

## **Evvia portage: the Jews, ELAS and the Allies in Evvia, 1943-1944**

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The “Evvia portage” is a topic little known in its complexities even among students of the Greek scene during World War II. It is important however for a number of reasons, not the least of which is that it represents the rescue of some 1,500 Jews from the clutches of the Nazis, who sought to send all the Jews of Greece to the gas chambers and crematoria of Auschwitz. It is important too in that it is the tip of an iceberg that touches upon the relations between Greeks and Jews, the British and the Americans, the Allies and the Turks, and a host of other relationships during that tragic period. It is a story of rivalries, betrayals, heroism and venality that parallels many other episodes during the war. In short, it is a story rich in detail and drama and so worth telling for the historical record from which all great ideas and plots derive their inspiration.

Evvia (Euboea) is an elongated mountainous island that hugs the coast of Central Greece. It is divided from the mainland by the volcanic action that supplies the hot springs of Thermopylae and generates the shift of current that so perplexed Aristotle. The northern end faces Volos and the southern end, with its string of islands that lead to the Archipelago, beckons Attica with its mountains and beaches. It was to the mountains that Jews of Halkis, the capital of the island, fled for safety and where most of them survived. Some Jewish mothers from Volos crossed to the northern end of the island and parcelled out their children among the mountain villagers for the duration of the war. And it was via Oropos that Jews from Athens, including numerous refugees from Salonika, crossed to

Evvia for the long trek to safety in Palestine. In addition to the sanctuary that Evvia provided, there was its importance as a transit between Attica and Turkey. Traffic ran in both directions with recruits and refugees moving east across the Aegean and Greek and British officers moving west via various carriers into occupied Greece.

The Evvia story sheds light on those individuals who were between the top leadership that set policy and the victims who experienced it. Within this middle level there is a further division between leaders and teachers and the rank and file. Jews, due to their cultural and educational experience, were found proportionately more among the former. This middle level, we should note, is usually ignored in historical studies, particularly in Greece.

As is known,<sup>1</sup> Nazi policy was to eliminate the Jews, first from the expanding Reich by forced emigration and later by wholesale murder in the death factories of Poland. Only a small percentage of Jews had the opportunity to escape after the war broke out, but these too were handicapped by their ignorance of the broader scheme. And it is that lack of knowledge or understanding of the lethal anti-Semitism that contributed to an even higher percentage of victims of the Final Solution. Hence the Jewish story during the war has to take into effect the inability of the Jewish masses to plan or react in a constructive way to the new circumstances that were organized toward their very destruction. This was even more so the case among the Greek Jews to whom Nazi malevolence came swiftly and unexpectedly in the spring of 1943. The series of persecutions in Salonika during the second half of 1942 did not seem much worse than the vicissitudes being suffered by their fellow Greeks under Bulgarian occupation.

The number of Jews in the *andartiko* was less than it could have been for a number of reasons. Many of the Greek-Jewish

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<sup>1</sup> Especially from several libel trials in Great Britain: those of Leon Uris in 1964 and Deborah Lipstadt in 2001, in which David Irving was denounced by the court as a Holocaust denier.

memoirs recall the solidarity of Jewish families and the unwillingness of young Jews to abandon their parents who, they thought, were going to a new and strange home in the Kingdom of Krakovia. It was also difficult for city boys and girls to adjust to rough life in the mountains, especially before the resistance was sufficiently organized to receive them, how much the more so their parents and grandparents. These sentiments are clearly stated in the memoirs that Yad Vashem, the Israeli Center for the Study of the Holocaust, has collected over the past half-century from Greek survivors who immigrated to Israel.

Other sources record how young Jewish girls through force of personality rose to positions of importance within ELAS. One was a redheaded beauty known for the sweetness of her singing who recruited women and men for the resistance. She was from western Greece and so it is unknown whether she participated in the pre-war Socialist movement's wakening of young women, something that was more common in Salonika, from where a larger number of young women went to the mountains. Several times this *kapetanissa* appeared on the island of Skopelos where ELAS sent her for rest periods. There she stayed with Lily Mitrani, a teacher from Salonika who had asked the Greek government to transfer her to a safer locale. She managed to teach openly as a Jew throughout the war. She too was in the underground, and for that reason was able to assist the resistance with such occasional hospitality.<sup>2</sup>

The story of women in the resistance during World War II was a fascinating one for contemporary readers. This was the first war in which they fought alongside men and brought their special characteristics to the mountains that hitherto in Greek tradition had been reserved for the *kleftis* and the *pallikari*. Neither Kazantzakis nor Prevelakis would have thought to

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<sup>2</sup> The Molho family, booksellers from Salonika, hid out on Skopelos. Neither knew of the other's presence during the war. After the war Molho's son reopened the bookshop and employed Daisy Carasso Mosheh (she married *Kapetan* "Kitsos") until she emigrated with her family.

write a novel showcasing the fighting role of Cretan women against Hitler's finest, the paratroopers of General Student. Yet a Greek-American journalist had just that eye for his American audience, where women were entering the workforce and the military.

After the German evacuation from Greece, a gaggle of journalists accompanied the British and Greek forces that replaced them. Even before their arrival however, while Greece was still occupied, reports were being prepared by adventurous souls, in particular Constantine Poulos, the intrepid Greek-American correspondent, who entered Greece in mid-August 1944 and was already in Athens the day before the British forces arrived. His byline story of another *kapetanissa* begins:<sup>3</sup>

Athens, Oct. 23. (ONA – By Wireless) – Sarika Y—, 18-year-old Jewish Greek girl from the city of Chalkis, is the captain of a company of uniformed women Andartes (Greek guerrillas) on the island of Euboea.

