

The Agony of Salonika Jewry – Hed Hamizrah Newspaper, October 24, 1943

Salonika – a Jewish metropolis that has been destroyed

The great tragedy that had befallen Greek Jewry was revealed today by Yosef and Baruch Uziel, representatives of the Greek immigrants in Palestine, who met with journalists in Tel-Aviv.

Mr. Yosef Uziel spoke of the Jewish community in Salonika, the largest of Sephardic Jewry. This community of 70,000, which was a Jewish stronghold of Zionism, strong in its patriotic feelings and high values, afforded the entire city a special character.

Out of a population of seventy thousand, approximately 12,000 immigrated to Palestine. Of these, 9,000 reside in Tel-Aviv, 2,000 in Haifa, and the rest settled in other places including a settlement that they had established, “Zur Moshe”.

This Jewish community has been completely destroyed. A small part remains in the environs of Salonika. The majority, however, was transported to Poland or escaped to the mountains to join the partisan units.

What happened to Greek Jewry?

Attorney Baruch Uziel based his account on a letter written in Hebrew, which was received half a year ago, and on a memorandum from a Greek student, P.K., who had left Salonika on July 18 and then sent in September a special memo to the Greek government about what was happening in Greece.

In the early stages of the occupation, there was no persecution of Jews. Soon, however, the economic situation deteriorated, the rich lost their property, the middle-classes were impoverished, and the poor reached the point of starvation. At least ten people died from starvation every day. In

March, the deportation by the S.S. began. At first, 8,500 men were sent to labor camps. Later, a census of the Jews was taken. The Jews were made to wear the Star of David and were confined to three ghettos, where all the Jews of Macedonia were also concentrated.

During the deportation, Jews were put in cattle cars, each one containing 70 people, among them women, children and old people. 53,000 Jews were deported in this manner, and not a single Jew was left in Salonika. Torah scrolls, the Jewish libraries, and all Jewish property were looted and burnt.

Out of the entire community, only 180 Jews remain, thanks to their Turkish or Spanish citizenships. They are awaiting immigration certificates to Palestine. No one knows what happened to Salonika's Jews or to where they were sent. The Jewish community of Palestine must not remain indifferent: there are still Jews in Athens and in other places in Greece.

Mr. Moshe Caraso spoke of the aid and information that have been provided by the Union of Greek Immigrants in Palestine.

On Saturday, a public meeting dedicated to Greek Jewry will be held in the "Ophir" cinema in Tel-Aviv in the presence of Mr. D. Ben-Gurion.

An aid committee for Greek Jews has been established recently in Palestine by Mr. L. Rikanati, M. Caraso, A. Rikanati, B. Uziel, Yosef Uziel, Yaakov Beego, Shmuel Amario, Haim Angel, Shelomo Vanzia and Albert Alsheich.

Mr. Ovadia Shalem and Leon Castro of Egypt have promised their full support in the rescue of Greek Jewry.

Thanks to the efforts of the aid committee, the Greek and British radio services have addressed the Greek people, asking them to help the persecuted Jews and rescue them from the Nazis.

In the next few days, Mr. I. Molcho, author and public figure from Jerusalem, will travel to Istanbul on a mission from the Committee to help the refugees there.

The Committee hereby announces a Week of Greek Jewry, which will include public gatherings where the story of the atrocities and persecution of

Greek Jews will be told. In the aforementioned meeting in “Ophir”, Mr. D. Ben-Gurion and Mr. Baruch Uziel will address the audience.