

*Organising Rescue Against All Odds: Turkish Zionists In İzmir and Their Role In The Trans-Aegean Rescue Operation Saving Greek Jews From Extermination (1943-1944)**

Julia Brigitte FRÖHLICH

University of Vienna, Department of Near Eastern Studies, Vienna-Austria

E-mail: julia.froehlich@univie.ac.at

ORCID ID: 0009-0006-4414-2280

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ABSTRACT

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This paper seeks to highlight the activities of Turkish Zionists relating to the migration and rescue phenomenon unfolding in the Aegean: During 1943 and 1944, around 1,000 Greek Jews were smuggled from the Greek peninsula

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Euboea across the Aegean to Türkiye and were thus saved from Nazi extermination. While the operation scheme was coordinated by the Jewish Agency Office located in İstanbul as well as the organisers of Anglo-Greek evacuation, success also depended on Zionist grassroots organisations such as the *Ne'emanim Tz'ion* [Those Loyal to Zion]: These provided food, water, clothing, and money as well as ships needed to carry the refugees across the sea and thus constitute an important part within the network of actors determining Jewish refugees' escape and their agency. Zooming in on the local actors engaged in the rescue operation (Turkish Zionists, Greek partisans and captains / fishermen), present paper discusses the Greek-Jewish refugee movement within the larger context of forced immigration observable in the Aegean as a result of the Second World War. Intertwining testimonies given by Turkish Zionists with refugee testimonies, Turkish administrative reports as well as British military and secret service correspondence, my paper intends to examine local Turkish-Zionist action and locate it within the wider network of collective and corporate actors shaping the Greek-Jewish migration movement as well as individual and collective refugee agency. Additionally, refugee reports are taken as a basis to trace some of the many hazards and threats of escape – a multi-faceted phenomenon made tangible through a multitude of different stories that are needed to see beyond the abstract structures of trans-Aegean rescue.

Keywords: Holocaust, Turkish Zionism, trans-Aegean migration, Yishuv rescue operation, İzmir

ÖZ

FRÖHLICH, Julia Brigitte, **Tüm Zorluklara Rağmen Düzenlenen Kurtarma Operasyonu: İzmir'deki Türk Siyonistler ve Onların Yunan Yahudilerini Yok Olmaktan Kurtaran Trans-Ege Kurtarma Operasyonundaki Rollerini (1943-1944)**, CTAD, Yıl 20, Sayı 41, pp. 455-483.

Bu makale, Türk Siyonistleri'nin Ege'de yaşanan göç ve kurtarma olaylarıyla ilgili faaliyetlerini vurgulamayı amaçlamaktadır: 1943 ve 1944 yıllarında, yaklaşık 1.000 Yunan Yahudisi, Yunan yarımadası Eğriboz'dan Ege üzerinden Türkiye'ye kaçınıldı ve böylece Nazilerin onları yok etmesinin önüne geçildi. Operasyon planı İstanbul'da bulunan Yahudi Ajansı Ofisi ve İngiliz-Yunan tahliyesinin organizatörleri tarafından koordine edilirken, başarı aynı zamanda *Ne'emanim Tz'ion* [Siyon'un Sadık Adamları] gibi Siyonist taban örgütlerine de bağılıydı: Bunlar yiyecek, su, giyecek ve paranın yanı sıra mültecileri denizden geçirmek için gereken gemileri de sağlamış ve böylece Yahudi mültecilerin kaçışını ve eylemliliklerini belirleyen aktörler ağının önemli bir parçasını oluşturmuştur. Kurtarma operasyonuna katılan yerel aktörlere (Türk

Siyonistler, Yunan partizanlar ve kaptanlar) odaklanan bu makale, Yunan Yahudisi mülteci hareketini, İkinci Dünya Savaşı'nın bir sonucu olarak Ege'de gözlemlenebilen daha geniş zorunlu göç bağlamında tartışmaktadır. Bu çalışma Türk Siyonistlerin ve mültecilerin tanıklıklarını, Türk idari raporları ve İngiliz askeri ve gizli servis yazışmalarıyla birlikte ele almaktadır. Böylece de yerel Türk-Siyonist eylemlerini incelemeyi ve bunu Yunan-Yahudi göç hareketini şekillendiren daha geniş kolektif ve kurumsal aktörler ağının yanı sıra, bireysel ve kolektif mülteci hareketliliği içinde konumlandırmayı amaçlamaktadır. Tüm bunlara ek olarak, mülteci raporları, trans-Ege kurtarma operasyonundaki soyut yapıların ötesini görmek için gerekli olan çok sayıda farklı hikaye aracılığıyla somut hale getirilen ve çok yönlü bir olgu olan kaçışın birçok tehlike ve tehdidinden bazılarının izini sürmek için temel alınmaktadır.

Anabtar Kelimeler: Holokost, Türkiye'deki Siyonizm, trans-Ege göçü, Yişuv kurtarma operasyonu, İzmir

Introduction

In spring 1944, when Sara Golan¹ reached the Turkish coast near İzmir after having endured hunger, thirst, and all-encompassing fear, she did so as a free person, no longer threatened by denunciation, arrest, deportation, and subsequent death. She, a Jewish teenager born and raised in Athens, had escaped Nazi extermination policy in Axis-occupied Greece by crossing the Aegean on a motorboat organised by Greek left-wing partisans. She had made it – but when she set foot on Turkish soil (or, more accurately, coastal stone), she did so as a refugee, largely dependent on the goodwill of others. She was used to relying on everyone's mercy by now, with circumstances in Greece having gradually minimised Jewish agency since 1942 (in zones occupied by Nazi Germany and Bulgaria), and autumn 1943 (in the zone formerly occupied by Italy)²: Having lived in the Italian zone, Sara Golan and her family had not

¹ Subsequent biographical information stems from an interview given to Yad Vashem: Interview with Sara Golan. 1995, O.3. Testimonies Department of the Yad Vashem Archives. ID 3563220. File number 8960, p. 1–23.

² For a general overview on Axis occupation politics see, for instance: Hagen Fleischer, *Im Kreuzschatten der Mächte. Griechenland 1941-1944*, Peter Lang Verlag, Frankfurt a.M & New York, 1986; Hagen Fleischer, *Deutscher Widerstand im besetzten Griechenland. Ergänzungen zum Katalog der Ausstellung „Deutscher Widerstand 1933-1945“*, Goethe-Institut, Athen, 1987; Hagen Fleischer, *Oi Pólemoi Tis Mnimis. O V Pankósmios Pólemos sti dimósia istoría*, Nefeli, n.p., 2012; Hagen Fleischer, Iasonas Chandrinou, *Póleis se pólemo, 1939-1945: evropaiká astiká kéntrypó germanikí katochí*, Ekdoseis ho Moñ Skiourou, Athens, 2018; Mark Mazower, *Inside Hitler's Greece. The Experience of Occupation 1941-1944*, Yale University Press, New Haven et al., 1998; Mark Mazower, “Structures of Authority in the Greek Resistance 1941-1944”, *Opposing Fascism. Community, Authority and Resistance*

felt the brunt of Nazi antisemitism and extermination policy before autumn 1943, when Athens and the rest of the Italian zone came under Nazi jurisdiction as a result of Italy's capitulation. Hence, Sara Golan was forced to go into hiding, with Christian families providing shelter for money, and an Orthodox priest arranging for subsequent escape across the Aegean that led her from Euboea to Çeşme (see appendix, *Figure 1*).

