Steven Bowman  
**Greek Jews against the Axis**

There were many forms of Resistance during World War II among the various nationalities, ethnic groups, ideologies, and religious groups under Nazi domination. The Jews, however defined according to the above categories, could be found well represented in various ways in the general Resistance and occasionally as an identifiable group of their own during the war. In particular the career of Abba Kovner could claim to be a unique Jewish response – or at least the first such group – through his call for Jewish resistance in Vilna on New Year’s Eve 1941: “Let us not die like sheep led to slaughter” which became a battle cry as well as a condemnation among Jews and gentiles during and after the war.¹ Whatever the sources for this battle cry – a Soviet commander’s query, an early Zionist paean, a nineteenth-century ubiquitous comment on the mass slaughter of soldiers, or the first appearance of the phrase in the tenth-century *Sepher Yosippon* – it electrified his young scouts and led to the formation of four small regiments totaling some 800 Jewish youth who fought in the forests of Lithuania throughout the war.

Among the national groups who resisted the Axis were the Greeks who had their own traditions of “Freedom or Death” as the Cretan novelists hallowed in their wartime tales of Greek resistance to invaders.² This tradition was embedded in Greek tradition since ancient times and was best summarized by Jacob Burckhardt in his notes on ancient Greek culture.³ There he summarized the responsibility of the besieged citizens of the polis who were about to be defeated by another polis: Kill your wives and children, fire your city and stores, and then commit suicide. The latter part of this tradition is better known as “noble death” and has been practiced in the West since the Roman Republic by nearly every military which chose death with honor over capture, imprisonment, and torture. Since the tenth-century the tradition of noble death and martyrdom, the latter a Hellenistic Jewish variation that became fundamental to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, have been conjoined in the *Sepher Yosippon*, a history of the Second Temple period.⁴ The latter indeed was a significant factor in the nineteenth-century

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emergence of Zionism, the Jewish version of nationalism that was realized in the mid twentieth century.⁵

This paper will examine aspects of the response of Jews of Greece to the oppression of the Axis in Greece during the occupation and elsewhere in the wartime Reich.⁶

The tale begins with the Italian invasion of Greece on October 28th, 1940. Jews in the Greek army fought for their “patrida” and a hero of the Epirote campaign was a career officer who had managed to stay clear of the political stasis between the French trained and the German trained officers who were favored by the Germanophile Ioannes Metaxas. The French trained officers were cashiered and sat out the war, eventually forming the backbone to the Republican Resistance Movement EDES [Ethnikos Dimokratikos Ellinikos Syndesmos] which was ultimately subverted by the British into supporting the return of the king now in exile under British protection. Lt. Col. Mordecai Frizis, a staff officer who helped plan the defense of the Albanian border region, led his troops in the successful counterattack that drove back Mussolini’s “hollow legions” and captured large numbers of the ill-trained and ill equipped troops.⁷ Frizis was killed in an aerial attack along with a small group of Jewish soldiers from Larissa who were protecting him while he led his men in another charge. Metaxas declared him a national hero and promoted him to colonel; his sons were offered state benefits including membership in his Youth Movement from which Jews were generally excluded.⁸

Other Jews were part of the suicide defense line that guarded the Rupel Pass from Bulgaria to Greece. This Metaxas Line that defended the border with Bulgaria was manned by orphans since it was considered a last stand effort. The large graveyard on the Bulgarian side of the pass, visible from the heights, testifies to the ferocity of the fighting; none of the forts fell to the invaders. Some of the Greek survivors went into the mountains to continue the fight including Elias Nissim of Salonika who died from wounds incurred later in 1944 fighting near Grevena. After a series of victories that pushed the Italians back into the Albanian mountains and essentially trapped them where they froze, Mussolini tried two generals and finally himself as leader to break through to conquer Greece. The tragic story of the so called “Cohen Brigade” made up largely of Salonika

⁶ In addition to the articles in the previous two notes see Bowman, Steven: The Agony of Greek Jews, 1940–1945. Stanford 2009.
⁸ See Bowman, Agony of Greek Jews, p. 253, n. 2 for his wartime career.
Jews was sent by a Greek career officer who apparently did not like Jews across a bridge guarded by Italian machine guns that inflicted heavy casualties. Yitshak Mosheh, who had learned German while at school in Thessaloniki, was the only soldier capable of speaking with the German officer who drove up to the Greek lines and requested their surrender since the government had evacuated Greece and General Tsolakoglou had already accepted terms from the Germans who had overrun the Greek rear. Hitler was so impressed by the fighting élan of the Greeks that in his May 4th speech he praised their soldiers effusively and released all Greek prisoners of war. He was soon to lose nearly his entire parachute corps during the invasion of Crete.

The heaviest casualties suffered by both the Italians and the Greeks were from frostbite and subsequent gangrene that were treated most easily by amputation, a result that could be seen for years among survivors of the mountain fighting. The prosthetic limbs of the Jewish veterans of Albania still fill the bins at the Auschwitz Museum along with the myriads of personal possessions of the victims: shoes, eyeglasses, suitcases, shaving gear etc. Some of the Jewish doctors found better treatment for gangrene, especially for those soldiers who protested most strongly against amputation. A number of them survived to fight in the mountain resistance forces. Dr. Jean Alalouf who ran the Greek hospital in Albania during the 1940–1941 campaign used the therapy of René Leriche [a surgical technique he called sympathectomy to increase blood flow in the arteries] to prevent amputation for treatment of frostbite. Alalouf was subsequently honored by the Greek government, the Masonic order of Phoenix and St. George. The Germans sent him to Bergen-Belsen where he administered the health services in the camp. For his treatment of survivors during and after the war he was honored by the French ambassador, and Queen Wilhelmina of Holland gave him honorary Dutch citizenship after the war.

