

# Musical Borrowings in Songs about the Holocaust by the Jews of Greece

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This article deals with songs about the Holocaust. Most of these songs have remained almost unknown until today, and this article aims to bring them out and to highlight the fact that they serve as evidence to the sufferings of the Greek people during World War II. All songs were written in Greece, and the practice of *contrafactum* (borrowing melodies and changing the lyrics) was applied to all of them. The borrowed melodies originate from Western music (e.g., operas), Western and Greek popular songs of the time, and from Greek folk and urban folk music. The variety of musical borrowings reveals cultural interactions between the ethnic and religious groups of the Greek land. It is also indicative of the increasing role of the mass media (radio, cinema) at that time. The lyrics of the songs are usually written in Greek and, in some cases, in Ladino (Judeo-Spanish of the Eastern Mediterranean area). Apart from having musicological interest, the songs are also important from the historical point of view. They were written either before the transportations to the extermination camps, or in the camps, or after the Holocaust. Their lyrics depict aspects of the living conditions of Jews during World War II. Moreover, these songs acted as a way of expressing feelings and thoughts.

KEYWORDS: Jewish music, *contrafactum*, Greek Jews, Thessaloniki, World War II, Holocaust, Ladino, Judeo-Spanish, kaddish, Shoah

## Introduction

Since time immemorial, music has been of great importance to people's lives as a powerful means of expression and self-identification of an individual as a member of a social group, and very often used for the strengthening of ties between group members themselves. Of all human activities that create the sense of identity and community, music is the most personal and has the deepest intellectual importance. Another important factor in the creation and maintenance of identity is language.<sup>1</sup>

This article deals with some songs about World War II and the Holocaust. All songs have verses written by Greek Jews who witnessed the war and deal with aspects of that war. The Jewish population in Greece consists mainly of Romaniote and Sephardi Jews. The Jews who settled in the Greek lands in the Hellenistic and the Byzantine eras whose vernacular was Greek are called Romaniote Jews,<sup>2</sup> and the Jews with

1 Folkestad 2002: 151, 156–157.

2 According to Leon J. Weinberger, the Romaniote Jews are those that settled in the region from the pre-Paleologos Byzantine period: Weinberger, Leon J. 1978: 77. See also Crowdus 2019: 136.

origins from Spain and Portugal are called Sephardim. The latter's vernacular used to be Judeo-Spanish. The Sephardim settled in Greek lands after their expulsion from Spain in 1492. They managed to maintain their language in most of the places they settled in, especially Thessaloniki, the city where the majority of Greek Jews, mainly Sephardim, lived before the Holocaust.<sup>3</sup> Unsurprisingly, many songs were obviously written by the Jews of Thessaloniki.

The article is based on the author's research for her PhD dissertation and her post-doctoral work. The aims of the article are (a) to bring out songs about World War II that have almost been forgotten,<sup>4</sup> (b) to highlight the tragic events that took place in Greece during the German occupation and the impact of those events on the citizens, as expressed through the songs, (c) to showcase the ability of songs to bear witness to historical events and serve as means of expression of emotions such as fear, sorrow, nostalgia, and (d) to reveal the importance of on-site and archival research to the history of a city and a community. The methodology combines on-site and archival research, and aesthetic apprehension, with a historical review of the 1940–1944 period in Greece. Recent interdisciplinary research and methodology currents from the fields of musicology, historiography, social studies, ethnography, and qualitative research were applied.<sup>5</sup> The archival research was conducted in the Historical Archive of the Jewish Community of Thessaloniki, the music archives of National Bank of Greece Cultural Foundation, the newspaper archives of the Central Library of Thessaloniki, and the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies, and bibliography relevant to the subject was thoroughly studied. After the songs were collected, they were classified and catalogued in a chronological order according to their text into songs about (a) life in Greece during the German occupation, (b) the living conditions inside the train wagons during transportations, (c) the living conditions inside Auschwitz, and (d) life and remembrance after the Holocaust. In this article, the songs are presented in this order.

*Contrafactum*, the centuries-old practice of singing the melodies of popular songs using different lyrics, was applied to all the songs.<sup>6</sup> The borrowed melodies originate from either Western art music or Greek and Western popular songs of

3 Harris 2002: 120–121; Kerem 2002: 103. Also see Menexiadis 2006: 21–24; Idelsohn 1992: 376–377; Bunis 2004: 8–9, Séphiha 1994: 91–92.

4 Established in 1830, Greece is a relatively new country. Most of its land had been part of the Ottoman Empire for many centuries. The Greek governments acknowledged the need for the formation of a Greek identity based on the ancestry of the Greek people from Ancient Greece and on belonging to the Eastern Orthodox Church. This fact and also huge economic, demographic and psychological reasons forced the Greek Jewish community to keep a low profile until the end of the twentieth century, including setting aside songs that revealed their identity and brought painful memories: Scarlatos 2021: 110–111. For heritage and memory, see also: Smith 2006, 57–66.

5 Sakallieros 2010: 235–237; Merakou 2021: 123–124; Daykin 2004; Leavy 2015: 58–59.

6 In Europe, this practice dates back to at least the twelfth century (Falck and Picker 2001). In the Mediterranean region, the melodies of many folk songs, which belong to the Greek folk music tradition, are also often found with lyrics in other languages.

the time. The latter were widespread thanks to radio broadcasts and to the art of filmmaking, or were borrowed from Greek folk and urban folk music. The act of borrowing melodies of Western popular music to adapt to lyrics in Greek was very usual in Greek revues; in fact, this was what the Greek revue audience expected to hear. The revue fashion reached Greece in the late nineteenth century, and during World War II revues were still very popular.<sup>7</sup> As a result, Greeks were accustomed to the practice of *contrafactum*.