Wearing a pair of British soldier boots and a cap, jacket and culotte uniform made from an American blanket, she leads her company daily in doing whatever job the Andarte regiment to which it is attached orders.

She is a short, stocky girl with dark hair and blue eyes. She runs like a man and can shoot a walnut from a tree at 200 yards. Whether she is calling out marching orders with a steady "Hep, Hep, Hep" or pounding out a beat with her arm as her Company goes singing down a mountain path, she does it vibrantly and proudly.

Only after the Greek surrender to the Italians was it necessary for her to flee to the mountains. From there, as a peasant, she periodically went back to German-held Chalkis to gather information for her Andarte regiment. When this became too dangerous, she began teaching in mountain schools. Following this, she went to work in the Resistance Movement's central

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<sup>3</sup> Constantine Poulos, "Report on Greece", Tamiment Library, New York University, Box 1, File 39, pp. 21-3 (reprinted with permission of the Tamiment Archivist). Poulos entered Greece from Turkey via the OSS caique ferry (see below) and wrote a series of articles based on his extensive travels throughout occupied Greece.

office. And later when a women's Andarte Company was organized, she was selected as its Captain.

Of a large family of sisters and brothers-in-law and uncles, only she and her mother are left. "This is my country," Sarika told me, "I was born and raised here. The Greeks are my people, their fight is my fight. This is where I belong."

Sarika is one of the incredible number of Greek women who took part in the fierce Resistance Movement. Sometimes it seems as if more women than men were in the mountains.<sup>4</sup>

Sarika's image was well known to journalists, although Poulos is the only one to have interviewed her and recorded her Jewish identity. As a result of the post-war persecution of former *andartes*, Sarika emigrated to Palestine in 1946 where she returned to a more sedentary life. This former *kapetanissa* at the Headquarters of ELAS in Evvia married Marcello Fortis and raised a family. She later related her story for the Israeli record, and it appears that Poulos only got a surface look at this rather remarkable teenager.<sup>5</sup>

Sarika was an excellent student and prominent as a youth leader in her high school in Halkis, the capital of Evvia. Born Sara Yehoshua, she was the niece of Lt. Col. Mordecai Frizis, hero of the Battle of Kalamas where he helped turn the Italian flank and precipitated their retreat.<sup>6</sup> She, but 15, and her

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<sup>4</sup> Poulos continues with other heroines of the resistance. See now Deborah Renee Altamirano, "Up in arms: The lives and times of women activists in the World War II Greek Resistance", PhD thesis, University of California at Santa Barbara (March 1993). Altamirano states that up to one third of the female population was involved in resistance activities. Cf. Th.-S. Pavlidou and Roudiger Bolts (eds.), *Μην αλείφεις ποτέ τα ίχνη...* (Thessaloniki 1999), p. 37: 1,740,000 women out of 3,000,000 in Ethniki Allilengyi and about 50% of EPON and Paidiko Kinima were young girls. See also: Eleni Fourtouni, *Greek women in Resistance* (New Haven: Thelphini Press 1985); Janet Hart, *New voices in the nation. Women and the Greek Resistance, 1941-1964* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press 1996).

<sup>5</sup> Further details will appear in my forthcoming study of Jews in the Greek Resistance.

<sup>6</sup> As the highest ranking officer to be killed in battle Metaxas promoted him as a national hero after his death at Premeti.

mother escaped to the hills on a donkey and took refuge in the village of Steni, where she taught the women to read and write and to waken their female consciousness. Such activities were a central part of the resistance movement's participation in the social revolution that permeated the Greek hinterland during the war, and were performed by the young women of EPON, the youth wing of ELAS. When word came that the Germans were sweeping through the area, her contact took her to the mountains, where she began to serve more actively. Sporting two bandoleers, she moved through the villages explaining the resistance to the women and eventually succeeded in organizing a unit of young women to serve first as camp auxiliaries, working in the mess, laundry etc. Later they were taught to handle weapons and to make "Molotov cocktails" (gasoline-filled bottles that exploded into flames on contact). British observers would later note in amazement the anomaly of the tiny lass who paraded two-metre tall male fighters for their benefit.

At the beginning of 1944 they were ready for action. *Kapetanissa* Sarika and her 200 girls became a special diversion unit for the Resistance. When an action was planned against the Germans, Sarika led her girls, armed with "Molotov cocktails", to a distant village where they simulated an attacking force. The Germans responded; the girls melted away since they were above suspicion; and the main resistance force carried out its action elsewhere. Once she was sent by her commanding officer to the village of Kabia, where the local priest was a German informer. Dressed in peasant garb the young lass shyly told him she had a confession to make but was too embarrassed to reveal it in such a holy place. When he left the church, the *andartes* arrested him. The story spread quickly throughout the area and the reputation of the unit and its Jewish leader was accordingly enhanced.

