

The Jewish Community of Preveza

Exhibit by Kehila Kedosha Janina Synagogue and Museum

The Jewish Community of Preveza was officially established in 1883 when a delegation of Jews from Corfu went to the city to make plans for the building of a synagogue. There were certainly Jews living there before but, previously, the small Jewish presence in the city was not sufficient to warrant the building of a synagogue. When nearby Arta became part of Modern Greece in 1881, trade became difficult for those



communities in the northwest of Greece [Epirus] that were still part of the Ottoman Turkish Empire and a new center of trade was established in Preveza. Jews, prominent in mercantile trade, moved to the city from nearby Arta, Ioannina and Corfu.

The Jewish Community was small in size, never numbering more than 400. Most had familial connections in Ioannina, Corfu and Arta. Some of the most common family names were: Albala, Asser, Askinazi, Barouch, Battinos, Ganis, Hanen, Koen, Kofinas, Levi, Matsas, Matsil, Saba, Solomon, Yomtov and Zakar.



Between the two world wars, the Community began to emigrate, some settling in Athens, some making Aliyah to Eretz Israel and, others joining their fellow Romaniotes in the newly established community on the Lower East Side of Manhattan.

The community's synagogue was on Kariotaki Street in the center of the Jewish Quarter. Kal Kadósh Tefilá Lemosé, was built in 1903 and was dedicated by the rabbi from Ioannina, Mosé Koen, who donated the necessary amount for the purchase of the plot.

The synagogue was only in service for 41 years and after the destruction of the Community in the Holocaust, the building was given to the Municipality. In 1998, the Municipality of Preveza presented Kehila Kedosha Janina with the only remaining photo of the structure.

Adjacent to the synagogue was the Jewish Public School, created in 1908. There were two classrooms and four teachers. The Alliance provided a French teacher [Solomon Danon] in 1911. A bequest left by the late Haim Koen [income derived from rents, and proceeds from his 170 olive trees] paid the salaries of the other teachers and funded dowries for five young, needy Jewish women. Hebrew was taught at the school and during their last three years, the students, also, learned French. After the liberation [from Turkey] in 1914, a teacher of Greek became part of the staff. After Jewish public school [elementary], the students went to Greek high school.

The Jewish-owned shops were centered in the market place. Some of the prominent merchants in the city were Avraam Tzafou [fabrics], Daniel Zadik [flour and dairy], Daniel Zakar [fabrics], Matsil Brothers [Matsliach, Abas and Eliezer who traded in fabrics], Solomon Ganis, Zak Matsas [fabrics], Semos and Leon Matsas [tailors], and Solomon Solomon [fabrics].

There were also other Jewish owned shops: Bochor Albala [watchmaker], Zak Koen [butcher], and the small shops of Leon Saba and Amadeo Hanen. In the Business and Occupation Guide of Thessaly and Epirus from 1939, there were 39 Jewish names listed from Preveza.

In addition to those Jews who owned businesses, there were also those who worked as itinerant merchants. Well known were Aaron and his brother who had a small, two-wheel cart that was pulled by a small horse, making its way through the winding streets of the neighborhood, loudly announcing its arrival with blast of trumpets. On their backs were cheap fabrics, around their waists, a bag with threads, buttons, ribbons, safety pins, brooches, and hairpins, holding a metal yardstick in one hand. One of them, David, to entice customers, would call out, "American cloth, 3 cents a yard."

The Jewish neighborhood was composed of four square blocks created by Kariotaki, Politexniou, Ioanni Moustaki and the market. Intermingled with the Jewish homes were those owned by Christians and Moslem Turks. The Jewish homes were close to their businesses and the properties were bought from Christians and Turks. While most of the shops were rented from Christians, all the Jews owned their own homes.



The Jewish Community of Preveza was small in number and was not in economic competition with the Christian community. The small community took an active interest in the affairs of the

municipality and lived alongside their Christian neighbors in relative harmony. Iakov Levi and Solomon Gani were both elected to the Municipal Community Council. Daniel Zadik was a member of the Administrative Council of the Mercantile Association. Asser David was one of the first members of “Orpheus” [The Musical Association which created the Philharmonic in 1920].

Nothing is left of the Jewish Community of Preveza. The Community was destroyed in March of 1944. The Jewish cemetery was outside the city. No attempt was made to save the cemetery and it was finally sold [by KIS] to the municipality for a pittance.

In the early morning hours of March 25th, 1944, the Jewish Community of Preveza was rounded up and deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau. Along with the 172 deported directly from Preveza, an additional 108, who were residing in Athens, would join their co-religionists from Ioannina, Arta, Athens, Chalkis, Volos, Trikala, Larissa, Patras and Kastoria, arriving at Auschwitz-Birkenau April 11, 1944 in the largest transport to leave from Greek soil. Only 15 from Preveza would survive.

Eyewitness accounts of that terrible day in March of 1944 document the demise of the small Jewish Community of Preveza:

“...On March 25, 1944, the Germans, knocking wildly on the doors and windows, woke the Jews and ordered them to get dressed, take some necessities and all come out into the street. When the Jews came into the streets, it was daybreak...The German trucks had stopped at the beginning of P. Tsaldari Street, close to the Central Judicial building...”

We heard desperate crying and saw them loading the Jews into open trucks. I heard the Jew Askenazi call out to me: ‘Yianni, light a candle in the Church of the Virgin for us.’ I became very emotional and fled. Shortly afterwards, I went to the church and lit a candle.”

Yianni added: “Even now, remembering, I shudder again!”

This exhibit is dedicated to the memory of the Jews of Preveza.