

# The Holocaust in Northern Greece: The Destruction of Sephardic Civilization

Dr. Harry Dinella

The Greek Holocaust, in comparison to the larger destruction of European Jewry that occurred in central and Eastern Europe during World War II, is a relative backwater for the majority of Holocaust scholars. However, there is increased interest amongst scholars in the Greek Holocaust in recent years and a number of books and dissertations have shed new light on this important facet of Jewish and Greek history. At the same time, this increased interest has led to a controversy amongst students of the Greek Holocaust regarding why more Greek Jews were not saved. Some contend that anti-Semitism in Greece played a substantive role in terms of the high percentage of Jews, at least 87% of Greece's pre-war population of 78,500 Jewish Greeks, murdered by the Germans. Others, including myself, believe the answer to this question is more complicated than ascribing much of the loss of Greek Jews during the war to anti-Semitism in Greece.

My association with Greece, the Greek people, and perhaps particularly the Greek military, is a long and happy one and began when the United States Army selected me to begin a program of training in the early 1980s specifically designed to make me one of their Foreign Area Officer 'experts' on Greece. Therefore, as a senior captain in 1982, I began a study of national security affairs with an emphasis on Greece and the Balkans at the U.S. Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, California. This was followed by a year of intensive Greek language training at the Defense Language Institute, also in Monterey. By the time I finished this program of study I had a master's degree, was promoted to major and immediately sent off to Greece to become the "new American student" at the Hellenic Army War College (HAWC) in Thessaloniki.

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It was during my year at HAWC that I became acquainted with the fact that there was a Greek Jewish population. This was not a result of my studies or of even talking to a Greek Jew. There were certainly no Jewish-Greek officers in attendance at the War College. Moreover, I can say with confidence that I never knowingly spoke to a Greek Jew during my fourteen months in Thessaloniki, the city that was the heart of the Holocaust in Greece, the center of Sephardic Jewish civilization in the Balkans, and home to 56,000 of Greece's 78,500 Greek Jews in 1940.

There were no discussions at the War College about Jews, Gypsies or for that matter Moslems, except in terms of the perceived modern-day Turkish threat to Greek territory. And while Turkey might have been Greece's number one defense concern, lessons were strictly business-oriented and involved one increasingly complex map exercise after another on how to defend Greece in the event of a NATO-WARSAW Pact war.

I found out that there were indeed Jews in Greece as the result of giving a classmate a lift at the end of school one day. He wanted to be dropped off near the shore in the vicinity of the city's famous "White Tower." Along the way, things occurred that became etched into my memory. First, I spotted a long-abandoned mansion that must have been one of the talks of the town in its heyday and from its condition and age there was little doubt that its heyday was before World War II and the Greek Civil War. I had seen it before and was always curious about the place. I, so long as he was in the car, asked my classmate if he knew anything about it. He answered that it "may have belonged to a rich Jew." I told him that I was unaware that there was a Jewish population in Thessaloniki. He replied "They are all gone now" in a tone that clearly suggested that there was nothing left to talk about on this subject.

Before I could enquire further, I stopped the car at a red light and we were instantly approached by a colorfully attired Gypsy girl seeking a handout. This was nothing unusual in Thessaloniki at the time and as I reached into my pocket for a coin, my colleague became very agitated and said "don't give her a single drachma." After the apparently very happy girl left with my fifty-drachma coin firmly clutched in her hand and I began driving again, I asked my friend with as much sarcasm as I could generate "Do you think that kid made some type of application to be a Gypsy in Greece?" Although he was no longer agitated he never answered the question and since we were at the place where he needed to be, he thanked me for the ride and got out of the car.

I never forgot the incident with the Gypsy girl, the dilapidated mansion or the words "they are all gone now." Indeed, before departing Thessaloniki in the fall of 1985 I learned that a small though viable Jewish community remained in the city despite the terrible toll of the Holocaust in Greece.