When the Germans learned that "the teacher" was operating out of the village of Steni, they sent an informer to flush her out. It turned out however that he caught the wrong "teacher", i.e. a young Jewish girl from Salonika named Medi

Moskowitz. His mistake was that he asked for “the teacher”. The Germans arrested her and destroyed the house where she was hiding. The informer was given the privilege of shooting “the teacher”. Sarika, hearing of the tragedy, asked her commander for permission to avenge the deed. The *andartes* verified the identity of the informer and Sarika went to the village. On the way she encountered the informer and asked him about the affair. He replied, “Finally we are rid of the Jewish teacher.” She took out her revolver and shot him. This act too added to her local legend.<sup>7</sup>

In another incident, word came that the Germans were planning a *razzia* in the environs of Halkis. Sarika was sent to warn them. From a rooftop she called on the villagers to flee to the *andartes*. Her teenage voice found a response and the young males fled to the resistance. After the Germans retreated from Greece, she returned to Halkis where she continued to work with the youth. Since the former partisans were out of favour with the new leaders of Greece, Sarika was soon arrested. Her reputation, however, saved her. The police investigator warned her to hurry and ask the local rabbi to send her to Athens, whence she could leave Greece. Since 1946 she has lived in the environs of Tel Aviv, where she raised her family.

Evvia, during the war, was the assembly point for Jewish refugees from Athens (mainly survivors from Salonika who either fled before the deportations or escaped with foreign papers under the aegis of the Italian authorities there), who embarked on caiques for the Turkish port of Çesme. This “underground” ferry service, one of several to ply the Aegean escape route, had been organized by the two Barki brothers, Solomon in Athens and Rafael in Izmir – both with Turkish citizenship – in conjunction with two Palestinian Jewish defence forces, the Hagganah and the Mossad for *Aliya Beth*, and under the protection of ELAS. Ultimately it would be respons-

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<sup>7</sup> Details differ in the literature. The above is based on interviews with Sarika herself.

ible for the rescue of over 1,000 Jews and several important non-Jewish Greeks, including George Papandreou. By comparison nearly 20,000 mainland Greek Christians were ferried to Turkey.<sup>8</sup>

The Evvia-Çesme route, which wove through the patchwork of Aegean islands, was already in operation by pre-war smugglers. During the 1941 negotiations between the British and the Nazis, mediated through the International Red Cross, over the question of provisioning the Greeks in light of the impending famine, it was agreed that Turkish wheat would be sent to Greece on Swedish ships flying the ICRC flag. We know now that the British took advantage of this commerce (in addition to other avenues) to smuggle agents into Greece; the Germans probably knew or at least suspected as much. Nonetheless the ships did sail and, while the famine was not averted, the food saved thousands of lives during 1942 that otherwise would have been lost. Later Argentinian wheat, at first 50,000 tons and in increasing amounts, would be sent in 1944 under the aegis of American War Relief.

Hundreds of Jews began to converge on Evvia, especially after the Italian surrender in September 1943 when it became obvious that the Germans were going to arrest them. As soon as the Athens Jews realized the danger, they began to flee to the mountains or to Evvia. The latter route via Marathon to Oropos was rather safe since it was controlled somewhat by the “pirate” clans of Attica. A short ride by car, taxi or bus to the coast, a ferry to the island, refuge with the help of EAM or ELAS or independently among the local villages were relatively easy preliminaries to arrangements to cross the sea to Turkey. So, Eli Hassid, aged 20, fled Salonika by train to Athens in March 1943 with Joseph Hassid; they remained there until

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<sup>8</sup> For figures, see Burton Berry’s report “Movement of Refugees from Greece through Izmir” in Franklin Delanor Roosevelt Library (Hyde Park, New York), War Refugee Board, Box 31, Folder: Greek Government in Exile. See his “Further Information...” dated 3 June 1944 in the same file for a summary of Solomon Barki’s report.



September when they took a bus to Oropos and then crossed to Evvia and went to the *andartes*, whose headquarters were in Steni. Yomtov Mosheh and several other Jews from Ioannina also crossed from Oropos, where they joined the *andartes* of Eretria in October 1943.<sup>9</sup>

The increasing number of refugees soon made it evident that a more organized process of escape was necessary. Contrary to published accounts, however, contact was apparently initiated by the *andartes* on the island and not by the Jews. A report in the Hagganah Archives summarizes the interview with Alberto Amarilio (alias "Aleko"), who had been a prominent Zionist in Salonika until 1941 and later served in Athens.<sup>10</sup> Shortly before he left Greece on 19 April, Byron and Mimi, two leaders of the *andartes* on Evvia, invited him to a restaurant. They had heard of his relationship to the HQ of the VIth Corps at Kalyvia during his three-month stay there and proposed that he pass on their desire to institute relations with the "Leftist" party in Palestine, of which they had heard much. They passed on their appreciation for the several hundred (actually 200) pairs of boots that "the Jews sent them". They requested that the Jews of Turkey be organized to send them money, ammunition and clothing. Their contact would be

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<sup>9</sup> Interviews with the author in March 1997.

<sup>10</sup> Greece – March 1943 to April 1944, Hagganah Archives, file 14/51, dated 11.6.44, p. 84. He was the legal representative of the Zionists to the Jewish Community in Salonika and treasurer for the community and for the Hirsch Hospital, as well as director for the Keren Hayesod in Greece, and hence an impeccable source for the Jewish Agency. In 1941 he left for Athens and from March to December 1942 he served on the ad hoc secret Jewish Counsel in Athens to aid Salonikan Jews with Daniel Alchanati, Pepo Benoziliu and two non-Zionists, Hayyim ben Dubi and Eli Attas. The last two were members of the Bnei Brith and possibly maintained relations with Greek Masons, who later helped Jews to hide and escape.

Alberto Amarilio escaped with his son Paulos to the mountains, where he hid under the protection of ELAS in Kalyvia from September to December 1943 during the initial phase of the German persecution in Athens. He left Greece on 19 April with 62 Jews on a caique that ferried a group of Greeks to Turkey.