When safely reaching Türkiye, she did so thanks to a range of different actors – both individual and collective / corporative that had lent their support – with Italian officials³ making her family aware of Nazi intentions and policy in the German zone, with a priest⁴ acting as mediator between the Jewish family and the partisans willing to help them escape, and with countless and often unnamed individuals helping them either actively or passively: by turning a blind eye, thus not giving in to the lure of the potentially lucrative practice of denunciation. In Türkiye, Sara Golan's dependence on support did not cease – much to the contrary, as she was then in a country whose language she did not speak, whose laws and customs she did not know, and where she lacked any relatives or friends to rely on. As such, she was just as helpless as many other refugees fleeing to Türkiye during the Axis occupation of Greece, with push factors ranging from the Great Famine (esp. 1941-1942),⁵ political and military activity, and generally brutal occupation policy to the antisemitic extermination policy implemented in Nazi German, Bulgarian, and (from autumn 1943

in Europe, Ed. Tim Kirk, Anthony McElligott, CUP, Cambridge & New York, 1999, pp. 120-131; Anestis Nessou, *Griechenland 1941-1944. Deutsche Besatzungspolitik und Verbrechen gegen die Zivilbevölkerung – eine Beurteilung nach dem Völkerrecht*, V&R unipress, Osnabrück, 2009; Eds. Nikolas Pissis, Dimitris Karydas, *Die „Neue Ordnung“ in Griechenland 1941-1944*, Edition Romiosini, Berlin, 2020.

³ For an insider's view on Italian officials' attempts to help persecuted Jews, see the diary written by Lucillo Mercè: Yad Vashem. Diary from 1942-1945 of Professor Lucillo Mercè. O.31 – Italy collection. Item ID: 10665268. File number: 48. See also Yolanda ben Uzilio's interview, p. 41 and 42 for activities of the Italian consulate at Thessaloniki – esp. Ricardo Rosenberg, Valerie Torres and Emilio Neri (Yad Vashem, Interview with ben Uzilio, Yolanda. 1999b, O.3. Testimonies Department of the Yad Vashem Archives. ID 3747653. File 11272).

⁴ For a general discussion of the attitude and actions taken by the Greek Orthodox Church with reference to Nazi antisemitism and extermination practices see Panteleymon Anastasiakis, *The Church of Greece under Axis Occupation*, Fordham University Press, New York, 2015 (esp. chapter 7). For a biographical sketch of Archbishop Damaskinos, an ardent defender of persecuted Jews, see *Ibid.*, chapter 3.

⁵ Violetta Hionidou, *Famine and Death in Occupied Greece, 1941-1944*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2006; Violetta Hionidou, "Relief and Politics in Occupied Greece, 1941-4", *Journal of Contemporary History*, Volume 48, Number 4, 2013, pp. 761-783; Violetta Hionidou, "If We Hadn't Left... We Would Have All Died'. Escaping Famine on the Greek Island of Chios, 1941-44", *Journal of Refugee Studies*, Volume 34, Number 1, 2021, pp. 1101-1120.

onwards) the former Italian zone.⁶ Arriving at the coast near İzmir, Sara Golan did not know where to turn. However, she found that her narrow escape across the Aegean was part of a broader rescue scheme devised by a joint venture of Greek left-wing partisans (EAM),⁷ the Jewish Agency, her unofficial second branch, the *Haganah*,⁸ and the consulate of the Greek Government-in-exile⁹ still operating in İzmir, which meant that she was not left entirely to fend for herself alone: Together with the approximately 30 other refugees travelling on the motorboat, she was picked up from the beach by contact men (presumably affiliated with the Greek consulate or the Jewish Agency), and brought to İzmir, where she was provided with accommodation for several weeks. She was part of a rather smoothly running operation launched in December 1943 as a result of attempts to rescue the remainder of Greek Jewry from deportation and thus could rely on a network of actors trying to accommodate her basic needs, administrative requirements for Aliyah, and her subsequent transfer from Türkiye over Syria to Palestine.¹⁰ While it is clear that the multi-organisational rescue network played a crucial role with regards to her survival,

⁶ For comprehensive studies on the Holocaust in Greece, see Eds. Giorgos Antoniou, A. Dirk Moses, *The Holocaust in Greece*, CUP, Cambridge, 2018; Steven Bowman, *The Agony of Greek Jews 1940-1945*, Stanford University Press, Redwood City, 2009; Leon Saliel, *The Holocaust in Thessaloniki. Reactions to the Anti-Jewish Persecution, 1942-1943*, Routledge, London, 2020.

⁷ For a general overview on hierarchy, ideology, and activity of the left-wing partisan movement EAM and her military branch ELAS see, for instance, André Gerolymatos, *The British and the Greek Resistance 1936-1944. Spies, saboteurs, and partisans*, Lexington Books, London et al., 2018; Jane Hart, *New Voices in the Nation. Women and the Greek Resistance 1941-1964*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca & London, 1996; Mazower, *Structures of Authority*; L.S. Stavrianos, "The Greek National Liberation Front (EAM). A Study in Resistance Organization and Administration", *The Journal of Modern History*, Volume 24, Number 3, 1952, pp. 42-55; Spiros Tsoutsoumpis, *A History of the Greek Resistance in the Second World War. The People's Armies*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2016.

⁸ For secret rescue networks established by representatives of the Jewish Agency and the *Haganah*, see Friling 2006. For an 'insider's perspective' see Ehud Avriel, *Open the Gates! The Dramatic Personal Story of 'Illegal' Immigration to Israel*, Littlehampton Book Services Ltd, n.p., 1975.

⁹ For a re-evaluation of the role played by the Greek Government-in-exile that used to be portrayed as having been rather minor with regards to rescue activity – in contrast to this portrayal, the exiled government did get involved, cooperating at times both with the EAM and the Jewish Agency / *Haganah*; see Yitzchak Kerem, "The Greek Government-in-exile and the Rescue of Jews from Greece", *Governments-in-exile and the Jews during the Second World War*, Ed. Jan Láníček, Jordan James, Valentine Mitchell, 2013, pp. 175-196.

¹⁰ Mordehai Falcon et al., *Files for the study of the Zionist and Pioneer-movement in Türkiye, Verband der Veteranen der zionistischen Bewegung in der Türkei [Yahudot turkhiya va ha-tziyonot. Qvetzim le-hakar batnu'ab ha-tziyonit ve ha-halutzit ba-turkhiya, Turkish Judaism and Zionism]*, Association of Veterans of the Zionist Movement in Türkiye, n.p., 2000, p. 17.

single individuals or non-organisational entities also had considerable influence on the outcome of an escape attempt – both in Greece, and Türkiye, the country of preliminary arrival and transit.

