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Our Prelates are Hanged, not Shot

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Abstract

The title of this work *"Our Prelates are Hanged, not shot"* references the sarcastic statement given by Archbishop Damaskinos of Athens and All Greece in response to being threatened with execution by firing squad from the occupying Nazi Germans. As it relates to Holocaust resistance in Greece during World War II, Damaskinos' response is not only emblematic of the Greek Orthodox Church's largely supportive policy in protecting the country's Jews, but also the willingness of the Orthodox Christian population to assist in carrying out said policy. The research behind the paper is broken down into three major sections. The first involves analyzing the complex origins and histories of Greece's various Jewish communities, and how having different histories and geographies impacted the degree to which the Holocaust was felt in each community. The second involves the political legacy of Greek Prime Minister Ioannis Metaxas and how larger Greek political contexts intersected with Greek-Jewish contexts. Third and most significantly, this research investigates the Orthodox Christian element of the Greek Holocaust resistance, analyzing the significance of both public and private acts of resistance against the Holocaust, both from clergy and lay Greeks. Through uniting perspectives from past historians, accounts from key historical actors, statistics and visual sources, the hope is to give a more complete picture of how this fascinating and understudied chapter of Holocaust resistance is brought forward and remembered.

Keywords: Greco-Italian War, Greece, Greek Orthodox Church, Holocaust resistance, Jewish history, Orthodox Christianity, World War II

"According to the traditions of the Greek Orthodox Church, our prelates are hanged, not shot. Please respect our traditions."[1] This sarcastic statement was given by Archbishop Damaskinos of Athens and All Greece in response to being threatened with execution by firing squad from the occupying Nazi Germans. His statement alluded to the historic hanging of another church hierarch, Patriarch Gregory V of Constantinople during the struggle for Greek independence in 1821. Though certainly a noteworthy moment in Greek resistance against Axis occupation during World War II, Damaskinos' response is emblematic of countless acts of Greek Holocaust Resistance. I was motivated to investigate this chapter of Greek history due to my own family's involvement in these historical events, which I will reference later.

Sadly, Greek contributions to resistance efforts against Axis control, their successes, and national tragedies are not widely known outside of Greece, overshadowed by the more widely known and documented efforts in Western Europe. Moreover, the tragic murder of most of Greece's Jewish population during the Holocaust largely erased many centuries of rich history as Europe's oldest Jewish community. Following the war, many survivors would move to the newly established country of Israel, making their legacy even more difficult to access. Due to all of these factors, widespread knowledge and scholarship on this history remains limited. As such, this research project focuses mainly on the resistance efforts during the war surrounding the various communities of Greek Jews across the country. Furthermore, it connects the various resistance efforts undertaken by Orthodox Christian Greeks, since it is impossible to separate Greek resistance - even as it pertains to the Holocaust - from the vast majority of Greeks. I accomplish this through tying together prominent acts of public resistance, individual efforts from ordinary Greek citizens, and allowing personal accounts both from Greek Jewish survivors and Orthodox Christian historical witnesses to speak for themselves.

Historiography

Scholarship in this era of Greek history generally inhabits a few broad areas of focus. The first major category primarily addresses the military history of the war more broadly as well as the influence it had on the subsequent Greek Civil War. Historians like Richard Clogg understand the Greek legacy of World War II as one of emerging, intensifying political power struggles between factions of Greek resistance, each of which held opposing ideologies to one another. His work *Greece 1940-1949: Occupation, Resistance, Civil War* intentionally emphasizes the very political nature of the conflict, including a contents list of dozens of abbreviations and acronyms in order to properly distinguish the ever-changing, complex entities that were involved in resistance against the Germans. In regard to the Greek Jewish community, Clogg associates the Greek Communist Party (KKE) as the group that advocated most strongly for the protection of Greece's Jewish community, appealing to the ideologies of Marxism by using atrocities committed (many against Jews) under German occupation as evidence of the evils of fascism. While other republican and royalist groups also participated in aiding the Jewish population, Clogg identifies fear of communism spreading as the main factor in many Greeks joining the resistance. Clogg even argues that while some collaborators shared

[1] Archbishop Damaskinos of Athens and All Greece, response to execution threat, 1943, in "The Holocaust in Greece." United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, www.ushmm.org/m/pdfs/20130305-holocaust-in-greece.pdf.

the racist, antisemitic views of the Nazis, most collaboration was "overwhelmingly motivated" by the perceived threat of communism.[2]

The second area of scholarship around Greece during World War II deals mostly with the legacy of the Greek dictator Ioannis Metaxas and his famous "no" to the Italian fascist leader Benito Mussolini. The legacy of this action by Metaxas remains an important aspect not only in Greek history, but in Greek culture today. October 28th, 1940 - the day Metaxas rejected the Italian ultimatum - is celebrated annually, the largest non-religious national holiday to this day. Scholars affiliated with organizations like The Washington Oxi Day Foundation and The Metaxas Project emphasize the effect that Metaxas' "no" had on turning the tide of World War II overall. In conjunction with The Washington Oxi Day Foundation, historian Alexander Kitroeff argues that Metaxas' "no" and the subsequent successful Greek resistance against the Italians had major consequences in terms of the outcome of the war. The Greek victory against the Italians forced Hitler to split his army to secure Axis control of the Balkans, slowing down and weakening his offensive east, giving the Soviet Union the crucial time needed to repel the German advance.[3]

The third area of scholarship analyzes the Jewish community of Greece as a group operating in a more isolated, independent way from the political and cultural forces around them. Historians in this line of scholarship also tend to highlight instances of collaboration, especially as it relates to long-standing tensions between Greece's Christian and Jewish populations. For example, scholar Devin Naar uses the old Jewish cemetery in Thessaloniki as an example to show how the long-held desire of Greek leadership to transform the city into a more Greek and Christian one led them to take advantage of occupying Germany's antisemitic inclinations to achieve their aims (the cemetery was ultimately destroyed during German occupation in order to expand the University of Thessaloniki).[4] In highlighting this example, Naar crafts a persuasive claim that mostly local non-Jewish responses determined the fates of their Jewish communities, though I would argue this claim largely overlooks several layers of nuance that are also critical for understanding these events.