The Axis divided Greece into three parts among which Italy received the bulk of the mainland and the islands [Greece has some 2,500 islands], Bulgaria which gained its irredentist claims to Macedonia and Thrace, and Germany which took Thessaloniki, the strip along the Bulgarian-Turkish border, an area of Crete, and some strategic points. The destination for the brave Cretans who battled General Von Student’s paratroopers was Mauthausen. A group of fierce Cretan women, captured in battle in their native dress, were allowed to keep their knives in their

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9 Author’s interviews with Yitshak Mosheh, aka Kapetan Kitsos in 2010.
Athenian prison. Germans generally respected the fighting élan of the Greeks as emphasized by Hitler’s May 4th speech. That respect however did not deter them from massive retaliation against non-military Greek men, women, and children throughout the occupation.

Greek resistance began as a congeries of bands ranging from soldiers who refused to surrender to klephthes, the traditional bandits who had earned a folklore reputation by fighting the Turks, and outright thieves who preyed on the peasants. In autumn 1941, the Communists who had been released from their island prisons by the victorious Germans answered Stalin’s call for a mass people’s resistance against the Nazis and Fascists. The Communist led ELAS [Ethnikós Apelevtherotikós Stratós – National People’s Liberation Army] gradually put an end to the klephthes, the thieves, and the rival bands of soldiers in most of Greece. Most of the soldiers of ELAS were either Socialists, peasants, refugees, and in all about 1,000 or more Jews who were dispersed among the various ELAS units. By summer of 1943 ELAS had become organized as a semi-professional army with its own officer school under the leadership of General Sarafis. Its methods were harsh toward internal and external opponents but generous in its welcome to Jewish fighters and refugees.

In June 1940 Winston Churchill called for “Setting Europe Ablaze“, that is a general call for a guerilla war in every country occupied by the Axis. A new intelligence corps SOE [Special Operations Executive] was formed that organized and assisted the various movements and parachuted agents, supplies, weapons, and BLOs [British Liaison Officers] into occupied Europe. In June 1942 the Americans formed a complimentary organization the OSS [Office of Strategic Services] led by William Donovan, a personal friend of Franklin Roosevelt. Eventually the British and American allies formed the Allied Military Mission [AMM] when the Americans began to operate in Greece. Stalin had already called for a people’s resistance in September 1942. But it was the locals, whether assisted by the Soviets [loyal to Stalin’s orders and tactics] or the British, who had to navigate between the true local allies and those who were supported by the Axis, i. e., the men on the ground who ran the show. The real question for the Allies was who would govern after (or if) they won the war.

In Greece ancestral tradition taught as summarized by Euripides [frag 245] “I tell you one thing only; do not allow yourself to be taken alive into servitude, as long as you can still choose to die free“, and the ancient writers are unanimous in the view that slavery is worse than death. Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Greek writers echoed this sentiment and Greek nationalists fought to the

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last bullet and killed themselves in various ways to avoid capture and torture by the Turks and Bulgarians. Over 75 percent of the Greek women participated in the resistance from weapons to laundry. Aside from male collaborators most of the peasants and shepherds were with the resistance, especially those with young sons in danger of being drafted for labor by the Axis occupiers. Greece was still predominantly a patriarchal society and would remain so after the war, especially with regard to the thousands of women who were “liberated” by the preaching of the specially trained women of ELAS. Many of these peasant women would spend years postwar in government prisons, many with their children, rather than renounce their new found freedom of self-identity and self-assertiveness to return to their former beast of burden status in the mountain villages. 13

The Greek Resistance was drawn from a number of sources both native and foreign. While numerous Greek officers escaped via Resistance networks to Egypt where they joined the Greek army in exile, the soldiers either returned to their villages where they supplied reserve forces for those elements in the mountains which remained “Free Greece” throughout the war or went to serve in the mountains. Jews who fought both in the Italian and German campaigns mostly returned to Thessaloniki whence the bulk of the Jewish draftees and volunteers hailed while others escaped to Egypt to serve there or to Palestine where they integrated with the earlier Greek immigrants or went to the mountains to continue the fight. When the persecutions of the Germans began in summer 1942 many young Jews in Thessaloniki were recruited by Communist or ELAS agents to flee to safety in the mountains where they subsequently joined fighting units. Older Jews with their families fled during the deportations of spring 1943 to mountains villages where many of them served with their various intellectual or commercial skills and experiences. The majority of these Jews were either formally educated in the Greek system including university or polyglot by virtue of the international and polyethnic society of Thessaloniki. Many of the young women, actually teenagers, were imbued with Socialist teachings and the emerging emancipation of urban females in interwar Thessaloniki. They were recruited and trained to draw the young men to the resistance. However, their efforts were generally stymied by older matrons in the matriarchal households who chased them away. Eventually they escaped to the mountain villages where they organized various services for the families of the fighters, led cheering rallies, provided basic education for the village children, taught nursing skills, and generally spread their modern ideas among the rural traditional and conservative Greek population, in particular the

women. Also many of them joined the fighting units in various capacities. Older Jewish women joined the village women among whom they took refuge while the men and older girls were with the resistance and contributed whatever urban skills they had brought with them, e. g., sewing machines which were unknown in the mountains.

