Greek Jewry to take a forceful

stand against reported discriminatory practices, which included the failure of the state to aid Jews in the reacquisition of their pre-war property and incidents of antisemitic violence. The question of Zionism was also evaluated, with Vassilikou highlighting leftist criticism towards emigration to Palestine and the role of relief agencies, namely the American Joint Distribution Committee (AJDC) for financially assisting such ventures. An examination of public discourse thus highlighted the divisive tensions between left-wing 'resistance fighters' and the 'old guard of Zionists' within post-war Greek-Jewish political circles. An animated discussion at the close of the first panel highlighted the pressing need for further academic research on Greece's Holocaust experience, particularly regarding the growth in antisemitism and presence of far-right nationalism within Greece's current political system. Furthermore, debates concerning the 'profiling' of Greek Nazi collaborators underlined the limitations within current historiographical arguments and scope for future studies to be undertaken.

KATEŘINA KRÁLOVÁ's (Prague) paper on the post-war experiences of Holocaust survivors in Greece opened proceedings for the second session. Using a range of archival sources, most notably oral history testimonies, Králová unpicked these often complex narratives of Holocaust survivors in order to address issues surrounding the context of post-war Greece. As Králová noted, previous scholarship had generally relied on these accounts as sources of reference for the interwar and wartime period. Focusing on recordings from the Visual History Archive of the USC Shoah Foundation, Králová's analysis centred on four key subjects: memories of the axis regime, reconstruction, migration both to and from Greece, and the involvement of Greek-Jewish post-war identities. Králová concluded that an evaluation of oral testimonies is invaluable for constructing a typology of Greek Holocaust survivors, whilst highlighting how individuals' experiences were translated within the wider context of Greek Jewry and their desire for normalcy at the end of the war. Her paper provoked insightful questions, with many focusing on issues of methodology and memory.

The effects of interviewer bias and variances within testimonies over time were of particular interest.

The case of international post-war relief initiatives to Salonican Jews was evaluated within the panel's second paper. DEVIN NAAR's (Washington) poignantly entitled paper, "'You are Your Brother's Keeper': Rebuilding the Jewish Community of Salonica", analysed philanthropic efforts from both global Jewish relief agencies such as the AJDC, to community-led endeavours by Salonican Jewry in the US. The aid afforded by Salonican Jews abroad to their coreligionists in Greece, Naar argued, played a pivotal role in the rehabilitation of the Salonican Jewish community. From the provision of dowries to clothing and prayer books, the raising of funds to assist the destitute Jews of Salonica reflected a sense of a collective diasporic affiliation amongst Salonican Jewry, globally. Furthermore, such initiatives formed part of an established tradition that had emerged in the early twentieth century. The efforts of Salonican Jews abroad towards their native community encapsulates the multifaceted nature of post-war relief, which transcended the scope of global humanitarian organisations such as the United Nations Relief Rehabilitation Administration and included the minor, lesser documented efforts of international diasporas.

MARIA KAVALA's (Thessaloniki) evaluation of the 'social reconstruction of the Jewish community of Thessaloniki' focused on the institution of marriage as a point of analysis for the development of Salonican Jewry and their reintegration into the social structure of post-war Greece. Centring on marriage, Kavala argued, enables us to assess the emergence of both social and economic trends throughout this period. Kavala's exploration of the demographic variations between individuals, from occupation to gender, highlighted the differences in post-war experiences and their abilities to recover both their economic and social standing in Thessaloniki. Furthermore, Kavala stressed the importance of undertaking comparative analyses with the interwar period to ensure the presence of Salonican Jewry is documented within narratives of Greek social history.

The third and final session commenced with RONY ALFANDRY's (Ramat Gan, Israel) analysis of a collection of personal letters exchanged between a Jewish family living in Thessaloniki during the war and their relatives in Palestine. Alfandry's exploration of these letters highlighted how personal documentation can be utilised to further our understanding of the history of Salonican Jewry and as a record of their demise. The correspondence between members of the Cohen family, which chronicle their lives before the war until their eventual deportation, reveal a fascinating example of familial history set within the backdrop of wartime Greece. As Alfandry noted, the narrative of the Cohen family reveals both a personal testimony of their history but also speaks to wider themes of Holocaust memory and preservation.