[2] Clogg, Richard. Greece 1940-1949; Occupation, Resistance, Civil War: A Documentary History. New York, NY: Palgrave, 2002.

[3] "The Story of Oxi Day." YouTube, uploaded by The Washington Oxi Day Foundation, 27, October, 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KztWUNKCkio

[4] Naar, Devin, director. Greek Jewry and the Holocaust. YouTube, Museum of Jewish Heritage, 9 Nov. 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hkwWUtx_t_4.

Figure 1: "The Jewish cemetery after its destruction in December 1942," From: "Escaping the War Horror: 'Tourist' Photographs of Thessaloniki under the German Occupation (1941-1944)." *Visual History*, 7 June 2022, https://visual-history.de/en/2022/06/07/katsaridou-motsianos-escaping-the-war-horror/.

This paper primarily investigates the Orthodox Christian element of the Greek Holocaust resistance, unpacking the significance of both public and private acts of resistance against the Holocaust by Orthodox Christian Greeks. A large portion of my research works to connect Greece's expansive Jewish history with the unique status the Orthodox Church has both socially and politically within Greek society. Through including voices from several individuals of the period and scholars who have investigated these events since, I hope that a more complete picture of this fascinating and understudied chapter of Holocaust resistance is brought forward and remembered. Understanding the successes and failures in protecting Greek Jews is directly related not only to official church policy (which was overwhelmingly sympathetic to the plight of the Jews), but also the willingness of local Orthodox Christian populations to assist said policy.

The Greek Jewish Story

In order to understand the circumstances of the Greek-Jewish population during the Holocaust, it is important for one to understand their history and the geography of Greece's Jews at the start of the war. Greece's Jewish population can be divided into two major groups, each group having their own distinct culture, history, and practices. The Romaniote Jews are the descendants of Greece's earliest Jewish communities, who trace their history in Greece back over 2000 years. As a result, Romaniote communities only spoke Greek and were more thoroughly integrated into the rest of the Greek population. By contrast, Greece's Sephardic communities had a relatively more modern history in Greece. Sephardic Jews trace their roots back to the Iberian peninsula. Following the Reconqista and the Spanish Inquisition in the 1400s, the majority of Jews were expelled. The Ottoman Turks, who at the time were occupying Greece, allowed the displaced Sephardic Jews to settle throughout present-day Greece. So many Sephardic Jews would settle in Thessaloniki, that the city would become the center of

Sephardic Judaism not just in Greece, but in the world. At the height of Jewish prosperity in the city, it became known among Sephardic Jews as "La madre de Israel" or Mother of Israel. In addition to the Romaniote and Sephardic communities, there was also a small, but wealthy community of Central European Ashkenazi Jews in Athens, who had come to Greece as merchants and professionals following the establishment of the Kingdom of Greece to serve the new king, Otto of Bavaria. These Athenian Ashkenazi Jews were active and well-integrated into both Athenian Jewish and wider Greek society.[5]

At the start of World War II, Greece's second-largest city, Thessaloniki, was home to roughly 50,000 of Greece's 80,000 Jews, accounting for approximately one-fourth of the city's total residents. As the center of the Sephardic Jewish population and Greece's largest Jewish community by far, Thessaloniki's Jews endured unique challenges both before and during the war. The first major challenge that befell the community following the city's incorporation into the Kingdom of Greece in 1912 was the Great Fire of Thessaloniki in 1917. Greek Jewish historian and Holocaust survivor from Thessaloniki Joseph Nehama recorded that "over half the structures destroyed belonged to Jews. Almost every school, 32 synagogues, some 50 small houses of prayer, every cultural center."[6] Most of the Jewish population found themselves temporarily homeless, and even as reconstruction began, many Greek Jews were left in dire poverty.

The next challenge to follow came with the 1923 population exchange between Greece and Turkey, in which hundreds of thousands of Orthodox Christian Greeks from Anatolia settled in the city. This greatly altered the demographic makeup in the city, and the Jews for the first time in centuries, became a minority in Thessaloniki. One of the consequences of this demographic shift was the introduction of compulsory Sunday closing laws in 1924.[7] This marked a break from over four centuries of the city's observance of the Jewish Sabbath (Saturday) as the day of rest. For Jewish businesses, this mandate presented massive religious and economic challenges for those still wishing to observe the Sabbath. For the Jewish community as a whole, the Sunday closing law was symbolic of the already declining Jewish control of city administration.

The political rise of the newly established fascist party in Thessaloniki in the late 1920s, Ethniki Enosis Ellados (EEE, National Union of Greece) following the population exchange and the Sunday closing laws culminated with the 1931 Campbell (or Kambel) Riots. A group of university students organized by the EEE, motivated in large part by existing tensions between the Orthodox Christian majority and large Jewish minority, targeted and burned several homes in predominantly Jewish neighborhoods. Though the EEE never gained widespread significance and was censured by the Greek Parliament for its involvement in the riots, several historians view this development with special symbolic significance. The Campbell Riot marks the first time in the history of Thessaloniki that the Jewish population was the victim of a pogrom, which historians such as Devin Naar argues "shatters the image of Salonica as a unique Jewish safe

[5] Steven Bowman, *The Agony of Greek Jews, 1940-1945*. Stanford University Press, 2009.
[6] Steven Bowman, "Jews in Wartime Greece." *Jewish Social Studies* 48, no. 1 (1986): 45–62. http://www.jstor.org/stable/4467317.
[7] In short, the law mandated most businesses close on Sunday in accordance with the Orthodox Christian calendar.