Not only Greek Jews were to be found among the resistance. Indeed among the first volunteers in the mountains were Communist refugees from neighboring Yugoslavia which had been rapidly conquered and divided among the Axis allies: Italy, Hungary, Bulgaria, and the “independent” dependency of Croatia. In response to the bloodbaths unleashed during the war two major resistance movements emerged with that of the Communists under Tito welcoming thousands of Jews who served throughout the ranks as they did in Greece. Occasional Jewish refugees from Poland moved south to Greece where they were trapped by the war and some joined the Resistance. Jewish refugees from Austria could also be found as well as German Jews, part of the Palestinian contingent in the British Expeditionary Force to Greece in autumn 1941 who were left behind during the British retreat to Crete. A non-Jewish Swiss engineer, Rene Burckhardt, who worked for the large Allatini factory in prewar Thessaloniki, provided valuable services as the wartime agent in Thessaloniki of the International Committee of the Red Cross. Another engineer, a German Jew, provided key data that assisted the resistance fighters in their encounters with the Wehrmacht 999 punishment battalions that did guard and occupation duty in Greece. Greece had a number of Central European specialists who helped to modernize industry during the interwar years and several of them, e. g., Edgar Thomashausen, manager of the Athens Electric Company, remained in Greece during the occupation in various contexts. A contingent of Soviet Jewish prisoners of war escaped from slave labor in Crete and fought with the resistance as we shall see. In sum Jews and non-Jews from Greece and elsewhere were an integral part of the multi-ethnic forces that constituted the Greek resistance forces during the war.

The Greek resistance movement during the war was the arena in which two wars were fought: The one against the Axis occupiers was secondary to its prewar civil struggle over the future of Greece. How would the Greek monarchy, constitutional at best, Orthodox and conservative, face the challenge of Socialism and the international Communist movement with its totalitarian messianic vision of a new society so attractive to the modernizing Left. Among the various groups that emerged in the wake of Greece’s surrender were ELAS and EDES. ELAS was the largest and most powerful and controlled most of Free Greece in particular the Pindus mountain range and Olympus with units in the Peloponnese and the islands. It consisted of a congeries of political parties from agrarian to socialist but secretly was led by Soviet trained Greek Communists. ELAS fighting forces were
led by Aris Velouhiotis, a prewar Communist who had recanted his membership due to police pressures and thus was suspect to the more orthodox Communist leadership. EDES membership was basically republican Venezelists; its officers were French trained who had been cashiered by the dictator Ioannes Metaxas whose bloodless coup of August 4th, 1936, suspended the constitution yet continued to support the monarchy. The royals were divided between British supporters (the king took refuge under their protection and fought with the Empire who wanted to restore him after the war) and the queen who was sympathetic to the Germans, a tradition that had begun during World War I and was based on the Germanic antecedents of the monarchy. Metaxas himself, identified as a Mediterranean fascist (as were Franco and Salazar), actually attempted to reintroduce ancient Athenian values into Greek society. EDES was led by Colonel Zervas who was clever enough to be seduced into supporting the return of the king after the war in return for British support. He was cautious enough to survive both the Germans and ELAS throughout the occupation. Both ELAS and EDES were more concerned with the postwar resolution of their prewar struggles for control of Greek society; even so they assisted the BLOs who were spread among their units and contributed men, arms, and gold to the various operations against the enemy as called for in the war effort. Britain supported both movements, although ELAS more reluctantly due to its Communist leadership and to its call for a postwar plebiscite over the return of the king. Even so Churchill honored his agreement with Stalin over the disposition of the Balkans in which Britain was to have 90 percent influence over Greece while Stalin would control the Slavs of the Balkans that his army was overrunning.

The Jews were not part of this grand scheme however. Of the nearly 80,000 Jews in prewar Greece over 65,000 were deported to Auschwitz and Treblinka. Less than 2,000 survived and only some 1,200 returned after the war. About 8,000–10,000 fled to the mountains and the remainder mostly found refuge in Palestine and other neutral or Allied controlled regions. Many old and infirm succumbed during the rigors of the occupation prior to the deportation of their healthier relatives. It is to the mountain story that we turn now for examples of the various Jewish contributions to the resistance: the fighting and non-fighting contributions, the leadership and the training, the medical and the commercial. We shall also see Jewish resistance against the Nazis in Poland, both in Auschwitz and in Warsaw. We shall see too how after capture Greek Jews who died by their myriads as “sheep led to slaughter” reified the virtually unknown words of Euripides that permeated Greek society through the memory of the Maccabees and other legendary Hellenic heroes of the distant and more recent past: “I tell you one thing only; do not allow yourself to be taken alive into servitude, as long as you can still choose to die free.”
A short excursus on the phrase “as sheep led to slaughter” is necessary at the outset given its political and emotional postwar history. The phrase is generally considered as an insult to the victims of the Holocaust whom religious Jews commemorate as martyrs. While many were not martyrs, they died mostly by the four means of dying mentioned in the Yom Kippur service: famine, plague, hanging, burning.