Years later in the late 1990s, while pursuing a doctorate at George Mason University in education with a focus area in history, I chose to examine the Holocaust in Greece for my dissertation topic. Part of the inspiration for this included the fact that I had recently completed a graduate course on the Holocaust taught by Professor Lenore Weitzman, a noted Holocaust scholar. During her course it became apparent to me that very few people had studied or written on the Holocaust in Greece. For a person seeking a doctorate it is a good thing to pick a topic that not too many other people are studying for a lot of reasons. One primary reason is that it perhaps gives you a running start in terms of creating new knowledge on the subject. Moreover, I was well-connected in Greece, knew the language, at least well enough to read and converse in it, and felt uniquely positioned, especially for a Christian, to study a very interesting story that occurred in a country that I had become quite fond of in two assignments for the U.S. Army that together totaled almost six and a half years in Greece.

Jews have lived in Greece since antiquity and well before the Jewish revolts that resulted in the destruction of the Second Temple by the Romans in 70 A.D. and which continued well into the 2<sup>nd</sup> century. These revolts, perhaps particularly the one in 70 A.D., prompted the Diaspora that sent Jews fleeing from Israel to the four corners of the earth. Some of the Diaspora Jews that would later play a prominent role in Jewish-Greek history initially settled in the Iberian Peninsula and created a Jewish civilization in Spain under the Romans, the Byzantines, the Goths, and finally under the Moslem Moors when they conquered a large portion of the peninsula in the 8<sup>th</sup> century.

It is fair to say that the Jewish community in Spain thrived in the centuries following the Moorish conquest. For their part, the Moors were more tolerant of the Spanish Jews than the previous Visigoth rulers had been and Spanish Jews, also called Sephardi or Sephardic Jews, evolved into a prosperous community and civilization with a distinctly Spanish character that included a form of spoken Spanish called Ladino, the primary language used by the Jewish community in Spain.

Although the Jews of Moorish Spain could never be considered anything but second class citizens, they were for the most part permitted substantial freedom in their commercial enterprises as well as the conduct of their community affairs and religion. The Sephardi were considered by the Moors to be “people of the book” influenced by prophets recognized in the Koran. This recognition bestowed on them certain rights despite their second class status as non-believing infidels. Another important reason that the Sephardi did so well under the Moors is the fact that, in addition to their commercial abilities and the taxes they paid, they presented no threat to the ruling Moslem establishment.

While the Moors certainly took Spain from the Visigoths and the indigenous Spanish residents of the peninsula, they after all took nothing from the Jews who

resided in Spain as non-Christian immigrants. The Jews of Visigoth-ruled Spain were at best reluctantly tolerated and at worst abused by the peninsula's Christians. Unlike the Christians of the peninsula, the Jews had already lost their country, Judea, to the Romans in the 1st century. They sought refuge in Roman Spain where they were nominally protected by tolerant Roman and Byzantine laws prior to the arrival of the less accommodating Visigoths. Therefore, while the Christian residents of the peninsula had something to win back, the Jews did not and the Moslems very much appreciated this. Indeed, for the Jews of Spain, the Moorish conquest merely represented a change of landlords and, in comparison to the Visigoths - more tolerant landlords to be sure.

Things took a radical turn for well-established Sephardi in 1492 when Ferdinand and Isabella finally expelled the last of the Moors from Spain. In this historic year, the Moors retired south to North Africa, Columbus sailed for the new world and the Jews of Spain who refused to convert to Catholicism were expelled from the country under the auspices of the Edict of Expulsion (Alhambra Decree). The Expulsion Edict was implemented within months of its announcement by the country's new rulers with the full support and urging of the Catholic Church's influential grand inquisitor, Friar Thomas de Torquemada.

The forced displacement of this educated, capable, and commercially astute population presented an opportunity that could not be ignored by the Ottoman Empire's ruler, Sultan Beyazid, II. It was essential in order for Beyazid's still expanding empire to thrive to establish a strong economy with a good tax base. The Christian subjects of the sultan, particularly Greeks, but other Christians as well, constituted a substantial percentage of the empire's commercial and manufacturing class. Nevertheless, there were places like Istanbul where the economy could be expanded and places like Thessaloniki where a moribund economy needed to be revitalized. So far as Beyazid's interests were concerned, why not give the richer commercial and artisan class of Christians in the empire a little competition with a population that would be more loyal to the sultan than Christians ever would?

