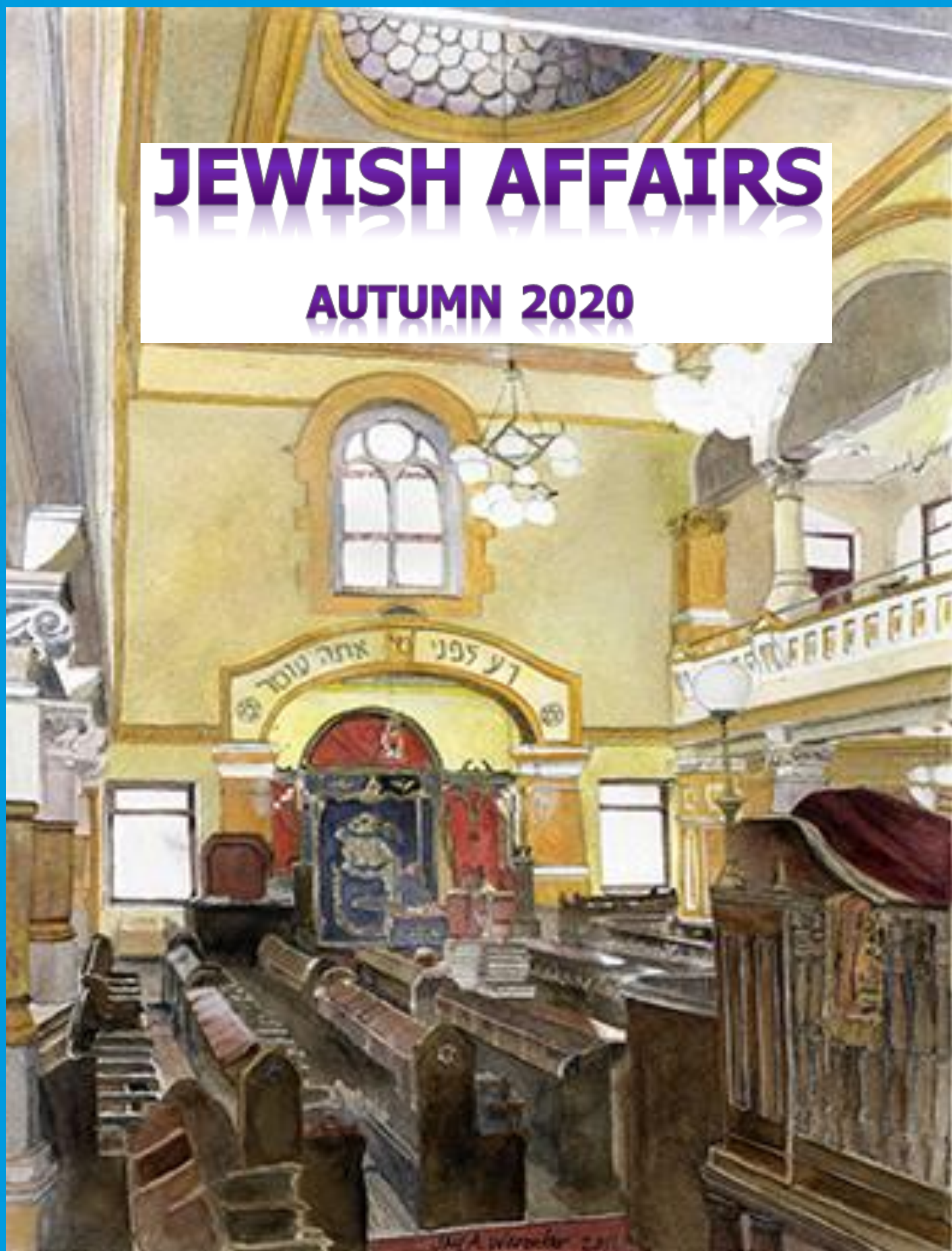


JEWISH AFFAIRS

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JEWISH AFFAIRS aims to publish essays of scholarly research on all subjects of Jewish interest, with special emphasis on aspects of South African Jewish life and thought.

It will promote Jewish cultural and creative achievement in South Africa, and consider Jewish traditions and heritage within the modern context. It aims to provide future researchers with a window on the community's reaction to societal challenges. In this way the journal hopes critically to explore, and honestly to confront, problems facing the Jewish community both in South Africa and abroad, by examining national and international affairs and their impact on South Africa.

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JEWISH AFFAIRS

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*Front cover image: Interior of the Doornfontein
Hebrew Congregation (Jay Waronker, 2012)*

A BRIEF JOURNEY THROUGH GREEK JEWISH HISTORY

Bernard Katz

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The earliest known Jewish presence on the Greek mainland dates to the 3rd Century BCE. However, it is highly probable that Jews travelled or were forcibly transported to Greece prior to this date.[1] The first Greek Jew known by name is “Moschos, son of Moschion the Jew,” a slave mentioned in an inscription, dated approximately 300-250 BCE. This date coincides with the reign of the Spartan king Areios I (309-265 BCE), who according to later sources, corresponded with the Judean high priest Onias. If this correspondence was authentic, it is likely that Jews would have travelled to Greece around this time and local Jewish communities would have existed. [2]

Growth in the Jewish community probably took place in the 2nd Century BCE as a result of the Hasmonean uprising, which resulted in Jews being sold into slavery. At least two inscriptions from Delphi from the middle of that century refer to Jewish slaves. During the Hasmonean period Jewish communities were reported in a number of important centres including Sparta, Rhodes, Samos and Crete.[3] In the 1st Century BCE, the Greek historian Strabo mentioned that there was no city in the known world where Jews did not live. [4]

The Jewish population of Greece probably increased significantly during and after the Jewish War (66-70 CE). Josephus wrote that Vespasian sent 6000 youths from Palestine to work for Nero at the Isthmus of Corinth.[5] In the 3rd Century CE Jews are estimated to have comprised approximately 10% of the population of the Roman Empire.[6]

Greece and Judea (333 BCE-164 BCE)

In 333 BCE, Alexander the Great conquered Judea on route to Egypt and Persia. The Talmud records that on meeting Shimon HaTzaddik, he remarked that an image of his likeness appeared in his dreams before all his victories.[7] Alexander changed the world by spreading Greek civilization. Greek became the international language and Hellenism the dominant culture. After his death his empire was divided amongst his generals, with Ptolemy gaining control of Egypt and Seleucos of Syria. Judah and Jerusalem lay strategically between these two rival kingdoms and fell under the control of Ptolemaic Egypt from 332 to 201 BCE.

Whilst under Ptolemaic control the Hebrew Bible was translated into Greek. This made it accessible to Diaspora Jews such as those living in Alexandria, who increasingly were Greek speaking and whose knowledge of Hebrew was diminishing, as well as to the wider public, which ultimately enabled the spread of Christianity. Legend has it that the translation was made at the instigation of Ptolemy II (285-246 BCE) who invited 70 scholars to undertake the assignment, hence the name Septuagint. Under the rule of the Ptolemies Alexandria became the world's paramount Greek city and one of the great cities in Jewish history – at one time 200 000 Jews lived in there, comprising one-third of the city's population. [8]

In 201 BCE the Seleucid Antiochus III captured Jerusalem. He recorded in a letter that he had received an excellent reception from the Jews and had granted them permission to live “according to their ancestral laws.”[9] Dr Victor Tcherikover writes that under the Seleucids Jews felt absolutely no external pressure to their way of life, just as they had felt none under the rule of the Ptolemies.[10]

This tolerant state of affairs changed during the reign of Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175-164 BCE). Between the extremes of religious zealots and Hellenizers there were many observant Jews who did not object to Greek rule provided that autonomy remained in relation to religious observance.[11] The possibility of coexistence was destroyed by the emergence of a Jewish reform party, who wished to accelerate Hellenization and were contemptuous of Jewish tradition. Little is known of this faction for the history of this period was ultimately written by the victorious fundamentalists.[12] The reform movement received support from Antiochus IV and the pace of Hellenization accelerated. The priesthood became politicised and corrupt. Onias III was replaced by his brother Jason as high priest in 172 BCE, and he, in turn was outbid for the position by Menelaus the following year.