To which we may sadly add the more modern bombing, gas chambers, bullets, torture, poison, and in general, sadism. The phrase is biblical in origin and is a metaphor for God’s actions viv-a-vis the Jews and so it became part of the medieval prayers. By the nineteenth century it was in common use in Hebrew texts and newspapers to describe the mass murders of soldiers and civilians in the nationalist wars, in particular among gentiles. During World War II a Soviet officer asked Abba Kovner why Jews were going to their deaths like sheep to the slaughter. In postwar Palestine and later Israel it was used to condemn the galut [diaspora] as a negative force in the new identity that Zionism was forging. This negative development became a branding insult to the victims of the Holocaust.

However, the complete phrase is “Do not go like sheep led to the slaughter” as uttered by Abba Kovner in his clarion call for Jewish resistance against the genocidal policy of the Nazis. Here he was citing [directly or indirectly does not concern us here] the tenth-century nationalist-religious history of the Second Temple period popularized as Sepher Yosippon, which became the most influential story of Jewish history and the end of Jewish independence during the millennium preceding Abba Kovner. In the Yosippon the author has merged two biblical phrases [Isaiah 53:7 and Psalms 44:22] to form this mighty phrase which he puts in the mouth of Matathias, the patriarch of the Hasmonean clan. Matathias sends forth his son Judah in secret throughout the cities of Judah [Judea] calling out “Who among you is with me and who for the Lord to me” and the community of militant Hasideans flocked to him. Whereupon follows Matathias’s injunction:

Why further mince words! There is nothing further other than prayer and fighting. Be strong and we shall be strengthened and we shall die fighting and not die as sheep led to slaughter [namuth bamilhamah velo namuth ketson latevah yuval].

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15 Yael Feldman’s Yad Vashem lecture in spring 2010; a revised and expanded study appeared in Jewish Social Studies 19:3 (Summer 2013), pp. 139–169.
16 Feldman, Not as Sheep to Slaughter. The origins of the Soviet officer’s query has not been analyzed in this context.
17 Flusser, David (ed.): The Yosippon [Josephus Gorionides]. Jerusalem 1981, p. 76. “And from that day on the burden of the nation of Makedon was cast off from the nation of Judah.” (p. 77).
This phrase appears in numerous writings in subsequent centuries and of course in the many editions of *Yosippon* in Hebrew and Yiddish and the numerous translations throughout the subsequent millennium. And even if Abba Kovner’s scouts were among the few who never read *Sepher Yosippon* his citing of the phrase and subsequent leadership ignited the spirit of resistance unto death among the Jewish youth of Lithuania.

Indeed, as Abba Kovner points out, Jewish youth were the first into battle and constituted the vanguard of the resistance in Lithuania at the beginning of 1942, already a few weeks anterior to the Wannsee Conference at which the Final Solution and the genocidal phase of the Holocaust was officially announced by the Nazi and governmental leadership.

Among Greek Jews *Sepher Yosippon* was available in Hebrew and also in an eighteenth-century Judeo-Spanish translation. The rabbi of Kastoria used to cite the heroes of *Yosippon* who had already become the heroes of Zionism through the literary efforts of Micah Berdischewski [Bin Gorion, name adopted after the purported author of *Yosippon*] at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries. One can find numerous allusions and references to the content of *Yosippon* and even David Ben Gurion hebraized his name Grün from the purported author of the book as he admitted to David Flusser, the modern editor of this classic text. The rabbi of Kastoria however imbued he was with Zionism nonetheless castigated the resistance as communists and therefore forbade the youth to join it. Nevertheless a few ignored him and were saved by their participation in the mountain fighting. Other young Jews were entertained by the Judeo-Spanish version that was cited to them by their teachers in the Jewish schools of Salonika and Bulgaria. By comparison the Greek youth were harangued with nationalist mottos and the stories of heroes and martyrs during the War of Independence (1821–1830) as well as the border fighters against the Bulgarians in their pursuit of the Megali Idea, the Modern Greek version of Manifest Destiny which included the recovery of all former Greek possessions surrounding the Aegean Sea and former Byzantine possessions to the north.

We have not yet found reference in Greek Jewish sources to two other influential texts that recalled the disasters of Jews and Armenians past and present during the interwar years and that had a major influence on the Jews during their resistance movements against the Nazis: Isaac Lamdan’s epic poem *Masada* which was recently shown to be based on *Sepher Yosippon* and not on Flavius Josephus’s *Jewish War* and Franz Werfel’s classic *Musa Dagh* whose Hebrew
translation was widely read and partially contributed to the idea of a Mount Carmel redoubt in the event of a German breakthrough into Palestine in 1942.\(^{19}\)

Literature and folklore aside, although not discounting their influence among Jews and non-Jews, the few memoirs of Greek Jews cast some light on the various areas of the resistance in which they participated. I have collected nearly 700 names of Greek Jews, men and women, who were active during the war, out of some estimated 1,000. Some estimates suggest about 3,000 Jews who were in fighting or serving in the mountains out of about 30,000 andartes [partisans] (i.e., between three and ten percent). Needless to say many died nameless and share a common grave with their Greek synagonistes as their colleagues in arms. Historian Joseph Matsas of Ioannina commemorated them in his seminal lecture of 1982; that was the original stimulus for my research on the topic.\(^{20}\) A decade and a half later his relative Michael Matsas added more data in his memoir cum history.\(^{21}\)

An army marches on its stomach as Napoleon quipped, and so in addition to fighters there is the general problem of logistics, impedimenta as the Romans designated supplies. A resistance army has to forage for its supplies while a regular army has the support of a state structure to supply it, although Mussolini failed to do so in Albania and as the war wore down the Wehrmacht too ran short of supplies. Greek resistance forces were supplied by air from Egypt and later Italy by the British and occasionally by submarine. Various sorts of supplies and men were smuggled over the Aegean from Turkey under the auspices of British services and later by the Americans. The latter eventually landed American Greek-speaking soldiers on the mainland and Crete to assist in sabotage and creating general mayhem among Axis forces.