Indeed, the role of individuals tends to be overlooked in the face of grand schemes operating on the meso or macro level, and this neglect has also been paid to the local Jewish community in İzmir¹¹ – quite mistakenly, as it turns out, as local initiative could mean a lot to the arriving Jewish-Greek refugees. Sara Golan vividly recalls the help of the local Jewish community both with regards to material help and moral support:¹²

“In the meantime, the Jewish community of İzmir heard that refugees had come, so they helped us, gave us things, there were even people who didn’t have shoes, because how long can it last, a pair of shoes that you wear for almost a month? And Father said to them, imagine that on Passover I ate bread, and things like that, [and] then there was one [member] of the Jewish community who made a Passover seder.”

Recalling the importance attached by her father to observing religious traditions, Sara identifies the Passover seder as an important anchor, enabling the uprooted refugees to (re-)connect to what many of them perceived as part of their identity – an identity that they had been persecuted for.¹³ Being welcomed into a community sharing the same or similar religious and cultural rituals clearly was a solace to Sara and her family, and Jewish community life in İzmir can be interpreted as a much-needed safe space to partly recover from trauma and a paradoxical sense of shame of having escaped.¹⁴

Embarking from testimonies such as this, my study draws on accounts given by refugees and rescuers with secret service material and diplomatic as well as administrative reports found in the archives at Ankara, Kew (London), and Washington. Through close reading and content analysis, these sources are

¹¹ Thus, the recent publication of *Anıların İzinde İzmir Yahudileri 20. Yüzyıl Başından Günümüze* (Turkey İzmir Musevi Cemaati Vakfı 2023) by Raşel Rakella Asal and Sarit Bonfil, is a highly relevant study that sheds light on the activities of the local Jewish community and its contributions to Greek-Jewish escape.

¹² Translated from Hebrew: Yad Vashem, Interview with Sara Golan. 1995, O.3. Testimonies Department of the Yad Vashem Archives. ID 3563220. File number 8960, p. 15.

¹³ For an insightful discussion of issues of identity, memory, and trauma inflicted by the Holocaust, and the subsequent need for reconstruction of individual and collective Jewish identities in postwar Greece, see Pothiti Hantzaroula, *Child Survivors of the Holocaust in Greece. Memory, Testimony and Subjectivity*, Routledge, London & New York, 2021.

¹⁴ A prime example of blaming the victim, shame often surfaced in children that identified their Jewishness as the core of their suffering and consequently felt bad for being (identified as) Jewish see Hantzaroula, *op.cit.*

intertwined and contextualised to provide glimpses into refugee experience and its embeddedness in the chaotic structures governing forced migration as well as the multi-faceted trans-Aegean migration phenomenon in general.

Supporting Refugees: The Turkish-Jewish Community of İzmir and Its Tradition of Charitable Work

The anonymous people forming the local Jewish community thus provided support on a level disregarded by the macro-level organisers of Jewish rescue. While this kind of moral support certainly helped individuals on a mental and affective level, it also sought to equip them with useful skills regarding their immigration to Palestine. As Heinz Ziffer, a Zionist activist working in İzmir, states, the young people in his organisation were eager to help in as many ways as possible, giving lessons in relevant skills needed for Aliyah. He recalls that;

“all young people who wanted to immigrate to Palestine had to go through lessons, so those [activists] who could, gave Hebrew lessons. They gave some information about Palestine geographically and the history of Palestine. I gave two years gymnastic lessons to the young men and young women (...). I used to give [lessons] four times a week, gymnastic lessons (...).”¹⁵

Heinz Ziffer was part of a Zionist youth organisation then active in İzmir and İstanbul under the name *Ne’emanim Tz’ion*. With about 500 members and close connections to the Jewish Agency, the *Haganah*, and the sub-group *Mossad l’Aliyah Bet*, this group was one important local group trying to rescue Jews from Nazi-occupied or Nazi-controlled territory, most notably Bulgaria and Greece.¹⁶

Albeit relatively small in numbers, the Jewish community of İzmir had a notable charitable and Zionist tradition: The decline of the Jewish mercantile class of İzmir, observable from the 18th century onwards, led to relative pauperisation of the Jewish community. As Dina Danon (2020) shows for the 19th century, there was a clear discrepancy between a small wealthy elite and a large, impoverished Jewish collective, which made the establishment of charitable associations necessary.¹⁷ These endeavours were centralised in 1878,

¹⁵ USHMM, *Interview with Heinz and Nera Ziffer*, 2000, Accession Number: 2001.213.26. RG Number: RG-50.969.0026., p. 5.

¹⁶ Falcon et al., *op.cit.*, p. 46.

¹⁷ In the mid-1840s, the fiscal categorisation of the Jews of İzmir reads as follows: The majority of 54.4% ranked in the lowest category, compared to a mere 5.4% that qualified for the highest class of taxpayers; see Dina Danon, *The Jews of Ottoman İzmir. A Modern History*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, CA, 2020, p. 11.

with the Gabbaé Sedaka Society trying to improve the living conditions of what they termed ‘*los vervaderos pobres*’ [the truly poor].¹⁸ While being philanthropic in essence, Jewish charity for Jews also stems from the urge to preserve the communal ‘honour’ that was thought to be threatened by open display of pauperisation.¹⁹

This strong sense of religion-based unity and collective responsibility that asked for solidarity across classes was also at the core of Zionist activity in İzmir. This showed in the establishment of the *kupat Eretz Israel* or Land of Israel Treasury, which was founded in 1831 by Rabbi Chaim Pallache and Avraham Yehoshua Yehuda, then secretary of the İzmir community: The dividends, amounting to 10% of the money invested, exclusively went to members willing to emigrate to Palestine.²⁰ Notwithstanding the quantitative insignificance of the İzmir emigrees to Palestine,²¹ the fund nonetheless indicates an important change in the self-perception and identity conceptualisation of the Jewish community: Solidarity and collective responsibility was extended to not only encompass the local community, but all Jews – in Palestine and the diaspora.

This modification of outlook was crucial for the Greek Jews that would depend on support decades later. Embarking from grassroots endeavours to support Zionism and to celebrate Jewish heritage,²² the Zionist movement of

¹⁸ As Danon states, the differentiation of ‘the truly poor’ and ‘the imposters’ as made by the Society points towards “*the mobilization taxonomies of poverty and ‘deservedness’ in the modern Sephardi world.*” see Danon, *op.cit.*, p. 64.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 63; Ebru Boyar, Kate Fleet, *A Social History of Ottoman Istanbul*, CUP, Cambridge, 2010, p. 137.

²⁰ Falcon et al., *op.cit.*, pp. 10-11.

²¹ According to estimations, only four members and their families received funds from the funds in 1855; see. *Ibid.*, p. 12). For much more recent Aliyah trends from Türkiye to Israel see Rifat Bali, “*Aliyah*”. *Türk Yahudilerinin İsrail’e Göç Hikâyeleri*, Libra, İstanbul, 2018.

²² As Zionist activity was viewed with suspicion as a potential threat towards Ottoman nationhood and unity, this was largely restricted to communal life in sport clubs. Maurus Reinkowski, „Zionismus, Palästina und Osmanisches Reich. Eine Fallstudie zu Verschwörungstheorien im Nahen Osten“, *Judaism, Christianity, and Islam in the Course of History. Exchange and Conflicts*, Ed. Lothar Gall, Dietmar Willoweit, Oldenbourg, München, 2011, p. 97.