Michail Tragonis in the village of Kouste near Çesme. They gave him half of a 5,000-drachma note to establish contact. Amarilio was unsuccessful in arranging the affair in Izmir and passed on the information and torn bill to the American Vice-Consul Davis in Izmir.<sup>11</sup> Davis asked him to make a written report on the situation in Greece and the problems Jews encountered in escaping. The report was also read by the American Joint Distribution Committee (AJDC) and the Jewish Agency. According to Ehud Avriel, the Mossad (Organization for Illegal Immigration, a branch of the Hagganah) sent Moshe Agami from Palestine in early 1944 to Rafael Barki in Izmir, who was already engaged in the process of smuggling food and medicines to his brother Solomon in Athens.<sup>12</sup> Barki sent Agami to Thomas, the leader of the smugglers, who informed Agami that he was a member of EAM-ELAS.<sup>13</sup> Soon an agreement was concluded whereby the Mossad would pay one gold coin for each Jew who reached Turkey. (This figure should correct the tendentious reports filed by the British that ELAS was making a fortune by selling places to Jews rather than contributing to the rescue of British agents, POWs and Royalist recruits for the Greek army.) By the end of the war this escape route had brought over 1,000 Jews to the safety of Turkish shores, from where they were sent overland via Syria to Pales-

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<sup>11</sup> Davis reported all to Burton Berry, the American Consul, who sent informative reports to the State Department, where they languished unread until Michael Matsas utilized them for his book *The illusion of safety* (New York 1997).

<sup>12</sup> Ehud Avriel, *Open the gates! A personal story of "illegal" immigration to Israel* (New York 1975), cited in Matsas, *The illusion of safety*, p. 102, where he identifies the contact as Rafael Barki.

<sup>13</sup> Thomas was imprisoned by the British in their crackdown on ELAS after the liberation of Greece. He wrote a plaintive letter to the Jewish Agency requesting their intercession with the British that he be deported to Russia, where he could continue the fight against the enemy. There is no further data on Thomas in the files I examined.

tine, Sinai and Egypt. Other individuals attempted to find their own way, and some did not succeed.<sup>14</sup>

Amarilio's report provides a sociological profile of the resistance leadership that helps to explain further the difference between the fate of the Jews in Salonika and Athens. In Salonika, over 45,000 of whose Jewish population were deported to Auschwitz during the spring of 1943,<sup>15</sup> the Jews were relatively isolated from the rest of the population since their major pursuit was trade. Thus Salonika did not produce many Jewish professionals or intellectuals who could establish the same kind of relationships with their counterparts in the resistance as in Athens.<sup>16</sup> In the capital, on the contrary, Jews had been pursuing professional careers since the late nineteenth century. The men Amarilio denotes as friends of the Jews were important Venizelists in Athens, as were their Jewish friends.<sup>17</sup> In Salonika it was lower-middle-class Greeks, students, and army veterans who were friends with their social equals; the university faculty and student body was divided into pro- and anti-Jewish groups. Many of those involved in supporting Jews were Masons, and the popularity of the Masons among the Greek military, the Church leadership and the Jewish professionals is a subject that demands further research.<sup>18</sup> And finally, the family network that embraced close friends paralleled the general structure of Greek paternalism; this phenomenon was a characteristic of the Athenian Jews, who by virtue of education,

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<sup>14</sup> See Matsas, *The illusion of safety*, pp. 102-6 and sources cited in my *The agony of Greek Jews during World War II* (forthcoming). See sources and discussion in Tuvia Friling, "Between friendly and hostile neutrality: Turkey and the Jews during World War II", in: Minna Rozen (ed.), *The last Ottoman century and beyond: The Jews in Turkey and the Balkans 1808-1945* (Tel Aviv University 2002), II, pp. 407-16.

<sup>15</sup> The problem of numbers is discussed in my forthcoming *The agony of Greek Jews during World War II*.

<sup>16</sup> Exceptions were of course to be found among those who held foreign citizenship. These were generally the wealthier merchants and manufacturers or journalists with important ties to the wider community.

<sup>17</sup> To complicate matters many Venizelists in Salonika were anti-Jewish.

<sup>18</sup> My thanks to the late P. K. Vatikiotis for this observation.

interests and language were Jewish counterparts of their fellow Greeks. Amarilio also supplied the names of local ELAS officials and commanders on Evvia and a few EDES supporters.

Already at the beginning of 1944 it was known in Jerusalem to the Jewish Affairs-Emigration desk via the Amarilio report that Leon Azouli had been appointed by EAM as representative of all the Jewish refugees in Evvia. Azouli had been a member of EAM for over two years by that time and was a logical choice to organize an increasingly burdensome and potentially dangerous situation. If enough Jews were to come to the island and destabilize it, then the Germans might come in force to capture them and punish the local population. There were after all sufficient collaborators to inform the Germans of the developing situation.<sup>19</sup> This concern was manifest among the British and American Secret Services, who were unaware of Azouli's existence. Another report<sup>20</sup> lists the location of a number of Jews on the island and cites their distribution among the Greek villages where the resistance was quartering them. Leon Azouli was located in the village of Yimnon, where he was the head of 24 Jews. Isac Chanen (alias "Sophianos") led 50 Jews. In the villages of Theologos were several Jews from Halkis and in Magoula there were 14 Jews. At the Headquarters of the partisans in Steni there were 50 Jews. The report notes

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<sup>19</sup> According to Eli Hassid, who accompanied him, *Kapetan* Orestis crossed to the island at the beginning of 1944 to organize Eretria and blow up houses of collaborators. The head of the OSS Mission "Stygia" to Evvia described General Orestis, Executive Officer of the 5th Brigade, as "quite a character – a large edition of Adolph Menjou, resplendent in captured finery – a Brooks quality flannel shirt, gabardine jodpurs, good boots, a sheepskin coat I'd give my eyeteeth for – all set off by a fur cap and a large handlebar moustache... He had come to Evvoia with fifteen officers and men, all mounted on beautiful horses which they brought over on caiques" (NARA 226/190/2/file 19). Hassid later took part in fighting near the ferry that crosses to Volos in September-October 1944, apparently to harass the German retreat from the island (interview 17 March 1997).