But in the mountains the Greek andartes had to rely on the poor villages. A number of resourceful individuals were foragers for food and other supplies including David Brudo and Alberto Meir, while Jules Nissim collected supplies and other equipment and spare parts.\(^{22}\) A Jewish agronomy student from the University of Athens actually organized a collective among some 50 villages and acted as translator for the German forces that also lived off the land. Yaakov Arar,

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22 On Brudo see Bowman, Jewish Resistance in Wartime Greece. Brudo’s brother Marcel was also in the resistance. According to his son, Dr. Isaac Meir, Alberto Meir served with the Sterea Ellas Division under Triantaphyllidis after September 1943. The latter’s role was supplied by his daughter.
who had experience among the villages of Macedonia in his capacity as merchant, was able to guide British officers in their hunt for fresh food and other supplies. As for feet which are as important to the military as stomachs, Alberto Meir is reported to have told the following story: After a firefight with the Germans on Euboia the andartes retired and fled to the mountains. Exhausted they came upon a hot spring, took off their boots, and soaked their feet. The Germans, having pursued them, opened fire and killed all of the men save one. The witness, Alberto Meir, was the only one who did not remove his boots. The Histadruth of Palestine was pleased to supply several hundred pairs of boots to ELAS along with gold coins that paid the fare of Jewish refugees escaping from Nazi occupied Athens to Euboia. The ELAS run boat service from Euboia to the Çesme peninsula in Turkey was paid one gold coin per Jew ferried to safety. Among those so rescued and paid for was George Papandreou who later formed a post-liberation government in Athens. British headquarters in Cairo had earlier engaged Captain Aczel, a Palestinian Jewish sea captain, to rescue the Greek government which had escaped to Turkey in 1941 and bring them and their families to Palestine.

Brudo and Meir were also fighters of note in the mountains but the most wellknown was Kapitan Kitsos, the nom de guerre of Itzhak Mosheh of Salonika. Along with Brudo and Meir he too was a Communist whom he joined in 1936 after the August coup of Ioannes Metaxas and in response to the abject conditions of the thousands of tobacco workers, mostly women, of Kavalla who precipitated the strike that provided the rationale for the coup. Kitsos was a fighting commander and also a “politikos” who preached the message of resistance. As a leader in the field he was sent orders to call up reserves for special missions that he led and he was able to discuss the strategy of these orders with his superiors. Another political and military leader was Baruch Schibi who was one of the urban leaders for Sector 3A in Athens and later fought in the Peloponnesus toward the end of the occupation during a German sweep through Arkadia in Passover 1944. Schibi, who was one of the three leaders in the area and administered the resistance newspapers in Arkadia, was called up to assist the units trapped near Gortini. The Greeks inflicted a major defeat on the 700 German regulars at the Battle of Glogoba.

There were a few other Communist Jews in the resistance – Alegra Skyphti joined

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23 On Kitsos also see Bowman, Jewish Resistance in Wartime Greece.
24 See Bowman, Jewish Resistance in Wartime Greece, chap. 6. Schibi returned to Athens in December and was arrested by the British now engaged in the Dekembria. He was sent to Egypt where he became spokesman for the thousands of Greeks interned there. After liberation he returned to Salonika and helped organize the survivors of the death camps and the mountains of Greece, later becoming president of the community.
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the KKE [Greek Communist Party] in Volos and served with EAM, the National Liberation Front, under her husband’s name as Alegra Kapeta – however, they were never part of the leadership as were their co-religionists in Yugoslavia and elsewhere. Indeed Jews were rather to be found on the lower levels of leadership as active political promoters and lieutenants in the ELAS fighting forces. Another fighter and forager of supplies and equipment was Salvator Bakolas of Ioannina. Known as Sotiris, he was in the 5th Brigade of EPON [Eniaia Panelladiki Organosi Neon – Greek Youth Organisation] and fought in the battle of Amfissa (July 2nd, 1944) where second lieutenant “Skoufas” (Yohannes Kajis from Arta) was killed.25 Another wellknown fighter was Kapetan Makkabaios, so designated by his commander who wished to honor his fighting ancestors, only forty years later identified as Ido Shimshi. Most of the young Jewish boys and girls however leaned toward Socialism which was well established in Salonika since the foundation of the Socialist movement there by Abraham Benaroya.