Antiochus IV had ambitions to unite the Seleucid and Ptolemaic empires. In 170 BCE he conquered Egypt only to withdraw after being given an ultimatum by the rising power Rome. False rumours that Antiochus had been killed in Egypt probably resulted in Jason, who had fled to Transjordan, returning to Jerusalem and leading a rebellion. The rebellion incensed Antiochus who returned to Jerusalem and according to the Books of Maccabees killed 40 000 inhabitants and sold a further 40 000 into slavery. In the words of Simon Schama, “So the king turned monster, and the jokes that he was not Epiphanes (God manifest) but epimanes (lunatic) suddenly became serious.”[13]

The conflict reached its peak in 167 BCE after the Temple was looted, an altar to Zeus built, pigs sacrificed and Jewish worship and observance, including kashrut and circumcision outlawed. These events led to a rebellion launched by Mattathias and his five sons, led by Judah Maccabee who between 166 and 164 BCE drove the Greeks out of the area surrounding Jerusalem. In December 164 BCE, the Temple was rededicated, an event celebrated today as Chanukah. A protracted war continued for 25 years with the Seleucids, who were beset by many problems, not

least by Rome, oscillating between repression and tolerance. Eventually, in 143 BCE the last surviving son of Mattathias, Simon, signed a peace treaty. Judah's independence lasted until Rome took control in 63 BCE.

The decrees and behaviour of Antiochus IV have puzzled scholars who have struggled to explain what caused someone who had been schooled in an atmosphere of religious tolerance to behave in so intolerant a manner. Tcherikover maintains that the Jewish Hellenizer movement failed to take into consideration the strength of the nation's resistance to their political plans[14] and it was not the revolt which came as a response to the persecution but the persecution which came as a response to the revolt.[15] *Encyclopaedia Judaica* concurs that the religious oppression appeared to Antiochus to be the only means of achieving political stability but adds that it would be wrong to completely disregard the strange behaviour of the king, who contemporaries referred to as a madman or lunatic, which must have played a major part in the formulation of such oppressive policies.[16]



Greek fortress uncovered in Jerusalem, 2016

Schama acknowledges that while Antiochus IV may well have committed all the infamies attributed to him, this behaviour was the exception, not the rule. In his view, there was nothing about the conduct of the first Seleucid to rule Israel, Antiochus III, to suggest intolerance, much less persecution. He quotes 2 Maccabees which recounts that Antiochus IV repented on his deathbed, and once the fiercest fighting between Jews and Greeks was over it was perfectly possible for the old working relationship to be restored.[17] In Schama's view Greek culture and Torah observant Judaism were not mutually exclusive [18] or

fundamentally incompatible.[19] He stresses that the enemy of the Jews was Antiochus IV and not the Greeks.[20]

Byzantine Period (330-1453)

The Byzantine Empire dates from 330 CE, when Constantine reorganised the Roman Empire into a Greek East and a Latin West. The Greek East became known as Byzantine and was essentially a Greek Empire centred on Constantinople. The Byzantine Empire survived the fall of the Roman Empire in the 5th Century and continued for a further thousand years until 1453, when it was conquered by the Ottoman Turks.

In 313 CE Emperor Constantine adopted Christianity as the state religion of the Roman Empire and enacted legislation restricting the rights of Jews. It resulted in a deterioration of their position from an era of tolerance to one of subjection. As Christianity grew, later emperors further restricted Jewish rights.[21]

The 12th Century Jewish traveller Benjamin of Tudela reported that Jewish communities were present in Corfu, Patras, Corinth, Thebes, Thessaloniki, Rhodes and Samos. Thebes was the largest community, with 2000 souls, and Jews of Thebes were the most skilled craftsmen in silk in all of Greece. 500 Jews lived in Salonika, were also involved in silk-weaving and were oppressed.[22]

Ottoman Period (1453-1821)

The Ottoman Turks made regular inroads into the Byzantine Empire, capturing Thessaloniki (renamed Salonika) in 1430 and finally Constantinople in 1453. The Ottoman period lasted in Athens and the Peloponnese until the outbreak of the Greek War of Independence in 1821 and in Salonika and northern Greece until the Balkan Wars of 1912-1913. Under the Muslim Turk Ottomans, conditions for Jews were significantly better than under the Christian Greek Byzantines. They were well treated although subject to dhimmi regulations. In 1492 more than 160 000 Jews were expelled from Spain.[23] Approximately 100 000 of them migrated to Turkey and of these a significant proportion settled in Salonika.[24]

Until the arrival of the Sephardi Jews the great majority of the Jews in what is today Greece were Romaniot, namely Greek speaking Jews living in the Roman Empire. The Sephardi newcomers were assisted by the local Romaniot communities but differences in language, customs and Sephardi feeling of superiority led to tensions. More numerous and wealthier, Sephardim soon dominated the Romaniots, in particular those of Salonika where the Sephardi language and customs were adopted.[25] It was only in a few isolated places, including Ioannina that Romaniot customs continued.

By 1520 the Jewish population of Salonika numbered 20 000, amounting to half the city's population and making up the world's second largest Jewish

population.[26] For almost five centuries Jews comprised the major ethnic group and dominated the life of the city.



Sephardi Jews in Salonika

Jews were principally engaged in the crafts of spinning silk, weaving wool and making cloth and developed the textile industry within the Ottoman Empire. They also controlled an important part of commerce, moneylending, and the lease of the taxes. During the 1500s, Sephardic Jews built a vast trading network based in Constantinople, Salonika, Izmir and Edirne. They were leading importers and exporters of goods and their warehouses in Salonika dominated the harbour skyline. By the 17th Century Jews so dominated business activity in Salonika that all businesses, Jewish and non-Jewish and the port were

closed on the Sabbath and Jewish holidays.

By the 1620s commerce was increasingly shifting to the Atlantic and Amsterdam's increasing importance was mirrored by Salonika's decline. Taxes were becoming more difficult to afford, social despair was on the rise and protests and even riots broke out amongst Jewish Salonikans. The Turks responded with arrests, imprisonments and even the occasional execution.

Against this background the attraction of the false Messiah Shabbatai Tzvi can be understood. He spent two relatively peaceful years in Salonika before being exiled under *cherem* in 1657 after a ceremony in which he married a Torah. This frenzy reached its peak in 1666 when thousands of Jews sold their businesses and homes as they prepared for their journey to Palestine, and nowhere was this frenzy greater than in Salonika. But by then the Turks had had enough of the charade. Shabbatai was given an ultimatum – he chose to live as a Muslim rather than to die as the Jewish Messiah.

After Shabbatai's death a new sect emerged. Nominally Muslim but with its own strange mix of Kabbalistic, Shabbatean and crypto-Jewish practices, it became known as Donmeh (false prophets) and by the late 19th century they may have numbered about 15 000 in Salonika. For purposes of the population swaps between Greece and Turkey (see below) these Donmeh (who were considered Muslim) were moved to Turkey and have all but given up their dual existence.[27]

By the mid-19th Century Salonika's continued decline seemed terminal. However, a major new harbour completed in 1889 and the connection of the city to the Trans-Balkan Railroad led to an economic resurgence. By the beginning of the new century Jews were prominent in shipping, import-export, tobacco manufacturing

and distribution and retailing. Despite the significant wealth of a small minority, at the close of the 1800s, the vast majority of Salonikan Jews lived in poverty.

