



**PUBLISH WITH THE EXPERTS
IN SELF-HELP.**

Learn how Balboa Press, a Division of Hay House, can help you empower others with your book.



Claim your free guide



WEATHER SEARCH LOGIN

Melbourne: Broken clouds, light rain
Sydney: Clear sky, 33 °C
Athens: Few clouds, 19 °C

Bookmark this site
Make Us your homepage

neoskosmos.com
The Hellenic Perspective. Since 1957

ENGLISH ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΑ

Thessalonian Jews

Examining the instances of the heroism of the Greeks in the deportation and persecution of the Thessalonian Jews will provide much needed background to the resurgence of intolerant and fascistic tendencies today

Comments: (0)

No votes yet

Your rating: None

30 Sep 2014

DEAN KALIMNIOU

The recent event commemorating the Jewish Community of Thessaloniki, organised by the Thessaloniki Association 'White Tower', with the support of the Jewish Community Council in the Victorian Parliament, was unique in the annals of Greek community endeavour. For the first time, Greeks and Jews came together to celebrate the history of a vibrant community that came to Thessaloniki in search of a haven from persecution and intolerance, only to be decimated, centuries later, by an inhumane hate-preaching regime, for whom persecution and intolerance was its sole raison d'être.

Keynote speaker Dr Helen Light, in providing an overview of the history of the Thessalonian Jewish community, highlighted the manner in

which it was able to flourish in Thessaloniki and make meaningful contributions to its culture and economy, all the while retaining and developing its own unique sense of identity. Keynote speaker Eyvah Dafaranos on the other hand, captivated all present not only with her spellbinding bilingual English/Hebrew delivery, but also her unique, learned and sound analysis of Greek musical and literary responses to the deportation and ultimate massacre of Thessaloniki's Jews, emphasising that it is not only through shared places, but also through shared forms of expression such as music that communities can establish lasting bonds of friendship and solidarity. In his remarks, Greek Ambassador Dafaranos, in assessing the contribution of the Thessalonian Jewish community and its ultimate destruction at the hands of the Nazis, stressed the importance of continued vigilance against copycat fascist and racist movements such as the unspeakably vile one that is currently blighting the Greek political proscenium. This sentiment was returned to time and time again by the many Victorian state parliamentarians present, and indeed most eloquently by federal MP Maria Vamvakinou.

Events such as these challenge the outdated, hypernationalistic, narrow conception of Greek history as something that pertains only to the 'Greek' race, (however this is defined), and properly places it in context with the world around it and the many peoples who have called Greece home. Organised as one of a series of events celebrating the sisterhood of the cities of Melbourne and Thessaloniki, the aforementioned event is laudable as it highlights the infinite possibility of development of a culture, in a region that is benign, benevolent and not only tolerant but actively advocates diversity. This was certainly Thessaloniki for a significant period of time and surely is the case for Melbourne today.

The praiseworthy homage to Thessalonian Jews, in the form of the event organised by the Thessaloniki Association, cements centuries of interwoven cultural and religious existence. Dr Helen Light pointed out that historically, the Thessalonian Jews were left to their own devices. While some Byzantine emperors imposed some sanctions upon Jewish worship, these were relatively harmless compared to the intense western European persecution of Jews and further, the Ecumenical Councils of the Orthodox Church emphasised the Jewish community's right to worship freely. Other speakers mentioned the active role of the Greek Orthodox Church in opposing the Nazis' deportation of the Jews during the War. Such a noble tradition comes in marked contrast to the intolerance and anti-Semitism displayed by Golden Dawn today, proving that its ravings are without any roots in modern Greek culture.

The function had at its aim not only the celebration of Thessalonian Jews but also the commemoration of the destruction of that community by the Nazis during the Second World War.



(http://neoskosmos.com/news/sites/default/files/2014/September/diatribe_27.9.jpg)


Members of the Jewish community of Thessaloniki rounded up for forced labour and deportation in 1943.

At some stage, though this was not within the ambit of the aforementioned event, it would be useful to examine the multiple facets of the terrible tragedy that befell Thessaloniki's Jews.

The fact remains that the vast majority of Greeks actively opposed the Nazi deportation of the Jews in various parts of Greece and did their best to hide or rescue Jews from their fate. The church hierarchy, in particular, including the brave bishop of Zakynthos and Archbishop Damaskinos, condemned the deportations of the Jews at considerable risk to their own lives, and issued fake baptism certificates and other documentation in an effort to save Jews from their fate.

A very small minority, however, actively assisted the Nazis, claimed indifference and opportunistically helped themselves to the spoils of looted Jewish property in Thessaloniki after the deportation of the community. In his ground-breaking play Salonika Bound, local writer Tom Petsinis emphasises the lasting bitterness created by the perfidy of Greek neighbours refusing to deliver Jewish property they have illegally occupied back to their rightful owners upon the return of Holocaust survivors to Thessaloniki after the war. Fittingly enough, such reconciliation as takes place occurs in multicultural Australia.

In his research, US historian Andreas Apostolou looks at latent anti-Semitism among hitherto marginalised elements of the Thessalonian Greek community, who jumped on the Nazi bandwagon. Thus it should come as no surprise that local Greek anti-Semites assisted the occupying Nazis in publishing two propaganda newspapers that vilified the Jews. On 21 April 1941, the day after Hitler's birthday, Greek collaborators put up signs in Greek and German declaring 'Jews unwelcome in this shop'.

Recommend  Tweet

Read more from

Comments

[Post New Comment \(/News/En/Thessalonian-Jews#Comment\)](#)

ADVERTISEMENT

850% + Investment Returns

private-client-group-research.com

Invest In Alternative Investments. Huge Profits. Free Top-Pick Guide!

Copyright © 2009-2014 Ethnic Publications Pty Ltd ABN 13005 255 087