All songs provide information about life during World War II. They serve as testimonies to the living conditions in the ghettos, the transportation trains, and the camps. Moreover, from a musicological point of view, their borrowed melodies belong to a wide variety of music genres: Greek folk music, Greek urban folk *rebetiko* music, Western art music, Western popular music, Greek-westernised-popular music.<sup>8</sup>

### The German Occupation in Greece

Greece entered World War II on 28 October, after Benito Mussolini issued an ultimatum to Ioannis Metaxas, the Greek dictator, then the prime minister (appointed by King Georgios of Greece), demanding the cession of the Greek territory. Metaxas rejected the ultimatum and this decision led to the beginning of the Greco-Italian War. Unexpectedly, the Hellenic Army defeated the Italian troops. Adolf Hitler took the defeat as a threat to Germany and, as a result, in spring 1941 sent his army to aid his ally, Italy.<sup>9</sup>

On 6 April 1941, after many failed attempts, the Nazis invaded northern Greece and occupied Thessaloniki on 9 April. On 11 July 1942, the so-called Black Sabbath, the Nazis gathered all male Jews aged 18–45 from Thessaloniki in Liberty Square to census them in order to send them to hard labour in Leptokarya, a seaside village near Mount Olympus in northern Greece. On that day, they also humiliated the Jews in many ways.<sup>10</sup> The text of the song ‘En estas noches yeladas’ (During Those Cold Nights) describes the harsh living conditions in Leptokarya. Its melody is unknown.<sup>11</sup>

7 A play of this theatrical genre usually satirises current affairs and incorporates much music and dance. Revues also served as a newscast, at a time when mass media hardly existed: Liavas 2009: 91–93.

8 With the great help of Jacky Benmayor, her teacher in Judeo-Spanish, the author used the *Aki Yerushalayim* spelling method for the words in Judeo-Spanish. The author also translated the lyrics into English.

9 Mazower 2005: 495–497; Kontis and Stefanidis 1997: 214–220, 229.

10 Nar *Communal Organization...* 1997: 288; Molho and Iosif 1976: 63–65. It was urgent for the Nazis to find workers. Christians were also sent to hard labour: Mazower 2005: 499.

11 There has also been a brief contrafactum of ‘Oh, Paro, Paro’, a Passover song about Pharaoh, substituting Hitler’s name for Pharaoh. This contrafactum was apparently created in Thessaloniki: Cohen 2011: 224, 233.

### 1. En estas noches yeladas (During Those Cold Nights)

En estas noches yeladas	During those cold nights
I asta las manyanadas	And until the morning breaks
Vorimos komo kriaturas	We like children who have foggy nightmares
En ensuenyos de folguras	We digged at Leptokarya
A Leptokarya kavakamos	And the earth we brought up
I la tyera ke aleventamos	And also, the hard stones
Ansi ke las pyedras duras	Are the only edible things.
Son las unikas farturas	And hunger brings tuberculosis
I l' ambrera aze tikia	And other nights and days we see bodies
I otre noche i dya	falling
Los puerpos ke ve kayer	Precious bodies of bright boys melt like
Puerpos keridos de lusios mansevos	candles
Deridos komo sevos	When they should blossom.
Al punto de enflorser.	But hope wakes for everyone like a rose
Ma la esperanza a todos	Which is born on the thorn of pain
Amanese komo una rosa	And the community has promised to help
Ke nase al punchon de la dolor.	And to give for Liberty.
I la komunita apromityendo	
Ke akidare i dare para la liberta.	

After the Black Sabbath, the measures against the Jews of Thessaloniki became gradually stricter, until they culminated on 25 February 1943, the deadline given by the Nazis for the Jews to settle in specific quarters that were soon turned into ghettos. The Baron Hirsch ghetto was a district built by Baron Maurice de Hirsch in Thessaloniki after the fire of 1890. It was located in the Western part of the city, near the railway station. During the German occupation, part of it was fenced off in wooden planks and barbed wire to be used as a transportation camp to Auschwitz.<sup>12</sup>

Two poems deal with the living conditions inside the Baron Hirsch ghetto: 'To prosklitirio' (The Bugle Call) in Greek, and 'Un dya de Shaba amanesyo' (There came the dawn of a Shaba), with its lyrics in Judeo-Spanish. Being the majority of Thessaloniki's population for centuries, the Sephardi Jews managed to maintain Judeo-Spanish as their vernacular. Only after the annexation of Thessaloniki by Greece in 1912 did they start to systematically learn and use the Greek language. Moreover, the advent of tens of thousands of Greek refugees to the city in 1922, after the Greco-Turkish War that followed World War I, subverted the demographics and Greek-speaking Orthodox Christians became the majority. By 1940,

<sup>12</sup> Papagiannopoulos 2009: 833-834; Menexiadis 2006: 21-24.

the young generation was fluent in Greek, the official language of the Greek state, as they studied it at school.<sup>13</sup>

‘To prosklitirio’ (The Bugle Call) was written to the tune of the 1938 German love song ‘Lili Marlen’,<sup>14</sup> and ‘Un dya de Shaba amanesyo’ (There came the dawn of a Shaba) was adapted to the melody of the theme song ‘Bel Ami’ of the same-title film of 1939.<sup>15</sup> Both songs were very popular among the German people of that time and were frequently broadcast by various radio stations.<sup>16</sup> ‘Lili Marlen’ is a farewell of a German soldier to his loved one.<sup>17</sup> The film *Bel ami* was made on the eve of the outbreak of World War II and its plot suited the Nazi propaganda as it dealt with corruption in French society and politics.<sup>18</sup> According to the existing evidence, during the German occupation, the film was shown in November 1941 in Thessaloniki at the Titania cinema hall, which was requisitioned by the Nazis.<sup>19</sup> Those melodies were probably chosen because in case the Nazis heard their prisoners sing the songs, the chances were that they would be pleased and react in a positive way.<sup>20</sup> Ironically, and maybe also intentionally, these melodies further underline the connection of the text with the Nazis.