A prime example for the link between sport and (clandestine) cultural-Zionist activity is the Israelite Gymnastics Club of Constantinople, which was founded on 8 January 1895 by Avraham [Albert] Ziffer and constitutes one of the forerunners of today’s Maccabi Sports Movement see Falcon et al., *op.cit.*, p. 13; Bora Sinan, “Türkiye’de bir İlk. İzmir Matza (Hamursuz) Fabrikası Hakkında Belgeler”, *Tarih ve Coğrafya Araştırmaları Dergisi*, Volume 7, Number 2, 2021, p. 283; Benny Ziffer, “My Grandfather, Founder of Muscular Judaism”, *Haaretz*, 2012,

İzmir outlived the Ottoman Empire and survived the social and political upheavals linked to the often chaotic and violent first decades of the 20th century.²³ With the consolidation of the Turkish republic in the 1930s, Zionist activity became more pronounced, but was still largely restricted to the underground. This had its heyday during the Second World War, when organisations such as *Ne'emanim Tz'ion* contributed to Jewish rescue in cooperation with the Jewish Agency, the *Mossad l'Aliyah Bet* and other Yishuv institutions (e.g. the *Histradut*)^{24,25} Local organisations in İzmir, but also İstanbul and İskenderun accommodated refugees, provided food and clothing, and prepared the refugees for their Aliyah by giving them lessons in gymnastics, Hebrew, and agriculture, as Heinz Ziffer illustrated.²⁶

Organising Rescue: The Barki-Network

Together with a further group located in İzmir, the so-called 'Halutz [Pioneer]'-movement,²⁷ the members of *Ne'emanim Tz'ion* were an integral, albeit 'small' part of the general, broad rescue scheme run by the 'big players' at national and organisational level, with local activists picking up refugees, transporting them to meeting points or railway station, and running errands whenever needed.²⁸ For instance, Sotiris Papastratis, a member of EAM involved in trans-Aegean rescue, remembers that Jewish refugees were usually met by Jewish guides in Türkiye who gave them directions.²⁹ However, reducing the role of members of the local Jewish community in İzmir to just

<https://www.haaretz.com/2012-08-17/ty-article/my-grandfather-founder-of-muscular-judaism/0000017f-e3e4-df7c-a5ff-e3fe570c0000> (last accessed 11 May 2023).

²³ For an overview, see Ed. Özkan Akman, *Social, Educational, Political, Economical and Other Developments Occurred in Turkey between the Years of 1923–1938*, Isres Publishing, n.p., 2018; Ed. Riva Kastoryano, *Turkey Between Nationalism and Globalization*, Routledge, New York, 2013; Ed. Hans-Lukas Kieser, *Turkey Beyond Nationalism. Towards Post-Nationalist Identities*, I.B. Tauris, London & New York, 2006; Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*, OUP, New York & Oxford, 2002; Erik Zürcher, *Turkey. A Modern History*, I.B. Tauris, London & New York, 2004; Erik Zürcher, *The Young Turk Legacy and Nation Building. From Ottoman Empire to Atatürk's Turkey*, I.B. Tauris, New York, 2010.

²⁴ Founded in 1920, the *Histradut* was the first unified Jewish labour organisation (existing until today) and supported the trans-Aegean rescue financially.

²⁵ Falcon et al., *op.cit.*, pp. 16, 24.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

²⁷ This movement was founded in 1944 by Akiva Levinsky and others in İzmir; *Ibid.*, p. 32.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

²⁹ USC Shoah Foundation, Interview with Papastratis, Sotiris. 1998, ID 47258, tape 4: min. 0:38-0:40.

that would mean to overlook an aspect much more substantial: active involvement in setting up and / or building on existent structures used to organise rescue. As outlined by Falcon et al.,³⁰

“(…) a number of prominent figures from the community worked in İzmir to save Jewish refugees in Greece, among them Shabtai Sheltiel - the chairman of the community, Raphael Barki who escaped from Greece, Mr Chaves – a native of İzmir and the philanthropist Rabbino Politi. Along with the community’s finances, the ‘*Ne’emanim Tziyon*’ and the ‘*Halutz*’-movement in İzmir stood for its 500 or more members who helped as best they could to take in the Greek refugees”.

These local members of the İzmir community helped save about 1,000 Jews³¹ from formerly Greek territory. Drawing on all kinds of contacts, these local individual actors managed to set up a smuggling operation linking İzmir with Athens and Euboea, a Greek peninsula close to Athens, through three ‘groups’ of actors: 1) representatives of the Turkish community in İzmir, 2) the former fisherman Thomas, now a member of the ELAS, the armed branch of the Greek left-wing partisan movement EAM, and 3) Salomon Barki, brother of Rafael Barki and still living in Greece, who could rely on his own support network in Athens.³² Spanning the Aegean like a triangle, the support and rescue network created by Jews in İzmir links Çeşme and the coastline close to İzmir with Athens and Euboea (see appendix, *Figure 2*).

The members of this support network helped according to their capabilities and room for manoeuvre, with local representatives in Türkiye sending food and medicine to Athens, thus following what had already been established as a lucrative – and, in view of the Greek famine dearly needed – smuggler’s trail. While the Barki-network was thus initially conceptualised as a smuggling operation aiming at providing Salomon Barki with some essential commodities, it was eventually developed into a rescue mission. This transformation was mostly due to the involvement of various Yishuv organisations (incl. the *Histradut* party and especially the organisations directly concerned with *Aliyah*

³⁰ Translated from Hebrew: Falcon et al., *Yahudot turkhiya va ha-tziyonot*, p. 26.

³¹ Estimates vary from 859 to approximately 1,500; see Barbara Spengler-Axiopoulos, „Wenn ihr den Juden helft, kämpft ihr gegen die Besatzer“, *Der Untergang der griechischen Juden*“, *Solidarität und Hilfe für Juden während der NS-Zeit. Regionalstudien 1: Polen, Rumänien, Griechenland, Luxemburg, Norwegen*, Ed. Wolfgang Wolfgang, Juliane Wetzel, Metropol, Berlin, 1996, pp. 135-187, here p. 159; Heinz Ziffer, “Rescuing Greek Jews under German Occupation. With the Help of the Jewish Community of İzmir (1943-1944)”, *Los Muestrros 50*, The Jewish Community of Athens, 2003, <https://athjcom.gr/english/h-koinothta-mas/ziffer-heinz-diasosi-ellinon-evreon-kata-ti-diarkia-tis-germanikis-katochis/> (last accessed 11 July 2021).

³² Avriel, *op.cit.*; Falcon et al., *op.cit.*, p. 26.

Bet) which recognised the already existing structures of the multi-organisational smuggling operation as an opportunity to save lives by turning smuggling activity into a rescue operation.³³ Thus, through the influence of Moshe Agami (*Mossad l'Aliyah Bet*) and Ze'ev Schind (*Haganah*), the Barki-network, originally a private enterprise, was developed into a centralised rescue operation running evacuation boats from late 1943 onwards.³⁴ When Salamon Barki, who, owing to his Turkish citizenship, had not been 'seriously' affected by Nazi antisemitism before spring 1944, was eventually forced to flee in March,³⁵ the 'transport service' run by the network continued to exist, with their boat(s) going to and fro simultaneously with the many boats run for Anglo-Greek military evacuation.