Salonika was a multicultural city. In 1912 the Jewish population numbered 70 000 out of a total of 160 000 (roughly 40% of the population; with Greek Orthodox 30% and Muslim 25%).[28] But despite this, Salonika was known for being a closed world, even to other Jews.[29] The Ladino newspaper *La Solidaridad Ovradera* wrote in 1911 that it was not one city as the Jews, Greeks, Bulgarians, Turks and Donmehs “lived side by side, without mixing, each shut in its community, each speaking its own language.”[30] Most of the inhabitants “know the Jewish tongue because day and night they are in contact with and conduct business with Jews.”[31] Angel Pulido, a Spanish senator, visited Salonika in 1904 and was “astonished and overjoyed” to discover that he could converse in his mother tongue with the local Jews.[32]

Modern independent Greece (After 1832)

The Greek War of Independence against Turkish rule commenced in 1821 and by the time it ended in 1832 the Kingdom of Greece consisted of Attica (area encompassing Athens), Peloponnese and the Cycladic Islands. It is estimated that in this uprising the Greeks massacred 5000 Jews on the Peloponnese because of their support for the Turks.[33] After Greek independence less than 1000 Jews were living in Greece and none on the Peloponnese.

Between 1932 and 1947 the borders of Greece were expanded six times until it settled into its current composition. During the Greco-Turkish War of 1897, a number of Jews from Old Greece (including Patras, Corfu, Athens, Zakynthos) fought on the side of the Greeks whereas Jews living in the Ottoman Empire fought on the Ottoman side. This war is possibly the first instance in modern times of Jews fighting against Jews in the context of a national war. [34]

An unlikely alliance between Greece, Bulgaria and Serbia against the Ottomans resulted in an equally unlikely victory. The significant outcome of the Balkan Wars (1912-1913) was that the population and territory of Greece nearly doubled. Salonika (renamed Thessaloniki) became part of Greece, whose Jewish population increased from under 10 000 to well over 80 000 of whom around 70 000 lived in Salonika.[35]

Before Salonika was conquered by the Ottomans in 1430 it had already enjoyed 1700 years as a Hellenistic, Roman and Byzantine city and as a result was viewed by Greece as rightly theirs. The Jews of Salonika had been strong supporters of the Ottomans and were unenthusiastic about the Greek conquest. Few of them had believed that they would be better off under Greek rule.

In 1912 the population of Salonika had been 40% Jewish, 30% Greek and 25% Muslim but by 1926 it was 80% Greek and 15-20% Jewish.[36] This change was

directly as a result of Greece's determination to Hellenize Salonika and the population swaps with Turkey. The catastrophic fire of 1917 assisted this outcome. On 4-5 August of that year, a fire caused massive destruction to the area within the city walls including the business district and the waterfront – the area where Jews had historically lived. It left 52 000 Jews homeless and 32 synagogues destroyed. Greece took this opportunity to design and build a new city and to transform Jewish Salonika into Greek Thessaloniki.



Great fire of Salonika, 1917

Suspensions were aroused as to the cause of the fire. The *New York Times* published an article in 1919 stating that the Greek government had not provided a “satisfactory explanation” in this regard. These suspicions were heightened given the celebrations emanating from newspapers in Athens in response to the tragedy.[37]

The Treaty of Sevres in 1920 partitioned the Ottoman Empire and, inter alia, allocated Izmir (Greek Smyrna) and the surrounding territory in Asia Minor in Turkey to Greece. By then Greece had already landed troops in Izmir to implement the promise made to it at the Paris Peace Conference. Before the arrival of refugees 150 000 Greeks lived in Izmir, comprising about half the city's population.[38] Turkey launched a counter-attack in 1922 under Mustafa Kemal (Ataturk), who had been born in Salonika, and ultimately Greece was defeated and ejected from Asia Minor. The Treaty of Sevres was annulled and replaced in 1923 by the Treaty of Lausanne which recognized Turkish sovereignty in Asia Minor. The Treaty also legislated for mandatory swaps of population between Turkey and Greece. Muslims living in Greece (except Thrace) were to be relocated to Turkey and Christians living in Turkey (except Istanbul) were to be relocated to Greece. About 400 000 Muslims were moved from Greece to Turkey and well over a million Christians were moved from Turkey to Greece. [39] Of these about 100 000 were relocated in Salonika[40].

Greece was determined to Hellenize Salonika. Measures introduced to advantage Salonikan Greeks included punitive taxes on traditional Jewish vocations such as textiles and retailing and Jews working in the port were forced out by legislation forcing the port to be open on the Sabbath. Jews, increasingly marginalised, began emigrating from Salonika in growing numbers. The exodus had already commenced on a small scale from 1910, but in the 1920s and 1930s the pace was stepped up. Perhaps 20-25 000 left before World War II, of which about a quarter moved to Palestine.[41]

Holocaust

Germany invaded Greece on 6 April 1941 and three days later captured Salonika. Under German occupation, Greece was divided into three zones namely: German, Bulgarian and Italian. The German zone included Salonika and its surrounding region. There, anti-Jewish measures resulting in the impoverishment of the Jewish community were instituted immediately. The first transports to Auschwitz departed on 15 March 1943 followed by further transports of 3000 Jews every two to three days. Of the 46 000 Salonikan Jews who were deported, 95% were murdered.[42]

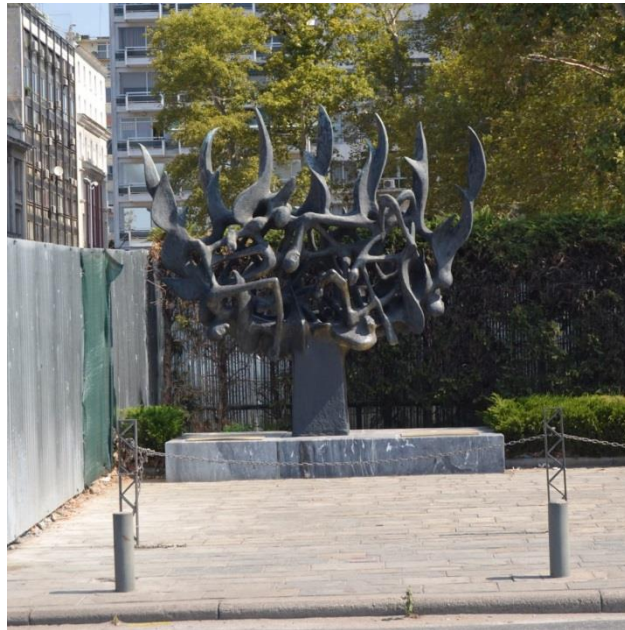
The Bulgarian zone comprised Thrace and eastern Macedonia. Although Bulgaria protected the Jews living in Bulgaria itself, in occupied Greece they complied with German wishes, and over 4000 Jews from Thrace and over 7000 from Macedonia were deported by them.[43] Some members of the Bulgarian parliament protested this collaboration, and were reprimanded for signing a petition.