The verses of ‘To prosklitirio’ (The Bugle Call) are attributed to Lilian Menase, a well-educated young Jewish girl from Thessaloniki. She died at the age of seventeen in the Auschwitz extermination camp. ‘To prosklitirio’ (The Bugle Call), probably written inside the Baron Hirsch ghetto, describes the life there. The first names and surnames of many Jews from Thessaloniki are mentioned in the lyrics: Daniel Haguel, Ovadia Sion, Amarilio, Mizrahi, Ezrati, Pepo, Levi, Misel, Jecky, Edgar, Henri.

13 Nar, *Communal Organization...* 1997: 288; Molho and Nehama 1976: 21; Nehama 2000: 1537.

14 The author saw the poem on a panel of a temporary exhibition titled ‘Jews and Christians in Thessaloniki’ (May–June 2022) at the Jewish Museum of Thessaloniki. Lucy Nahmia, the museum supervisor, kindly sent the panels to the author. The author had already seen a video recording of a Jewish Holocaust victim from Thessaloniki singing the song on 3 May 2022, at Stephen Naron’s presentation of the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies, during the 14th Spring Seminar ‘Jewish Children of Thessaloniki, 1915–1943’, organized by the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki and the Jewish Museum of Thessaloniki. The author uses the first verse as the title of the song. The sheet music of the song is available on <https://muscore.com/user/22650366/scores/6595323> [accessed 2023 December 1].

15 Nar, *Lying on the Coast...*, 1997: 211–212. The author uses the first verse as the title of the song. The sheet music of the song is available on <https://muscore.com/user/73100/scores/189075> [accessed 2023 December 1].

16 There also were other versions of both songs in Greek during the German occupation. Some versions narrate about the harsh living conditions in Greece and aim at mocking the Nazis. The author’s research shows that those versions were probably incorporated in revues and aimed to lift the spirits of the suppressed people, also see: Liavas 2009: 93.

17 Leibovitz and Miller 2008: 16–17, 119, 201.

18 Bandmann and Hembus 1980: 126–127.

19 According to the Nazi newspaper *Das Neue Europa*, published in Thessaloniki during the German occupation: [anonymous] 9 November 1941; [anonymous] 11 November 1941.

20 This is the author’s opinion. Joseph Moreno’s article is revealing: Moreno, Joseph 1999: 4–5.

## 2. To prosklitirio (The Bugle Call)

Γίνεται προσκλητήριο	There sounds the bugle call
Στη Σταύρου Βουτυρά,	In Stávru Vutirá street,
Πολιτοφύλακες τρέχουνε,	Policemen ran,
Να μην πάνε αργά,	So as not to be late,
Πρώτος είναι ο Χαγουέλ,	First comes Haguel,
Τ' όνομά του Δανιέλ,	His first name Daniel,
Μαζεύει αγγαρεία	He picks up chores
Και κάμνει φασαρία.	And makes noise.
Έρχονται μετά οι αδερφοί Λαζάρ,	Then come the Lazar brothers,
Ο Οβαδία Σιών με ειδικό παρπάρ,	Ovadia Sion
Πέπο Μπάσο ο βιολιστής,	With a special imposing presence,
Και ο τρανός μας διοικητής,	Pepo Basso the fiddler,
Μισέλ ο τραγουδιστής	And our great commander,
Και καρδιοκατακτητής.	Michel the singer
Τρέχοντας φτάνει	And heartbreaker.
Ο Τζάκος Αβαγιού,	Here comes running
Κομψός στην τρίχα	Jacko Avagiu,
Εβρίσκεται παντού,	Very elegant,
Έπειτα έρχεται ο Λεβής,	He is found everywhere,
Ακολουθεί ο Εζρατής,	Then comes Levis,
Σαούλ ο μορφονιός,	Ezratis follows,
Τζέκυ ο μοναχογιός.	Handsome Saul,
Και φτάνουνε αισίως	Only son Jecky.
Οι αδερφοί Αμαρίλιο,	And the Amarilio brothers arrive,
Ο ένας μ' ένα άστρο	The one with one star,
Και ο άλλος με τα δύο.	The other with two,
Έρχεται έπειτα ο Ανρίς,	Then Anris comes,
Ακολουθεί ο Μισραχής,	Mizrahis follows,
Εδγάρ ο ορειβάτης,	Edgar the mountain-climber,
Των όρων αναβάτης.	He climbs up mountains.

On 6 February 1943, a Shabbat day, the Nazis demanded that the Jews wear yellow star badges and move into ghettos. The first strophe of the song 'Un dia de Shaba amanesyo' (There came the dawn of a Shaba) is rather impersonal, as it uses the third person, *la djuderia*. However, the first person in the plural form is used in the following two strophes. Those strophes narrate that 'we' have been transferred to the Baron Hirsch and 'they' (the Nazis) seal our *konkardas* – the Nazis sealed the yellow star badges of the Jews before each transportation. Fear is described using a metaphor: 'Our hearts began to beat, tik tak'. The lyricist has

the intuition that something bad is going to happen. The feeling of having suddenly become part of a motley crowd, shocking and painful for the upper- and middle-class families, is expressed by the words: ‘We all became equal’. Then, the expectation of a change and of justice comes: ‘they will pay for what they do to us’.