haven."[8] By some estimates, nearly 30,000 Jews migrated from the city in search of greater prosperity. Taking into context Thessaloniki's interwar Jewish history and its absorption into the Greek state, the extent to which Thessaloniki's Jewish community declined as a result of these challenges, on the surface, seems obvious. However, historians such as Naar view the interwar period as a time of increased participation of Jews both within their own community establishments and within wider Greek society. Naar even views many of the previously mentioned challenges as instances in which Greek Jews took to modernizing existing institutions and establishing new ones.[9]

The Jewish community in Thessaloniki historically and still by the start of World War II lived much more segregated from the neighboring Greek Orthodox Christian population than the other Greek Jewish communities. Beyond the religious differences, many Thessaloniki Jews (especially the older generations) primarily spoke Ladino (a language closely related to Spanish). Many Jewish businesses primarily conducted their work in Ladino.[10] Jewish survivor Moise Eskaloni recalls that his mother didn't know much Greek and never socialized with Christians, "only a 'good morning' or 'good day' when passing each other on the road. [The Greek Jewish community of Thessaloniki] was extremely closed off."[11] However, the primary language of communication varied greatly between families. Another Jewish survivor from Thessaloniki, Yvette Leon, states that the language she spoke with her family at home was Greek, and while her parents knew Ladino, she and her siblings learned Ladino only through speaking to other Jews in the community.[12] This linguistic variation within the Jewish community illustrates the trend towards "Hellenization" which had been occuring in Thessaloniki since the city's incorporation in 1912. Both through further interaction and integration with neighboring Greek speaking communities and through an increased number of Jewish children attending Greek public schools and universities, fluency and literacy in Greek among Thessaloniki's Jews, especially among the younger generations, was quickly rising and gradually replacing Ladino.[13]

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[8] Naar, Devin. "Beyond the 'Valley of Tears': Reassessing the Narrative of Decline in Salonican Jewish Historiography." *ÉTUDES BALKANIQUES*, May 6, 2019. https://www.academia.edu/39026625/BEYOND_THE_VALLEY_OF_TEARS_REASSESSING_THE_NARRATIVE_OF_DECLINE_IN_SALONICAN_JEWISH_HISTORIOGRAPHY.

[9] Ibid.

[10] See image, *Business Postcard*. *Jewish Museum of Greece Research Center*. Judaica Europeana, 2017. https://artifacts.jewishmuseum.gr/artifacts/postcard-2/.

[11] Eskaloni, Moise. Interview 28007. Interview by Rena Molho. Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation, February 22, 1997. Accessed February 15, 2023. https://vha.usc.edu/testimony/28007

[12] Leon, Yvette. Interview 43188. Interview by Marilyn Pizante. Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation, April 14, 1998. Accessed June 11, 2023. https://vha.usc.edu/testimony/43188

[13] Naar, Devin E. "The Boundaries of Hellenism: Language and Loyalty among Salonican Jewry, 1917-1933." *Thessaloniki*, 2020. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429201561-12.

Figure 2: "Postcard of the factory for alcoholic beverages of Moissi Castro & Co., in Greek, French, and Ladino." Source: https://artifacts.jewishmuseum.gr/artifacts/postcard-2/.

Metaxas and the "Megalo Oxi"

Three in the morning, October 28, 1940: A representative from Italy arrived at Prime Minister Metaxas' residence with an ultimatum from fascist dictator Benito Mussolini.[14] In this ultimatum, Greece was to peacefully surrender to the Axis powers, granting them safe passage through Greece- in effect, becoming an Axis puppet state. The Prime Minister replied with one single word – "Oxi" – "No."[15] Within hours of his refusal, the Italians had mobilized their army in Albania, which they had invaded the year prior.

Metaxas had been watching the course of the war in Europe and had been weary of taking measures that would drag Greece into the conflict. The odds of holding off the Italian army did not seem favorable for the Greeks. Since the start of World War II, there had been no victories for the Allies. Nations such as Denmark and Czechoslovakia surrendered to the Nazis without a fight. Even Poland and France, countries far larger in land area, population, and military capability fell to Axis powers in 30 days and 43 days respectively.[16] The United Kingdom was taking heavy damage from the Blitz. And the United States still remained on the sidelines, trapped in its isolationist bubble. To add to Greece's disadvantages, it had been economically weak and politically unstable since the end of World War I. The Metaxas regime's suppression of parliamentary democracy and communist elements politically resembled Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy in many ways. Metaxas himself had been educated in Germany. Nevertheless, when the time came, Metaxas demonstrated his fierce resolve to protect Greek self-determination at all costs.

One of Metaxas' first actions following the Italian invasion was to swiftly utilize the control he held over Greek media. In one of several messages broadcast all over Greek radio shortly after the rejection of the ultimatum, Metaxas rallied the Greek people, appealing to Greek nationalism and patriotism:

[14] See Appendix I, 1937, The Archaeological Society at Athens. "Ioannis Metaxas." *The Digital Library of Modern Greek Studies*, University of Crete Library, 2013, anemi.lib.uoc.gr/metadata/a/f/9/metadata-01-0000380.tkl.
[15] "The Story Of OXI Day." *The Washington OXI Day Foundation*, 10 May 2018, oxidayfoundation.org/the-story-of-oxi-day/.
[16] Kokkinidis, Tasos. "The Statistics of Pride: Greek Resistance to Axis Forces Longest in Europe." *GreekReporter.com*, 25 Jan. 2021, greece.greekreporter.com/2019/10/28/the-statistics-of-pride-greek-resistance-to-axis-forces-longest-in-europe/.