The Italian zone comprised Athens, Peloponnese and most of the islands. As long as this zone was held by the Italians, Jews were not persecuted. However, after the Italian surrender in September 1943, the Germans took control and deportations commenced. Whereas only 5% of Salonika's Jews escaped deportation, 50% of those in Athens a year later did so. There are many reasons for this including that Salonika's Jews were more numerous, more obtrusive and less assimilated. It was considerably easier helping a few thousand Jews in a city of nearly half a million than helping 50 000 in a city half its size. Timing was also a crucial contributory reason, in that by 1944 much more was known about German atrocities and so the Jews had some warning.

In Salonika, by and large, there was little protest against the German persecutions. Athens was very different. Archbishop Damaskinos condemned the German occupation's treatment of Jews, condemned the deportations in Salonika and later when the Jews of Athens were in jeopardy issued instructions to all monasteries and convents to shelter all Jews who knocked on their doors. Many Greeks hid with their Greek Jewish neighbours.

It is estimated that 77000 Jews were living in Greece before the war. Of these, some 10 000 survived the war. Up to half of those who survived did so with the assistance of the leftist Greek resistance.[44] Over 300 Jewish soldiers and 1000 other Jews joined Greek partisan units.

The greatest single heroic act of Greek Jews was the mutiny of a *Sonderkommando* charged with cremating corpses, at Auschwitz-Birkenau. Aided by French and Hungarian Jews they blew up two crematoriums. Attacked by SS guards and by five planes, the rebels held out for an hour until all 135 were killed.[45] This is remembered as a significant moment of Greek national pride.



Holocaust memorial, Thessaloniki

Relations with Israel

Greece was the only European country to vote against the United Nations partition plan for Palestine in 1947. In the subsequent period relations between Israel and Greece remained problematic for Greece maintained a pro-Arab and pro-Palestinian orientation and many Palestine Liberation Organisation members found refuge there. Greek policy was partly motivated out of Israel's close relationship with Turkey and Greece not wanting to jeopardise the flow of oil from Arab states.

Over the last decade relations between Israel and Greece have undergone a dramatic transformation. Aristotle Tziampiris writes in his book *The Emergence of Israel-Greek Cooperation* that six decades of Greek policy making were overturned, almost overnight..[46] Reasons for this policy shift provided by Tziampiris include the deterioration in Turkish-Israeli relations, the weakening of Greece in recent years and the strengthening of Turkey, and the discovery of natural gas in the Eastern Mediterranean. Gallia Lindenstrauss, writes that the improvement in Israeli-Greek relations should also be seen in light what Yossi Alpher presents in his new book as a potential "New Periphery." [47] After Israel's independence, Iran and Turkey were the most important elements in the original "Periphery Doctrine," meant to break Israel's isolation in the Middle East. In view of hostilities with Iran and the deterioration of relations with Turkey, Greece is one possible element of this possible reincarnation of the "Periphery Doctrine." Lindenstrauss writes that other countries include Azerbaijan, Cyprus, Bulgaria,

South Sudan and Kenya, although sharing several traits of the original periphery relationship they do not bear the same strategic weight of Iran and Turkey.[48]

In July 2010, the then Greek Prime Minister George Papandreou visited Israel and a few weeks later Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu visited Greece. Bilateral cooperation in the zone between Israel and Crete (a distance of about 1400 km) has allowed Israeli pilots to engage in bombing drills across a distance similar to that between Israel and Iran's Natanz nuclear enrichment facility.[49]

Despite the leftist Syriza Party becoming the government in Greece relations between the two countries continued to improve. This was particularly surprising given Prime Minister Tsipras' stance while in opposition. Tsipras has also shown sensitivity in fighting antisemitism.[50] Syriza was replaced in July 2019 by the centre-right New Democracy Party under Prime Minister Mitsotakis who has given his commitment to further strengthen Israel-Greek ties.[51]

Greek Jews and Places of Jewish Interest

Karen Fleming in her book *Greece: A Jewish History* discusses the issue of Greek Jewish identity.[52] Until the 20th Century there was no such thing as a Greek Jew. Salonika, home to the significant majority of Greek Jews only became Greek in 1912 (and with great reluctance on the part of its Jewish community) and Rhodes only became part of Greece in 1947 (it was previously Italian). It is only in retrospect that the Jews from these places have come to be regarded as Greek Jews. Both Salonika and Rhodes are included in Yad Vashem's list of destroyed Greek communities. With the exception of some, largely Romaniot communities, i.e. indigenous, Greek speaking Jews (notably communities in Athens and Ioannina) the designation Greek Jews would have met with puzzlement up until at least the end of World War II.[53]

Today 5000 Jews live in Greece, mainly in Athens.[54]

Thessaloniki (Salonika)

Thessaloniki was a Greek city for its first 1700 years, the Turkish city Salonika for 500 years and, since 1912, has been Greek again. Although historical evidence is scarce it is believed that Alexandrian Jews who arrived there around 140 BCE were amongst the first to settle in the city.[55] Local Jewish tradition holds that Jews have had a presence in Thessaloniki for 2300 years which would correspond to the founding of the city in 315 BCE.

Evidence of the existence and growth of Jewish life in Salonika during the Hellenistic and Roman periods derives from several sources. The apostle Paul, born Saul to a devout Jewish family in Tarsus, preached to the Romaniot Jews of Thessaloniki on three consecutive Sabbaths at the Etz Haim Synagogue and that afterwards he was forced to leave the town. Only when this and other congregations turned against him did he turn his attention to pagans. The Jews of

Thessaloniki during the Roman and Byzantine periods had Greek names and spoke Greek.

Sephardi Jewish settlers founded 32 communities in Salonika, each with its own synagogue, traditions and unique customs, bearing the names of places of origins in Spain and Portugal such as Castilla, Catalunya, Aragon, Toledo and Cordoba.

The Jewish Museum of Thessaloniki, which opened in 2001, contains: “A Short History of the 2300-Year Jewish Presence in Thessaloniki.” On the ground floor are tombstones from the Jewish cemetery which the Nazis destroyed. A room in the museum contains 23 panels of names of those murdered. Before 1997, no Holocaust memorials existed in Thessaloniki.[56] That year, such a memorial was unveiled in Eleftherias (Freedom) Square, the location where the Jews were summoned in 1942 to be tortured and humiliated. The memorial depicts a menorah with flames mangled with human bodies for its seven branches.

The Jewish cemetery in Thessaloniki, which dated to 1492 was the largest in Europe and contained more than 300 000 graves.[57] It has become the new geographic centre of Greek Thessaloniki and a university complex has been constructed on top of the burial ground. In 2014 a Holocaust memorial was finally erected on this site.

The Yad Lezikaron Synagogue, used for daily services, has a long history since it constitutes the continuation of various synagogues in the city centre and particular in this area. Specifically its history begins from the Synagogue ‘Askenaz’, founded



in 1376.[58] Its walls contain a long list of the names of synagogues that once existed in Salonika. The Monastiriotes Synagogue survived the Holocaust as it was used as a warehouse. Today it is used during the Jewish holidays.

The promenade along the waterfront passes along the area that was once the Jewish quarter, where the Jews once lived and worked.

About 1000 Jews remain in Thessaloniki out of a population of one million.[59] Almost all citizens are Greek and the multicultural city of Salonika exists no more.

Athens

Concrete information of a Jewish presence in Athens dates to the first century CE.[60] There may have been Jews living in Athens in the Middle Ages but Benjamin of Tudela in the 12th Century made no mention of this.

After Athens became the capital of an independent Greece in 1834, a Jewish community in Athens started developing, with an influx after the Balkan Wars when places such as Ioannina and Salonika became part of Greece. By World War II it numbered 3000, many of whom were of Romaniot background. This doubled to 6000 as Jews sought protection in Italian-controlled Athens.