<sup>20</sup> "Greece – up to December 1943/Jewish Affairs – Emigration", Hagganah Archives, File 14/51, dated 4.1.1944.

that the Rabbi remained in Halkis. It is noteworthy that there is no mention of Sarika or any of the other Jewish *andartes*.

Till now we have been dealing with a story whose outline has long been known, although the newly discovered reports add important details and reveal an organized infrastructure hitherto unsuspected. This material should adjust the Allied view of the Jews as passive victims of the Nazi persecution. Rather Jews, at least the contingent on Evvia, should now be seen as partners with ELAS in the rescue of Jews and as arbiters of their own fate. We now turn to a story that became available to scholarly research only in the past two years from recently declassified OSS files. Already at the end of 1942, shortly after the Soviets had sent agents into Greek cities and the British had established their mission in the mountains of Sterea Ellada, the Americans began to organize their Greek option.

Most scholars, following wartime British opinion and relying on the domestic American scene, have ignored the American interest in Greece during the war. Rather the American role in Greek relief and in its intimate connection with the Greek Government in Exile has been the subject of research. But in general it is true that American interests were subsumed to the British claim on Greece. Additionally, the American perspective was focussed primarily on Italy, the weakest ally of the Axis; American troops were in North Africa heading toward Tunisia and preparing for an invasion of Italy. American strategy seemed poised to invade Europe from the south to liberate Rome and from the north-west to liberate Paris. The Office of Strategic Service had a broader vision, however, which is now revealed. The background to this story necessitates a brief return to 1942.

The Deputy Director of OSS was Lieutenant Colonel (later Colonel) Ulius L. Amoss. On 25 June 1942 he sent to Major David K. E. Bruce, Head of OSS Intelligence Section, a "Primary Blue Print for Creation and Functioning of East

European Section's Secret Intelligence".<sup>21</sup> Amoss followed up on 11 August with a conceptual plan for a Greek Irregular Project that apparently had been the basis for his joining the Strategic Services on 16 December 1941 at the request of "Wild Bill" Donovan, Roosevelt's hand-picked head of the OSS. Amoss explained the rationale for his plan – to be kept absolutely secret<sup>22</sup> – to Donovan via a summary of a conversation he had with a Professor Carl Haushofer in 1922. According to Amoss, Haushofer had enunciated a "Geo-Politik that affected every civilized person in the world", and especially the Germans. According to him Greece was the most important of the Balkan states with enormous potential to impact on East Mediterranean strategy.

Well, that had to be one impressive performance to influence Amoss for the next two decades! Though Haushofer, according to Amoss, was considered to be a charlatan in the west, nevertheless Amoss was sharp enough to realize the potential of Haushofer's argument; and indeed anyone who analysed the growth of German influence in Greece during the 1930s would see the Nazi reliance on his vision. Hence Amoss took the opportunity to propose a counter-Haushofer plan under the auspices of the OSS. The first stage would be the Greek Irregular Project headed by Stavros Theofanides, Minister of Mercantile Marine for Greece, and answerable to Vice-Premier Kanellopoulos of the Greek Government of Exile in Cairo. The Greek Minister in Ankara would also collect data and forward it to Theofanides ("the Specialist in American Affairs") in New York. Ultimate control however would be with OSS. The data would come from the worldwide Greek diaspora that was linked by Greek seamen. The importance of Greek colonies from Ethiopia to Rumania and from Turkey to Vienna

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<sup>21</sup> NARA 210/410/04.

<sup>22</sup> As far as he was concerned, only SIS Cairo could be trusted to keep the secret. On the internecine competition within SOE and between SIS and SOE see André Gerolymatos, *Guerrilla warfare and espionage in Greece 1940-1944* (New York 1992), passim.

blanketed one of the important theatres of the war. Maniadakis, former head of Metaxas's National Security and still on the government payroll, was active in South America. Admiral Canaris of the Abwehr was a Greek and could potentially be turned. Amoss's argument for a worldwide net of potential Greek agents totally eclipsed the Nazi fear of the "Elders of Zion" and the growing American fear of the "Communists". Amoss had plans, and even promises, to organize the American Greek community through AHEPA, the ubiquitous Greek fraternity in the United States, and the worldwide presence of the Orthodox clergy. OSS files contain various lists of potential recruits assembled by Orthodox priests throughout the United States. Donovan was impressed enough to fund the Greek Irregular Project for six months (January-July 1943) with \$300,000. On 16 July he recommended that GIP be discontinued and that the project should become regular.

