

Giorgos Antoniou and A. Dirk Moses, eds., The Holocaust in Greece

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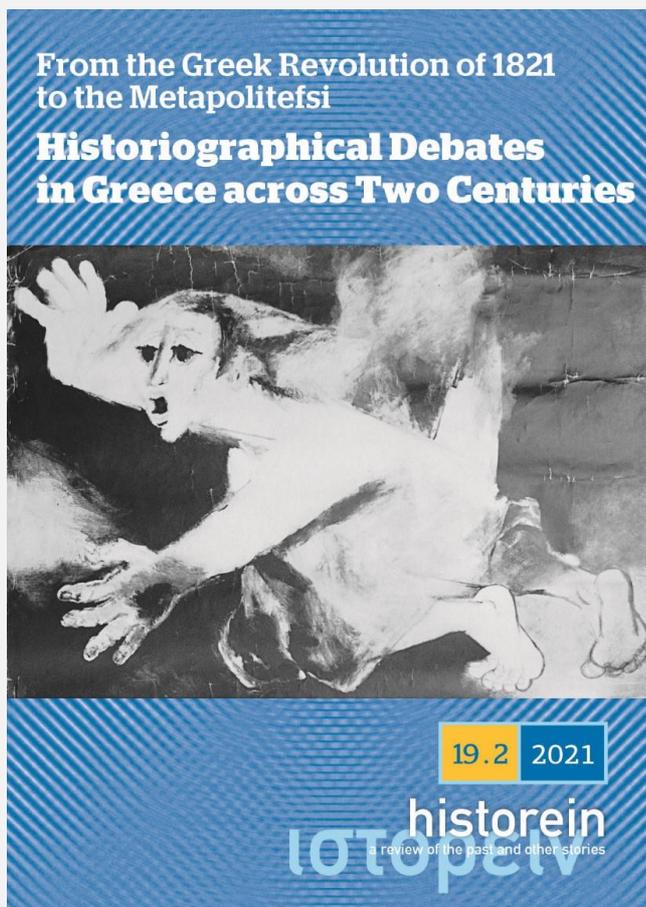
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Giorgos Antoniou and A. Dirk Moses (eds.)

The Holocaust in Greece

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Giorgos Antoniou and Dirk Moses have produced an invaluable volume about the history of the Holocaust in Greece, bringing together both young and established historians who examine aspects of the tragedy that unfolded during and after the German occupation in innovative ways. Unlike other works on the Holocaust in Greece, this volume does not get tied down in simple accounts of the events or testimonies of survivors but begins an important discussion of previously ignored topics such as the role of collaborators, the question of Jewish properties and the reception of survivors in the aftermath of the war. By doing so, the authors of the chapters of this volume carefully integrate the Holocaust into the country's wartime and postwar historical experience.

The volume is composed of 14 chapters, divided into four sections with an introduction by the editors and a concluding essay by Katherine Fleming. Each section has remarkable cohesion with sometimes differing and often complementary viewpoints. The brief, thoughtful, introduction situates the volume in Greek and European historiography while providing the reader with the rationale of each section. The first section usefully introduces the fundamentals of the Holocaust in Greece. The first chapter, by Iason Chandrinos and Anna Maria Droumpouki, is a general account of the Holocaust in Greece that sets the stage for the remaining chapters. The second chapter, by Mark Levine, analyses the events through an examination of the broader picture of occupation in order to shed light on the behaviour of Christian Greeks. He looks at the Bulgarian occupation of parts of northern Greece and the policies of ethnic cleansing enacted there with the politics of the previous decades and wars in mind. By situating the Holocaust within preceding and contemporary violence towards other minorities in the Balkans, the author provides a different way of understanding such violence, although the limited space does not allow him to expand on the many points he raises. The third chapter, by Anthony McElligott, examines the Jewish community of Rhodes which was part of the Italian state from 1912 and had already experienced the racial laws enacted by the fascist regime in 1938. In a rather descriptive account, McElligott shows the ambiguities of Italian, and later German, rule that

created a false sense of security and facilitated the quick deportation of Rhodian Jews.

The second part of the volume focuses on the collaborators and victims of the Holocaust. Chapter 4, by Andrew Apostolou, examines the role of the Greek authorities under occupation, illuminating their role as much more significant than usually portrayed. Apostolou correctly sets their actions within their nationalist concerns and, in particular, the circumstances of the Bulgarian occupation of parts of the country; however, the often polemical tone does not serve the chapter well. Chapter 5, by Leon Saltiel, also deals with the role of the Greek authorities, in this case with a focus on Thessaloniki's municipal authorities. Saltiel, like Apostolou, highlights the willingness of Greek authorities to collaborate with the Germans' Jewish policies from the symbolic renaming of streets and the eradication of the Jewish history of the city, to the use of forced labour and the expropriation of Jewish properties following the deportations.