Among the many highlights of the Jewish Museum of Greece is a reconstructed synagogue from Patras, containing the original bimah, some of its pews and the ark. The section on the ancient Jewish presence in Greece mentions twelve Jewish communities that existed dating back to the 1st Century CE and an ancient synagogue from the island of Delos dating to the 1st Century BCE. A copy of a small piece of marble engraved with a menorah and lulav was found in a 5th Century synagogue that once existed in Athens below the Acropolis in the Agora. The original is stored in a basement of antiquities of the Ministry of Culture.[61]

Two synagogues in Athens are still in use. The Beit Shalom (Sephardi) was built in 1935 and renovated and modernised in 1972. It contains stained glass windows depicting Isaiah's ascent in a chariot and the giving of the Ten Commandments. Across the road is Etz Chayim (Romaniot), built in 1905.

A Holocaust memorial taking the form of a deconstructed Magen David has the names of all the Greek Jewish communities from where deportations took place on its six separated triangles.

Ioannina

Ioannina is home to Romaniot Jews who are neither Ashkenazi nor Sephardi but Greek speaking Jews who were part of the Roman Empire. Many Romaniot Jews believe that their origins date to the destruction of the Temple by the Romans in 70 CE but some communities, notably Ioannina, claim that their ancestors arrived even earlier – somewhere between the destruction of the First Temple by the Babylonians and the early Roman period. [62] Of the Romaniot communities that were not subsumed by the Sephardi arrivals and retained their customs, Ioannina was the largest.

Ioannina has only existed as a town since about 1000 CE. The first recorded evidence of Jews living there dates to 1319. [63] Ioannina became part of Greece in 1913 during the Balkan Wars after having been part of the Ottoman Empire for the previous 500 years. An observer of the battle for Ioannina in 1913 described it as: "The city that went to sleep Turkish and Ottoman woke up Greek and Christian. [64]

At the beginning of the 20th Century 4000 Jews lived in Ioannina. By World War II this had decreased to 2000. [65] Only 5% of the Jews of Ioannina survived the Holocaust[66] and just 34 Jews remain there today. Of these, five are professors at

the university including the recently elected mayor of the town Moses Elisaf, the first ever Jewish mayor in Greece.[67]

The Jewish Museum of Ioannina contains interesting exhibits including specialities of Ioannina Jews – exquisitely embroidered wedding dresses, some of which were converted to parochets after the wedding. Silver and gold plating were important occupations of the Jews of Ioannina and some items are on display.

The Kahal Kadosh Yashan Synagogue is only used for the High Holidays where a big effort is made and many Jews of Ioannina heritage from around the world attend. Last year 240 people attended.[68] The parochet once again displays fine embroidery and inside are a number of exquisitely painted boxes (called Tiks) containing Torah scrolls. These scrolls are never removed from the Tiks so the Torah is read in an upright position on a flat surface.

A Holocaust memorial can be found in the town near the lake.

Rhodes

Jewish history on Rhodes dates to the second century BCE with the earliest references recorded in the Book of Maccabees and later in the writings of Josephus. [69]

Jews were mentioned in Rhodes after the Arab conquest of the island when in 653 CE the Arab conqueror ordered the destruction of the remains of the Colossus of Rhodes. It was sold to a Jew who carried away 90 camel loads of bronze.[70] Benjamin of Tudela, in the 12th Century reported that 400 Jews lived in the city of Rhodes.[71]

After being expelled from Palestine, the Knights of St. John Hospitallers settled on Rhodes (1309-1522). During the siege of the city by the Turks in 1480, the Jews fought in the defence of the city.

In 1522 the Turks took control of Rhodes and held it until 1912. After the Turkish conquest Jews from Salonika arrived on the island and the number of Jews during the 19th century amounted to between 2,000 and 4,000.[72]

In 1912 Rhodes became an Italian possession.

Race Laws were promulgated against Jews on 1 September 1938. One of its immediate consequences was that foreign Jews were no longer permitted to remain on Italian territory and resulted in a forced exodus of about 850 Jews.[73] The Italian administration on Rhodes substantially ignored the racial laws against the Jews which they considered unethical and unjust. After Mussolini was deposed on 24 July 1943 relations between native Italians and Jewish Italians returned to near normal.[74] But this respite was short lived as the 7000 German troops stationed

on Rhodes took control of the island despite the presence of 30 000 Italian troops.[75]

From the early 1900s, due to the lack of opportunities, Jews had started to emigrate from Rhodes. Many moved to Rhodesia, Belgian Congo, Palestine and USA. For this reason and the promulgation of the Racial Laws, of the 5,500 Jews living on Rhodes in 1920, only about 1673 remained by the time the Nazis took control.[76] They were all deported to Auschwitz in July 1944 and only 151 of them returned.[77]

The Kahal Shalom Synagogue is the oldest synagogue in Greece. In the courtyard where a fountain once existed is a plaque dated 1577 when it is thought the synagogue was consecrated.[78] It is thought that the fountain was used by the Cohanim before their priestly blessing.[79]

An interesting feature in the synagogue is its two arks. One hypothesis is that the one ark represents the exile from Spain and the other the longing for Jerusalem. The second hypothesis is that in some Muslim countries a Koran had to be housed in the



synagogue to protect it from being destroyed. However, in the 1960s a synagogue was unearthed in Sardis, Turkey which dates to the 4th century CE which also has two arks and bears a remarkable similarity to this one and of course predates the Spanish exile and the birth of Islam.

The museum, in what was formerly the ladies section of the synagogue, contains a Torah scroll which is 800 years old. It is well preserved and one of the oldest scrolls in the world and was originally used in the Iberian Peninsula.[80]

Rhodes became part of Greece after World War II in 1947. A Holocaust Memorial was dedicated in the “Square of the Martyred Jews” in 2002 to the 1604 Jews from Rhodes and Cos murdered in the death camps.

Crete

Crete has been identified with the biblical Caphtor, the original home of the Philistines.[81] Recent genetic studies indicate that the Philistines originated from the Aegean world which would add support to the Crete hypothesis.

The earliest evidence of a Jewish community living on Crete is in a letter in support of the Jews sent by the Roman Senate in 142 BCE to various countries at the request of Simon the Hasmonean.[82]

During the Venetian period (1204-1669) the Romaniot community formed the upper class and in 1481 there were 600 Jewish families and four synagogues in Candia (now Heraklion). After the Spanish expulsion, Sephardi Jews arrived in Crete.[83] The Turkish period (1669-1898) marked a decline in the cultural life of the Jewish community. When Crete became independent in 1897, the Jewish population numbered 1150.[84]

In May 1944, the Nazis rounded up the entire Jewish population of Crete and forced them onto a tanker ship called the *Tanais*. The ship was subsequently mistaken by the British for a German war ship and sunk, drowning nearly all of the 300 Jews aboard.

Zakinthos (Zante)

Zante is located off the western coast of the Peloponnese. All 275 Jews living here survived the Holocaust. When the island's mayor was ordered by the Germans, at gunpoint, to provide a list of the island's Jews he and the bishop turned over only two names. His, Karrer, and Hrysostomos (the bishop's). While arguing about this with the Germans the Jews were taken to the mountains and hidden by Christian families. In 1978 they were honoured by Yad Vashem as "righteous gentiles."