Thessaloniki, a strategic communications hub for Ottoman Macedonia, had never lived up to its potential or recovered economically from the Turkish conquest that wrested it from the more commercially astute Venetians in 1430. At the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century the city remained an underdeveloped backwater of the empire. There was no better place than Thessaloniki for Beyazid to settle the majority of the Sephardi refugees in his empire. In addition to the contribution the Sephardi could make to the town's economic development, Beyazid would benefit from a refugee people that the Turks had never taken anything from, who feared renewed Christian rule, and who had, in comparison with their experience under the Goths and Spain's new rulers, done comparatively well under the Moslem Moors.

In the centuries following their resettlement in Thessaloniki, the Sephardi thrived economically and as a community with its own institutions. They, like the Christians of the city remained second class citizens of the empire with reduced rights and higher taxes. For the Ottomans, the Jews of Thessaloniki represented a goose that laid golden eggs that did not have to be cared for. The Ottomans did essentially nothing for the Sephardi community except to ensure that Thessaloniki remained in Ottoman hands. Anything the community required beyond the relative security provided by the Turks was provided for by the community itself. This included the establishment of synagogues, medical facilities, schools, charitable institutions and what amounted to an informal government led by the rabbis and chief merchants of the city. Beginning in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Thessaloniki flourished as a commercial hub for Macedonia and the Turkish-held Balkans and in short order became a majority Jewish (Sephardi) city.

The end of the second Balkan War in 1912 unequivocally established that Thessaloniki along with the lion's share of Macedonia would be returned to Greek (Christian) sovereignty. It is clear that the prospect of Greek rule represented an uncomfortable moment for the city's majority Jewish community that numbered 80,000 in a city of some 157,000 people. However, the transition from an Ottoman Jewish town to a Greek city was not as traumatic as many might have thought it would be at the time. Indeed, there was very little actual trauma involved beyond things that might be expected like the port eventually being open on Saturday, the Jewish Sabbath, and closed on Sunday, the Christian day of celebration.

The Greek government intended to incorporate their new Jewish population in Thessaloniki and the Sephardi Jews in smaller towns in Macedonia and Thrace fully into the fabric of Greek society with the same constitutional rights, privileges, and responsibilities of all Greek citizens, or at least all Greek Christians. And while it is fair to say that some of these rights were not fairly accorded to minorities like the ethnically Turkish Moslem population of Thrace, the Pomaks or the Gypsies, it is also fair to say that they were accorded to the nation's Jews who were seen as a valuable population that had to be assimilated. In other words, unlike the Ottomans, the Greeks fully intended for the Jewish population of Greece to be first class citizens.

By 1940, a scant twenty-seven years after Thessaloniki's incorporation into the greater Greek state, the city's Jewish population was well on its way to being assimilated into the greater fabric of Greek society. The younger Sephardi generation spoke Greek fluently and had a keen appreciation for Greek history, literature, and even Christianity (the Lord's Prayer was recited daily in public school in the same way that the Pledge of Allegiance is recited in American public schools and all students, Orthodox and Jew alike were required to cite it) as a result of mandatory public schooling. While the older population spoke mainly Sephardi it was fast becoming a

secondary language more used at home rather than in public in much the same way as Italian, Polish, Yiddish, and other languages became secondary in America as the first generation went to public school. Therefore, while many Jewish grandparents of the World War II era in Thessaloniki may not have been fluent in Greek, their children and grandchildren were either comfortable with or altogether fluent in the language.