The sixth chapter, by Giorgos Antoniou, is one of the most interesting in the entire volume. Antoniou uses a microhistorical approach to examine the Jewish community of Veria in order to investigate the roles of collaborators as well as those who resisted the German occupation and sheltered Jews. This chapter challenges our conceptualisation of the roles of Greek Christians in the Holocaust but in nuanced and often troubling ways, setting the Holocaust in its proper setting within the very complex social and ethnic structure of northern Greece. Antoniou effectively draws out this intricate picture of urban Jews hiding among Christian villagers and the roles of groups such as the Karamanlides, Slavophones or Vlachs during the German occupation. By focusing on a little-known story of the Holocaust that, as the author stresses, does not fit into the established patterns of the Holocaust, Antoniou effectively problematises simplistic accounts of the Holocaust in Greece.

The second part concludes with a chapter by Paris Papamichos Chronakis, who discusses questions of identity and nationhood among Greek Jews in the camps. Readers would be well served by being familiar with the works of Panayis Panagiotopoulos¹ and Katherine Fleming,² who have previously addressed the question of "Greekness" of Greek Jews in the camps and who serve as a foil to the author's argument. Papamichos Chronakis problematises these opposing views by complicating the question of identity through a focus on local (Thessalonikan) identity. His prior work on the interwar period is certainly of great help to the author as is his decision to move away from the Auschwitz camps to Warsaw, where some Greek Jews were employed as slave labour. The author effectively discusses the "ethnic" stratification of the camps and the position of Thessalonikan Jews in that system as well as the crucial difference that nationality could play in the slave labour camps. Like Antoniou, Papamichos Chronakis problematises previous accounts by stressing the multiplicity of survival strategies as well as the complexity of social, local, national, and religious identities that could form the basis for

solidarity among the inmates. He concludes that the “Greekness” embraced by the Jews of Thessaloniki at Auschwitz was a constructed identity based on the realities of life at the camp itself rather than one based on prewar concepts.

The third part of the volume examines the question of Jewish properties. Chapter 8, by Maria Kavala, is a data-rich analysis of Jewish wealth in Thessaloniki prior to the war and an attempt to follow the legal and practical infrastructure of its expropriation and ultimate fate. It serves to situate the discussion of the ensuing two chapters, by Stratos Dordanas and Kostis Kornetis, who focus on the beneficiaries of the spoliation of Jewish properties in Thessaloniki. Dordanas used the archives of the Special Court of Thessaloniki to illustrate the actions of the Service for the Disposal of Jewish Property as well as the magnitude of the expropriations and the identity of the beneficiaries. He also illustrates the corruption of the German officials who intervened in the process for their own benefit and that of their close collaborators. However, as the author makes clear, the beneficiaries of the seizure of Jewish properties were a much more diverse group that included the municipality, the International Red Cross, professional associations as well as many individuals from among the general public, including refugees from the Bulgarian zone of occupation. Dordanas correctly includes in his discussion the destruction of Jewish settlements and properties and the auctioning off of building materials to Greek companies which permanently transformed the city. Kornetis’ chapter focuses on the effects of this spoliation of Jewish properties and the transformation of the city itself. As he states, the legal-bureaucratic process of expropriation allowed for the “colonization” of the city by newcomers and the creation of a new economic structure (228). He then extends his analysis to the effects of this process on the erasure of the Jewish presence from the collective memory of the city’s inhabitants. The emphasis Kornetis places on postwar developments is a particularly welcome addition since it shows that this process was not limited to the period of German occupation but that the destruction continued for years after the conclusion of the war.

The fourth and final part of the volume deals with questions of memory in varied and innovative ways. Chapter 11, by Philip Carabott and Maria Vassilikou, focuses on the internal debates of the surviving Jewish community in Greece, primarily as it emerges from the articles of the *Israilitikon Vima* in the immediate postwar period (1945–1947). Using Fleming’s observation regarding the disunity of survivors, the authors expand on the divisions between those that survived the camps, those that joined the resistance and those that escaped through hiding, within the context of the emerging civil war, the creation of Israel, and the formation of a clear “Leftist–Zionist” divide among the survivors. Their arguments are complemented in the following chapter by Devin Naar, who examines the attempts to rebuild the Jewish community of Thessaloniki through the assistance of expatriate Jews in the United States. The chapter discusses the conflicts between various aid agencies, primarily the American Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) and the Salonica Jewish War Relief Committee, a Sephardic philanthropic organisation, whose goals