Thessaloniki (Salonika) today, photographed by the author

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CAPE TOWN JEWRY AND THE 1918 FLU PANDEMIC

Howard Phillips

Emeritus Professor Howard Phillips has taught and published extensively in the fields of the social history of medicine (including epidemics and pandemics) and the history of universities, including in the University of Cape Town's faculties of Humanities and Health Sciences. This article is abbreviated from an interview, conducted by the author with Spanish Flu survivor Jenny Stern in November 1978, that appears in his book In a Time of Plague: Memories of the Spanish Flu Epidemic of 1918 in South Africa (Van Riebeeck Society, Cape Town, 2018), now available as an eBook at www.hipsa.org.za

[Note: In 1918 they had no antibiotics, no paracetamol, no ventilators and did not know that viruses existed. What they did have was egg-nogs, garlic, lemons, enemas, mustard plasters and red medicine, a knowledge of social distancing and a sense of volunteering]

I think the flu epidemic started immediately either before Rosh Hashanah [7.9.1918] or after. When the troops were coming back [from World War I] they brought it. They said it came from overseas.

My father [Mr Shaer] was a deputy beadle in the Gardens Shul. He got ill and Dr Kark said 'He's got a cold. Let him stop in bed.'

Daddy got better and he went to shul. And then it started. Dad came home and said, 'I don't know what it is, everyone's sick. The shul is empty this evening, the Friday night.'

We lived in 116 Hatfield Street and round the corner was [the] Wittenberg family Lionel [Wittenberg] got the flu. I used to sit with Lionel and I was told not to tell Lionel that [his brother] Nathan's fiancée [a Miss Apple] died. I remember that one of the Shagams died. I think they had a chemist's shop. Across the road in Hatfield Street the fellow who worked for Singers sewing machines was delirious. He ran out of his bed screaming along Hatfield Street. I don't remember who caught him. The military tailor in Plein Street died.

And then my brother got sick, he got better and my other brother got very, very ill. Momma used to beat up egg-nog and put it in brandy, and we had that every night so I didn't get it. Momma also took garlic and crushed it. My sister Martha was very, very sick and we couldn't get a doctor. And momma says to me, 'Come with me to the chemist in Caledon Street. I will try and get something'.

The chemist shop was closed but Momma knocked at the side entrance and the chemist's wife came out [and said], 'It's no good asking for medicine. I don't know whether my husband's alive or dying.'

So we went away. Momma put a mustard plaster on Martha and gave her an enema and Martha got better

They opened the shul and cried and fasted. Daddy said, '*Gott in Himmel. Vos is dos? Vos hot mir geton?* [God in Heaven. What is this? What did we do?]

And my mother says, '*Daniel, vos kwetz du tu? Dos ist von Gott...* [Why are you moaning? It comes from God ...']

Every shul was open. People went. But people tried to keep away from one another. We had the streets cleaned with an old-fashioned water-cart and they sprayed the city with water and something in it. It was terrible, terrible. Every shop in Cape Town was closed. You could not get anything. There was nothing, nothing to buy. The doors were open. You could walk in and take everything.

Momma did stop at home and momma cooked and she washed and she looked after us. My father used to bring home a big bath with food and mother always had flour and baked I know we weren't short [of food].

Things got from bad to worse. People were starving and dying in the houses. We couldn't get doctors, they were also ill. Coloureds were lying dead in the street! They went [died] like flies. Lots of Jews died. Plenty. No time even for coffins I know that the Coloureds were put onto carts and taken away like that ... [and buried] in big holes. Daddy told me. He told mama. ..I think he was a very brave man. There was a morgue in Venken Lane near where *Die Burger* is in Keerom Street and the corpses were lying, one on top the other. Then it got to such a pitch that Dad was burying them non-stop, not even knowing who, by lamp until one o'clock in the morning. They didn't take notice whether they were Jews or Gentiles they threw them into a grave.

They opened depots at the City Hall and the school in De Villiers Street. Everything (in the school) was taken out [to accommodate the depot's needs] and my brother Jack and I grabbed and we took. [The depots distributed] blankets and food and little bottles of red medicine. Whether it helped or not, I don't know. I know everybody was crying out for lemons.

I was helping with Jack and we would bring food and go and tell them at the City Hall or at De Villiers Street where people were lying, where people were sick and what they could do. I didn't go to school [during the epidemic], I helped. My father didn't like the idea, but I wanted to go, and I wanted to help. We went to a place in Woodstock – the mother was dead, the baby was screaming, the husband was sick. I'll never forget it. I saw lots of things, it was very very [sad].

THE BUBONIC PLAGUE AND THE JEWS IN CAPE TOWN, 1901

Gwynne Schrire

Gwynne Schrire, a veteran contributor to Jewish Affairs and a long-serving member of its editorial board, is Deputy Director of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies – Cape Council. She has authored, co-written and edited over twenty books on aspects of South African Jewish and Western Cape history. This is an edited version of her article, originally entitled 'Immigration Restriction, Bubonic Plague and the Jews in Cape Town, 1901' that appeared in the Chanukah 2008 issue of Jewish Affairs.

The advent of HIV/AIDS, the most extensive and fearful pandemic the world had known, made all previous pandemics pale in significance. Previously the most feared was the plague, from the Latin *plaga* meaning a blow, usually administered by a god.[1] The blow or blame has often fallen on the Jewish community. The Jews were made the scapegoat of the 1348 plague, or Black Death, resulting in extensive massacres throughout Europe. This article will examine what happened in Cape Town, when the 1901 plague reached it from the East.

People living in Cape Town, Muslims believed, would be safe from the plague because of a prophesy by Imam Abdullah bin Kadi Abdus-Salaam (Tuan Guru, 1712-1807), founder of the first madrassah in the city. He had foretold that all Muslims who lived within the circle of *kramats* (shrines) that encircled the peninsula would be safe from fire, famine, plague, earthquake and tidal wave[2]

But it was not to be so, because another great plague pandemic to befall the world reached Cape Town in 1901.

BUBONIC PLAGUE IN CAPE TOWN.

CAPE TOWN. Feb. 10.—Ten cases of what is supposed to be the bubonic plague have been isolated. One of the victims is a white person, the others being natives. A native child has died of the disease.

The New York Times

Published: February 11, 1901

Considering the dread the pandemic instilled among the populace, the fact that it killed nearly twelve million people world-wide, and that it had local repercussions, it is surprising that there is so little reference to it in Cape Town Jewish history. Israel Abrahams, in his *The Birth of a Community*, makes what may be an oblique reference when complaining about the difficulty in obtaining sufficient matzah for Passover that year: “The war was still on and afflictions of all kinds were not in short supply, except – ‘the bread of affliction.’” As the first night of Passover, 15 April, occurred when the epidemic was at its height, it can be presumed that one of those ‘afflictions’ was plague.[1] The Cape Town Jewish Philanthropic Society appears not to have met during the epidemic because its minute book jumps from 24 February, when the plague began to take hold, to 9 June, when it was in retreat.[2] Neither Saron and Hotz in *The Jews in South Africa*[3], nor Dr Louis Herrman in *The Cape Town Hebrew Congregation 1841-1941*[4] mention the plague.

The omission is surprising, unless memories were short or the writers wished to gloss over something that reflected poorly on the community.

By this time, the role of heavenly bodies and righteous anger had been discounted as playing a role in the transmission of the disease. The responsible bacteria had been identified in 1894 by Alexandre Yersin, a student of Louis Pasteur, while working in Hong Kong. Yersin also noted that the disease was transmitted by rats.[5] The role of fleas was discovered three years later, but it was some time before this revolutionary idea was accepted, the prevalent belief being that the plague originated in filth and poor sanitation.

In 1898, the Bombay Plague Research Committee had defined the plague as a “disease which is essentially associated with unsanitary conditions in human habitations, the chief of which are accumulation of filth, overcrowding and absence of light and ventilation.”[6]

Compare this definition with the following contemporary descriptions of Jews in Cape Town:

Dwellings of the Jewish community are much overcrowded and ill-ventilated. These people herd together and overcrowd to an alarming extent. They are exceedingly afraid of fresh air and ventilation, and close every aperture in their rooms, notably when they have any illness. Their mode of living is objectionable and dirty in the extreme. They seldom ever bath and their bodies are covered with vermin.[7]

Cape Town... is full of those Polish Jew hawkers who live in dirtier style than Kafirs.[8]

The lowest class of Russian, Polish and German Jews, filthy and evil smelling.[9]

...the greasy dress of the Jewish refugee ... the glimpses of indescribable dirt and squalor...through open doors and windows...[10]

...Jews, who overcrowd and cohabit promiscuously. Amongst them filth and vermin abound, and they have great objection to ventilation, the crevices all being wedged up with rags in many of their rooms. Some of these people are worse than the natives in these matters.[11]

Elizabeth van Heyningen[12], a historian of the plague in Cape Town, believes that one of the factors behind the passing the following year of the Immigration Restriction Act, which limited the immigration of Jews and Indians, was the fears the plague aroused. As there was a perceived belief in the responsibility of Jews and Asians for the plague, the omission of the subject from local Jewish history is all the more remarkable. Immigration restriction had first been mooted at a plague



prevention conference held in 1899, when the plague had reached India and there were fears that it might come to South Africa. One conference recommendation was that steps be taken to provide for the prohibition or restriction of immigration into South Africa from countries in which plague was prevalent.[13] The subsequent 1902 act was aimed, in the words of Governor Sir Walter Hely-Hutchinson, at Asiatics, “paupers and persons suffering from ‘loathsome disease’”. [14]

Anti-immigration cartoon typical of what appeared in the early 20th Century South African media

One of the victims was this writer’s great-grandmother. On her recovery, adverse public opinion influenced the family to leave Cape Town and return to Europe.

The plague pandemic started in China in 1894, reached India in 1896 and arrived in Cape Town in 1901, spread by the British army during the South African War. The Cape Town harbour had been invaded by an armada of ships. Sometimes there were over 120 ships at anchor in the bay, many waiting months before they could be unloaded.[15]

The military took over the South Arm of the docks. In the ships arrived camp kettles, canned food and compressed cakes of tea, tents, clothing and tobacco, saddles, harnesses and hairbrushes, artillery, swords and guns. They offloaded horse shoes from Germany and Sweden, mule shoes from the United States[16] and horses, fodder and, inadvertently, ants from the Argentine (the latter soon made itself at home and replaced the local species, at considerable cost to the local

fynbos.) From India, the ships carried boots, helmets and rats.[17] The rats carried fleas and the fleas carried the plague bacillus.

The war created employment opportunities both for labourers and call girls.[18] (“I went to the docks and the boats daily as a stevedore”, wrote one Eastern European Jewish immigrant to his wife, “There I worked for three weeks. In the first week I earned 8 roubles [16/-], the second week 16 roubles and the third week 20 roubles but I saw it would be the end of my health before that of my money and I could not carry on anymore”.[19]) There were 600 houses of ill fame in Cape Town. A brothel keeper complained that “he would not keep Jewish girls because they would not keep their places as quiet as French girls, and could not pay as much for their protection as the French girls”.[20]

The first cases of the plague, soon isolated, arrived in March 1900 on board the *SS Kilburn* from Argentina, which docked with its captain dead and three of its crew ill. They were all sent off to quarantine in Saldanha Bay, the matter was hushed up and the outbreak contained. In November, cases cropped up in King William’s Town among Africans, so that the belief arose that Africans were susceptible because of their unhygienic living standards.[21]

By September, dead rats started turning up in the docks, particularly in the South Arm, and dock workers began to fall ill. The Medical Officer of Health for the Cape Colony, Dr AJ Gregory, blamed “the old insanitary conditions of many parts of the city especially ancient storm water drains which created a labyrinth of rat runs”.

For the rats, Cape Town was a pantry. Unwanted waste from the fishing boats at Roggebaai and its fish market littered the shore-line. Untreated sewage ran into the bay. The offal from the Shambles (abattoirs), between the Grand Parade and the beach, was dumped in the sea nearby for the tides and the rats to dispose of free of charge.[22] Similarly, the refuse of Somerset Hospital was dumped twice daily on the beach by the assistant cook.[23] The Woodstock Station Hospital was no more sanitary. It was:

Badly situated on a flat stretch of beach close to the city and wedged in between the sea and the railway line. Moreover, the foreshore is not of the cleanest and the city council in its wisdom has constructed the sewage outfall in the immediate neighbourhood ... it lies in the teeth of the prevalent south east winds, which churn up clouds of dust.[24]

That wind called the Cape Doctor would blow the winter’s accumulated dirt into the ocean. Some areas of the city were never cleaned. Neither the City Council nor the ratepayers had the incentive to spend money on sanitation. Regular street sweeping and water-borne sewerage was only instituted by the City Council after the 1896 typhoid epidemic and the 1901 plague.

The war resulted in an influx into the city of refugees from the Witwatersrand, most of them penniless. As with the refugees from the 2008 xenophobic attacks, there was an outpouring of assistance from private individuals and communal organisations, but the arrivals only exacerbated the existing poverty and overcrowding. Twenty-five thousand people arrived between September and October 1899, of whom 3 000 were Jews.

“Next to Bombay, Cape Town is one of the most suitable towns I know for a plague epidemic”, stated Prof. WJ Simpson, the plague authority appointed to advise the government.[25] He reported that Cape Town had an extraordinary proportion of ancient and filthy slums, occupied by a heterogeneous population. The Africans were unfit for town life; the poorer coloured people were even dirtier in their habits, while the Malays and Indians possessed the habits of the Asiatic, and the poorer class Portuguese, Italians, Levantines and Jews were almost as filthy as the others. “Living in the same insanitary areas, often living in the same houses, the different races and nationalities are inextricably mixed up, so that whatever disease affects the one is sure to affect the other,” he wrote.[26] Jewish living conditions were identified as a contributory factor.[27]

Simpson did not believe that fleas transmitted the disease, but that rats became “infected by eating contaminated food, or by passing over infected clothing or places... Filth associated with darkness and dampness is peculiarly favourable to the growth of the microbe... Old dilapidated, dark, insanitary, and overcrowded houses... infected by rats are particularly dangerous. Rats and house vermin often carry the infection from dirty into clean houses.”[28]

The incidence of the plague was small at first, but the numbers of people affected gradually increased as did the virulence. In February 1901, Cape Town was declared an infected port, and the British Army stopped landing troops there. The deaths peaked in March, with 81 people hospitalised. By May there were about 33 deaths a week. The last plague victim was discharged from hospital on 27 November. According to the Medical Officer of Health, 204 whites were infected with the plague, with 69 deaths, 431 Coloureds (244 deaths) and 172 Africans (76 deaths).[29]

The Cape Town Hebrew Congregation’s 7th Avenue Cemetery in Maitland contains graves of Jews who died of the plague. All of them died at the Uitvlugt Plague Camp and all had “Bubonic Plague” listed as the cause of death. The 16-year old Barnett Berman died on 6 March 1901 followed two days later by 50-year old dairy man Samuel Kamenetz. They were joined in April by Judel Aberman (45), Sunder Freedman (24), Andrew Osoler (23) and Jacob Kaplan (60) and in May by a male pauper called Baker or Becker.[30]

The highest mortality was amongst the Coloureds, but it was the Africans who suffered the most, being blamed for its spread because of the association with lack of hygiene and because the first plague casualty was an African. Although there

were 50% more cases of plague among the soldiers than there were amongst the civilian population, public criticism, blame and fear was not directed against the army, but against outsiders - the 'other'. This was unjustified because the plague was introduced into the Cape by the military and the military was to blame for its spread through its negligence in failing to report the dead rats in the South Arm. It was also the military that was responsible for the disease spreading from the docks to the city through its camp in Green Point.[31]

But blame – and bigotry – is not always rational. Whenever plague struck, fear for one's own life outweighed any concern one might have felt for the life of another and unfocused prejudice was directed at all strangers, including Africans, Asiatics and East European Jews.

