

Oral history interview with Nikolaos Meggoudis RG-50.855*0031

Nikolaos Meggoudis, born on July 12th, 1922, in Apoloniada, Asia Minor, Turkey, describes his experience as a Greek Christian in Kastoria, Western Macedonia, Greece, from 1923 when his family migrated to Greece until 1945, after the German occupation. There were a lot of Greeks in Asia Minor at that time. His father, Panayiotis, mother, Vasiliki and their family escaped Turkey at the beginning of 1923, when he was 9 months old, after the Greek Army was defeated by the Turks in the aftermath of the First World War. The family came to Greece through Alexandroupolis, in Eastern Greece, and went to Thessaloniki. From there, they went and settled in Kastoria. His father was a fisherman in a lake in Asia Minor and continued to be a fisherman in Kastoria, which is also on a lake with very similar surroundings. Panayiotis served in the Turkish Army from 1911-12 in Thessaloniki, he deserted in 1912 and went to the USA, where he stayed until 1919. When the Greek Army started making inroads and gaining ground in Asia Minor, Panayiotis decided to come back to his village, Apoloniada. In 1923, when the Greeks lost the war, the family had to leave Turkey along with the retreating Greek Army.

In Kastoria, there were about 1,200 Jews. They stayed in the area around Mitropoleos street. Nikolaos did not have any Jewish friends but he knew 3 brothers who had a grocery store. He remembers only two names, Moushiko and Michele, and their father, Solomon. His uncle had a barber and coffee shop, and he used to get supplies from them. Jews and Christians had business dealings but not social interactions. Mixed marriages were unheard of. The Jews were well off, and had the reputation of being stingy and saving a lot of pounds sterling (gold). He thought that they almost knew their fate and collected gold to be easy to hide. In Asia Minor, during the Easter Week, Jews did not dare to go to Christian neighborhoods, because they were considered "Christ killers". In Kastoria, however it was not like that, although, there were rumors that the Jews were using Christian kids' blood during Passover to make their special bread. He remembers Jews wearing stars of David and their houses marked with swastikas. He did not see Jews being gathered, but saw them in the yard of a school waiting to be deported. When the Jews left, there was some looting of their homes, but the people who got caught were punished by the Germans. There was one German thug, named Douda, who was terrorizing and even killing people. Before the German occupation, he knew 4-5 young men who escaped to the surrounding mountains to join the Resistance. They were all saved. If more Jews had left, they would have survived. But they were misled, by one person in particular, a Polish Jew (he does remember his name) who convinced them that the Germans will not harm them. From the original 1,200 Jews, about 4-5 returned from the concentration camps. After the war, the surviving Jews were managing the Jewish estates. Eventually all Jews left Kastoria, either to Thessaloniki or Larissa. Before the war there were about 10 young men who were trained as farmers and were allowed to migrate to Israel.