The utilisation of oral history testimonies was once again explored with RENA MOLHO's (Athens) paper on eyewitness accounts of the deportation of Greek Jewry and the subsequent looting of their property throughout Greece. Based on a vast catalogue of interviews personally conducted by Molho, the role played by Greek citizens and the variance in their experiences and attitudes towards the elimination of Greek Jewry was examined. She suggested that while instances of Greek citizens helping their Jewish counterparts did exist, such cases were rare. Furthermore, the prominence of antisemitic stereotypes and reluctance of certain interviewees to name Greek collaborators who participated in the looting of property highlighted the diverse perceptions of non-Jewish Greeks towards this catastrophic episode in their history. As Molho stressed, such sentiments demonstrate the need for education and the case of Greek Jewry to be appropriately examined within Greek national history.

The panel's final paper by EVANGELIA MATTHOPOULOU (Nicosia) widened the geographical scope of discussion by examining the case of Jewish migrants in colonial Cyprus. Focusing on public opinion in the years from 1933 to 1949, she analysed the discourse between left and right-wing political factions in relation to the presence of Jewish migrants on the island. An increase

in Jewish refugees during the interwar period and subsequent detention of visa-less immigrants attempting to enter Palestine in British-run internment camps in Cyprus from 1946 to 1949, helped foster antisemitism particularly amongst the right. The perceived threat of a Jewish influx on economic and social trends in Cyprus was often voiced within the press. However, the assistance afforded by the left-wing party AKEL to help internees escape from detention camps clandestinely, largely as a result of a collective anti-British ideology, stressed the divisive nature of Cypriot politics during this period. As Matthopoulou concluded, despite the presence of anti-Jewish propaganda within the press and forms of public protest, a sense of 'peaceful co-existence between settled Jewish immigrants and the local Cypriot population' was evident.

The conference's closing remarks focused on 'The Future of Holocaust Research in Greece'. The question of where Greece's Holocaust experience can be placed historically provoked a lively debate, with scholars arguing for the need of Greece's integration within current histories rather than as a unique and distinct example. Throughout the day, reference was made to the recent unveiling of a memorial to commemorate the wartime desecration of the Jewish cemetery of Thessaloniki. Furthermore, in light of present right-wing nationalism of the Greek political party *Golden Dawn*, the subject of memorialisation and education on the history of Greek Jewry is particularly timely. Although the establishment of commemoration sites and convening of international scholars positively marks the progress of research, it is clear that the subject of Greece's Holocaust experience is still emerging, especially in the English language. It is thus hoped that scholarship on this largely overlooked period will continue to develop.

Conference Overview:

Mark Levene

„The Bulgarians Were the Worst!": Situating the Holocaust in Salonika in a Broader Context

Leon Saltiel

Local-Decision Making and the Holocaust:

The Case of Thessaloniki

Stratos Dordanas

Eliminating the Last Traces: Auctioning Off the Baron Hirsch Ghetto

Philip Carabott and Maria Vassilikou

„One For All But Not All For One?": Greek Jewish Leftist Voices in the Open, 1945-1946

Kateřina Králová

How was it to be a Holocaust Survivor in Greece? Memories of the Post-War Period 1944-1953

Devin E. Naar

„You Are Your Brother's Keeper": Rebuilding the Jewish Community of Salonica from Afar, 1944-1948

Maria Kavala

The Postwar Demographic and Social Reconstruction of the Jewish Community of Thessaloniki: Marriages (1945-1955)

Rony Alfandary

Proposition: Letters from Thessaloniki—Past, Present and Future

Rena Molho

Eye Witness Accounts on the Deportation of Greek Jews and the Looting of their Property in Chania, Jannina, and Thessaloniki

Evangelia Matthopoulou

Cyprus as a „Clearing“ Area for Jewish Migrants and the Public Opinion, 1933-1949

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