> Greeks, the time has come for Greece to fight for her independence. Greeks, we now must prove worthy of our ancestors and the freedom they gave us. Fight for the Fatherland, for your wives, for your children and for the sacred traditions. Now, above all, fight![17]

The response to this call garnered overwhelmingly positive support from the Greek public. Hundreds of thousands of volunteers, men and women all over Greece, headed to army recruitment offices to enlist. Thousands more took to the streets chanting anti-Italian slogans. One Greek soldier named Argiris Balatsos wrote of his experiences on the front lines in Epirus, illustrating the universal support and united effort of all the Greek people in the fight against Axis control:

> I met women who were carrying ammunition. One was 88 years old. Another one told me she had locked the kid in the shed so that she could come to help the army. During the night, I saw an old woman taking care of the two kids, while their mother was baking bread for the Army under the candle light. The snow, the ice, the dreadful cold did not seem to bother them. They all wanted to help the army where the supply trucks couldn't reach.[18]

This level of Greek unity was unprecedented. Few events in modern Greek history up to that point had promoted such an overwhelming national response. Under Metaxas' leadership, Greece not only successfully repelled the Italians on the Albanian Front, but occupied the southern regions of Albania in a subsequent counteroffensive.[19] These developments gained major attention worldwide, as it was the first Allied victory against Axis forces in World War II, shattering the myth of Axis invincibility. For Greeks, the victory served as a much-needed boost to their national morale. It also, at least temporarily, realized Greek territorial aspirations that had existed well before World War II for controlling the ethnically Greek regions of southern Albania (Northern Epirus).

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[17] Iaonnis Metaxas, *Broadcast over Greek Radio* Markessinis, Andreas. *Metaxas Project*, 13 Apr. 2009, metaxas-project.com/greco-italian-war/.

[18] From Argiris Balastos War Diary, found in *History, World. Biggest Blunders of WWII. United Kingdom: SAGA Egmont, 2020*

[19] See Map, *An Abridged History of the Greek-Italian and Greek-German War 1940-1941: Land Operations*. Hellenic Army General Staff, Army History Directorate, 1997.

Figure 3: The Greek counter-offensive during the Greco-Italian War. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Greek_Offensive_1940_41_in_Northern_Epirus.svg.

The relationship between Metaxas and the Greek Jewish population can be characterized as complicated and frequently contradictory. Following his ascent to power in 1936, Metaxas officially banned anti-Jewish demonstrations and outlawed antisemitic political movements such as the aforementioned Ethniki Enosis Ellados (National Union of Greece). However, Metaxas also forbade the appointment of new Jewish officers in the Greek armed forces and suspended Jewish-French newspapers. Despite continuing to allow publication in Ladino, daily circulation in that language also rapidly declined throughout the 1930s, falling from 25,000 to 6,000 and severely hurting the economy of Jewish newspapers.[20] Metaxas would retract the ban on Jewish-French publications following the Italian invasion.

Politically, the Jewish population was divided in their support of Metaxas. From Greece's modern inception, the Jewish population had traditionally largely sided with monarchists, and as such viewed the pro-Monarchist Metaxas favorably. In contrast, the Greek communist party that was heavily suppressed by Metaxas had garnered large support, especially among the youth in northern Greek Jewish populations.[21] Following Metaxas' death in 1941 and throughout the war, communist-backed movements such as EAM would be among the most heavily involved and most outspoken groups against Jewish persecution by the Axis. Nevertheless, even many Greek Jews with communist leanings eagerly responded to Metaxas' efforts to rally a national defense. This can be seen in the numbers of Jews who enlisted in 1940 to fight on the Albanian front. Of the roughly 80,000 Jews living in Greece, there were nearly 13,000 Greek Jewish men enlisted, including 343 Jewish officers, some of which would go on to receive formal recognition and special awards for their heroism and service by the Greek

[20] Steven Bowman, "Jews in Wartime Greece." Jewish Social Studies 48, no. 1 (1986): 45–62. http://www.jstor.org/stable/4467317.
[21] Communist sympathy discussed in several survivor accounts, including Moise Eskaloni.

government.[22] Following the German invasion, many of these same Greek Jews would join numerous resistance groups including the National Liberation Front (EAM) and the Greek People's Liberation Army (ELAS). Jewish resistance fighters would also largely be spared deportation to Nazi and Bulgarian concentration camps, a fate that many of their fellow Greek Jews sadly would ultimately meet before the war was over.

Damaskinos and the Greek Orthodox Church

With the internationally recognized Greek government forced into exile in Cairo, the Greek Orthodox Church became the most powerful pre-war institution that still held significant authority in Greece. At its spiritual head was Greek Orthodox Archbishop Damaskinos of Athens and All Greece.[23] In contrast to many Catholic and Protestant religious leaders in Europe who either supported the Nazis or did nothing to prevent the extermination of Jews, Damaskinos used his moral authority as the leader of the Greek Orthodox Church of Greece to passionately communicate to his Orthodox faithful their spiritual duty to protect their Jewish neighbors. Archbishop Damaskinos sent a public letter to the German-backed puppet Prime Minister Konstantinos Logothetopoulos formally protesting the deportation of the Greek-Jewish population. The letter was co-signed by nineteen distinguished Greeks representing voices in academia, art, law, and business. According to the International Raoul Wallenberg Foundation, this document is unique, as no similar document directly challenging Nazi holocaust policy has come to light in any other European country.[24] Archbishop Damaskinos clearly states the church's position in the following excerpt:

> The Greek Orthodox Church and the Academic World of Greek People Protest against the Persecution... The Greek people were... deeply grieved to learn that the German Occupation Authorities have already started to put into effect a program of gradual deportation of the Greek Jewish community…
> In our national consciousness, all the children of Mother Greece are an inseparable unity: they are equal members of the national body irrespective of religion... Our holy religion does not recognize superior or inferior qualities based on race or religion, as it is stated: 'There is neither Jew nor Greek'[25] and thus condemns any attempt to discriminate or create racial or religious differences. Our common fate both in days of glory and in periods of national misfortune forged inseparable bonds between all Greek citizens, without exemption, irrespective of race…[26]

[22] Steven Bowman, "Jews in Wartime Greece." Jewish Social Studies 48, no. 1 (1986): 45–62. http://www.jstor.org/stable/4467317.
[23] See Appendix I, "Archbishop Damaskinos." *The International Raoul Wallenberg Foundation*, www.raoulwallenberg.net/es/generales/archbishop-damaskinos/.
[24] Burns, Margie. "Archbishop Damaskinos." *The International Raoul Wallenberg Foundation*, www.raoulwallenberg.net/es/generales/archbishop-damaskinos/.
[25] Nelson, Thomas. Orthodox Study Bible, Galatians 3:28
[26] Archbishop of Athens and Greece, Damaskinos. "Protest by Archbishop Damaskinos and Greek Intellectuals against the Persecution of Greek Jewry." *Shoah Resource Center, The International School for Holocaust Studies*, www.yadvashem.org/odot_pdf/Microsoft%20Word%20-%205114.pdf.