### 3. Un dia de Shaba amanesyo (There came the dawn of a Shaba)

Un dia de Shaba amanesyo	There came the dawn of a Shaba
No savemos lo ke akontesyo	We did not know what was to come
La djuderia ya fue aserada	The Jews had already been confined
En los getos de la sivdad.	In the city’s ghettos.
A Baron Hirsch	They started loading us
mos empesaron a kargar	at the Baron Hirsch (ghetto)
I las konkardas a sfragisear	And they sealed our badges
El korason ya mos empeso aharvar tik-tak tik-tak.	Our heart started to beat tik-tak, tik-tak.
El geto no mos fue buena sinyal	The ghetto was not a good omen for us
Ya mos trusho a todos al par.	It caused us all to become equal.
No se van a konsola	Those who did us wrong
Los ke mos kijeron mal	Will not rest in peace
A la fin lo van a gumitar.	In the end, they will throw up (all that evil).

### Deportations

The first train from Thessaloniki to Auschwitz-Birkenau departed on 15 March 1943. Dozens of people were crammed into cattle cars each of which was intended for eight horses. By the end of summer, many more transportations followed, all to Auschwitz-Birkenau, except one which went to Bergen-Belsen.<sup>21</sup>

The poem ‘Sta Vagonia’ (Inside the Train Carriages) was written by Lilian Menase and was aimed to be sung – once again – to the melody of *Bel ami*.<sup>22</sup> The poem provides the following information: there were fifty people inside each train carriage. Small children were making a lot of noise, probably because they were crying. There was a soldier who was responsible for bringing fresh water whenever they reached a railway station. They used a bucket behind a curtain as a toilet.

<sup>21</sup> Papagiannopoulos 2009: 833–834.

<sup>22</sup> The author saw the poem on a panel of a temporary exhibition titled ‘Jews and Christians in Thessaloniki’ (May–June 2022) at the Jewish Museum of Thessaloniki. Lucy Nahmia, the museum supervisor, kindly sent the panels to the author, who used the first line as the title of the song.

#### 4. Sta Vagonia (Inside the Train Carriages)

Απ' του Βαρόνου Χιρς μας βγάλανε,	They got us out of Baron Hirsch
Και στα βαγόνια πια μας φέρανε,	(ghetto)
Από πενήντα μέσα στο καθένα,	And they brought us
Και τα μπαγκάζια όλα σκορπισμένα,	Into the train carriages
Μα σαν για να μη μας φτάνουν όλα αυτά	Fifty of us inside each carriage
Έχουμε εδώ όμως και τα μικρά	To make things worse
Που μας φουσκώνουν το κεφάλι μας	We have the small kids here
Και τρομερά.	They blow out our minds
Έχομεν όμως και αρχηγό	We have also a leader
Που φροντίζει για μας συνεχώς	Who takes care of us
Προσπαθεί για το νερό	He does his best to provide
Να είναι φρέσκο, καθαρό	Clear, fresh water
Το ανανεώνει από κάθε σταθμό.	He refreshes it
Όσον όμως για την ανάγκη μας,	At every train station.
Είναι δύσκολον και για όλους μας,	All of us find it difficult
Και στην μίαν την γωνίαν,	To go to the toilet
Πίσω απ' ένα παραβάν,	And at one of the corners,
Στο δοχείον καθόμαστε κρυφά.	Behind a curtain
	We sit on a bucket secretly.

The content of the poem 'Syete dyas enserados' (Seven days locked up), written in Auschwitz by David Haim, is similar. Its lyrics are adapted to the melody of the Turkish song 'Gelmeden'.<sup>23</sup> The song also serves as a kaddish for Haim's family.

#### 5. Syete dyas enserados (Seven days locked up)

Syete dias enserados	Seven days locked up
En vagones de bemas	In cattle cars
Una ves a los tres días	Once every three days
Mos kitavan ayrear.	They let us out for clean air.
Madre mia mi kerida	Mother, dearest mother,
Ya tu vites el zehout	You were fortunate
De muerirte en tus tyeras	To have died in your homeland
I non pasates por el oluk.	And not to pass through the chimney.
Padre mio mi kerido	Father, dear father
Kyen te lo iva decir	Who would have told you
Ke veniryias kon tu ermano	That you would come
Il krematoryo de Aushvits.	Brother, at the crematorium of Auschwitz.

<sup>23</sup> The song is available on <https://youtu.be/NIM9ioLGDF4?feature=shared> [accessed 2023 December 1].



### 5. Syete dyas enserados (Seven days locked up)(continued)

Padre i madre, ermanos i ermanikas	Father and mother,
Salyendo todos redjadjis	Brothers and sisters,
A el Patron del mundo	May you all be supplicants
Ke embyie salud a mi	To the Master of the world
Ke me kite de estos kampos	To grant me good health,
Para vos echar kadish.	And to liberate me from these camps
	So that I can recite you the kaddish.

### In Auschwitz

Far away from their homeland, the Greek Jews preferred to use the Greek language to musically express themselves and to narrate about the living conditions in Auschwitz. An explanation for the prevalence of Greek could be that it was unlikely that the Nazis spoke it, and, consequently, they could not understand it. Another explanation could be that there were both Sephardic and Romaniote Jews from Greece in the camp, and the latter spoke only Greek. The Greek language united the two groups and identified them as Jews from Greece. This is further stressed by the chosen melodies typical of Greece, to which they adapted the verses they conceived.