On the eve of World War II, Jewish Greeks held positions in all facets of Greek society, including government and elected office. All Greeks, including Jewish Greeks, served a mandatory tour in the military. Unlike the case of Jews in other European countries, Greek Jews were not barred from becoming reserve officers in the military or from combat arms assignments in the infantry, cavalry, and artillery. Indeed, it was a Jewish Greek colonel of infantry that is credited with first hurling back the Italian attack on Greece thru Albania in 1940. On the other hand, Moslems, or Turkish Greeks were barred from serving as officers and from combat arms assignments. They by and large still are today.

However, given the fact that there were two distinct Jewish Greek communities in Greece, it is important to stress that there were some unique things about the Thessaloniki Sephardi community and other Sephardi communities in Greece that were notably different from Romaniot Jewish communities in the country that primarily lived south and west of Macedonia. Moreover, the newly incorporated Sephardi communities of Greece were much larger than the older, more assimilated Romaniot communities who had lived with their fellow Greeks for centuries, fought for Greece in its many wars and spoke Greek without an accent, and who in some cases even had surnames that sounded quite Greek rather than distinctly non-Greek.

While the Romaniot Jewish communities of Greece were more assimilated into Greek society than the much larger Sephardi communities in Macedonia and Thrace who became citizens in the aftermath of the Balkan Wars, it is fair to say that by the beginning of World War II, the Sephardi newcomers were also quite assimilated. The Sephardi certainly demonstrated their loyalty to their new state as soldiers during World War II. However, considerable differences nevertheless remained between the two Jewish Greek communities. The Sephardi, and particularly the large Sephardi community in Thessaloniki were more separated from their fellow Jewish Greeks, not so much by distance, but rather by the differences in Sephardi and Romaniot history, civilization, and tradition.

In 1940, the Romaniot Jewish Greeks are as fully assimilated as non-Orthodox Christians can expect to be in a predominantly Greek Orthodox state. In the larger towns and particularly in Athens, Romaniots live amongst the Greek Christians rather than in enclaves or neighborhoods separated from them. In contrast, large neighborhoods in Thessaloniki are more often than not almost exclusively Jewish Greek

or Christian Greek. The Romaniots of the era, if they speak another language at all, speak French. This is also the case for middle class educated Greeks as well. Middle class educated Sephardi speak Greek, Ladino, and French. Otherwise, Romaniots exclusively speak Greek and in many instances conduct Jewish religious services in the so-called "Greek rite." However, in northern Greece the Sephardi still cling to their tradition of Ladino. Although the younger generation of Jewish Greeks in the north speak fluent Greek, their parents and certainly their grandparents still rely on Ladino as their primary language. When the older Sephardi of Thessaloniki spoke Greek, as many of them did in 1940, it is with a heavy accent that could and sometimes during the German occupation did, betray them as Jewish Greeks rather than Orthodox Greeks.

Therefore, in contrast to the Romaniots who were quite used to living in a minority status with and amongst Orthodox Greeks, the Sephardi of 1940 are still getting used to the idea of living with Greeks given that many of the natural barriers (majority Jewish neighborhoods) to assimilation that existed in 1912 are still present in one form or another at the beginning of World War II.

Although this is no longer the case in 1940, in 1912 Thessaloniki was a majority Jewish city. The Jews of the city had lived with each other as a distinct civilization, first in Spain and then in Greece for a total of almost two millennia. Strong institutions, religious and social, developed over the centuries adding to and perpetuating a Sephardic civilization that included language, religion, and a sense of community with community institutions, including leadership and welfare systems. For example, when a Romaniot Jewish Greek citizen in Athens got sick he like anyone else in the city went to a predominantly Greek Orthodox hospital. In Thessaloniki a Jewish Greek, even in 1940, could go to a community-based hospital as his or her first choice for treatment. Jewish Greeks in Athens did not necessarily live in majority Jewish neighborhoods. Jewish Greeks in Thessaloniki largely did.

