

RG-50.855.0047

Oral history interview with Antonis Doukas

Summary

Antonis Doukas, born in Thessaloniki (Salonika), Northern Greece, in 1931, describes his experience as a Christian during the German occupation. His family comprised of his father, Spyros, mother, Angeliki, and himself. His father worked for Wagon-Lits International, a manufacturer and operator of restaurant and sleeping train carts. Antonis started working at age 10, when his father got sick, selling cigarettes, bread rolls, spices, etc, out of a small cart. He made enough money to feed the family until his father became well, and continued to work after that. He got the spices and cigarettes from Jewish stores, but they never accepted money. Antonis eventually became a Physical Education Teacher. He worked at a Jewish summer camp for 25 years from 1960 to 1985 until he retired. He has written a number of books on PE and the Occupation in Salonika.

Starting in 1935, the Doukas family lived in a two-story house on 5 Fintiou Str., by the train station, owned by a Jewish woman, Madam Sol (no mention of last name). On the first floor, one room was occupied by Mme. Sol and her husband Davikos, the other by their son Rafael, his wife and their young son, and the third by the Doukas family. There was also a common kitchen. On the second floor, two rooms were occupied by the Roccas (Christian) family, and the third by Mme Sol's daughter Sarika, her husband Adolfo and their little daughter Solika. Mr. Roccas was a Director in the Wagon Lits Company. The three families lived very harmoniously without any differences. Indeed the two families in the first floor were cooking and eating the same food. Indeed, up to that time, and for almost 250 years, the people of Thessaloniki, Christians, Jews, Muslims, Armenians, etc., lived harmoniously together without even distinguishing who was what, if it was not apparent from their accent or dress.

The only truly Jewish "ghetto" was the area of Baron Hirsch Settlement, where a lot of poor Jews settled after a major fire in Salonika. Although there were neighborhoods with Jewish concentration, the Jews were spread over the city. The Jews generally held the Commerce in Salonika. Antonis used to go to the Synagogue for the Jewish Holidays, weddings, bar mitzvahs, etc. He remembers the well-known families of the Benmayors, Saltiels, Kounios, Molchos, Capons

Fintiou Str., being close to the train station, was an area with people employed by the railroad company. There were only two more Jewish families, one, the Gani family, two brothers who owned the Bakery. There were other Jewish households around the neighborhood. There were about 10 pupils in his Elementary School. When the Germans came to Thessaloniki in April 1941, the four-story house next to Antonis' was taken by the Germans as their Headquarters, and a Church across the street was transformed as their kitchen. That was important because a good-hearted cook was sharing leftover food with the people in the neighborhood.

There was a lot of hunger in Athens during the German occupation, because products were not available. Salonika and Northern Greece, in general, fared better because they were in a fertile area with lots of agricultural products. The Germans consumed the lion's share, but there was enough left for people who had money. Still there were hard times but not as much as in Athens.

When the Germans occupied Salonika in April 1941, immediately posted signs saying that "The Jews are Unwanted". Then they gradually started imposing restrictions: Jews had to wear the Star of David, could not go out after 6:00 pm, could not appear in public spaces like buses, trams/trains, coffee shops,

movies, etc. Their houses and stores were pillaged. On Saturday, July 11, 1942, the Germans called all adult male Jews to Eleftheria (Liberty) Square to select people for forced labor camps. They kept them until 2:00 pm under the hot summer sun, forcing them to all kinds of humiliation and torture. Rafael, Mme Sol's son was beaten mercilessly. They called them again on Monday. Rafael went back, concerned of retaliations against his family. He was chosen, among 9,000, for forced labor. He survived, but later was sent to the Concentration Camps. Adolfo, Mme Sol's son-in-law disappeared, survived and returned to Salonika after the occupation.

There were a lot of informers and collaborators in Salonika, many of them (10-15) Jewish. The most famous one is the Arch Rabbi of Salonika. He convinced the Jews that nothing bad will happen to them. They will move to a place in Krakovia to start a new life. Antonis believes that he is one of the major causes for the catastrophe in Salonika. In 1943, the Germans started gathering the Jews in 5-6 Ghettos. From there, piecemeal they transferred them to Baron Hirsch Ghetto, by the train Station, which they used as a Transposition Center. Starting on March 15, 1943 they put one group on the train, and bring another one to the Hirsch Center. There were about 19 missions, the last one in Sept., 1943, totaling about 45,000 Jews. The incredible thing was that the Jewish Community had to pay for a train ticket for everyone sent to the concentration camps

At the end of April, 1943, the Germans arrested Mme Sol's family. Antonis saw them leaving the house. He also saw Germans pillaging a neighboring Jewish house first, and other collaborators entering after them. All of Mme Sol's family were lost, except Adolfo, her son-in-law, who returned 5 years later. He inherited the house, sold it and immigrated to Israel.

On Sept. 21 and 23, 1943 there were heavy bombardments in Salonika that destroyed Mme Sol's House, His family had to move out to another house close by. The Germans bombed and destroyed the port and the train station before they left in October, 1944.