



JEWISH COMMUNITY - BITOLA ЕВРЕЈСКА ЗАЕДНИЦА - БИТОЛА

Jewish Partisans of Macedonia



In April 1941, the Bulgarian army, which was an ally of Germany, entered into Macedonia and occupied most of the territory. Bulgaria saw an opportunity to increase her territory and undertake rigorous measures. In October 1941, a special order was pronounced by the Bulgarian authorities, forbidding the Jews of Skopje and Monastir from all forms of trade and commerce, and forcing them to close down their businesses by the end of the year. A few months later, a new decree compelled the Jews of Macedonia, including the population in Monastir, to pay one-fifth of their property to the Bulgarian government as a “special tax.”



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Under Bulgarian rule, the Jews of Macedonia were stripped of citizenship and all basic rights. As already mentioned, their property was seized and their ability to earn a living severely restricted. The occupation also greatly reduced the area in Monastir in which they were allowed to live, forcing them to crowd together in a narrow region on the left bank of the Dragor River. Those living on the other side of the river were forced to leave their belongings behind. Jews were forbidden to come to market before 10am; all of the foodstuffs had been bought by 9am at the latest.

Those Jews willing to join battle units went underground and organized attacks – and then fled in the face of military might.

Earlier, in May 1941, about a month after the annexation of Macedonia to Bulgaria, approximately 100 rifles and some ammunition was stockpiled in the house of Benjamin Russo, in the hope that it would be used against the Nazis and their collaborators.

Despite their difficult circumstances and the constricted living space in the Jewish quarter, the Jews of Monastir attempted underground activities: Jewish homes were used to store and repair weapons, make copies of and distribute propaganda material, collect equipment for first aid and give shelter to the partisans.



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Totaling some 10 percent of the town's overall population, the Jews comprised close to three-quarters of all underground activists.

Macedonian Jewish partisans

Even though the heads of the communist parties warned the young Jews against joining combat units, many initiatives taken by the youth of Monastir to find a way to join different partisan units succeeded.

The partisans fought against the Chetnics, Balista Kombetare (Serbian and Albanian units that supported the Germans), the Bulgarian , German and Italian units.

Each member of the underground was given a nickname, making it is difficult to know the exact number of Jewish fighters.

The estimate is that dozens of young Jewish men and women from Monastir fought in the different units.

In 1942, Victor Meshulam (known as "Bustrik"), Mordechai Todelano ("Spiro") and Joseph Russo ("Pipo") joined the "Damyan Gruev" unit (named after the Macedonian hero who fought in the 1903 revolt against the Turks).



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Inscription on the back of the photograph: The Macedonian 'Goce Delchev' Brigade. The picture includes four Jewish women: 1. Estreja Ovadja (national hero). 2. Estreja (Estella) Levi. 3. Jamila Kolonomos. 4. Adela Faradji

Joining the "Yane Sandanski" unit were: Benjamin Russo ("Kiki"), Mordo-Mordechai Nachmias ("Lazo") and Nissim Alba ("Miki"). Aharon Aroesti and Yosef Lazar were returned to Monastir with the suggestion that they continue to operate in their local underground unit.

On the eve of the deportation, in March 1943, eight more youths managed to join the partisans: Shlomo Sadikario ("Mo"), Shmuel Sadikario ("Simoliko"), Albert Kasorela ("Berto"), Albert Russo



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("Kote"), Estreja Ovadjia ("Mara"), Jamila Kolonomos ("Tsveta"), Stella Levi ("Lena") and Adela Faradji ("Kata").

Esteraja Ovadija - Mara (National Hero)



In April 1943 her partisan life started in the partisan unit "Goce Delcev". From the unit "Goce Delcev" she went to the unit "Dame Gruev", which led difficult battles with the Italian occupiers in the surrounding of Prespa Lake. She was characterized as a person with courage, determination and endurance. She proved that by her participation in the very difficult February expedition. After the end of the February movements of the units, The Third



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Macedonian Fighting Brigade was formed and Estreja Ovadija was appointed deputy political commissar of the unit. With the formation of The Seventh Macedonian brigade she was named a political commissar of a battalion.

Estreja fell in battle, and after her death her comrades marched and sang a song of praise to Estreja the hero – Mara – that soon became a Macedonian folksong:

“Remember her, my brothers

Estreja Mara

Estreja – Mara

She fell for her people

For her people she fell

For Macedonia.”

She was killed in 1944. She was proclaimed a national hero on 11 October 1953.

Estreja Ovadija - Mara monument in Bitola, Macedonia

The Holocaust in Macedonia: Deportation of Monastir Jewry,
Mark Cohen, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum