

Lucillo Merci on Deporting Greek Jews to Poland

The persecution of the Greek Jews commenced in June 1942, when altogether some 47,000 people were deported from Salonika to the east. The passages from Merci's diary give an account of the activities of the Italian consulate in Salonika, which attempted to save as many Jews as possible by naturalizing them as Italian citizens. Lucillo Merci was active in these attempts.

April 6

The deportation of Greek Jews to Poland is continuing. They are transported in cattle cars. Sixty people of all ages are packed into one such car. Twenty-four hundred people leave in each transport. Some 20,000 people have been deported until now. There are three ghettos in Salonika: "Baron Hirsh" in the vicinity of the railway station, Vardar, and Kalamira which is designated for well-to-do Jews. The first to be deported were the residents of "Baron Hirsh"; they were followed by the residents of Vardar. One day prior to the deportation the prospective deportees are confined in their city sectors. They are required to be ready on one hour's notice. Then they are marched in a convoy to "Baron Hirsh". They are allowed to carry with them up to 20 kilograms of belongings and food per person. Their property... is seized by the German authorities. The [local] Greeks break into the houses emptied of the deportees and loot anything they can lay their hands on.

Greek partisans, some Jews among them, derailed a train on its way to Athens near Lyanoladi-Lamai in the Italian occupation zone. Their attack on the train was repulsed by our forces. Twelve of our soldiers and eleven partisans were killed in the fighting. There were many wounded on both sides. The struggle against the Axis countries is increasing in all parts of Greece...

April 12

In recent days I have been following with sorrow the departure of convoys of Jews from the “Baron Hirsh” ghetto. There were men, women, the aged and children. Among them were also ill people, completely helpless. They were guarded by German and Greek policemen. Upon their arrival at the railway station, they were heaved, hastily and in great confusion, onto the train cars – about 60 people per car, 40 cars altogether. Everything was executed in great haste... Families were being separated – scenes of pain and grief on all sides. This is a tragedy. It is clear that those unfortunate people will not reach the destination in Poland alive. The journey lasts four, five, six days.

Source:” Excerpts from the Salonika Diary of Lucillo Merci (February-August 1943)” *Yad Vashem Studies* , 18, Jerusalem 1987, p. 306- 308.