



JEWISH COMMUNITY - BITOLA
ЕВРЕЈСКА ЗАЕДНИЦА - БИТОЛА





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Group portrait of Jewish survivors from Bitola.

Among those pictured are Jozef Kamhi , first and last president of the postwar Jewish Community of Monastir 1945 -1948 (front), and Jamila Kolonomos (first on right).

Jamila Andjela Kolonomos was born in 1922 and raised in the Jewish community of Monastir (Bitola), a city in the province of Macedonia in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. Jews had lived in Monastir for two thousand years, and at the turn of the twentieth century comprised 10 percent of the population. By 1931 the Jewish population had decreased to 3751, and to 3242 people by 1940, following a wave of emigrations.

Jamila's father, Isak Kolonomos, was born in Monastir in 1893 to Djamila (nee Kasorla) and Kalef Kolonomos. Kalef had come to Monastir from Ioannina (Yannina), Greece with two brothers, Salamon and Mentesh, near the end of the nineteenth century. His family was Romaniote, Greek Jews whose origins date back to the Byzantine and Roman empires, and the family spoke Ladino along with Greek, French, Serbian, and Turkish. Jamila's mother was Esterina Fransez, who was from Skopje and spoke Ladino and Turkish. Isak and Esterina married in Skopje, where their first daughter, Bela was born in 1920. That same year, the family moved back to Monastir, and Isak began work at the Banque Franco-Serbe. He would continue to work there until 1941, and rise to the position of Director. While in Monastir Isak and Esterina would have four more children: Jamila (b. 1922), Kalef (b. 1925), Menahem (b. 1927), and Rachela (b. 1930). In the fall of 1940, Jamila's sister Bela was married to Moise Kassorla, and they



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moved to Skopje. Shortly thereafter, in February 1941, her mother (Esterina) died of heart disease, one month before the German invasion.

On April 6, 1941, the Germans entered Yugoslavia and Greece. Monastir was quickly occupied first by the Germans, then by the Bulgarians, and antisemitic laws were put into effect immediately. Jamila's brothers, Kalef and Menahem, were no longer permitted to attend school, and so began to learn office work. Jamila and her younger sister Rachela learned to sew, and cared for their ailing grandmother. During the first days of the German occupation, Isak was denounced by another bank employee to the German authorities, who forced him to open the bank safe and confiscated the money and documents inside. After this incident, the bank was closed and Isak remained without work until the deportations.

Before the invasion Jamila, along with many of the Jewish youth in Monastir, had been a member of Hashomer Hatsair (The Young Guard). When the Communists organized the Yugoslav Resistance against Fascism, most Hashomer Hatsair members joined with them and contributed in a variety of ways--making shoes for the partisans, collecting arms discarded by the Yugoslav army, and forming small underground groups. In June 1941, Jamila herself formed three youth groups and one women's group. The first groups of partisans were formed in the fall, and the first action against the occupiers took place on the October 11, with an attack on several police posts.

By the winter of 1943, there were only a few armed units of the resistance, dispersed in small villages far from the cities. Communications were difficult, so many of the organized groups in Monastir and other cities who



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wished to join the partisans were unable to. As rumors began circulating that young Jewish men were soon to be deported to work in Bulgaria, one of the resistance leaders, Broche Milyovski, advised Jamila not to sleep at home for the next few days, and gave her an address where she could stay. Before accepting the offer, she consulted with her family but her father, not wanting to leave his invalid mother, did not think it would be necessary for the entire family to go into hiding. Still, he knew of her resistance activities and did not discourage her to do so. The address provided to Jamila was a cigarette kiosk owned by Bogoya Silyanovski (later named Righteous Among Nations), located very near a police station. She passed one night there without incident and returned to her family the next morning to cook and care for her grandmother. The next night she returned to the kiosk with a friend, Estela Levi, and the owner locked them inside.

Early in the morning of March 11, they began to hear activity at the police station. Although they could see nothing from the windowless kiosk, by dawn they heard the shouts and cries of the townspeople. Locked in the kiosk, unable to join their families, they waited together in the cold till the end of the day. That evening, the kiosk owner returned with three more Jewish women: Roza Ruso (nee Kamhi), Estreya Ovadya, and Adela Faradji. Jamila and her companions then learned that the entire Jewish population of Monastir had been rounded up and sent north in cattle cars to a transit camp at the Monopol Tobacco Warehouse, in Skopje.

