

## **Deportation of Jews of Ioannina**

The Epirote Struggle: Thursday, July 28, 2005

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Front Page: March 25, 1944: Accompanying a dramatic photo of the deportations of Yanniotte Jews was the following text:

This was the way the Jews of Ioannina were deported.

Today, for the first time in the history of the city, shocking, rare photos are published in an 8-page insert in this newspaper.

Page 1: Accompanying deportation photo of the women and children as they see the men taken away in trucks: "The moment of the deportation of the Jews of Ioannina."

Page 2: Fourteen Shocking Photographs: [note: photo at bottom of article shows the Jews lined up at the 'Molo' on the Lake, their bundles of possessions with them.

The Ipeiroti Struggle is publishing today shocking documentation regarding the history of Ioannina. Included are fourteen photographs taken in the early morning hours of March 25, 1944, guarded all these years in the German State Archives. The photographs record the gathering of the Yanniotte Jews on the Molo [square on the Lake] and their violent embarkation in open trucks, in order to take them to German concentration camps.

These rare photos, most of them unknown and unpublished in Greece, came from the Bundarchives in Koblenz, Germany. They were taken by a German soldier with the name of Wetzel to be catalogued in the German Army and Air Force Office of Propaganda. All of the photographs are catalogued with the following note: "For Research on the Murdered Jews of Europe." Included in the deportation photos are those of the deportation of the Jews of Ioannina from the 25<sup>th</sup> of March 1944.

Former citizens of our city [men, women, children and the elderly] are included in these photos, as they were readied for their trip to Auschwitz. Those of us who are young are unable to recognize faces among those pictured. The obligation to recognize those pictured falls on the shoulders of the elderly, who, perhaps, can recognize their former friends, neighbors and colleagues. It is the least we can do, in memory of those who were so harshly and unjustly lost, to

give a name to the faces. We are, therefore, asking our readers to communicate with the newspaper, and give us names, identities, and whatever else they can remember about those they recognize.

We are publishing today 14 of the 18 photographs, permission to do so received by our newspaper from the Bundarchives. Rather than inserting our own comments, we are using the words of those themselves who were there. Most of these comments are by those who were there at Plateia Mavili, took the journey to the death camps, and succeeded in returning. Most of these testimonies come from Eftihia Nachman's book, *Yannina: Journey To the Past*.

For those of us in the new generation, the events that took place at Plateia Mavili on that frightful Saturday are inconceivable. On the same spot that citizens of Ioannina today congregate and enjoy themselves, alongside familiar houses, under the same trees, 1850 of our fellow citizens were taken on the road to exile. Less than 165 would succeed in returning. Rather than finding needed therapy and rest, as they should have, many returned to find their homes and shops looted and taken over by squatters. A second hell awaited them.

The Ipeiroti Struggle is proposing to the municipality to create a permanent exhibition space on the Jews of Ioannina [1941-1944]. There are sufficient documents, such as the photographs we have published, that should be saved and exhibited. Included among these documents are all the names of those Yanniotte Jews who were deported. Our newspaper is also proposing that the municipality rename the area where the Jews of Ioannina were placed on trucks for their deportation, 'The Square of the Holocaust of the Jews.'

The 25<sup>th</sup> of March 1944, is a tragic day in the modern history of Ioannina. Let us affirm that we will never forget it.

Page 3: Photo on top shows the men being readied for deportation, carrying their meager possessions in bundles. The text accompanying the photo is the testimony of Nina Bechor Matsas, the wife of Alberto Negrin: "That morning there was knocking on the door. We opened the door and there were Germans and Civil Policeman [Greeks] who told us: 'Take some food and clothing with you and gather at Plateia Mavili on the Molo.' I did not think anything. My brain had stopped working. We did not know what would happen to us. Inside the wagons [trucks], parents began to wonder where they were taking us and inquire if anyone knew what they were going to do to us. My father said to me: 'They will probably enclose us in a concentration camp and the men will engage in harsh labor. Maybe the women will work. Maybe we will return.' No one thought that they would take us and burn us. No one said that...."

## Chronicle of Deportation

On July 11, 1942, the German Military Administer of Northern Greece gathered all the males Jews of Salonika in Plateia Elefterias [Freedom Square] to register them. The violent barbaric tactics of the Third Reich had started in Greece.

From March to August of 1943, the Jewish population of Thessaloniki and northern Greece was arrested and deported. Their destination was the death camp of Auschwitz in Poland.