Under the Ottomans, the Sephardi of Thessaloniki established what in essence amounted to a pseudo-government. While this may have also been the case in the large Romaniot communities of Greece during the Turkish occupation, it was never as pronounced as in was in Thessaloniki given the large numbers of Jews in a predominantly Jewish city. In Thessaloniki there was a very developed office of the chief rabbi and a Jewish community organization that involved itself in religious, educational, welfare, and medical services for members of the city's Jewish community. The organizational structure of Thessaloniki's Jewish community was protected by Greek law after the incorporation of the lion's share of Macedonia into the Greek state after 1912.

The Greeks, wisely, never wanted to take part in World War II. Mussolini's quest for expansion compelled Greece to defend itself heroically in the fall of 1940 and the

winter of 1941 in a victorious and costly campaign against Fascist Italy. The Greeks, resilient and brave as they were, could not prevail against the more modern, organized, and determined forces that Hitler hurled against them in the spring of 1941 and the country already exhausted in its previous struggle with the Italians, fell to German arms within a month. The Germans divided Greece between themselves and their lackluster allies, Italy and Bulgaria. Italy got the lion's share of the country to administer while Bulgaria, Europe's lap-dog in the sense of always being the client state of one great power or another, was 'rewarded' with the occupation of much of Greek Macedonia and Thrace.

The Germans, with malice and forethought, retained certain key portions of Greece for themselves. It is no accident that Thessaloniki with its prewar Jewish population of 56,000 was occupied by Germany. There can be no argument that the city was certainly a strategic communications hub for the Balkans and provided Germany control of Greece's key port in the northern Aegean. However, controlling what amounted to the majority of Greece's Jewish population in a single town was also a major factor in the German occupation of the city. The Germans had plenty of time to plan the destruction of Sephardi civilization.

Likewise, the Germans retained control over a portion of Greek Thrace that included lesser Sephardi communities as well as the border between Greece and Turkey along the Maritsa River. Therefore, in one fell swoop, Germany occupied a portion of Greece that fully contained 75% or 58,500 of Greece's Jews 78,500 Jews. If one counts the Greek Jews in the Bulgarian zone of occupation, a further 5,400 Greek Jews were for all intents and purposes in German hands because the Bulgarians did not protect the Jews in their zone the way the Italians protected the Jews in their zone. Indeed, the Bulgarians previously referred to as Europe's ultimate lap-dogs, immediately complied when the German request when it came in March of 1943 and turned all of the Greek Jews in their zone over for transportation to the death camps in Poland. Therefore, from the spring of 1941 it is fair to say that the Germans controlled areas in Greece that contained almost 64,000 of Greece's 78,500 Jews or over 80% of Greece's Jewish population.

The Germans fully exploited the history, traditions, and institutions of the Jewish Greeks of northern Greece to the benefit of the German scheme to destroy them as part-in-parcel of their overall plan to destroy the Jews of Europe. Beginning in the winter of 1943, German officials in Thessaloniki brilliantly played upon the hopes and fears of the Sephardi population in a cat-and-mouse game with the city's chief rabbi, Dr. Zvi Koretz and its Jewish community leaders. Prior to this the German administration in Thessaloniki terrorized the Jewish community with registration of adult males followed by their induction into forced labor units. The Germans then proceeded to bleed the



community white with ransom arrangements in the late summer and fall of 1941 to free the Jews that were taken for forced labor. .

The Germans took advantage of an equally terrorized chief rabbi and the community offices he led to efficiently catalog the personal information and whereabouts of every Jew in the city. From his perch in Berlin, the arch enemy of all Jews under German occupation, Lieutenant Colonel Adolph Eichmann, dispatched two members of his professional band of murderers of entire populations, Captains Dieter Wisleccy and Alois Brunner, to Thessaloniki in the early winter of 1943. Their mission was to arrange for the deportation of the Jews of northern Greece to the death camps. The plan they so effectively carried out in the following months was nothing more than an SS work-in-progress that had begun even before the invasion of Greece.