The passage "There is neither Jew nor Greek" which Archbishop Damaskinos quotes comes from Galatians in the Bible. Beyond the ethical argument the Archbishop made, quoting this passage would have been viewed as significant for reasons beyond morals. The writer of Galatians, St. Paul the Apostle, is one of the most revered saints in the Orthodox Church. However, for Greeks, St. Paul holds a special significance, being one of the earliest preachers of Christianity, addressing populations all over present-day Greece and formerly Greek-speaking regions. His writings such as Galatians which Damaskinos quotes from, as well as Thessalonians and Corinthians, addressed to Greeks in the cities of Thessaloniki and Corinth respectively. Additionally, prior to St. Paul's conversion to Christianity, he was himself a Jew. These references would have not been missed—especially among more religious or well-educated segments of both the Greek Orthodox population and the occupation government. Indeed, Damaskinos was not the first one to invoke St. Paul's legacy. Prior to World War II, both Sephardic and Romaniote leaders in Thessaloniki cite St. Paul's writings in which he references his visit to Thessaloniki's synagogue in the first century to counter the claim made by Greek nationalists (and future collaborators) in the city that Jews were foreigners in Greece.[27] Damaskinos continued:

> Today we are... deeply concerned with the fate of 60,000 of our fellow citizens who are Jews... we have lived together in both slavery and freedom, and we have come to appreciate their feelings, their brotherly attitude, their economic activity, and most important, their indefectible patriotism...[28]

Here, Damaskinos makes an appeal to the long-shared history between Orthodox Christian and Jewish populations and their ultimately shared Greek cultural identity. He is certainly implying many moments from recent Greek history such as the war of independence from the Ottoman Turks in 1821 and the numerous wars in which Jews had participated in the early 20th century. Damaskinos was also certainly aware of the Greek Jewish contribution in resistance efforts, as from the first days of the war, thousands of Greek Jews had enlisted to fight the Italians on the Albanian front. His Eminence also maintained regular correspondence with several underground resistance groups such as EAM and ELAS, who as mentioned earlier were documented having Greek Jews in their ranks.

The Greek Orthodox Church was often the last line of defense, serving as the primary facilitator of national Greek Holocaust resistance, its long-established structure serving as a critical communication network that would ultimately prove vital and would have been difficult, if not impossible to replicate by other means. This was especially the case in a handful of instances where individual Greeks collaborated with the Axis or worked in prominent positions within occupation governments. Additionally, although public support for the Greek Jewish population was high overall throughout Greece despite propaganda and intimidation from wartime authorities, in situations which support among the general population was lackluster at best and openly hostile at worst, the Greek Orthodox Church remained consistent in support of Jews.

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[27] Devin E. Naar. "The 'Mother of Israel' or the 'Sephardi Metropolis'? Sephardim, Ashkenazim, and Romaniotes in Salonica." *Jewish Social Studies* 22, no. 1 (2016): 81–129. https://doi.org/10.2979/jewisocistud.22.1.03.

[28] Archbishop of Athens and Greece, Damaskinos. "Protest by Archbishop Damaskinos and Greek Intellectuals against the Persecution of Greek Jewry." *Shoah Resource Center, The International School for Holocaust Studies*, www.yadvashem.org/odot_pdf/Microsoft%20Word%20-%205114.pdf.

Victory and Destruction

It cannot be understated that direct support and assistance by the Greek Orthodox Church from its highest offices to laypersons all over the country was critically responsible for saving the lives of thousands of Greek Jews who would have otherwise almost certainly been deported and murdered in the Holocaust. Despite their best efforts, in the face of German occupation—which only intensified following the Italian withdrawal from Greek territory in 1943—the Greek Orthodox Church often found itself powerless to prevent much of the destruction, especially in regions with large and well-documented populations of Greek Jews. Though success in protecting Greek Jews drastically varied by the city and region, by the end of World War II, over 80% of Greece's prewar Jewish population would be dead, or about 60,000 casualties.

Conditions Greek Jews faced greatly differed on which zone of occupation they found themselves living under. Greek Jews living in German and Bulgarian occupation zones fared much worse than those living under Italian occupation. Most of the Greek mainland and smaller islands fell under Italian occupation (though all this land would eventually come under German occupation following the Italian withdrawal in by the end of 1943). Most of Macedonia and Crete were occupied by the Germans (including Thessaloniki), and Bulgaria took control of eastern Macedonia and most of Thrace, lands which Bulgarian irridentalists had long desired to control. The capital Athens fell under joint Italian and German occupation.[29]

Figure 4: Figure Occupation of Greece (1941) Source: See Map, "Occupation of Greece 1941 Map." United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Accessed 2023. https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/map/occupation-of-greece-1941.

[29] "Occupation of Greece 1941 Map." United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Accessed 2023. https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/map/occupation-of-greece-1941.

Often, regions in which there was more widespread suppression of the Greek Orthodox Church's activities also saw the less successful Holocaust resistance movements. The Greek Orthodox Church was especially powerless in Bulgaria. Upon occupying Eastern Macedonia and Thrace, Bulgaria expelled all Greek priests and hierarchs from their territory. Bulgarian-speaking clerics were sent in their place, and a crackdown on the use of the Greek language in liturgical services was instituted in the hope that these policies "would force the Greek population to flee in order to change the ethnographic makeup in their favor."[30] The Bulgarian state was highly motivated by its historic and religious claims to the region, in contrast to German and Italian interests, which were largely resource and economic driven.