‘Evraïopoula’ (The Jewish Girl) borrows its melody from ‘Tsopanakos’ (The Little Shepherd), a folk song from the inland of central Greece.<sup>24</sup> Its rhythm is 8/8 (3/8+3/8+2/8) and its melody is written in the Nigriz mode. Back in 1938, the people of the newly founded Athens Radio Station were looking for a sound badge that would be particularly moving to Greek immigrants in other countries and chose ‘Tsompanakos’. The station’s sound badge changed in Athens during the German occupation.<sup>25</sup> Even so, everyone in Greece knew this melody, which they recognised as part of their Greek identity and which reminded them of the years before the war.

The poem is obviously written by a woman, as it begins with the phrase ‘I was a Jewish girl’. It narrates that in Poland, women’s hair would be cut off and they would be given men’s clothes. They were taken to baths to be examined for

<sup>24</sup> Nar, *Lying on the Coast...*, 1997: 215–216; Cohen 2011: 224. The song is available on Kounadis and Ordoulidis, <https://vmrebetiko.gr/en/item-en/?id=5357> [accessed 2023 December 1].

<sup>25</sup> Kanellatou, <https://kanellatou.gr/el/paradosiako/sterea-ellada/aitoloakarnania/tsopanakos-imouna.html> [accessed 2023, August 9]; [anonymous] <https://ritorno2015.com/2016/06/17/3303/> [uploaded 2016 June 17; accessed 2023 August 9].

lice, and they were afraid that they would be taken to the gas chambers. Their fear is expressed with the words ‘Our hearts went tikitak’. They worked outdoors despite bad weather conditions, and they were beaten with a baton if they were slow at work. Two German words are found in the text: *Aufstehen* (getting up) and *Zel-Apel* (bugle call). The change from the present to the past tense may suggest that the song was written after World War II or that the present tense changed to the past tense after the war.

## 6. Evraïopoula (The Jewish Girl)

Εβραιοπούλα ήμουνα	I was a Jewish girl,
Το αστράκι φόρεσα	I wore the star
Μας πλακώσαν τα κοθώνια	The bad guys gathered us
Και μας πήγαν στην Πολωνία.	and took us to Poland.
Στην Πολωνία πήγαμε	We went to Poland,
Πω, πω, πω τι πάθαμε	Oh! What happened to us
Μας κουρέψαν τα μαλλιά	They cut our hair
Και μας ντύσαν ανδρικά.	And dressed us with men's clothes.
Το πρωί στο αυφ-στέεν	In the morning, after being waken up,
Βγαίναμε στο τσελ-απέλ.	We went out at the bugle call.
Πάντα πέντε στη σειρά,	Always five in line, oh, sweet mama.
Αχ μανούλα μου γλυκιά	Always five, one after the other,
Πάντα πέντε στη γραμμή	Oh, dear mama.
Αχ μανούλα μου χρυσή.	They took us to the bathrooms,
Στο λουτρό μας πηγαίνανε	They searched us for lice
Για ψώρα μας κοιτάζανε	Our hearts went tik tik tak
Κι η καρδιά μας τικ τικ τακ	For fear of taking us
Μην τυχόν στο γκάζ μας παν.	To the gas chambers.
Στη δουλειά πηγαίνουμε	We go to work
Με ανέμους και βροχές	When strong winds blow and with rains
Κι αν σιγά δουλεύουμε	And if we work slowly
το μπαστούνη βλέπουμε.	We confront the stick.

The second song is ‘Kleftiki zoi’ (Life of Kleftes).<sup>26</sup> Originally, this folk song in 7/8 (3/8+2/8+2/8) deals with extreme living conditions of the Greek warriors during the Greco-Turkish war that followed the Greek Revolution in 1821. Those warriors were widely known throughout Greece as *kleftes* ‘thieves’, and thus this category of songs is called *kleftiko*. ‘Kleftiki zoi’ was and still is the song

<sup>26</sup> Nar, *Lying on the Coast...*, 1997: 216–217; Cohen 2011: 224. The sheet music of the song is available on <https://www.scribd.com/doc/140108300/Kleftiki-Zoi> [accessed 2023 December 1].

that is sung at schools in Greece on the day of the Greek Revolution celebrated on March 25. It is quite likely that all Jews who went to schools in Greece knew the song.

The lyrics were written by a woman, as the way the Greek language and grammar is used indicates. The first two lines belong to the best-known version of the *kleftiko* song and talk about fear: ‘We live a hard life; we eat and walk with fear’. In the third strophe, the lyricist says she did not do anything wrong, she was imprisoned because of her religious beliefs. In the fourth strophe, the lyricist expresses her disbelief that the English would save them.

### 7. Kleftiki zoi (Life of Kleftes)

Μαύρη μωρέ μαύρη είν’ η ζωή που κάνουμε	We live a bad life
Με φόβο τρώμε το ψωμί	We eat bread and we walk in fear.
Με φόβο περπατάμε.	I cannot go to the faucet
Στη βρύσ’ μωρέ στη βρύση	The is a guard everywhere and says
Να πάω δεν μπορώ	‘You are imprisoned,
Παντού μου λέει ο φρουρός	You are a prisoner of Germans’
Είσαι φυλακισμένη,	that’s why they took me to jail.
Γερμανοκρατούμενη	I did not steal, I did not kill
Δεν έκλεψα μωρέ δεν έκλεψα ούτε σκότωσα	I was a Jewish girl,
Εβραιόπούλα ήμουνα	That’s why they imprisoned me
Γι’ αυτό με φυλακίσαν,	Inside Auschwitz.
Στο Άουσβιτς με κλείσαν.	Thank God the Englishmen
Χαλάλι μωρέ χαλάλι στα Εγγλεζάκια μας.	They will save us and free us
Αυτά θα μας γλιτώσουν	They will put us into a darker jail.
Και θα μας λευτερώσουν.	
Πιο μέσα θα μας χώσουν.	