The first major act of the resistance movement was the destruction of the Gorgopotamos Bridge, a key target on the railroad supply line to southern Greece for the German forces in North Africa. True, the bridge was destroyed in late November 1942 after the Battle of El Alamein which ended the Nazi threat to Egypt and Palestine. However, the sabotage was a major stage in the British involvement in the Greek resistance. Major Eddy Meyers, a scion of the older Sephardic immigrants to England and now a pro forma member of the state religion was drafted from his teaching position at the British military college in Haifa to lead a demolition unit to Greece. He succeeded in the process to obtain the assistance of the two major resistance forces ELAS and EDES and after the success of the mission he was ordered to stay in Greece and try to unite the two groups. Major Meyers finally succeeded in obtaining a hiatus in the civil war in the mountains by summer 1943 when he was recalled to England and replace by Christopher Woodhouse, a dedicated monarchist who had exposed the Communist leadership of ELAS. We now have more support for the claim that there were Jews among the andartes who supported the British mission.26 Alberto Meir is the only named Jewish fighter to date, according to family tradition, to have participated in the mission. In retaliation the Germans shot a number of hostages. On the plaque at the site commemorating the execution is the name of Sab[y or -bethai?] Sapheka,

25 See Matsas, The Illusion of Safety, and Bowman, Jewish Resistance in Wartime Greece. According to a witness he was killed after being captured by the Germans.
26 A Palestinian POW claimed one Jew participated in the raid [Central Zionist Archives S25/7852]. Kabeli, Isaac: The Resistance of the Greek Jews. In: YIVO Annual of Jewish Social Science VIII (1953), pp. 281–288 has an exaggerated figure that has been rejected by some researchers.
which is a decidedly Jewish name. The Germans used 286 Greek Jews and Christians to repair the bridge. Among the Salonika Jews drafted for this labor was Salomon Matalon who later escaped, joined the andartes and helped to mine the German supply line.

The island of Euboia was a crucial link in the escape route out of occupied Greece. A number of Jewish fighters visited the island along with their commanders from Central Greece [Sterea Ellada] where they regularly participated in the fighting, including the Battle of Amphissa. British agents from the Çesme peninsula passed by Jewish refugees and Greek military men heading for the east Mediterranean via Turkey, the military men to the Greek army in Egypt and the Jews to Palestine. Some of these Jews joined the Greek army and air service operating in Egypt. ELAS set up a ferry service of local caiques [traditional fishing and cargo boats] to facilitate the exodus from Greece. The British and the Americans in the Çesme peninsula hired their own caiques. On the island was a small Jewish community in Chalkis connected to the mainland by a bridge, although the refugees crossed to the island in the south and were later led to embarkation ports. One of its members, a young girl independent of spirit and clever beyond her years, convinced her mother to escape the occupying forces that she distrusted – the Wehrmacht dentist quartered in their home pretended to shoot Jews walking in the street – and with the aid of her friends left the city for the safety of the mountains. She began her career with the resistance by teaching in the mountain villages and later she negotiated her own diversionary squad of young girls who served as a distraction to the occupiers. Who would suspect young girls of setting off explosions? While the occupiers investigated the incidents, the andartes would carry out raids in the opposite direction. Sarah [Sarika] Yeshurun was related to Colonel Frizis, the hero of the Epirus defeat of the invading Italians. In addition to her work as teacher and commando leader [she was an excellent shot and even single handedly executed the collaborator responsible for her cousin’s brutal and sadistic murder], she became the poster soldier of Euboia ELAS and led a special marching company to honor the British and American journalists who accompanied the British forces after the German withdrawal.27

Many of the Jews who had served in Albania during the six month war with Italy had returned home, some of them to later join the andartiko [Greek partisan resistance]. Their military experience and their non-partisan politics deserve a special chapter in the difficult years of the occupation and the later civil war that racked Greece in the late 1940s. During that decade few Jews became army

27 See Bowman, Jewish Resistance in Wartime Greece, chap. 3.
officers and most of those were in the lower ranks. Itshak Mosheh pointed out that his affiliation with the KKE barred him from becoming an officer during the war. His leadership talents were recognized during the occupation however and he served as both military commander of his own group and politikos. Other talented Jews served as officers such as Lieutenant Samuel Eskenazi of Larissa, a decorated veteran of Albania who commanded a company in Regiment 54 and died in battle. Lieutenant Yohannes Hadjis of Arta, mentioned above, was a Second Lieutenant in Albania and died a First Lieutenant following his capture during the Battle of Amphissa.28 Zach Kakis was a captain with ELAS on Mount Pelion. His father Emil was not killed in battle by the Germans as previously noted, but rather died from pneumonia before the war according to his daughter Carmen who was29 a recruiter for ELAS in the region of Volos.

When ELAS finally established a regular army and an officer’s training school, Marko Carasso was chosen as a candidate following his citation for bravery in the battle that Regiment 16 fought near Kastoria against the German trained Slavophones.30 Carasso was bent on revenge against the Germans who had shot his father in Salonika during one of their numerous hostage massacres in retaliation for the killing or wounding of a German soldier. He died in an attack on a military train in July 1944. Much of his wartime career was spent in seeking vengeance for his father. Several Greek Jews received honorary commissions from the British with whom they served during the war and were listed on the Nominal Rolls Force 133 of Christopher Woodhouse, its commander following Myers recall to London.31

Medicine has occasionally been cited as a Jewish monopoly in the Balkans. Two factors may support this supposition. While the Bible emphasizes that God is the ultimate healer and later Jewish tradition eagerly absorbed all biblical references to medicine and healing, Jews also studied Greek medicine and many became physicians, many acceding to the royal houses and even to the Papacy itself despite the blandishments of more pious anti-Jewish clerics in the western and eastern churches. Numerous Jewish students studied medicine in Italy since the Renaissance and in later centuries returned to Greece to practice; others

31 See Bowman, Jewish Resistance in Wartime Greece, p. 288, note 47.
had their studies curtailed by the war and so went to the mountains with rather basic training in first aid and medical practice. One of the better known is Robert Mitranis who both fought and healed. His father was a well-respected physician in Serres who was murdered in Auschwitz. Though still a medical student at the start of the war Robert was soon assigned to the andartiko headquarters to set up a medical facility. His unit was ambushed at Agia Triada on January 5th, 1944, and he died on the field of battle while attempting to rescue his wounded commander.