The traumatic news was learned shortly afterwards in Ioannina. Some of those from the Jewish Community of Thessaloniki had been able to escape the pogrom and sought safe havens among acquaintances and relatives in our own city. In the meantime, the German military administration in Ioannina had begun to prepare for the deportations and had compiled a list of the Jews of the city. An office was set up in the Jewish hospital of Ioannina to register all the Jews.

In the early morning hours [4:00 am] of the 25<sup>th</sup> of March 1944, German soldiers from the Wechrmacht, reinforced by Greek civil police, had surrounded the Jewish neighborhoods and had closed off the surrounding streets. Shortly before, a conference had taken place between the German administration of Ioannina and the administrator of the Greek civil police [the section responsible for security] on the way to carry out the operation.

This small attachment of the Wechrmacht, and the Greek civil police, invaded the Jewish homes and, with austere orders, required the inhabitants to abandon their dwellings, taking only 40-50 kilos of the barest necessities with them. The Jewish community of Ioannina was living its most tragic moments. Within each house, each family was living its own drama: pregnant women, children, newly married couples, and heads of families, all prepared themselves for their last voyage. The mechanism of persecution began to function, and the first groups of members of the community had begun to arrive, escorted by the German and Greek attachments, at designated places: the Jews who lived inside the kastro were gathered at the military hospital. Those who lived outside the kastro were gathered at Mavili Square.

By 7:45 am, all had been collected. It was now that another drama unfolded as the Germans began to separate families. Men were gathered in a group, separated from women and children.

At 8:00 am, the Jews of Ioannina were placed into 80 German military trucks that began to arrive via Avexartisias [Independence] Street. The Jews of Ioannina said a last farewell to their beloved city.

The tragic convoy of German military trucks filled with unfortunate Yanniotte Jews traveled to Larissa by way of Kataras. Larissa was the first stop. Here they would await the arrival of trains from Athens that would take them on a trip with no return to the death camp of Auschwitz.

The Jewish community of Ioannina was almost completely destroyed by the Germans. Besides the material losses and confiscation of their property, there would be severe and deep loss of life: 1850 Yanniotte Jews breathed their last breath at Auschwitz-Birkenau. Only 163 would survive.

### The Masterminds of the Operation

Finally, who were the masterminds who planned and carried out the 'Final Solution?' As far as the deportation and mass murder of the Jewish Community of Ioannina is concerned we can emphatically answer this question. Those responsible were the administrator of the German Army [Wehrmacht] in Ioannina who ordered the 80 military trucks for the deportation, the German secret military police [Geheime Feld Polizei: GFP] who policed the whole operation, the SS who had their own officer [Major Hafranech] attached to the Wehrmacht to supervise the operation, supplying drivers and guards for the military trucks.

We must also mention the heads of the Greek Civil Police of Ioannina, the directors of the security battalions and their subordinates who openly worked alongside the Germans.

Regarding this, the historian Mark Mazower gave his opinion: "The Final Solution in Greece afforded a powerful argument in opposition to those who made a sharp distinction between the attitude of different branches of the occupying bureaucracies: the SS, the regular army and, regarding the operations involved in all aspects of the deportation [rounding up and deporting], the foreign ministries. In spite of difference between them, when it came to preserving the authority of the Reich against its real and imaginary enemies, they all worked together."

Page 4: two photos with captions:

Photo 1: group of Jewish women trying to keep themselves warm in the cold morning as they awaited deportation.

Caption: A quote by Kostas Papageorgiou: teacher from Ioannina [originally published in the newspaper "Antagonist" from EAM [left wing Greek resistance movement] and in Chronika, the periodical published by the Central Board of Jewish Communities. "From 5-6 am we heard knocking on the doors of the houses and shouting informing the inhabitants [Jewish] that they would be

allowed to take with them 40 kilos from each house. Terrified, they left their homes and gathered in three places: inside the kastro, at the square of the hospital [Katsantoni], outside under the clock tower and on the Molo. Many of the women could not walk, they were shoved into cars [trucks] and at about 8:00 am, they started off. Some were crying, some were lamenting...."

Photo 2: Women being led into trucks by members of the German Army.

Caption: quote by Lizeta Andzelou , daughter of Moise [wife of Emmanuel Negrin]. "I heard voices outside since our bedroom faced the street. I called out to my mother to open the window and the shutters so that we could see what was happening. I saw Germans gathered, filling the street and clearly heard the voices coming from nearby houses: 'Dear God, the Germans are taking us. All of a sudden this is happening to us,' and other similar things. Meanwhile they knocked at our own door and told us not to go outside, but to get ready and take some things with us, whatever was necessary. We then understood that our time had come. We already knew what had happened in Thessaloniki. A lawyer had told my father...."