‘Etsi einai i zoi’ (That’s Life) is a Greek song from a popular same-title Greek theatrical high comedy (‘ithografia’ in Greek) of that time.<sup>27</sup> The songwriter was Kostas Yannidis, the pseudonym that the Greek composer Yannis Konstantinidis used when he composed popular urban songs.<sup>28</sup> The end of the song is hopeful: ‘girls, be patient, we’ll get out of Auschwitz’.

<sup>27</sup> Nar, *Lying on the Coast...*, 1997: 220–221; Bresler 2022, e-mail. The song is available on <https://youtu.be/a-4McmBbez3> [accessed 2023 December 1].

<sup>28</sup> Sakallieros 2010: 33.

## 8. Etsi einai i zoi (That's Life)

Τη φυλακή εγώ δεν ήξερα	Imprisonment was unknown to me
Και τώρα τη γνωρίζω	But now I know
Μες στο κελί γυρίζω	I walk around the prison cell
Τους τοίχους αντικρίζω.	And face the walls.
‘Όλα στο νου μου έρχονται	Everything crosses my mind,
Τα γέλια και οι αγάπες	Laughter, flirts, all faded away
‘Όλα γινήκαν στάχτες	On life’s train.
Στο τρένο της ζωής.	That’s life, girls,
Έτσι είν’ η ζωή κορίτσια	That’s always life
Πάντα έτσι είν’ η ζωή	To be imprisoned in Auschwitz.
Να ‘μασσε κλεισμένες μες στο Άουσβιτς.	Youth passes by,
Νιάτα που περνούν,	Happy moments fade away,
Χαρές που φεύγουν, πίσω δε γυρνούν.	They don’t come back.
Κορίτσια κάντε υπομονή	Girls be patient,
Θα βρούμε από το Άουσβιτς.	We will escape from Auschwitz.

‘Thessaloniki mou glykia’ (Sweet Thessaloniki) is a poem adapted to the melody of either ‘Stis Salonikis ta stena’ [‘Στης Σαλονίκης τα στενά’, Eng. ‘On the Roads of Thessaloniki’] by Vasilis Tsitsanis or ‘Thimithika to 12’ [‘Θυμήθηκα το Δώδεκα’, – Eng. ‘I remembered (19)12’] by Markos Vamvakaris.<sup>29</sup> Both songs are Greek urban folk songs which belong to the *rebetiko* genre of Greek music.<sup>30</sup>

The text of ‘Thessaloniki mou glykia’ (Sweet Thessaloniki) narrates about the life in the camps and expresses nostalgia for homeland. The fact that the lyricist uses the past tense to describe what happened inside the camps and that the poem lacks messages of hope for freedom lead to the conclusion that the poem was probably written after World War II.

<sup>29</sup> According to Nar, the song borrowed its melody from the urban folk song ‘Stis Salonikis ta stena’ [‘Στης Σαλονίκης τα στενά’, Eng. ‘On the Roads of Thessaloniki’] by Vasilis Tsitsanis (Nar, *Lying on the Coast...*, 1997: 217–218. The song is available on [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xm8vnUb\\_SEM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xm8vnUb_SEM) [accessed 2023 December 1]. However, the Israeli singer Yehuda Poliker, originally from Thessaloniki, believes that the melody was borrowed from the song ‘Thimithika to 12’ [‘Θυμήθηκα το Δώδεκα’, Eng. ‘I remembered (19)12’] by Markos Vamvakaris (the song is available on <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3lTKBLjofIM>) [accessed 2023 December 1]. Poliker translated the song into Hebrew (Chatzistamatiou, Mariangela 2020, e-mail).

<sup>30</sup> *Rebetiko* music evolved in urban areas of the Ottoman Empire in the late nineteenth century. Initially, until approximately 1922, it was the music of the underworld, and it was played in bars of ill-repute (*tekes* in Greek) and prisons. From the early 1920s until the beginning of World War II, it became popular among lower and middle classes. Since then, it has become widely acceptable as belonging to the Greek music tradition. *Buzuki* is used as the basic instrument when performing rebetiko: Liavas 2009: 225; Damianakos 2001: 18.

### 9. Thessaloniki mou glykia (Sweet Thessaloniki)

Θεσσαλονίκη μου γλυκιά	Sweet Thessaloniki
Πατρίδα δοξασμένη	Glorious Homeland
Αχ πότε θα' ρθει ο καιρός	Ah, when will the time come
Να ζούμε ενωμένοι.	For us to be together.
Και να σου πω τα βιάσανα	And to tell you the trials
Που τράβηξα εκεί πέρα	I went through
Στης Πολωνίας τα κελιά	In Poland's prison cells
Στο λάγκερ νύχτα μέρα.	In the lager day and night.
Σαν τα ζουρλά μας ντύσανε	They dressed us like we were
Με μπλε και άσπρες ρίγες.	Insane asylum persons
Κι απ' τον καημό τ' αδέρφια μας	With blue and white stripes
Έπεφταν σαν τις μύγες.	And because of their sorrow
Βαρούσαν άνανδρα, σκληρά	Our brothers fell down like flies.
Ώσπου η καρδιά ματώνει	They beat cruelly, heartlessly,
Και καίγαν γυναικόπαιδα	Until the heart bleeds,
Οι μαύροι δολοφόνοι.	They burnt women and children,
Και σεις παιδιά της λευτεριάς	The black murderers.
Που μάθατε το δράμα	And you, children of freedom,
Ξοντώσατε το φασισμό	Now that you know this bad story
Σας το αφήνω τάμα.	Exterminate fascism!
	I leave this oblation to you.