Perhaps the best known doctor, among the many in the mountains and in the concentration camps, is Dr. Manolis (Emmanuel) Arukh, chief medical officer of V/34 Battalion and leader of the best medical unit in Central Greece. Jewish doctors also treated captured German soldiers, despite complaints to the contrary by his fellow fighters. Albert Cohen was another well remembered doctor in V/34 and helped set up a mobile hospital after the battle of Arachova where the andartes captured some large tents from the defeated Germans. Nurses too went to the mountains and trained young village girls in first aid and basic hygiene. The most famous is Fanny Florentin who had served with the Hellenic Red Cross in Albania. She served later with Dr. Yanni (a Jewish doctor later killed during the civil war) and trained village girls as nurses’ aides. She was saved after capture by the Germans and imprisoned in Salonika through the efforts of young Resistance members who bribed the guards before her execution. They had been informed of her status by her friends in the Helleni Red Cross. Fanny’s husband Leon was a mortar expert who fought alongside Salomon Matalon with the Greek American commandos at Veskoti in 1944 and were part of the Allied Military Mission that destroyed the Aliakmon Bridge.

In retrospect we can deduce several motifs in the Jews who served with the resistance. Many of the young men had fought in Albania and on the northern border of Greece. They were well trained. Many too had been educated either in the Jewish schools in Salonika or in the foreign schools where they learned several languages [French, German, Italian] in addition to their native medieval Spanish and Hebrew. Many were hard working, sons of merchants and professionals. The mass of poor stevedores were less educated but they controlled street Greek and Spanish at a minimum and their vocation gave them strong backs and endurance. Many were cited for bravery, a tribute to the education in Greek nationalism that had been introduced into the Salonika school system in an attempt to Hellenize the city so recently incorporated into the kingdom.

Like their Christian co-fighters, they were intense, perhaps more so since they were proud to be Greeks and, perhaps more importantly, they had little choice since Nazi Germany had sentenced Greek Jews to death and ultimately killed nearly 90 percent of them.
Resourceful and brave and somewhat desperate, they hid their identities under the mythical names of Hellenic heroes or their Christian neighbors. Very few survived capture to be sent to concentration camps: Mauthausen for the Christian Cretans and Auschwitz for the Jews. On the other hand, Jewish leaders were concerned with the survival of their men, many drawn from the peasant families who constituted the reserves for the resistance. And as much as they trained them to survive the tactics of the nineteenth century – wild charges across minefields, as reported by the Americans – losses were heavy, but enthusiasm for confronting the occupiers and seeking vengeance for the slaughter of women and children kept up general Greek morale in the mountains.

The resistance in Greece was fought by free men. But there was also resistance in the heart of the evil empire. The Poles rose in revolt in August 1944 in the mistaken belief that the Soviet Army would come to their assistance; Stalin, however, was happy to see his two foes killing each other and so rested his army across the Vistula River. Warsaw and the ruins of the Jewish ghetto was also the center of the revolt. Several trainloads of slaves from Birkenau were sent in Fall 1943 to Warsaw to recycle the ruins of the destroyed ghetto. In July most of the surviving Greeks were marched back to Dachau, leaving about 150 to break down the camp. When the revolt broke out these Greeks, many of them veterans of the Albanian theater, were able to contribute their experience, both medical and military, to the effort. They were for example able to maneuver and fire captured German tanks. They split into many smaller groups so that some might survive to report on their participation and they died as free men. The major problem they faced during the fighting was the blatant anti-Semitism they encountered from the Poles among whom they fought. Only 27 returned to Greece with their stories and the memories of their comrades.

Increasing research has illuminated the number of ghetto revolts or uprisings, the Warsaw ghetto uprising being the best known. In the death camps there were revolts in anticipation of the closing of the camps, in particular Sobibor where most of the slaves who escaped were killed. One of the features of the latter revolts was the arrival of Jewish officers in the camps. One must remember that the majority of the slaves in the killing process were young, strong, and totally bewildered by the insane situation into which they had been so brutally thrust. Discipline was exacting and veterans were regularly removed and killed and younger ones sent in as replacements. The shifting of Jewish slaves to various work camps did not allow for organization. Thus the arrival of officers among the Sonderkommandos gave some hope for planning, especially as rumors of the approach of the Soviet Army and increased contact with the Polish resistance raised hopes if not for success then for vengeance. This leadership in the various camps has not been sufficiently emphasized during research and in popular
treatments of the death camps. The uprising in Auschwitz-Birkenau in Fall 1944 will hopefully serve as an example for future consideration.

