

Oral history interview with Panagiotis Saraferas

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Panagiotis Saraferas, born in 1925, in Kastoria, Western Macedonia, Greece, describes his experience as a Christian in Kastoria from 1940 to 1944. His family was large, comprised seven siblings, 5 boys and 2 girls. His father was a furrier. Furs were, and continue to be, a large part of Kastoria's economy, and were dominated by Christians. Jews tend to have various small shops, particularly fabric. He lived in a neighborhood, close to the Synagogue, with a lot of Jews. He spent his kindergarten year in the Jewish school, located in the yard of the Synagogue, because then there was no public elementary school close by. Then he moved to public Christian schools. He and his family had Jewish friends from the neighborhood. He remembers only first names, like Mousikos, Davikos, Moisis, Palomba (girl). Everybody around was relatively well but not wealthy. There was a rumor that the Jews put kids in barrels with nails to extract their blood and eat/drink it, but nobody really believed it. In general, before the war, the relations between Jews and Christians were good. They were no mixed marriages.

The war found Panagiotis in Kastoria. When the bombing started at the beginning of April 1941, his family went to a village to avoid it, but after the Greek front collapsed and the German marched in (April 6), they returned. The Italians occupied Kastoria first, and things were relatively easy, but when the Germans came in 1943, things got much tougher. Liberties were curtailed, and hunger ensued, because the Germans took everything for their own consumption. The Jews fared a little better, because of their profession; they were friendlier with the farmers and could barter fabric for food. After a while, the Germans forced the Jews to wear the Star of David and mark their houses with it. The President of the Jewish Community, Mr. Kalef who owned a flour watermill, was under constant pressure to give money to the Germans. He remembers a Jewish neighbor, Mrs. Soltzi, crying because of a rumor that when the "black snow" comes, the Jews will be taken and killed; a couple of days earlier, snow that looked grey and dirty had fallen. After a couple of days, March of 1944, the Jews were rounded off their homes and put in a big house called the Valala house. They were about 1,000. They were kept there for a while and then transported to the concentration camps. He saw Jewish men from the neighborhood coming back to their homes with Germans, likely to get money and valuables, and going back to Valala. When the Jews left their homes, first the Germans and then "poor" Christians entered their houses and took whatever they wanted. Very few Jews came back from the concentration camps, less than 30, and looked like skeletons. They stayed in Kastoria for a little while, and then left to settle in other Greek cities, like Larissa and Salonika, or leave for Israel or America. Also, there were 2 or 3 who escaped to the mountains and joined the Partisans; they came back. Today, there is only one family left, the Eliaou family.