The five women hid together in the tiny kiosk for a month with little food and no sanitary provisions, separated from the daily commerce by only a curtain. On April 7, after many difficulties, they were moved to the mountains and joined a detachment of the Yugoslavian Resistance,



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Damyan Gruev, in a Greek village. Jamila was soon appointed as "Commissar" (the political leader of a military unit) of the detachment and acted as the editor of their first newspaper. In August their original group of thirty members merged with two other detachments, Goce Delchev and Pitu Goli, to form the first Macedonian Partisan Battalion, called Mirche Acev. Now 130 members strong, they liberated a group of Serbs and Slovenes from a prisoner camp in Greece, who joined them to form Brigade 1 (Tovimos).

In September 1943, Jamila was appointed Commissar of Brigade 1 (Tovimas), where her growing responsibilities included preparing status and logistical reports for the battalion, and organizing literacy lessons and presentations in liberated cities. In June 1944 the Serb and Slovene battalions returned to their own regions, and a separate Macedonian Brigade 1 was established. Jamila acted as Deputy Commissar for the newly formed brigade, as well as for the 42nd Yugoslav Division. That August, her brigade attempted to liberate Debar, a city in western Macedonian, but was forced to retreat. During the battle, Jamila was wounded in the back by an exploding shell, but was pulled to safety by a fellow soldier and soon recovered. On October 30, 1944, she participated in the liberation of the town of Ohrid and later, with great difficulty, of Struga. In December 1944, the "Second Congress of Anti-Fascist Youth" was held in Skopje, with Jamila acting as one of the officials. During this time, she was married in a civil ceremony to her fellow partisan, Chede Filipovski, along with eight other partisan couples.

Until the end of the war, Jamila and her fellow partisans knew little of what had happened to their family members, and nothing of the death camps. They returned to Monastir, moved into two houses at the city center, and



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founded the postwar Jewish Community of Monastir, with Josef Kamhi as the first president. Until the end of 1945 they stayed, hoping that their friends and family would return. Instead, they began to hear more details of what had transpired after the deportations to Monopol. Conditions in Monopol had been abysmal. The Jewish transports had received no food or water for three days, followed by inadequate food, continual inspections, and beatings. Along with additional Jews gathered from Skopje and Shtip, they had been sent to the Treblinka concentration camp in three transports. The first left Monopol on March 22, 1943 and arrived at Treblinka on March 28; the second traveled from March 25 to April 1, and the final transport from April 1 to April 5. All passengers were gassed immediately on arrival. With the exception of a few foreign nationals and doctors who were released, not a single Jew from Monastir survived the aftermath of Treblinka.

In June of 1945, Jamila's husband was killed in a motorcycle accident, one month before the birth of their daughter, Mira. By the end of the year she, along with other survivors, left Monastir for Skopje, where there was a larger Jewish community. There, Jamila married Avram Sadikario in June 1947, and they had one son, Samuel.

After the war, Jamila was recognized many times for merit and bravery shown in her wartime service. She became a leading official in many political, benevolent, and social associations, including the Alliance of Yugoslav Resistance, the Union for the Protection of Childhood of Macedonia, and the Alliance of Anti-Fascist Women of Macedonia. In addition, she served as a deputy in the Macedonian Assembly. In 1962, she was named Professor Emeritus in the Faculty of Philosophy, Department of Romance Philology at Sts. Cyril and Methodus University, in



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Skopje. She is the author of numerous articles on Judeo-Spanish (the language of the Sephardim) and the Yugoslav-Macedonian Resistance.

[Source: Kolonomos, Jamila. Monastir Without Jews. New York: Foundation for the Advancement of Sephardic Studies and Culture, 2008.]

Date: 1945 - 1948

Locale: Bitola, [Macedonia; Bitolj] Yugoslavia; Bitolj; Bitol'; Bitolia; Bitolya; Bitol

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