Page 5: two photos with captions:

Photo 1: men trying to load their bundles into a truck.

Caption: a quote of Joyia Biro Dostis [wife of Mavrikiou Bati]: "My father, driven half crazy with fear, went down to the basement and pulled the plugs out of the wine barrels. He broke all of the bottles so that the Germans would not find any. He destroyed the wine himself. Thus, crying, shaking, with our legs trembling, not knowing if we would ever return, we took our bundle of clothing and went to the kastro, to the place they had ordered us to gather. In the beginning, we waited for a few hours, talking among ourselves. With the arrival of the open trucks, we were all put inside and our lives became hell...."

Photo 2: men lined up, waiting.

Caption: a quote of Stella Saltis Avraam [wife of Lazaras Moisis]: "March 25, 1944. It was morning when there were knocking at our door and the Germans poured inside, accompanied by one of our own civil policeman. 'Listen. I have something important to tell you.' The Germans were saying: 'Alt, alt.' 'Take a few things,' the Greek policeman told us. He had pointed out where the Jewish homes were. The Germans would not have known. For example, the Greek policeman could have passed by my house and gone to another. We were distressed. We picked ourselves up. We started to scream. What could we do? We gathered a few things together to take with us. Meanwhile, one of our own civil policemen was on the floor below. He had rented a room from us on the ground floor. When the other civil policeman saw him, he said: 'My colleague, do you think that I informed on them?' Our boarder answered: 'Before this we were

colleagues. From now on, I wish nothing to do with you." Not another word. He froze in place...."

Page 6: two photos: the one on top of the women and children lined up at the Molo; the one on bottom, of the women being loaded into trucks.

Caption: quote of Eftihia Battinou [wife of Xaimaki Ezra]: "What could we take with us? We took a few things and had to gather on the lakeside, at Mavili Square, where Mavili met Drisko. That's all we knew. Naturally, when we fixed our bundles, we went outside the door and followed the narrow cobble-stoned streets to the kastro gate and, then, to the Molo. In the street, we saw our neighbor, Simel [Samuel] who had two young daughters and his wife, Eftimia. His daughters were two exceptional, little angels, Eftihoula and Ester. I saw him completely distraught. He was sitting on the doorstep of his house, holding his wooden staff and saying: 'What evil has befallen us!'...."

Page 7: two photos, both of men and young boys lined up at the Molo.

Caption 1: quote of Eftihia Battinou [wife of Xaimaki Ezra]: "At the Molo, there were large trucks used for transporting cargo. Certainly, it was very difficult there. All of the families [for example, in my family, my father, my mother, my sister, my little nephews] were trying to stay together. We were led into the trucks and taken out of the city. The greatest irony was that as we were leaving, we passed through the center of the city, by way of Independence [Anexartias] Street, through the commercial center with all the stores...."

Caption 2: quote of Stella Mordochai Mioni [wife of Samuel Koen] and Eftihia Mordochai Mioni [Stella's sister and wife of Ebbie Svolis]: "How did it happen? I want to tell you. They requisitioned the Jewish Old Age Home. An order was issued that all the inhabitants of Ioannina from 12 years and older had to go to the office of the old age home and show their ID cards. As soon as you went inside, the Jewish Community had an office on the right and there were two Greek civil police there. When I passed by, they called out "Yuda [Jew]. This is how they learned who we were and how many of us there were. Before that, there was someone else who recorded which houses we lived in...."

Page 8: two photos of the men being loaded onto the trucks.

Caption on first photo: quote of Joyia Davidjon David [wife of Zakaria Arrogi]: "It was Saturday morning, March 25, 1944. It was still early and we were all still in our beds. Our bedrooms were in the interior of the house and we did not realize what was happening. Only aunt Joyia's bedroom faced front. Noises were heard in the street. We opened a window and saw Germans closing off the streets at the corner so that no one would escape. It was frightening. Someone screamed out: 'Davidjon, get up fast. The Germans have closed off all the alleyways.' Those were the exact words. As soon as my father heard this, he began to hit his head. All of us remained silent...."

Caption on second photo: report from the German Secret Police assigned to Ioannina: "As of 7:45 am, the ghetto has been evacuated and all the Jews were gathered together at the designated place. The forces of the Germans carried out the operation of evacuation of the ghetto. Notices written in Greek were pasted on the walls [of the kastro] and on many of the houses, stating that the punishment for looting would be shooting the offender to death. The operation proceeded without any instance. By 8:00 am, the transport had begun."