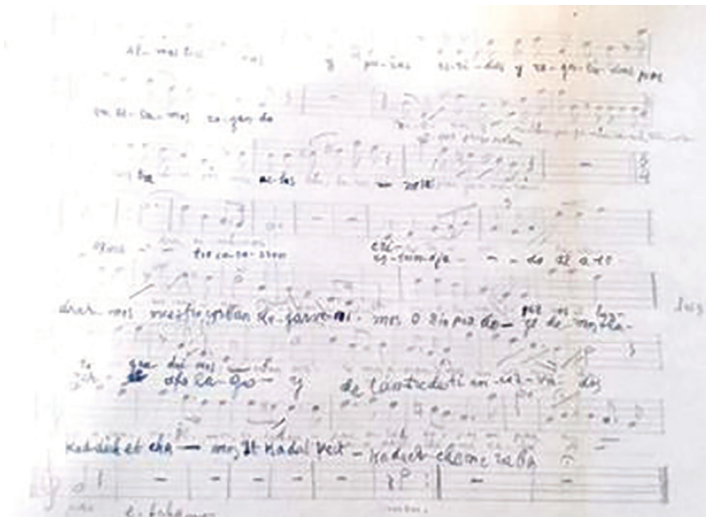
### Dirges and Nostalgia for the Homeland

Two other poems, written after the Holocaust, are dirges in Judeo-Spanish for the loved ones who died in Auschwitz. The first is 'Almas tyernas y puras' (Tender and Pure Souls; see Figure), which borrowed its music from the recitativo and the aria 'Ombra mai fu' from the opera *Xerxes* by Georg Friedrich Händel (1685–1759). The lyricist of 'Almas tyernas y puras' (Tender and Pure Souls) is unknown until today.<sup>31</sup> Its lyrics deal with the Holocaust victims. In the first line, tender are the souls of the victims and not the leaves of the tree.

<sup>31</sup> Scarlatos 2019: 122–129.

## 10. Almas tyernas y puras (Tender and Pure Souls)

Almas tyernas y puras,	Tender and pure souls,
Keridas y regaladas,	Loving and precious,
¡Por vos estamos rogando!	For you we pray!
Truenos y relampagos	Thunders and lightnings
Nunka mas truvieran	Will never again be on your way,
Vuestra cara pas.	Brutal acts
Mas aktos varvaros	Will never again profane you!
¡No vos profanaran!	Fathers, brothers, little children,
Padres, ermanos, kriaturas,	Who were consumed in flames,
Ke en las flamas vos konsumieron,	Fathers, mothers, little children,
Padres, madres, kriaturas,	We neither mourn for you,
Ke por vos el luyto no guadrimos,	Nor did we sit down for seven days,
Ni en syete mos asentimos,	Nor did we cover you in a grave,
Ni kon tomba vos akouvijimos,	Rest in peace, rest in peace.
Estad en pas, estad en pas.	



**Figure.** Sheet music of the song ‘Almas tyernas y puras’ (Tender and Pure Souls), found at the Historical Archive of the Jewish Community of Thessaloniki

The verses and the music of ‘La linda jovenika’ (The Pretty Girl) or ‘La jovenika in Lager’ (The Girl in Auschwitz) were written by Moshe Ha-Helion, a Holocaust survivor who used to be a violinist in the Auschwitz orchestra, in memory of his sister.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Papazoglou 2016, interview.

## 11. La linda jovenika (The Pretty Girl) / La jovenika in Lager (The Girl in Auschwitz)

La linda jovenika	The pretty girl
Izika muy kerida	Beloved daughter
Ke sus paryentes todo	Her parents gave her
Le davan en su vida	Everything in her life.
Kon seda la vistian	She was dressed in silk
Yevava djoyas d' oro	She wore golden jewels
La alondjavan siempre	They kept her away
De males i de yoro.	From bad things and crying.
Un dia los Almanes	One day, the Germans
De nido l' arankaron	Rooted her out of her nest
I djunto su famiya	and so they did with her family
Al lager la llevaron.	They brought them to the camp.
Sesh dias i sesh noches	Six days and six nights,
Stuvieron enserados	They were enclosed
A dentro de vagones	Into train carriages
Eskuros i siyados	Dark and sealed.
Ma kuantu a Birkenau	But when in Birkenau,
El kampo de la muerte	The extermination camp
Entro d'un punto al otro	Luck changed
Se le troko la suerte	In the blink of an eye.
Sin entender del todo	Without realizing
Lo ke s' esta pasando	What was happening
Desnuda sta al banyo	She is nude in the bathroom
La stan dezenfaktado.	They are disinfecting her.

After World War II, Iakov Levi, a Jew from Thessaloniki and a Holocaust survivor, migrated to Israel. There he wrote the music and lyrics of the song 'Chronia eimai makria sou' (It's been a long time since I was sent away from you), to express nostalgia for his homeland and for the past.<sup>33</sup> A major consequence of World War II was that millions of people were forced to migrate to other places or even continents to start a new life.