Notwithstanding the relevance of the Yishuv rescue boats, it is important to bear in mind that Jewish escape was not limited to the few boats that could be financed and organised by the Yishuv organisations. With Greek Jews gathering at the same evacuation spots as Greek and Allied military personnel, civilian escape and military evacuation were heavily entangled and did not only share the same geographical context and similar escape strategies, but also often relied on the same support structures: Indeed, many Jews managed to reach Türkiye by travelling on boats originally planned for military evacuation, as Karina Lampsas emphasises among others.³⁶ This overlap in refugee and evacuee streams is especially prominent from December 1943 onward, when an agreement between the *Haganah* and the British MI9 stipulated that Jewish refugees would be taken on British-led evacuation boats in exchange for information needed for intelligence work.³⁷ This gradual merge of civilian and military evacuation was further advanced by an agreement between EAM representatives, British intelligence services (esp. MI9) and *Aliyah Bet* organisations in Haifa, which once again established that Jews would be

³³ Karina Lampsas, "I apódrasē ton Ebraiōn tēn Elláda, 1943-1944 [The escape of the Jews from Greece, 1943-1944]", *O pólemos kai prosfygiá. Prósfyges apó tēn Elláda: Tourkía, Mésē Anatolē, Afrikē 1941-1946, War and refugees. Refugees from Greece: Turkey, Middle East, Africa 1941-1946*, Ed. Alexandros Lamprou, Epikentro, Athens, 2021, pp. 127-158, here p. 147.

³⁴ Ziffer, op.cit.; Karina Lampsas, *Ē diásosē: ē siapē tou kósmou, ē antístasē sta gkēto kai ta stratópeda, oi Éllēnes Ebraiōi sta chrónia tēs Katochēs, The rescue: the silence of the world, the resistance in the ghettos and camps, the Greek Jews during the years of the Occupation*, Ekdoseis, Athens, 2012, p. 147.

³⁵ For the interview with Salamon Barki, conducted by the American Consulate General at Istanbul, see the National Archives, United States [=NA/US]. 868.000. 15 April 1944, pp. 1-6.

³⁶ Lampsas, "I apódrasē ton Ebraiōn", p. 129; Lampsas, *Ē diásosē*, p. 340.

³⁷ Lampsas, *Ibid.*, p. 131.

allowed to travel on any boat, no matter if that was organised by the Anglo-Greek evacuation network or the Yishuv rescue network.³⁸

‘Overt Allies’ in Escape: Dearly Needed, often Dreaded

The refugees fleeing from Euboea to Çeşme were mostly not aware of the interplay of actors needed to organise their escape: In fact, most testimonies portray considerable lack of knowledge with regards to specific saviours – except for individual contact persons with whom they had direct interaction. This lack of knowledge naturally also applies to the origins and the structural basis of the refugee movement and the network of actors behind it. While it is true that the operation conceived by the Barki brothers served as a prototype for Yishuv rescue, both movements were based on structures established by the Allied military evacuation scheme. Albeit largely hidden from the individual refugee’s view, the strategies and cooperations characteristic for the military evacuation operation proved highly beneficial to the Jewish rescue mission.

Notwithstanding the many differences between the notoriously underfunded civilian Jewish rescue on the one hand and the (by 1943) comparatively efficient and well-operating military evacuation operation on the other, these two trans-Aegean movements did share some important allies: the armed Greek resistance as well as Greek civilians. As both movements were orchestrated from abroad – with military evacuation being mostly planned in Cairo, while the *Aliyah Bet* organisations were in charge of the Yishuv rescue operation – they greatly relied on local allies in Greece: Individual civilians, small resistance networks, and local secret service agents provided relevant information, organised transport, false papers,³⁹ food and shelters – and, perhaps most importantly, much needed safe spaces for boats to moor and pick up the refugees gathered on the shores of Euboea. These tasks were often fulfilled by the Greek resistance, most notably the EAM and its military branch ELAS,⁴⁰ that used the trans-Aegean rescue and evacuation structures for their

³⁸ Sotiris Papastratis, *Méres tou 1943-1944 stén Eúboia* [*Days of 1943-1944 in Euboea*], Chatzinikoli, no place, 1995, p. 86.

³⁹ For an example of a small network organising false papers for anyone with the means to pay for their services, see, for instance, the network around Miss Caldani in Athens: Owing to extremely good relations with some Italian officials, this network was able to provide Antonas Nicolas (among others) with forged papers that allowed the Greek soldier to travel to Egypt (via Türkiye) and join the Allied army in the Middle East (NA/K. HS 5/687. SO1 report on Antonas Nicolas. 15 April 1942, p. 1).

⁴⁰ For the importance attributed to ELAS as a safeguard of the refugee route between Euboea and Çeşme, see NA/K. WO 208/3371. Enemy Action in Euboea. 9 July 1944, p. 1.

own benefit: most notably for smuggling goods, including weapons from Türkiye into Greece.⁴¹

As the partisans did have direct contact with the Jewish refugees, they feature very prominently in refugee testimonies – and they did make quite an impression: The portrayal of partisans is indeed often drastic, with children and adults alike conjuring up images of gruesome, brutal, bearded men spreading fear among the refugees. As Renée Saltiel Abravanel (later: Molho), then a young Jewess from Thessaloniki, remembered, ‘of course, the partisans were armed and they had big, long beards and they had bullets all around their belts and chest.’⁴² Appearance was not the only source of fear by far, however, as she continued to describe partisans killing a man because they considered him, a Christian Greek refugee, a traitor for trying to escape: ‘(...) they gave us a ‘lesson.’ And what was the lesson? They gathered us and told us that they had caught a guy lying and put a knife here and took it out there: right through his throat. Now if you feel like lying or anything else, think twice.’⁴³

This gory scene exemplifies that, while each part of the network was crucial to help Jewish refugees escape, the actors involved were not always perceived as saviours, owing to their ambiguous, multi-faceted corporate⁴⁴ identity. Consequently, the (armed) Greek resistance, primarily in charge of organising transport, and, if necessary, hiding, appears in many different forms and shapes in the testimonies. This heterogeneous portrayal seems to be partly linked to the individuals’ ideology and the circumstances of their respective escape attempts – with refugees self-identifying as ‘left-wing’ more prone to knowing of partisan activity and to describing ELAS-fighters in a favourable light: Fleeing with the help of the partisans, Leon Shaki, a self-proclaimed admirer and small-scale supporter of EAM recalled: “*We loved the Greek freedom fighters.*”⁴⁵

In contrast to that, David Konis, fleeing both as Jew and future recruit for the Allied military operating in the Middle East, predominantly relied on other support structures: As dearly needed soldier, he was evacuated by the British

⁴¹ USC Shoah Foundation, Interview with Papastratis, Sotiris. 1998, ID 47258, tape 4: min. 13:38.

⁴² Centropa, Interview with Molho, Renée. 2000, , p. 24
<https://www.centropa.org/de/biography/renee-molho> (last accessed 6 April 2023)

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ The term ‘*corporate*’ is used here because the partisans are not regarded as a social community bound through, for example, relation, age, or belief, but instead were an organisation with a clear hierarchy and mission.

