



Salonika

Main city and port on the northeastern mainland of Greece, located in the Macedonia region. In April 1941, the Germans invaded Greece. On April 9 they conquered Salonika at which time, there were 50,000 Jews living in the city. Within a week; the Nazis arrested the Jewish community leaders, confiscated Jewish apartments, shut down Jewish newspapers and took over the Jewish hospital for the use of German troops. During April and May, Einsatzstab Rosenberg - an organization established for the systematic plunder of the art and cultural objects belonging to Jews in Europe - methodically looted the Jewish libraries and cultural treasures of Salonika. Most of the pillaged items were sent to Frankfurt, where the Nazis were setting up a Jewish research library.

Over the next 14 months, the Nazis did not call for any specific anti-Jewish measures. However, the winter of 1941--1942 was extremely harsh, and the Jewish community of Salonika was threatened with starvation. Over 600 Jews died of cold and disease. In addition, the Jews of Salonika were not prepared for what was to come next.

On July 11, 1942, 9,000 Jewish males from the ages of 18--45 were forcibly assembled at Liberty Square (*Plateia Eleftheria*), the city's central square. About 2,000 were sent to do forced labor for the German army. By October, 250 had died. The rest of the men were brought back home in exchange for a ransom handed over to Dr. Maximilian Merton, the advisor to the German military administration in Macedonia. The Jewish communities of Salonika and Athens paid some of the ransom; the remaining funds came from the transfer of the Jewish cemetery in Salonika to the city's municipality, who used the stones of the 500-year-old cemetery for building materials. Eventually, a university was built over the cemetery's ruins.

In December 1942, a *Judenrat* was established. Dr. Zvi Koretz, the Chief Rabbi of Salonika, was named *Judenrat* president---he represented his community in negotiations with Dieter Wisliceny and Alois Brunner, the ss officers sent by Adolf Eichmann in February 1943, to supervise the



deportation of Salonika's Jews. Scholars have debated Koretz's actions as *Judenrat* chairman, expressing contradictory views.

Beginning on February 8, 1943, Merton published several decrees placing the Nuremberg LAWS into effect. Jews were forced into a ghetto in the city's Baron Hirsch quarter, located near the railway station, in preparation for convenient deportation. About 20 transports, carrying 43,850 Salonikan Jews, arrived in Auschwitz-Birkenau between March 20 and August 18, 1943. Most of the new arrivals were immediately gassed. Of the 1,200 who survived the initial selections, most died later. Some of the women were used as subjects for pseudo-scientific sterilization experiments (see also Selektion and Medical Experiments). Rabbi Koretz, the *Judenrat*, and the Jewish police were taken to Bergen-Belsen in August.

Some Salonikan Jews were spared: those who held Spanish, Italian, Turkish, or other passports, 367 Jews who were given Spanish citizenship - reaching Spain via Bergen-Belsen and those few hundred Jews helped by the Italian government to escape to Italian-occupied territory or given Italian citizenship - causing conflict between the Italians and their German allies. In addition, some Salonikan Jews managed to reach Palestine with the help of Partisans.

Hundreds of Salonikan Jews survived the extermination and labor camps. After the war, many returned to the city, along with those who had hid in the mountains and those who had joined the partisans. In 1945, there were 1,950 Jews in Salonika. Many, attacked as "Communists" during the ensuing Greek civil war, immigrated to Israel, the United States, and South America.