By 1942, nearly all lines of communications to Greeks in Eastern Macedonia and Thrace were severed. The extermination of Jews was swift, following a pattern of "evictions, midnight roundups, deportation, and finally, confiscation and liquidation of property."[31] Bulgaria deported nearly the entire Jewish population under its control to the Treblinka concentration camp, including roughly 4,200 Greek Macedonian and Thracian Jews, almost all of whom would not survive the war.[32] It should be noted that while the Bulgarian state, eager to please the Germans, often executed Holocaust policy even more thoroughly and swiftly than the Germans, there was opposition from the Bulgarian Orthodox Church to the deportations.[33] However, far less action was taken by Bulgarian clerics challenging Jewish deportations when compared to what was done by the Greek Orthodox Church. The Bulgarian Patriarchate was also fully in support of their government's efforts to "Bulgarify" occupied Greek territory, seeing as it stood to gain significantly from the spiritual vacuum left by exiled Greek Orthodox clergy.

Thessaloniki

One of the most well-known and catastrophic examples involves the fate of the Greek-Jewish population in Thessaloniki. Of all of Greece's Jewish populations, Thessaloniki's Jews were subject to the greatest surveillance. Beginning in 1942, all Jewish men between the ages of 18 and 45 were conscripted by the Germans into forced labor and every Jew required to wear the yellow Star of David. In the same month the Holy Synod of Greece approved Archbishop Damaskinos' actions and condemnations against the rounding up and deportation of Jews in Thessaloniki in early 1943, nearly all the city's Jews, who had been living confined in the ghetto Baron Hirsch established by the Germans adjacent to Thessaloniki rail yards, were deported. Of the over 50,000 Jews living in Thessaloniki prior to the war, around 95% would perish following their deportation to concentration camps in Poland.[34]

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[30] Anastasakis, Panteleymon. The Church of Greece Under Axis Occupation. New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2015, 162

[31] Plaut, Joshua Eli. *Greek Jewry in the twentieth century, 1913-1983: Patterns of Jewish Survival in the Greek Provinces before and after the Holocaust*. Madison, New Jersey: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2000.

[32] Washington D.C., United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. *United States Holocaust Memorial Museum*, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2021, encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/greece.

[33] Aizenberg, Isidoro. "Lost Voices: Greek Jews and the Holocaust." Queensborough Community College, March 25, 2012. https://khc.qcc.cuny.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Lost-Voices-Greek-Jews_UA.pdf.

[34] Saltiel, Leon. "Resistance or Collaboration: The Greek Christian Elites of Thessaloniki Facing the Holocaust (1941-1943)." Essay. In *Local Dimensions of the Second World War in Southeastern Europe*, 196–213. London: Routledge, 2020.

The most significant factors for the widespread destruction of the Jewish community in Thessaloniki were their linguistic differences, community isolation, and significant economic self-sufficiency. Though these had become characteristics that had defined Thessaloniki's Sephardic Jewish community for centuries, it also made it much more difficult for their communities to evade detection by Nazi authorities. By contrast, Romaniote populations in Thessaloniki and throughout Greece lived in much smaller communities that spoke Greek and were culturally and socially integrated into the Greek Orthodox Christian population. As a result, it was significantly easier for their populations to go unnoticed. The separation between Christian and Jewish Greeks in Thessaloniki was also the cause of greater historical tension that compelled fewer Christians in Thessaloniki to take action. Historian Panteleymon Anastasakis argues that "while many Greek Christians [in Thessaloniki] felt saddened by the deportation of their Jewish neighbors, they did not feel compelled to risk their lives to save them in the period prior to and during the deportations in the spring and early summer of 1943. In contrast, in places such as Athens, Volos, and Zakynthos, the Greek Christian community led by local political, civilian, and religious leadership, actively undermined the German policy of deportation to help their Jewish neighbors evade the Nazi authorities."[35]

The official position of the Greek Orthodox Church was markedly different from the general apathy of the Greek Orthodox faithful in Thessaloniki toward the fate of the Jewish population. Despite definite tension and even instances in which the Greek Orthodox Church unintentionally benefited from the Jewish decline, Metropolitan Gennadios of Thessaloniki, much like the vast majority of Greek clergy, actively opposed the Holocaust measures. Following the imprisonment of Thessaloniki's Chief Rabbi Zvi Koretz, Metropolitan Gennadios issued letters in support of the rabbi, petitioning for his immediate release. Additionally, he issued statements condemning Jewish persecution and the establishment of the Jewish ghetto of Baron Hirsch. Though the metropolitan's actions have been criticized for not going far in following the footsteps of Archbishop Damaskinos, there is a strong case to be made for Metropolitan Gennadios' unique—and more importantly, genuine—messaging against antisemitism. Prior to the war in 1931, the height of antisemitic demonstrations in Thessaloniki, "he asked priests to declare from their pulpits the peaceful coexistence with the city's Jews, thus censuring the attacks on Jewish neighborhoods as a barbarous and unchristian act."[36] Much like Archbishop Damaskinos and several others, Metropolitan Gennadios would later be awarded the title Righteous Among the Nations by Yad Vashem after his death.[37]

Another factor that contributed to the demise of Thessaloniki's Jewish communities was the weak leadership from Jewish leaders. In the initial stages of German occupation of the city, Jewish leaders like Rabbi Koretz were often very complacent to Nazi demands in the hopes that cooperation would spare their communities from the occupiers. When race laws against the Jews were first implemented in mid-1942, Koretz and other Jewish leaders made arrangements with German authorities, paying billions of drachmas in exchange for Greek Jewish men in forced labor. Rabbi Koretz submitted the names of all Jews willingly, not knowing that this

[35] Anastasakis, Panteleymon. The Church of Greece Under Axis Occupation. New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2015, 171

[36] "Good Shepherds- Metropolitan of Thessaloniki." Jewish Museum of Greece, April 23, 2020. https://www.jewishmuseum.gr/en/metropolitan-of-thessaloniki/.