The summer of 1944 was particularly tragic for the Hungarian Jews. Nearly half a million were deported to Birkenau and some 400,000 were immediately gassed and cremated by the Sonderkommando. This last Sonderkommando had been replenished in mid-June with the arrival of the next to last transport from Greece and consisted mainly of Jews from Corfu [about 1,795 of the 2,000 victims]. By September there were a less than 2,500 Greeks, of whom 731 were women, in the entire Auschwitz complex with its 39 subcamps. Already in July plans were being made for a camp wide revolt; however, the Polish resistance groups with the main camp demurred in face of the vengeful slaughter they anticipated from the Nazis. The mass of Jews in Birkenau were too weak to attempt a revolt but they would gladly add their numbers should a revolt break out. That left only the Sonderkommando whose members were young and strong, well fed, and many had military training and combat experience before their capture and enslavement. Among the planners of the revolt was Joseph Varouh, a career officer in the Greek army, who had joined the resistance after the Greek surrender, and four other Greeks. With him on the transport were another 30 Greeks from Arta, Corfu, Ioannina, Athens, and Salonika whose registration forms indicated their military service.

Plans for the revolt set for August 15th were sabotaged through the betrayal of the major kapo who helped to organize the revolt by another kapo. Toward the end of August the Sonderkommando was reduced in number since the Hungarian influx had abated. In October another selection was planned and on the seventh, a Saturday since the Nazis enjoyed desecrating holy days, the numbers of some Greeks and Hungarians were called out. [Three months was the average length of time for the previous 10 Sonderkommandos and it was time to cull the population with the last in to be the first removed leaving a corps of veterans to train the next Sonderkommando.] At this point, according to reports of survivors, Varouh called out an order to charge the guards. The slaves rioted and began to throw stones at the guards. One guard escaped the attack and alarmed the SS headquarters. Reinforcements arrived and within 55 minutes the uprising was put down and the rioters all shot on the spot. Within a few days those who had succeeded in escaping were captured. About 250 men were killed from crematoria 3 and 4. The latter was the center of the uprising and the men chose to blow themselves up with the dynamite that women slaves had smuggled out of the Unionwerke. No doubt they were well aware of the heroes of the nineteenth

32 Alternately spelled Baruch in the secondary literature and usually mistakenly identified with an Askenazi Jew named Joseph Baruch.
century who blew up their redoubts or otherwise killed themselves rather than be captured and shot. Reportedly they died singing the Greek and Zionist anthems, a final gesture of defiance by men trained to die as free men. Another 200 men of the Sonderkommando were killed bring the total to about two thirds of the pre-uprising complement. Another 30 who had escaped were recaptured and hid their identity and were sent to Dachau. Thirty slaves of crematorium 5 continued to service crematorium 5 Another 70 dismantled crematorias 2 and 3 in the wake of Himmler’s order to end mass murders at Birkenau. Eventually these 100, including 8 Greeks, were part of the general evacuation of Auschwitz in January 1945. The following day (January 26th) the SS blew up crematorium 5. The 100 survived their planned execution when the officer in charge of that detail was replaced at the last moment and the new officer, unaware of the order to execute them, evacuated them to Mauthausen.33

During the same period of the uprisings in Warsaw and Birkenau, the Greeks were busy harassing the German withdrawal from Greece. They were aided by the British BLOs and the American Greek Brigade who were primarily interested in hindering the withdrawal that the British had negotiated with the Germans. But that agreement only covered Athens and the Peloponnesus. The andartiko (occasionally assisted by Canadian and Soviet liaison officers as noted by Kapetan Kitsos, also known as Itshak Mosheh) however was more interested in revenge and pursued the troops, cutting the roads, sabotaging bridges and slaughtering the disorganized troops who had to pass through ELAS controlled territory on their way to Salonika and ultimately to safety in Bulgaria. Their vengeance against the Germans was continued into November 1944. Mainland Greece, Crete, and the Bulgarian side of the Rupel Pass are covered with German graveyards. Perhaps the most odd of these is the one at Marathon where hundreds of SS troops, many killed by the andartes, lie in twelve mass graves each covered by a cross. Surely their arrival in the Fields of Elysium was not welcomed by the ancient Greek heroes of Marathon who have their own honored tumulus in the area.

While the Jews were integrated into the Greek andartiko and rarely identified as such to their Greek Christian comrades in arms, there is one incident, unique in the Greek story of the war, when a Jewish group of andartes, now soldiers in the army of ELAS, rescued a group of Jews who were captured by the SS troops. The differing accounts by General Stephanos Sarafis in his story of the ELAS army and Joseph Matsas the first historian of the Jewish role in the andartiko is illustrative of the anonymity of the Jewish role in the resistance. Sarafis mentions no Jewish 33

See Bowman, Agony of Greek Jews, pp. 96–99 and notes for further bibliography.
fighters in his book, and only sympathizes with some Jewish refugees whom he passed on the road.\textsuperscript{34} His account is professionally listed:

6 May. A column of 600 Germans advanced into southern Olympus, fell into a 10\textsuperscript{th} division ambush and was decimated. German dead 150, wounded 150, prisoners 18. Booty: 12 heavy machine-guns, 25 Steyrs, 80 rifles, 20 pistols and a large quantity of ammunition. ELAS dead 8, wounded 12.

Matsas, who researched the battle, gives a broader background: German HQ in Larissa was informed of 12 Jewish families who were hiding in Kalyvia tou Handjiara. An SS battalion was dispatched to arrest them and then fire the site. The ambush that caught them was led by Lt. Marko Carasso and included several other platoons that caught the SS in a deep ravine. German dead 230 – ELAS took no wounded prisoners, prisoners 14 including the commanding officer and his interpreter. The Jews were saved.

\textsuperscript{34} Sarafis, ELAS. Greek Resistance Army.