⁴⁵ Translated from Hebrew: Yad Vashem, Interview with Shaki, Leon. 1959, O.3. Testimonies Department of the Yad Vashem Archives. ID 3555391. File 1357, p. 8, 10.

military whose secret service had set up a network aiming to rescue Allied soldiers left behind after the 1941 evacuation, Allied POWs, and Greek recruits. This military evacuation scheme only partly relied on the support of Greek partisans. Thus, in his perception, the partisans only played a minor part and were reduced to some sort of sidekick, even though they did 'help quite a bit' in general, as he admits.⁴⁶

Partisans served as guides (especially in the mountains), lorry drivers providing transport from one pick-up point to another, and organisers of accommodation, food and ship transfer. For this kind of support, many witnesses expressed gratefulness, even though, in some cases, plans did not work out as they should, with contact people not turning up on time or ships never arriving. Despite being left waiting for weeks on Euboea, without food, shelter and much money, Yolanda ben Uzilio (née Modiano) still recalls being highly grateful to them for having at least brought her to EAM-controlled territory:⁴⁷

“They were supposed to take us after a few hours from Euboea to İzmir, but the ship didn't come so we stayed there in the territory of ELAS. Nevertheless, we were grateful to the gang that took us out, even though they didn't bring the ship, and stole our clothes, because they saved us from the Germans. They took the money for the ship and for everything, but in fact they still saved us from the Germans, brought us to the territory of ELAS.”

For those reaching Türkiye, the partisans played a crucial role in realising their rescue. Nonetheless, as can be derived from the ambiguous portrayal of the partisans and private captains, the refugee experience differed greatly, even though all of them relied on the same or similar rescue structures. In the end, individual refugee experience was shaped by other individuals acting as representatives of corporate or collective entities, resulting in a very multi-faceted 'collective' refugee experience. Dependence on individuals was especially pronounced with regards to captains transporting refugees across the sea: Taking them on a very risky voyage, with not only German patrol boats, but also currents and weather conditions threatening safe arrival, these men often were responsible for the success or failure of individual escapes.

⁴⁶ USC Shoah Foundation, Interview with Konis, David. 1994, ID 731, min 17:10-17:20.

⁴⁷ Translated from Hebrew: Yad Vashem, Interview with ben Uzilio, Yolanda, p. 62.

Travelling across the Sea: Being at the Mercy of Waves, Wind and Drunk Captains

The journey across the sea was a risky endeavour: Normally, the refugees had to travel on rickety boats essentially unfit for sea travel – especially in winter, when cold winds and waves did not favour sea travel at all. In addition to the unreliable boats and seasonal cold, the mostly South-bound currents, short-frequency waves, cyclones and regional winds such as the meltemi, the sirocco, and the bora posed a considerable threat to a safe voyage. Under these circumstances, captains had to resort to ‘island-hopping,’ thereby making their way from one island to another all the way to Türkiye (see appendix, *Figure 3*). Thus avoiding open sea for kilometres on end, boats typically made their way from Euboea to Skyros (75 km), then from Skyros to Psara (90 km), from Psara to Chios (25 km) before finally crossing the distance from Chios to the Turkish coast somewhere near Çeşme (7 km).⁴⁸

In view of these hazards of sea travel, everything depended on the captain – with refugees’ lives hanging by a thread, the person in charge of a rescue boat was the only one capable of saving them, and hence, the refugees’ lives completely depended on his professional skills, experience and reliability. Indeed, numerous remarks can be found on the conduct and character of the respective captains who brought refugees to Türkiye – or at least attempted to do so. Many of them are portrayed in a very favourable light, with Jacob Asael, for instance, lauding his captain’s experience and knowledge regarding patrol routines and possible hide-outs, and especially his reliability and trustworthiness:⁴⁹

“We visited the captain of the boat, I got to know him and he seemed to me to be a kind and loyal person with initiative. I was soon convinced that we should try our luck with him. I would like to point out here that there were also those who claimed that we had heard about similar incidents when the captains took the money and handed the Jews over to the Gestapo, and about a group of 30 people who were missing and whom we heard no more about.”

Other testimonies, however, illustrate that the refugees’ undeniable dependence on captains was potentially dangerous if not the reason for the complete failure of the escape mission. At worst, the captain’s actions led to the refugees’ arrest, as was the case with regards to Rena Greenup’s family, whose

⁴⁸ There was a Southern route as well that led to Kuşadası, but this was far less frequently used; see. Papastratis, *op.cit.*

⁴⁹ Translated from Hebrew: Yad Vashem, Interview with Asael, Jacob. O.3. Testimonies Department of the Yad Vashem Archives. 1962, ID 3556434. File 2491, p. 25.

escape failed due to very bad weather conditions, the captain's inability to cope with them, and his lack of geographical and nautical knowledge. Rena Greenup's story of failed escape is even more tragic as they were so close to reaching safety, when the captain steered his boat to a German-occupied island instead of the close-by Turkish island, Gökçeada.⁵⁰ In another case, a captain was responsible for accidentally bringing the refugees to a German-controlled island, mistaking it for a Turkish one as he was clearly drunk.⁵¹

While drunkenness was the reason for failure in the latter case, it was the lack of nautical knowledge that nearly caused Yolanda Modiano's escape attempt to fail: Their captain fully relied on a compass for guidance at sea, neglecting star constellations during navigation, which put the whole mission at risk, when a tin in the boat rendered the compass dysfunctional.⁵² Luckily, in this case, lack of professionalism and knowledge did not cause any serious harm, as Yolanda Modiano's uncle interfered and set matters right. Nonetheless, it shows that refugees travelling on often-rickety fishing boats were completely and utterly at the respective captain's mercy, potentially paying with their own lives for his mistakes, drunkenness or fatigue.

Once more, it can be concluded that coordinated rescue, albeit offering the only chance for escape within relatively well-established structures, was not devoid of risks, and many of these were linked to the specific individuals constituting the network. Confronted with greediness, professional ignorance and neglect, when a captain just did not come on time, the refugees had to use what little room for agency they had to interfere: just as Yolanda Modiano's uncle did, who prevented the captain from shipping all of them to Crete, an island controlled by Nazi German forces.

Arriving in an Alien Country Ridden with Ambiguity

Running until August 1944, the Yishuv rescue and Allied evacuation brought about 1,000 Greek Jews across the Aegean, where they were received by the local Jewish community, the Greek consulate in İzmir, Jewish Agency representatives – and, as they were often the first on site – Turkish soldiers, whose attitude mostly mirrored the ambiguous stance taken by the Turkish

⁵⁰ Fortunoff Video Archive, Interview with Greenup [G.], Rena. mssa_hvt_1271_p1of2_index.xml, 1988, min. 16:22-18:37.

⁵¹ Yad Vashem, Interview with Nissim, Ines. 1999a, O.3. Testimonies Department of the Yad Vashem Archives. ID 3747473. File 11053, p. 39.