[37] World Holocaust Remembrance Center, located in Jerusalem.

action essentially committed the entire community to death. According to scholar Minna Rozen, Koretz would be "branded a traitor and Nazi collaborator…blamed for too readily acquiescing to the Germans' demand that he provide a detailed list of the Jewish population in the city, thereby enabling them to pursue their plans more efficiently."[38] More contemporary historians such as Maya Gonzalez argue that several Jewish leaders such as Koretz were weaponized, granted positions of power within Jewish communities by the Nazis "to shift the guilt of their crimes onto their Jewish victims."[39] Both of these perspectives paint a more nuanced portrayal of Koretz's role in the demise of Thessaloniki's Jewish community. The hostile and unusual circumstances would have made decision making difficult for any leader in Koretz's position. Regardless of Koretz's motivation or rationale, it is difficult not to be critical of his actions, especially when considering the fact that few Jewish leaders throughout Greece under similar threats of occupation capitulated so quickly and willingly to German demands.

Though the extent of which Rabbi Koretz collaborated with the Germans is still up for scholarly debate, this post-war debate largely overshadowed the actions of a man named Vitali Hasson, who is arguably among the most important Nazi collaborators, "a traitor and a war criminal."[40] Being a Thessaloniki Jew himself, Hasson's intimate knowledge of the social, economic, and cultural life of the city's Jewish population proved to be an invaluable asset in the Nazi's Final Solution. Bouena Sarfatty, a Holocaust survivor who knew Hasson, described him as being "like a lion let out of a cage." According to survivor testimony, Hasson stole from imprisoned Jews, raped and tortured Jewish women, and identified many young Jewish men to be sent to forced labor. Perhaps not surprisingly, following the war, "Hasson was the only Jew in all of Europe to be tried and executed by a state, Greece, for collaborating with the Nazi occupiers."[41]

Athens

The result of resistance efforts against the Holocaust both from clergy and lay action were much more successful in Athens than in Thessaloniki. Part of this success can be attributed to the fact that for the first three years of the war, Athens was under Italian occupation... Nevertheless, the withdrawal of Italian forces toward the end of 1943 and full control of the city falling to Nazi Germany posed a large threat to the Athenian Jewish population, who until that point had been able to go about their daily lives as normal. The aforementioned Archbishop Damaskinos played a central role in facilitating the Athenian Holocaust resistance effort. Following the letter he drafted to Prime Minister Logothetopoulos, Damaskinos ordered the churches under his jurisdiction to distribute Christian baptismal

[38] Rozen, Minna. "Jews and Greeks Remember Their Past: The Political Career of Tzevi Koretz (1933-43)." *Jewish Social Studies* 12, no. 1 (2005): 111–66. http://www.jstor.org/stable/4467725.
[39] Gonzalez, Maya C. "The Nazi Weaponization of Jewish Victims: Jewish Complicity and 'Privilege' during the Nazi Occupation of Greek Salonica." The Crimson Historical Review, 2021. https://crimsonhistorical.ua.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Jewish_Salonica_Final.pdf.
[40] Nehamas, Alexander. "The Lost Voices of Salonica." Jewish Review of Books, 2021. https://jewishreviewofbooks.com/articles/7087/the-lost-voices-of-salonica/#.
[41] Nehamas, Alexander. "The Lost Voices of Salonica." Jewish Review of Books, 2021. https://jewishreviewofbooks.com/articles/7087/the-lost-voices-of-salonica/#.

certificates to Jews fleeing the Nazis.[42] Orphanages run by the church took in many Jewish children "with no recorded attempt to convert them." Monasteries and convents in Athens and the surrounding regions also took in Jews and provided temporary beds for resistance fighters and those on the run.[43] In addition to these measures, Archbishop Damaskinos also directed the police chief of Athens, Angelos Evert that "any Jew who asks for them, [Evert] will issue false identification cards."[44] The following fake ID given to Eva Alhanati, or "Evangelia Alexiou" is just one surviving example of thousands of fake IDs given to Greek Jews in and around Athens by Archbishop Damaskinos and police chief Evert.[45]

Figure 5: "Eva Alhanati (Evangelia Alexiou)." Source: "On This Day March 3, 1891: Greece's Wartime Archbishop Damaskinos Is Born," *The Pappas Post*, 3 Mar. 2016, orthochristian.com/91194.html.

By carrying out Damaskinos' orders to protect Greek Jews, the Greek Orthodox Church was in turn heavily persecuted. Damaskinos (though ultimately being released) was imprisoned by the Nazis, and "over 600 clergymen were arrested for helping Greek Jews and many were deported to the concentration camps."[46] All told, roughly 80% of the Athenian Jewish population would survive the war thanks to the efforts of Archbishop Damaskinos and the clergy and laity under his spiritual jurisdiction.

Volos

[42] Appendix VI, fake baptismal certificate for Eva Alhanati
[43] Bowman, Steven. The Agony of Greek Jews, 1940-1945. Stanford University Press, 2009, 151
[44] Quote from Archbishop Damaskinos, found in "The Holocaust in Greece." *United States Holocaust Memorial Museum*, www.ushmm.org/m/pdfs/20130305-holocaust-in-greece.pdf.
[45] "Eva Alhanati (Evangelia Alexiou)." *On This Day March 3, 1891: Greece's Wartime Archbishop Damaskinos Is Born*, The Pappas Post, 3 Mar. 2016, orthochristian.com/91194.html.
[46] Miller, Frieda. "Greece and the Holocaust." *Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre*, 2000, vhec.org/wp-content/uploads/Greece-TG.pdf.