Amoss's vision and argument succeeded in the establishment of a secret liaison with British SIS in Cairo that fostered an important American base on the Turkish coast near Çesme, with listening posts set up throughout the Aegean and sponsoring missions to the eastern part of Greece and Crete. That base, called by its code name Boston, was headed by Major John L. Caskey.<sup>23</sup> Already on 11 July 1942 he (then a Captain) was designated "to set up a contact center in Izmir for occupied Greece". His SIS contact was Lt. Cmdr N. C. Rees, who had his own base in another bay. The bound volume of Caskey's mission reports contains weekly reports, the first of which is from 30 December 1943 to 5 January 1944. The volume continues to the end of 1944.<sup>24</sup> Amoss was soon out of the picture and the saga of the Greek-American effort was put on a regular basis. Eventually it would be expanded through the War Refugee Board effort to save Jews, in addition to its primary military

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<sup>23</sup> Caskey was an archaeologist who would lead a distinguished post-war career alongside Carl Blegen at the University of Cincinnati. His cover in Turkey was as representative of the Land-Lease Program.

<sup>24</sup> NARA 210/277/02.

function of gaining intelligence on the mainland. We shall confine our survey in this paper to Caskey's contacts with Evvia.

On 11 January 1944 Caskey reported that the Evvia *andartes* were suspicious of the British, who had failed to establish a mission among them, but they were willing to work with the Americans. This entry would characterize nearly all of the OSS reports from Greece and would contribute to the friction between the American and British missions. On 4 February a caique returned with three Italian soldiers, four Jewish refugees and 35 Greek civilians from Evvia for recruitment to the Greek military. The caique landed at the British base and resulted in a change in British policy to accept civilians in the future. On 3 March Captain Trig of the *Agios Nikolaos* (one of the ten caiques operating the "caiique-ferry" at the time) acceded to the request of the *andartes* to take 26 Jewish refugees to Turkey. Due to a breakdown<sup>25</sup> he landed at the British base named Kioste and left the refugees there. Rees protested the intrusion and, after Caskey apologized, "Rees said he was quite willing when necessary to take care of refugees brought by our caiques and landed unobtrusively on the Chesme peninsula." Caskey for his part was not annoyed by the delay in August of one of his caiques for a week "in order to bring out 40 Jewish refugees, who were undoubtedly milked of their possessions" by local Greek sub-agents.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> A constant problem for the American caiques that was never resolved. When a Report of the Aegean Caique Ferrying Service was drawn up, the technical complaint of inefficient and constant breakdowns – of fifteen caiques on 2 January 1944, only two were possibly fit – led to a query to the British in Haifa. Lt. Cmdr Therin was happy to explain how the British solved the problem. When they began the caique service they converted British Leyland tank engines to maritime use. Major Wallace, the British conversion engineer, was available to explain how to adjust the caique to carry the weight. NARA 210/277/2.

<sup>26</sup> Report No. 31, 3-9 August 1944. NARA 210/277/2. Caskey lists German and Italian prisoners brought on his caiques. Other reports indicate the help rendered to the British invasion of Samos.



Herein lay a fundamental difference between the Americans and the British. The British were annoyed that the Jews had flooded Evvia with refugees and bid up the price of caiques in their panic to escape Greece: both interfered with a prime British directive to rescue British soldiers.<sup>27</sup> It also interfered with British attempts to smuggle their own agents into Greece. This annoyance on the front line (understandable) masked the larger British problem of Arab complaints against Jewish migration to Palestine, which the British had curtailed in their infamous White Paper of 1939. A conference on 29 April 1944 between Major Caskey, Col. Simonds and Major Caridia of A Force cleared the air somewhat.

Col. Simonds stated that the increasing number of Jews who are coming out (partly, no doubt, because they pay big sums privately to the caique captains) are straining relations between A Force and the anti-Semitic Turkish authorities. He regretted on humanitarian grounds to discourage the rescue of Jews, but felt that, for the sake of the principal work, this traffic should not be carried by the secret services now operating. He hoped that a Jewish [sic] rescue service would be established, make its own arrangements with the Turks, and operate its own caiques.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> The report of agent "Brigand" dated 7 April 1944 (NARA 210/277/4) describes the failure of his mission at the end of September 1943. "Conditions in Athens were abnormal due to the collapse of Italy, the persecution of the Jews, and internal strife between factions. Prices for caiques were sky-high and no suitable boats were to be found because Jews were paying large sums for craft of any kind."

<sup>28</sup> Lt. Col. Tony Simonds was previously closely associated with Palestinian Jewish Intelligence Forces who were recruited for service in the East Mediterranean and the Balkans with MI 9, SOE and SIS and had supported rescue missions of Jews from the Balkans. Simonds was sympathetic to the Zionist enterprise in Palestine and had worked with the Jewish Agency since the Arab Revolt of the previous decade. See Eldad Harouvi, "British Intelligence Cooperation with the Jewish Agency during the Second World War", MA thesis, University of Haifa (1992) [in Hebrew].

Caskey summarized the problem he faced and asked Cairo for direction:

OSS Izmir has long been aware of the dangers to its own work which are inherent in any activity unwelcome to the Turks, and therefore normally steers clear of all rescue and escape operations. Maj. Caskey gave assurance that every effort would be made to avoid embarrassing A Force with Jewish refugees, but pointed out that in the light of recent statements by President Roosevelt and Ambassador Steinhardt it might become increasingly difficult for an American service to avoid giving help to stranded Jews. It was the opinion of Maj. Caskey, as of Lt. Comdr. Rees and others, that the Turks would certainly not authorize the operation of a caique service by Jews for their own rescue work. The problem is knotty, and OSS Izmir would welcome a statement of policy, or a directive from headquarters on this subject.

