

Macedonia and Thrace

Macedonia is a region in southern Yugoslavia, and Thrace, located to the east of Macedonia and south of Bulgaria, is a region in the eastern Balkan Peninsula, which, today, is divided between Greece and Turkey. Before World War II there were some 7,800 Jews in Macedonia and over 5,100 in Thrace.

In April 1941 Germany invaded Yugoslavia and divided it amongst its allies. Bulgaria received Macedonia; that same year, Bulgaria also annexed most of Thrace. In both areas, already existing Bulgarian anti-jewish legislation was applied. At first, the anti-Jewish measures basically affected the Jews' economic situation. Jewish professionals were no longer allowed to have dealings with non-Jews, shopkeepers lost their businesses, and the Jewish communities were forced to pay large fines. In addition, the Jews were restricted regarding where they could travel and live.

In the fall of 1942, while the rest of the population was given Bulgarian citizenship, the Jews were denied citizenship. Next, they were forced to register their homes and places of business. Finally, all Jews over the age of 10 were made to wear Jewish badges (see also Badge, Jewish.)

The next step was Deportations. In February 1943 the Bulgarians signed a pact with Germany, in which they agreed to deport to the east 20,000 Jews from their territories. Since nowhere near 20,000 Jews lived in the newly annexed territories of Macedonia and Thrace combined, the Bulgarian authorities intended to include Jews from Bulgaria itself in the deportations.

In March 1943 almost all of the Jews in Bulgarian-occupied Thrace (some 4,000) were arrested and surrendered to the Germans, who then deported them to their deaths at Treblinka. Another group of about 1,200 Thrace Jews was moved to Salonika and then sent to Auschwitz. At the same time, all of the Jews of Macedonia were rounded up by the Bulgarian authorities; all but 165 were deported to Treblinka. Some 200 Macedonian Jews survived the war, along with some 250 Jews from Thrace, who either joined the Partisans or hid with their Christian neighbors. Other Thrace Jews managed to escape to Italian-held territories during 1941--1942.