frequently clashed. While the Athens-based JDC in Greece was concerned with the support of refugees emigrating to Palestine, Sephardic organisations in the United States wanted to re-establish the community in Thessaloniki. Naar focuses his article on the latter, a little researched topic, stressing the role of Thessaloniki in the mindset of Sephardic Jews. The conflicts between the Sephardic philanthropic organisations and the JDC add a new element to the complex postwar circumstances of the Jewish communities of Greece but also expose the transformations of the Jewish expatriate communities. Naar opens a door to a previously largely unexplored field of study and points to divergent visualisations of Jewish future among Jewish aid agencies and the impact they had on the postwar development of Jewish identity in both Greece and the expatriate communities. This chapter dovetails well with chapter 13, by Kateřina Králová, which examines survivor narratives in postwar Greece, pointing to the emergence of a “new Greek Jewish/ethnoreligious double identity” (305). Králová notes that most of these narratives are positive and apolitical, surprisingly in view of the previous chapters and the circumstances of postwar Greece, although she notes the juxtaposition that the narrators make between their reception at Athens and Thessaloniki. The chapter is a foray into the development of a new Jewish community in Greece based on Athens and the increasing identification of Greek Jews with their country as opposed to their city of origin.

The final chapter of this section, by Carla Hesse and Thomas Laqueur, discusses the destruction of the great Jewish cemetery of Thessaloniki by incorporating some of the ideas that the latter has been working on in recent years.³ As the authors explain in this erudite and engaging chapter, the destruction of the largest Jewish cemetery in Europe cannot be seen within the context of Nazi policy since such destruction was nearly unprecedented in occupied Europe. They argue that while the eradication of the cemetery fits within a broader scope of European urban replanning throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the desecration of the remains and their erasure from memory is unique. They note that the destruction was not completed during the war but after the conclusion of the German occupation and even of the Greek Civil War, and juxtapose the way the Greek state and municipal authorities dealt with the destruction of the Jewish cemetery with other graveyard demolitions throughout Europe where the remains of the dead were treated with respect and often memorials were planned from the start to keep the memory of those places. They conclude that the destruction of the cemetery and the way it was carried out was the result of a convergence of three narratives, the demands of modern urban planning, the cultural politics of Greek nationalism and the facilitating presence of the German occupation (356).

The volume ends with an epilogue by Fleming, whose work is frequently referenced by the authors of this volume. Fleming stresses that one of the most important achievements of this book is the “uncomfortable story” it presents that challenges popular

preconceptions about Greece and the Holocaust (361). She correctly points out that the chapters of this volume do not present a simple, cohesive argument, but point to the complexities of the questions addressed including the historiographical issues of memory and the position of Jewish history in Greece.

This is a volume that any reader interested in the Holocaust, the history of Greece during the Second World War and its aftermath, or Jewish history should read. The volume's sections have a remarkable cohesion and the chapters are thoughtful, well-argued and, on occasion, provocative. Taken together, this book challenges many of the preconceptions and myths surrounding modern and contemporary Greek history, myths that only very recently have started to be questioned. It also correctly extends its scope to the periods before and after the Second World War, presenting a more complex and comprehensive understanding of the Holocaust in Greece while integrating it into Greek history. My only real criticism would be that the book follows a longstanding tendency to focus nearly exclusively on the Sephardic community of Thessaloniki. The editors are quite aware of the issue, as they acknowledge in their introduction (3), and, to some degree, this focus is justified by the sheer size of that community. However, the fact remains that the volume barely considers other significant communities like those of Corfu, Athens or Ioannina, some of which were composed of Grecophone Romaniote Jews. This was particularly true with regard to the section on Jewish properties, where all three chapters dealt exclusively with Thessaloniki. The hints that there may have been significant variation between the experience of different locales in the final chapters of the book makes this omission particularly unfortunate. Nevertheless, this is an excellent addition to a growing corpus of books on Greek Jewish history and certainly the most thorough volume on the Holocaust in Greece in English and quite possibly in Greek as well.

¹ Panayis Panagiotopoulos, "Η χρήση της εθνικής αναφοράς στο Άουσβιτς: Ένα στρατήγημα επιβίωσης" [The use of national reference in Auschwitz: A stratagem for survival], in *Ο ελληνικός εβραϊσμός* [Greek Jewry], ed. Maria Stefanopoulou, 70-88. Athens: Idryma Moraiti, 1999.

² K.E. Fleming, *Greece: A Jewish History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

³ Thomas W. Laqueur, *The Work of the Dead: A Cultural History of Mortal Remains* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015).