Caskey's reference to the "recent statements" by the American president and the U.S. ambassador to Turkey points up a tragedy that affected any warning or aid to the Jews of the former Italian zone. On 26 January 1944 Cordell Hull, the American Secretary of State, sent a circular airgram to all American missions except London, Lisbon, Madrid, Stockholm, Bern and Ankara announcing the formation of the War Refugee Board at the highest level of the American government (Secretaries of State, Treasury and War) "to take action for the immediate rescue and relief of the Jews of Europe and other victims of enemy persecution". For some reason that the State Department files from Greece do not explain, this message did not reach the American ambassador in Cairo until March. The aide-memoire to the Royal Hellenic Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Cairo, dated 16 March 1944, mentions only aid and rescue of refugees; there is no reference to Jews. On 23 March, Harold Schwartz, Counselor of the Embassy, noted apologetically the lack of receipt of the message and the aide-memoire with no explanation for the delay. Hull sent a telegram on 24 March announcing the President's evening radio bulletin warning the Axis and its satellites not to assist

“Hitler’s program to exterminate the Jews and other similar groups”. On 29 March the radio statement was given to the Greek Government in Cairo and that night the Greek Prime Minister Emmanuel Tsouderos issued a declaration:

... address to all Hellenes the request that they take particular notice of his recommendation that the Allied Balkan peoples help in the rescue and escape to neutral or friendly countries of the Jews now threatened by new and inhuman persecution, or of any other victims of Nazi tyranny.

This declaration was broadcast to Greece on 31 March at 1.15, 7.30 and 10.30 p.m.<sup>29</sup>

The Jews of the former Italian zone were arrested on Passover 1944, which fell on the night of 24/25 March. The question mutely rises from the grave: why was there a delay of two months between President Roosevelt’s executive order and its reaching his faithful Ambassador Lincoln MacVeagh in Cairo?

A number of agencies, political, military and civilian, were already in place among the British and the Americans capable of effecting the rescue of large numbers of Jews from Greece. These included ELAS, British, American and private caique service,<sup>30</sup> and representatives of the American Joint Distribution Committee, UNRRA, the Jewish Agency, and the

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<sup>29</sup> NARA 84/2649A/69/848/Greek refugees.

<sup>30</sup> Including rumours about a Jewish Organization starting up a ferry service with a few caiques; there is even an obscure mention of an Operation Moses to rescue Jews, possibly under U.S. auspices. For Palestinian efforts at rescue from Greece via a boat service, see Tuvia Friling, “Between friendly and hostile neutrality”. This was apparently the rescue service noted earlier that the Americans suggested be coordinated or curtailed lest it interfere with a broader rescue effort planned by the United States. He does not mention any Operation Moses. The Palestinian agent in charge of the operation, Mosheh Averbuch (Agami), estimated 2,000-3,000 Jews rescued. Historians more conservatively suggest about 1,000. American Joint Distribution Committee lists of Greek Jews brought to Turkey number less than 1,000 (see AJDC Archive, Jerusalem, File L15/57). See reports in FDR Library Boxes 31, 32, 45.

American diplomatic services in Cairo, Istanbul and Izmir along with the hospitality of the Greek consul in Izmir. "Considering the geographical position of Greece, which is one of the best in occupied Europe, the number of escapes have been very few," observed Alfred Cohen, Legal Advisor at the Greek Foreign Office on 31 May 1944. Earlier in the month Irving Friedman, in a memorandum dated 18 May, noted: "Since December about 250 Jewish refugees from Evvia via caiques operated by British navy in conjunction with American military personnel." It would be better, he noted, if the caiques, which could carry 50-60 people, were more full than the 20 on average transported.<sup>31</sup>

On 28 June Burton Berry, the American Consul General in Istanbul visited Major Caskey and asked if he could "do anything to help the Jews". Caskey replied that he did not have the facilities to do so. Unfortunately he was unaware that Berry was

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<sup>31</sup> In the last six months of 1943 some 280 Jews were rescued by the Palestinian-ELAS boat service (see previous note) according to Menahem Bader, who reported on 29/12/43 to the Executive Committee of the Histadrut on efforts organized from Istanbul. Three other boats were on the way and some 600 Jews were on Evvia waiting for boats. The problem was the unwillingness of the Mandatory Government to award them certificates to enter Palestine as Jews and even the difficulties involved in having them registered as refugees. See extracts in Yosef Ben, *Jews of Greece in the Holocaust and in the Resistance, 1941-1944* (Tel Aviv: Institute for Research of Salonika Jewry 1985) [in Hebrew], p. 114f. and discussion in Frilling, art. cit. To put the Jewish figures in perspective, we should look at the broader relief problem that the British faced. The multitudes of Orthodox Greeks who reached Cyprus via British warships and the Middle East via Turkey were set up in a series of camps that eventually became part of the extended War Relief administered by MERRA (later superseded by UNRRA). A memorandum on foreign relief and rehabilitation operation dated 26 July 1943 lists 12,695 Greek refugees as of 8 April 1943 (NARA 59/1410/2/Greece DPs). After the September 1943 British invasion of the Dodecanese islands over 12,000 Greeks abandoned the islands for Cyprus and a newly established camp in Gaza. By December the British were planning to build 50 caiques in Haifa for relief services. This idea was proposed by Major Baker (Istanbul), Sidney Simonds (British Embassy commercial attaché) and Stavros Theofanides (Greek Minister of Merchant Marine). NARA 84/2649A/61.

expending considerable effort both in Turkey and in Washington to effect the rescue of Jews in accordance with the directives of the War Refugee Board, and so had little patience with military protocol.<sup>32</sup> The difficulties with the Turks would continue until the government broke off relations with Germany at the beginning of August 1944. From that time it was free to act openly with the Allies and so some of the problems connected with Jewish refugees were alleviated.<sup>33</sup>

The issues summarized by Alfred Cohen in his report were listed in the memorandum prepared by Henry Hill, dated 5 July 1944, for Ambassador MacVeagh, to be carried by the latter to the United States (resulting in further delays). We must pause for a moment in order to appreciate what happened to the President's call in January "to take action for the immediate rescue and relief of the Jews of Europe and other victims of enemy persecution".