⁵² Yad Vashem, Interview with ben Uzilio, Yolanda, p. 65.

state⁵³ towards Jewish refugees: While generally acknowledging their need for support, they made sure that any refugees would be quickly taken care of by the Greek consulate – like the state they represented, they wanted to minimise interaction with the Jewish refugees as much as possible and thus quickly notified the representatives of the Greek government-in-exile. While aiming at swift and efficient migration procedures, starting from reception by Greek representatives and leading up to emigration to refugee camps in the Middle East, Türkiye did not welcome refugees to its shores in the strict sense of the word: Indeed, Türkiye's attitude towards trans-Aegean migration and Jewish transit was in constant flux, ranging from far-reaching cooperation with the Allied military evacuation schemes to outright rejection of civilian refugees in course of the famine migration (especially in 1942).⁵⁴

Accordingly, Jewish refugees had to tread carefully when setting foot on Turkish shores, as refugee boats were sometimes turned away by Turkish authorities at gunpoint: Boats approaching a port or being at the brink of mooring, were sometimes hindered from doing so, which made some refugees resort to very desperate measures, as the American Consul General reports:⁵⁵

“the (...) acceptable manner of landing, so far as the Turks are concerned, is by (...) shipwreck. (...) A number of caiques and small boats on which refugees have reached the Turkish mainland and there staved holes in their bottoms [the bottoms of their boats] to prevent their being led to carry the refugees back to the place from which they escaped, are still strewn along the shores of Cheshme.”

⁵³ For an overview on Türkiye's minority policy (especially with reference to Turkish Jews) and construction of nationhood in the 1940's see, for instance: Serhun Al, *Patterns of Nationhood and Saving the State in Turkey. Ottomanism, Nationalism and Multiculturalism*, Routledge, London & New York, 2019; Rifat Bali, *Cumhuriyet Yıllarında Türkiye Yabudileri. Bir Türkleştirme Serüveni 1923-1945*, İletişim Yayınları, İstanbul, 1999; Rifat Bali, *The “Varlık Vergisi” Affair: A Study of Its Legacy; Selected Documents*, ISIS Press, İstanbul, 2005; Bali, ‘Aliyah’; Hatice Bayraktar, *Salamon und Rabeka. Judenstereotype in Karikaturen der türkischen Zeitschriften „Akbaba“, „Karikatür“ und „Milli İnkılâp“ 1933-1945*, Schwarz, Berlin, 2006; Soner Çağaptay, “Citizenship Policies in Interwar Turkey”, *Nations and Nationalism*, Volume 9, Number 4, 2003, pp. 601-619; Sait Çetinoğlu, “The Mechanisms for Terrorizing Minorities. The Capital Tax and Work Battalions in Turkey during the Second World War”, *Mediterranean Quarterly*, Volume 23, Number 2, 2012, pp. 14-29; Corry Guttstadt, *Die Türkeri, die Juden und der Holocaust*, Assoziation A, Berlin & Hamburg, 2008; Corry Guttstadt, “Turkish Responses to the Holocaust. Ankara's Policy towards the Jews, 1933-1945”, *Nazism, the Holocaust, and the Middle East. Arab and Turkish Responses*, Ed. Francis Nicosia, Boğaç Ergene, Berghahn, New York & Oxford, 2018, pp. 42-76; Kieser, *Turkey Beyond Nationalism. Towards Post-Nationalist Identities*.

⁵⁴ See, for instance, İzzet Bahar, *Turkey and the Rescue of European Jews*, Routledge, London & New York, 2015.

⁵⁵ NA/US. 868.00. 17 October 1943, p. 9.

Türkiye found itself in a complicated situation in many ways as it sought to keep its friendly neutrality with war-waging parties that were courting the strategically important country. Torn between economic reasoning, a measure of ideological attraction,⁵⁶ and the Türk-Alman Dostluk Paktı (Turkish-German Treaty of Friendship, 1941) on the one side, and military-strategic considerations on the other side, Türkiye was trying to keep its balance throughout the Second World War. The various migration movements that reached its shores from Greece – not all of them part of the trans-Aegean migration phenomenon discussed in this paper⁵⁷ – were not only a potential financial liability and considered as a threat to national security,⁵⁸ but also a constant diplomatic burden that threatened Türkiye’s relationship with Nazi Germany. The Allied evacuation and smuggling missions, which the British orchestrated with Turkish knowledge and sometimes active support, particularly tested diplomatic relations with Germany. Seeking to maintain these good relations, Türkiye resorted to a strategy symptomatic for its diplomatic act of balance: turning a blind eye as long as possible.

As Türkiye wanted to maintain this strategy notwithstanding the bustling escape and evacuation activity at its shores, it imposed a clear condition: If they wanted to resume with Türkiye-bound evacuation, the British authorities and the Greek government-in-exile had to ensure a swift, efficient, and inconspicuous migration procedure and equally quick onward movement of the refugees and evacuees to other countries in the Middle East.⁵⁹ Accordingly, the British Ministry of State (Cairo), its various sub-departments and the British

⁵⁶ Ahmet Asker, *Kemalist Türkiye’den Nazi Almanyası’na Karşılaştırmalı Bakışlar ve Algılar. 1929–1939*, Libra Kitap, İstanbul, 2014.

⁵⁷ See for the Alexandros Lamprou, “Christians, Muslims, and Jews: Turkey and the management of refugee from Greece during World War II”, *New Perspectives on Turkey*, 2023, pp. 1–23, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/npt.2023.30>

⁵⁸ This refers to the famine migration that brought thousands of destitute, impoverished Greek civilians in an uncoordinated, unorganised migration movement to Türkiye. Although finally supported by the British-led MERRA, the refugees were long left stranded on their own on Turkish shores which led to a full-blown refugee crisis and rendered Turmigkey’s attitude towards refugees very hostile (for the deteriorating refugee situation see, for instance, National Archives, Kew [= NA/K]. CO 323.1845.22. Telegram from Minister of State’s Office to Angora. 16 April 1942, pp. 1-2; NA/K. CO 323.1845.22. Telegram from Angora to Minister of State’s Office. 22 April 1942, p. 1; NA/K. CO 323.1845.22. Telegram from Minister of State’s Office to Angora. 26 April 1942, p. 1; NA/K. CO 323.1845.22. Correspondence from Angora to Minister of State’s Office. 27 April 1942, pp. 1-2.).

⁵⁹ The British actors were adamant in preserving their good relations with Türkiye and made sure to control any movement that might have caused disturbances see. NA/K. HS 5/351. Telegram from “A”-Force to SOE. 27 July 1944. p. 1.

Foreign Office were sure to control any migration activity bound for Türkiye and also evacuated the stranded Greek war refugees who reached Türkiye in the thousands even after the peak of the famine.⁶⁰

The Yishuv rescue operation built on these agreements and structures that were established during the chaotic years of 1941 and 1942: It combined well-established smuggling trails, and strongly relied on the existence of a strong Greek resistance on Euboea that was both willing and able to help. It used strategies and schemes already well-tested in the military evacuation operation and could only flourish with Türkiye's unofficial consent, which was given to all migration movements that remained largely inconspicuous – which was made possible due to good cooperation with the collective and corporate partners in Türkiye, some of whom had been engaged in evacuation and rescue procedures for two years before the Yishuv operation was launched. The Greek government-in-exile and its representatives in İzmir and the British authorities had laid the groundwork and structures on which the Yishuv organisations could build and expand in their endeavour to save the remainder of Greek Jewry: With the support of the Jewish community of İzmir, the escape and onward transport of about 1,000 Greek Jews was made possible.