<sup>33</sup> Nar, *Lying on the Coast...* 1997: 218–219. Rezi Vardar, a western district of Thessaloniki, is mentioned in the lyrics. The author of this article uses the first verse as the title of the song.

## 12. Chronia eimai makria sou (It's been a long time since I was sent away from you)

Χρόνια είμαι μακριά σου,  
 Παντού πλανήθηκα και ζω  
 Μα το χώμα σου, Ελλάδα,  
 Πάντα εγώ το νοσταλγώ  
 Είσαι η πρώτη μου πατρίδα  
 Και ποτέ δε σε ξεχνώ  
 Είσαι η πρώτη μου πατρίδα  
 Και γι' αυτό σε νοσταλγώ.  
 Είμαι απ' το Ρεζί Βαρδάρη  
 Τον παλιό συνοικισμό  
 Εβραϊόπουλα λεβέντες  
 Είδαμε εκεί το φως  
 Το φωνάζω και καυχέμαι:  
 Είμαι Θεσσαλονικιός  
 Και θα είμαι ως το τέλος  
 Γνήσιος και πιστός Ρωμιός.

It's been a long time  
 Since I've been sent away from you,  
 I wandered and lived everywhere,  
 But I always miss  
 Your soil, Greece.  
 You are my first homeland,  
 I can never forget you  
 You are my first homeland,  
 That's why I miss you.  
 I am from Rezi Vardar,  
 The old quarter,  
 Brave Jewish fellows  
 Were born there  
 I cry out loud: I am proud  
 Of being from Thessaloniki,  
 I'll be an original and faithful Greek  
 Till the end of time!

### Conclusions

The lyricists of most of the songs were Sephardi Jews from Thessaloniki, who were urban residents and who used to enjoy listening to Western popular songs of the time. The poems written before the transportation of the Jews of Greece to extermination camps are from Thessaloniki and were written not only in the Judeo-Spanish, but also in the Greek language. The reasons for this lie in the historical and social particularities of Thessaloniki. However, most of the poems composed in Auschwitz were in Greek and borrowed their melodies from characteristic Greek folk songs or songs written by renowned Greek songwriters.

Nostalgia for homeland is expressed in Greek, linking the lyricists with Greece via the country's official language. However, most dirges related to the Holocaust were written in Judeo-Spanish, obviously by Sephardi Jews, and their melodies are either original or borrowed from Western art music. The Judeo-Spanish language probably serves as a connection between the lyricists and their ancestors, or it may be an expression of self-identification of the Sephardim of Greece (who, in many cases, married Romaniote Jews, or Orthodox Christian Greeks and had no apparent reason to use their vernacular). Many Sephardim migrated to other countries, such as the USA and Israel, so, in that case, their language was part of their identity that differentiated them from other Jewish people. Another reason may be the growing sense of the loss of a civilization, and an urge to maintain it.



Until very recently, most of these songs existed in audio archives and their lyrics could be found in some books thanks to the efforts of some scholars to preserve them. New research has brought them out and they are gradually finding their place in the cultural memory of the Jewish Community of Greece through concerts and professional studio recordings, thus highlighting the contribution of on-site and archival research to the musical life of a city and a community.

Received 11 August 2023

Accepted 7 November 2023

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*Chrissy Scarlatos*

## Graikijos žydų dainų apie Holokaustą muzikiniai skoliniai

### Santrauka

Straipsnyje aptariamos dainos apie Antrąjį pasaulinį karą ir Holokaustą. Atskleidžiama neišvengiama istorijos įtaka muzikai, kuria siekiama papasakoti apie tamsų Graikijos istorijos puslapį. Visus straipsnyje pateiktų dainų tekstus sukūrė Graikijos žydai, karo liudininkai; dainose jie vaizduoja Graikijos žydų gyvenimo sąlygas Antrojo pasaulinio karo metais. Surinktos dainos pagal tekstus buvo suskirstytos į kelias grupes: a) gyvenimas vokiečių okupacijos metais, b) gyvenimo sąlygos traukinių vagonuose pervežimų metu, c) gyvenimo sąlygos Aušvico koncentracijos stovykloje ir d) gyvenimas ir atminimas po Holokausto. Dainų tekstai dažniausiai parašyti graikų, o kai kuriais atvejais – ladino (rytinės Viduržemio jūros pakrantės judėjų-ispau) kalba. Taip įvyko todėl, kad Graikijos žydai yra daugiausia romėnai ir sefardai. Žydai romėnai apsigyveno graikų žemėse helenizmo ir Bizantijos laikais, jų gimtoji kalba buvo graikų kalba. Sefardai – iš Ispanijos ir Portugalijos kilę žydai – apsigyveno Graikijoje, kai buvo išvaryti iš Ispanijos 1492 m.; jų gimtoji kalba buvo judėjų-ispau.

Visoms dainoms buvo pritaikyta kontrafaktų praktika (skolintos melodijos ir pakeisti žodžiai). Skolintų melodijų muzikiniai šaltiniai – tai Vakarų profesionalioji muzika (pvz., operos), to laikmečio populiarūs Rytų ir Graikijos dainos, graikų liaudies ir miesto muzika. Ši įvairovė rodo Graikijos etninių ir religinių grupių kultūrinę sąveiką bei tuo metu didėjančią masinės informacijos priemonių (radijo, kino) vaidmenį.

RAKTAŽODŽIAI: žydų muzika, kontrafaktas, Graikijos žydai, Antrasis pasaulinis karas, Holokaustas, ladino kalba, judėjų-ispau kalba