Volos, an important port city on the Aegean halfway between Athens and Thessaloniki, had a small, but historic, Jewish community of 882 people at the start of the war. During its early years of occupation, Volos was under Italian occupation, and as a result, many Jews fled German-occupied Thessaloniki to seek refuge, causing the Jewish population of the city to grow to more than 1,000. However, the Germans would occupy Volos a few years later in 1943. The resistance movement became very active in Volos, becoming one of the clearest examples of how the church leadership and Greek Orthodox faithful proved critical in the success of the city's resistance. Metropolitan Ioachim of Demetrias, the local bishop of Volos, worked closely throughout the war with EAM (National Liberation Front) and Chief Rabbi Moshe Pessah of Volos to find sanctuary for the city's Jews in the mountainous villages of Pelion.[47] Helping to facilitate these efforts were thousands of mostly poor, lower-class Greek villagers.[48] It is this part of the Greek resistance story in which I have a strong family connection. According to my grandmother, her mother-in-law and my great-grandmother Ourania was one of the Pelion Greeks who assisted in this resistance, sheltering a Jewish man for several months in her home.[49] Ourania represents just one of many instances of which common Orthodox Christian Greeks responded to the calls from church leaders, putting their lives on the line- literally. "The penalty for Greek Christians assisting Jews was execution."[50] Thanks to the efforts of villagers like Ourania, of the more than 1,000 Jews living in Volos by March 1944, only 130 were caught and deported to Auschwitz.[51]

Zakynthos

Though significantly smaller and less influential than the Jewish centers mentioned previously, Zakynthos is a symbol of success in the Greek resistance against the Holocaust, being one of the few places in Greece (and in Europe) in which 100% of the island's 275 Jews survived the war. Similarly, to other regions with largely successful protection efforts, there was active and close cooperation between both religious and local leadership in rescuing local Jews. When German officials arrived on Zakynthos demanding a list of the island's Jews, local Bishop Chrysostomos famously gave the Germans a list with just two names- his own and that of the mayor of Zakynthos, Loukas Karrer. At the same time, all the island's Jews were hidden by Christian Greeks. Despite the entire island's awareness of the situation, not a single person collaborated, and all 275 Jews survived.[52] Though relatively few details about Zakynthos' Holocaust resistance have survived to the present day, as the majority of Zakynthos' Jews migrated to Israel and Athens following the war and a devastating earthquake which destroyed much of the island's archives in 1953. This lack of historical material has led historians like

[47] Mt. Pelion, the mountain directly overlooking the city of Volos and the Pagasetic Gulf. There are twenty-four villages scattered along the slopes of Pelion.

[48] "The Holocaust in Greece." *United States Holocaust Memorial Museum*, www.ushmm.org/m/pdfs/20130305-holocaust-in-greece.pdf.

[49] My grandmother was born shortly after World War II and was told these stories by older relatives as a child. She lived next door to her future mother-in-law growing up, and fondly remembers her as a "very good soul" and a "hard-working, selfless woman."

[50] Bowman, Steven. The Agony of Greek Jews, 1940-1945. Stanford University Press, 2009.

[51] *United States Holocaust Memorial Museum*, "The Holocaust in Greece, Volos"

[52] "The Holocaust in Greece." *United States Holocaust Memorial Museum*, www.ushmm.org/m/pdfs/20130305-holocaust-in-greece.pdf.

Yitzchak Kerem to conclude that while "Karrer and [Bishop Chrysostomos] were central forces in stalling for time… it is still not known why this miracle occurred." [53] While other factors and some amount of good luck certainly helped contribute to this success, a convincing argument can be made that the actions of Metropolitan Chrysostomos, Mayor Karrer, and the island's Orthodox Christians were the most important factors in guaranteeing the safety of Zakynthos' Jews.

October 28th Legacy

Largely due to the massive loss of life in Thessaloniki (which alone accounted for over 2/3rds of Greek Jewish casualties), over 80% of Greece's prewar Jewish population would be dead by the end of the war. In the aftermath of Greek liberation and in the face of further political and economic turmoil that followed World War II with the Greek Civil War, many Greek-Jewish Holocaust survivors would migrate to the newly established state of Israel and other places around the world. The Jewish population in Greece today numbers at about 5,000 scattered among the nine remaining communities, with the vast majority living in Athens and Thessaloniki. Each city includes roughly 3,000 and 1,000 Greek Jewish residents, respectively.

Today, October 28 is celebrated annually as a national holiday. Known in Greek as "Epeteios tou Oxi," or "Anniversary of the No," it commemorates much more than the single word Prime Minister Metaxas uttered. It commemorates the bravery and courage of the Greek nation against Nazism and Fascism. It commemorates the first Allied victory of World War II. It commemorates all the lives that were lost during this struggle. It commemorates the fight against anti-Semitism and the innocent victims of the Greek-Jewish community who died in the Holocaust, while it also recognizes the different outcomes for Jews who lived in various parts of the nation. Ultimately, it is important to remember both the heroic and tragic elements of this history not only to serve as a way of acknowledging the heroes and mourning the victims, but offers a glimpse into a society whose distinct history and culture created unique challenges and responses not found elsewhere.

[53] KEREM, YITZCHAK, and יצחק כרם. "הישרדותם של יהודי זקינתוס בתקופת השואה / THE SURVIVAL OF THE JEWS OF ZAKYNTHOS IN THE HOLOCAUST." *Proceedings of the World Congress of Jewish Studies /* דברי הקונגרס העולמי למדעי היהדות (1989): 387–94. http://www.jstor.org/stable/23535658.

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Appendix I

Ioannis Metaxas, Prime Minister of Greece, 1936-1941. Source:
https://www.britannica.com/biography/Ioannis-Metaxas#/media/1/378051/16610

Appendix II

Archbishop Damaskinos, Archbishop of Athens and All Greece, 1941-1949. Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Archbishop_Damaskinos_of_Greece.jpg#filelinks