#### Greek Jews – War Refugee Board

The Embassy has reported as to savings, upkeep, possibly using ferry service of Anglo-American Intelligence Services for Greek Jews. State Department has been requested to approach War Department, they in turn to approach British War Office, both to instruct British and American intelligence Services, facilitate departure of Jews from Greece, supply Gold sovereigns in Greece for the upkeep of Jews in hiding, matter being handled principally by Ambassador Steinhardt.<sup>34</sup>

The problem went much further than the Evvia-Izmir ferry service however. It reached up through the various British services as far as London and permeated nearly all British

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<sup>32</sup> Berry's story has still to be told. Michael Matsas (*The illusion of safety*) was the first to point out his importance, although he was unaware of the broader network that extended to Ambassador Lincoln MacVeagh in Cairo and thence to the WRB in Washington, which reported directly to President Roosevelt.

<sup>33</sup> See Tuvia Frilling, "Between friendly and hostile neutrality" for a summary of the Turkish difficulties.

<sup>34</sup> NARA 84/2649A/62/folder 123.

diplomatic stations throughout the Mediterranean theatre.<sup>35</sup> Even Rabbi Barzilai's appeal, after he reached the protection of ELAS, for funds to assist the Resistance came to the highest level and was characteristically responded to in rather cavalier fashion by Churchill:

This requires careful handling. It is quite possible that rich Jews will pay large sums of money to escape being murdered by the Huns. It is tiresome that this money should get into the hands of E.L.A.S., but why on earth we should go and argue with the United States about it I cannot conceive... We should take a great responsibility if we prevented the escape of Jews, even if they should be rich Jews. I know it is the modern view that all rich people should be put to death wherever found, but it is a pity that we should take up that attitude at the present time.

After all, they have no doubt paid for their liberation so high that in future they will only be poor Jews, and therefore have the ordinary rights of human beings.<sup>36</sup>

Great Britain had its own agenda, which was to bring the King back to Greece and defeat EAM-ELAS, from which it feared a Communist takeover.<sup>37</sup>

The above material points out the divergences of tactics between the British and the American military and the difficulties the military encountered in the face of political pressures by diplomats. The Jews were only the bellwether for such

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<sup>35</sup> See Tuvia Frilling, "Between friendly and hostile neutrality".

<sup>36</sup> Letter to Foreign Secretary from 10 Downing Street dated 14.7.44 (FO 371/43689/137459); the file contains further discussions about Rabbi Barzilai's call for aid and diplomatic notes to Cairo for consultation with the Greek government there. The discussion was prompted by Ambassador Leeper's call for guidance; the latter ignores the Jews in his memoir *When Greek meets Greek* (London 1950). See further my forthcoming book *The agony of Greek Jews*, ch. 9.

<sup>37</sup> A report on the Activity of the KKE in Karystos, Evvia, supported by the EAM-ELAS and dated 5.10.44 indicates that there was substance to his fear. Collaborators were executed, property confiscated, "all government bureaus were abolished and their own authorities installed" (NARA 226/190/2). This report may reflect *Kapetan Orestis's* sweep; see note 19 above.

tensions. Britain, for its own political reasons, was reluctant to send supplies to ELAS, which desperately needed shoes, weapons and ammunition. The British would not allow the Americans to interfere with their curtailment of aid to ELAS and OSS Izmir was under orders not to distribute weapons outside its own organization.<sup>38</sup> Still, the disappearance of Jews from government summaries of front-line reports and their isolation, if one can use such a neutral term, that follows both in scholarship and histories about the war distorts the reality of problems and tensions both in the field and at higher levels. In other words by removing the Jews from the story in an area where they were more than superficially present and indeed quite active demands an explanation to clarify the resulting obfuscation. The higher humanitarian principle that the British invoked on occasion sounds hollow in the face of unrestricted warfare on German civilians and lack of concern for “collateral damage” among the slave workers and other prisoners of the Nazis.

Evvia, given its fortuitous geographical location, emerges from these reports and anecdotes as an important station on the transportation network into and out of Greece. Its mountains and beaches made it virtually impossible for the Germans to control, although they could punish the resistance in occasional sweeps, such as in January 1944. It succeeded in protecting its own Jews who sought out *andartiko* aid and in providing refuge for many more who came from the mainland. ELAS even interfered with Allied missions by placing Jewish refugees on their caiques. Jews could be found active in the resistance, in helping their co-religionists to escape to Turkey, and in organizing a new supply line for the *andartes* in Evvia and Central Greece to supplement declining British support.

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<sup>38</sup> See Caskey report 13 December 1944 (NARA 210/277/4). This was contrary to British policy, which supplied Tito in Yugoslavia with huge amounts of materiel. It also did not acknowledge the various forms of assistance that Palestinian Jews rendered the British war effort in the Balkans and in Palestine.

The statue to Colonel Mordecai Frizis that stands prominently in Halkis, a legacy of Ioannis Metaxas's respect for his valour and sacrifice during the fight against the Italian invaders, is fitting tribute and a reminder of the contributions of Greek Jews and Palestinians on the island during the war.