The Germans had studied the Jewish Greek population of Greece and particularly the portion of Greece they initially occupied even before the war began. They understood that the Sephardi had a long history of community. They understood that the Sephardi had already been compelled to leave an established homeland in the past when the community moved its civilization to Thessaloniki in the 15th century. They understood that this community was close-knit and that it was led by an educated class of Jews who could make decisions for it. They understood that all they had to do was use the very sense of community and infrastructure that the Sephardi had developed and refined over centuries to move the entire community from Thessaloniki to Poland without so much as a notable protest. In the end it can be fairly said that the Germans used the community to organize and move itself from Thessaloniki to Poland.

It is important to realize the extent of the subterfuge conducted by the Germans in Thessaloniki and elsewhere in Greece and Europe regarding the deportation of Jews to Poland. The Jews who boarded the death trains had no idea that the last stop for most of them would be the gas chambers and crematoria of Auschwitz-Birkenau and its surrounding network of slaughterhouses in Poland. The Sephardi who boarded the trains in Thessaloniki actually believed they would be resettled in Poland - as a community. The Germans even had a program to collect what drachmas still remained in the emaciated hands of the Jewish Greek community for certificates of exchange that they could then present on arrival in Krakow for Polish Zlotys. To carry the deception a step further, the Germans had the passengers on the first transports fill out postcards with depictions of notable sights in the Krakow region to send back to their fellow Jews still awaiting transport. Of course, it was the Germans who stamped and mailed those postcards rather than the unfortunates who so unwittingly filled them out and who in most cases were long since murdered by the time the mail arrived in Thessaloniki to assuage the fears of the next trainload of victims.

What about the Orthodox Greeks? Why did they not do more to help their fellow countrymen, men who had fought bravely for Greece as part of the Greek military that threw back the Italians in 1940 and 1941 and who bravely did their part in defending Greece from the German invasion of 1941? There is little evidence in the historical record to show that very many Greek Christians were pleased with the plight of their fellow countrymen at the hands of the German authorities or their deportation to Poland.

After the deportations were announced, the Greek partisans offered escape and refuge for the Jews who could leave Thessaloniki for the safety of the countryside. Although some Jewish Greeks did escape to the partisans, the vast majority did not. These offers of partisan assistance were actively resisted by Chief Rabbi Koretz as he continued to assuage the fears of his flock by telling them that they would be resettled into a new Sephardi community in Krakow. He used their sense of responsibility to the community and tradition to warn them against escape when many, and particularly the young and healthy, could still escape. Indeed, almost until the time that the first transports from Thessaloniki to Poland left the city, escape was possible insofar as the Jewish Greek ghettos that had been established were not “sealed” sufficiently to preclude it.

The Sephardi community of Thessaloniki during the occupation, despite its closer relationship to the Orthodox community and the Greek state largely relied on the rabbinical and secular leadership provided by Rabbi Koretz and the Jewish community offices. This was reinforced once Wislececy and Brunner ordered the establishment of a Judenrat upon their arrival in the city. In 1940, Sephardi friendships amongst the local Orthodox population were not on the scale of Romaniot friendships amongst the local Orthodox population in the southern and western parts of Greece. Again, this is an accident of history in the sense that the Sephardi lived largely amongst themselves in almost exclusively Jewish neighborhoods. And while it is certain that there were Sephardi-Christian friendships, perhaps particularly amongst the younger generations, it is also certain that the majority of social contact in the Jewish Greek community was amongst themselves rather than with their Christian countrymen. This certainly impacted the help they might otherwise have received from individual Greeks and the help that was apparently more available to Jewish Greeks in other parts of the country.

Also, and this is an important point, in other parts of Greece and particularly in Athens, it was a lot easier for the local Orthodox Christians and civil authorities to assist and hide Jewish Greeks because of the relatively small numbers involved. The difficulties of hiding thousands or tens of thousands of Jews within Thessaloniki, a much smaller city than Athens, were insurmountable in comparison. The chief rabbi of Athens escaped to the countryside with the partisans setting an example of resistance to

his flock. The chief rabbi of Thessaloniki did the opposite and could even be accused of playing the unwitting role of a Jewish Greek Pied Piper of Hamelin, or in this case, Thessaloniki, given his apparent support of the German deportation scheme until virtually the last minute when his futile attempt at resistance to it was too little and too late.