This was also thanks to Türkiye's modifications to its former very strict immigration policy that had attempted to prevent immigration *and* transit of Jewish persons fleeing European countries with antisemitic policies *completely*, as stipulated in the decree Nr. 2/9498, passed on 29 August 1938.⁶¹ As several exceptions were made in the course of 1940 – especially thanks to the ceaseless diplomatic efforts of the Jewish Agency representative Chaim Barlas – the National Council decided to replace the 1938 decree with a quota system that allowed limited numbers of Jewish refugees from Europe to transit if they had visas for one of Türkiye's neighbouring countries (esp. Syria) and / or a

⁶⁰ Between December 1943 and November 1944, the T.C. Gümrük ve İnhisar Vekâleti reported a total of 7,793 refugees arriving at the Turkish coastline between Çeşme, Kuşadası, and Bodrum. Of these, 65.9% or 5,065 refugees, were identified as Greek civilians see T.C. Cumhurbaşkanlığı Devlet Arşivleri Başkanlığı Cumhuriyet Arşivi (BCA) Gümrük ve İnhisar Vekâleti, 22-26 December 1943. File 030.010.000.000.117.813.12; BCA. Gümrük ve İnhisar Vekâleti, 6 January-12 June. File 030.010.000.000.117.814.2.; BCA, Gümrük ve İnhisar Vekâleti, 25 November 1944. File 030.010.000.000.117.815.14).

⁶¹ İzzet Bahar, *Turkey and the Rescue of Jews during the Nazi Era: A Reappraisal of Two Cases; German-Jewish Scientists in Turkey & Turkish Jews in Occupied France*, PhD diss., Pittsburg University, Pittsburg, 2012, p. 92; Corry Guttstadt, "Turkey – Welcoming Turkish Refugees?", *Bystanders, Rescuers or Perpetrators? The Neutral Countries and the Shoah*, Ed. Corry Guttstadt et al., Metropol, Berlin, 2016, pp. 53-64, here pp. 60-61; Reiner Möckelmann, *Transit Istanbul – Palästina. Juden auf der Flucht aus Südosteuropa*, wbg Theiss, Darmstadt, 2023, p. 101.

Palestine certificate. Over the following months, this quota limit was in flux and was finally raised to 80 per week (February 1944).⁶² Additionally, the British Colonial Office, which also had to gradually abandon its strict anti-immigrant policy from early 1943 onwards, also raised its quota for immigration to Palestine and finally passed a new guideline that made every Jewish person reaching Türkiye *automatically* eligible for a Palestinian certificate.⁶³

Both the British and the Turkish modifications came in time for most Jewish refugees from Greece who in late 1943 and 1944, were part of a well-oiled machinery of refugee management in Türkiye: As Sara Golan witnessed in spring 1944, refugees that managed to reach Türkiye were normally well-received, cared for by representatives of the Jewish Agency, the *Haganah* and *Mossad l'Aliyah* Bet, who were in charge of organising the relevant immigration papers for Palestine and (if the refugees were to be brought there by land) Syria, as well as by the Jewish community of İzmir that accommodated, clothed and fed them and tried to provide any other form of medical or moral support that the often traumatised refugees required.⁶⁴

Conclusion

The Barki-network established by members of the Jewish community of İzmir served as a blueprint for the Yishuv rescue mission that helped to save approximately 1,000 lives by building on pre-existing structures of both military and civilian rescue operations. Intertwining skills, agency and power of various individual, corporate and collective actors, the Yishuv rescue network efficiently drew on the resources available, trying to circumvent boundaries and legislative pitfalls created by the Nazi German occupation forces to cripple individual – and particularly Jewish – agency. The Jewish community of İzmir did not only play a decisive part in the rescue operation by launching the regular ‘transport service’ across the Aegean, but also contributed on a local scale through direct interaction with the refugees. As shown in this paper, the local perspective also provides valuable insights into the abstract structures framing the Greek-Jewish refugee movement across the Aegean – with the impact exerted by partisans and individual captains being of utmost significance, owing to their proximity to the individual refugee. High levels of dependence on said actors make their actions highly meaningful with regards to success or failure of the respective escape attempts. The individuals travelling on this route – Renée

⁶² Bahar, *op.cit.*, p. 223.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ See Raşel Rakella Asal, Sarit Bonfil, *Anların İzinde İzmir Yahudileri 20. Yüzyıl Başından Günümüze*, Turkey İzmir Musevi Cemaati Vakfı, İzmir, 2023.

Saltiel Abravanel, Leon Shaki, Yolanda Modiano, and many others – depended on them, as well as on the many other actors that shaped the external structure of their escape. Additionally, they had to trust in luck, as their survival was sadly against the odds.⁶⁵

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⁶⁵ The survival rate for Jews in Greece amounted to a mere 15% – a very low rate compared to the survival chances of Denmark (99%), Italy (80%) Romania (67%), Germany (67%) or even neighbouring Yugoslavia (20%) see Christian Gerlach, *The Extermination of the European Jews*, CUP, Cambridge, 2016, p. 407.

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Appendix



Figure 1 - Geographical context of the Greek-Jewish refugee movement (1943-1944) © Raphael Siegl 2024

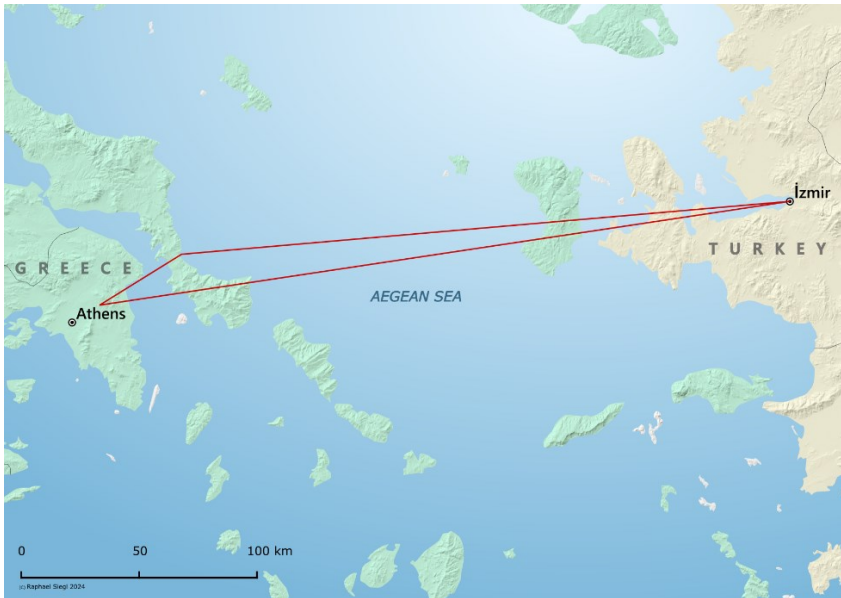


Figure 2 - The Barki-network running the rescue operation for Greek Jews © Raphael Siegl



Figure 3- The main refugee / evacuation route from Euboea to Çeşme © Raphael Siegl