Although it is certain that the Jews of Thessaloniki were fully terrorized by the German administration and the harsh tactics employed by Wisliceny and Brunner, it must be remembered that the Greek Orthodox population of the city also lived in fear of the German military and secret police regime in the city. The only thing the Germans seemed to respect about Greece was the ancient Greece of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Alexander, Pericles, and the ruins of the Glory that was Greece in Athens, Olympia, Delos, Pella, Epidaurus, and other sites around the country. For the average Greek in Thessaloniki, it did not take much to bring the wrath of the Germans down upon him or his family. Greeks, after all, were not the Danes or Norwegians that the Germans hoped to incorporate into the European society they wanted to construct at the end of the war. And while Greeks certainly rated higher on the German totem pole of racial hierarchy than Slavs and other occupied peoples, they did not rate much higher in terms of their perceived usefulness in the new Aryan Europe that Germany visualized. Greeks knew that ration cards could be cancelled in an instant or that they could be imprisoned and shot on a whim. It is important to remember that the German military in Thessaloniki had the organization, wherewithal, and lack of humanity necessary to turn their weapons and even their heavy weapons on any portion of the population any time they deemed it necessary to do so.

Given the unique circumstances that existed in Thessaloniki, different than those that existed in other parts of occupied Greece where assistance and aid to Jewish Greeks was more available, there was little the Orthodox community of Thessaloniki could do to stop the deportations or assist its victims. It must also be acknowledged that the Greek Orthodox civil and religious authorities in Thessaloniki were unfortunately more co-opted by the Germans than the equivalent authorities in Athens and other parts of the country.

The Germans after all, had been in occupation of Thessaloniki since 1941 and did not occupy Athens until the fall of 1943. For the Greeks in the Italian zone of occupation it was much easier to resist the Italians and find ways of limiting the effectiveness of the occupation. By the time the Germans occupied Athens late in the war, efficient mechanisms of Greek resistance were more fully established and organized there than they ever were in Thessaloniki. In Athens Archbishop Demaskinos and Police Chief Militades Evert went through great lengths to assist and protect Jewish Greeks as did the local civil population who assisted Jews to hide within the city or escape. But

Damaskinos, Evert, and others had the benefit of hindsight. They had seen what the Germans had done in Thessaloniki months before the Germans took control of southern Greece and Athens in the aftermath of the Italian capitulation in the fall of 1943. The Greeks in the south were much better prepared to defy the Germans and deny them the success they achieved in the north regarding the persecution of Jewish Greeks. Moreover, the Greeks in the south did not have to hide fifty thousand people from the Germans.

Could more have been done to save Jewish Greeks in Thessaloniki? The answer is an unqualified yes. However, whatever more could have been done for the Sephardi of Thessaloniki and northern Greece under the unique circumstances existing at the time would not have saved many more Jewish Greeks than were saved or altered the outcome of deporting the vast majority of the city's great and venerable Sephardic civilization to the death camps of Poland.

A very unfortunate set of circumstances in northern Greece, different than those that existed in other parts of the country combined to the advantage of the Germans who were able to murder 97% of the almost 64,000 Jewish Greeks of Macedonia and Thrace. In the south and much of the rest of Greece, German successes were mitigated by circumstances that allowed for greater assistance to the Jewish Greeks in the former Italian zone of occupation where over half of 14,600 Jewish Greeks survived despite intense efforts on the part of the Germans to capture, deport, and murder them. In the end it is not the people of Greece who are responsible for the destruction of the Jewish Greeks of northern Greece and almost half of the Jewish Greeks in the rest of the country. Unlike circumstances in other parts of German-occupied Europe where occupied civilian populations tacitly or actively assisted the German persecution of Jews, the Greek people never supported, let alone aided and abetted the German persecution of Jewish Greeks. The people responsible for the virtual destruction Jewish civilization in Greece as well as the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Orthodox Greeks during the war are, simply stated, the German occupation forces and the SS.