The Cape Town City Council hired two more sanitary staff to clean the city, offered between 3d and 6d for a rat body brought to the incinerator (the Harbour Board offered sixpence per rat tail), and distributed handbills that emphasised cleanliness:[32] "For cleanly people in cleanly homes which are free from rats there is practically no danger of getting the plague...DIRT, OVERCROWDING, WANT OF VENTILATIONS AND THE PRESENCE OF RATS encourage the presence of Plague on any home or locality".[33]

The Council's half-hearted attempts to prevent the spread of infection by employing an additional two cleaners and issuing handbills did not satisfy the Government. Anyway, neither the rats nor the new immigrants could read English. The Government overruled the Council, instituting a Plague Board to enforce regulations.[34] This body's first task was to set up a plague hospital (a site was chosen at Uitvlugt, near Ndabeni), and its second was to clean the city.

The number of cleaners was increased from two to 160 Europeans, 100 Africans and 280 convicts from the Breakwater Prison. These were offered a day's remission for each day's service – the work was hard, unpleasant and dangerous and there were fatalities among both the cleaning and the hospital staff.[35] Where a case of plague occurred the house was evacuated, hosed down with disinfectant, thoroughly cleaned and white-washed. Clothing and household effect were disinfected or, if too dirty, destroyed. Over 2 000 houses were demolished and rebuilt.[36] Those living in the infected houses and their contacts were inoculated and the rats and vermin killed.

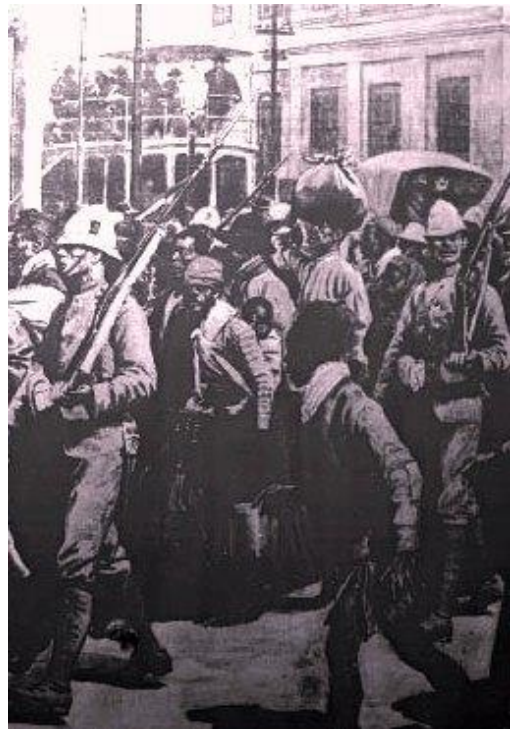
The Parade, where many Jewish immigrants traded, had a bad reputation:[37]

Saturday by Saturday the 'Grand' - Heaven save the word - Parade gets worse. The rotten trash that is put upon the sale there would be a disgrace to Petticoat Lane. Not only this but the trade is now largely carried out by Polish Jews, who import the commonest off-scourings of Houndsditch goods. Then these frowzy gentry stand around... until whoever purchases is sure to be heartlessly swindled.[38]

The Plague Board banned public auctions on the Parade, causing many to lose a source of income.

As the plague had originated in the East, Asiatics were implicated. The San Francisco city authorities, refusing to accept the theory that the plague was caused by rats, blamed Asian immigrants and quarantined thousands. Only when that proved ineffective did they accept the rat theory, and killed 700 000 rats.[39] In Cape Town, there were complaints that the people who ran Chinese laundries and Indian and Chinese shops were oblivious to sanitation and cleanliness[40] and attempts were made to prevent the movement of Asians.

As the Africans were considered the most unhygienic, their homes were suddenly invaded by sanitary officers and police, their possessions confiscated and, like little Zipporah of Hameln, they were forcibly removed. This, plus the fact that they were being singled out, caused much dissatisfaction, particularly as they were not allowed to return to their homes to avoid the disease. Being told that it was all for their own good was of small comfort and those working in the docks went on strike. After a protest meeting was broken by mounted police, they were then moved under an armed guard to a municipal location established at Uitvlugt, Ndabeni, not far from the Uitvlugt Plague Camp. Others were sent to a location run by the Harbour Board below Portwood Lodge in the docks. This, the beginning of imposed racial residential segregation, was to be the forerunner of a pattern of locations, townships, reserves, group areas, black spots and Bantustans. There was an additional advantage in removing them to the Cape Flats because other people could now move into their previous homes, thus relieving overcrowding elsewhere.[41]



Forced relocation of blacks to Ndabeni location, February 1901

Dirt and overcrowding was clearly stated in the handbills and messages as being factors encouraging the spread of the disease. Because of their alleged lack of hygiene, Jews were singled out. Dr. Gregory described Jews as being “often dirty in their habits, persons and clothing”.[42] The Wynberg district surgeon, Dr HC Wright, felt the cleanliness of the Africans compared most favourably with that of the Jews of the lower class. “No wonder Pharaoh found fit to ‘let the Children of Israel go’” he quipped.[43] In his 1901 Public Health report, Dr Wright complained that Jewish “houses are filthy in the extreme” and the children of “80

per cent of that persuasion bathed once a month.” The following year he reported that Jews “remain a sickly crowd, entirely oblivious to decency and sanitation. Many of their habitations are unfit to be used as such, and as they are large vendors of food, some serious notice should be taken of their mode of life and preparation and storage of articles of food.”[44]

In April 1901, some neglected District Six properties occupied by Africans and owned by Marcus Arkin in Vernon Terrace, Vandeleur Street, Mount Street and Caledon Street were condemned as unfit for human habitation. The Colonial Office took them over temporarily on condition that the government put them into a proper state of repair.[45] Arkin was prepared to evict the tenants on the very favourable terms offered by the government but Benjamin Levin, the holder of the second mortgage of the Vernon Terrace properties, objected.[46] When the Colonial Office returned the houses to Arkin in September, his lawyers instituted what Van Heyningen has described as an “acrimonious correspondence” over the condition in which the properties were finally left. She also noted that an examination of the street directories seems to indicate that the identifiable coloured names were replaced by Jewish names.[47]

My interest in the plague in Cape Town was first aroused when I was given a copy of my Great Uncle Harry Schrire’s memoirs. He had written:

There was an outbreak of bubonic plague in Cape Town at the end of the Anglo-Boer war, and my parents, who were considered fairly well-off with an income of £50 per month from rentals from the property in Harrington Street, decided to take a trip to Europe. They had been offered £5 000 for the property by a man called Kaiser but refused to sell because there was a boom at the time.[48]

Recently, I obtained a copy of an epic autobiographical Hebrew poem consisting of 150 verses, each having eight rhymed lines, entitled *The History and Happenings, Reasons and Adventures, From the Day of My Birth, to the Day of My Death, with a Short Critique in a Clear Language, in Songs and Prose, in Remembrance for All Time*. This was written around 1910 by my great-grandfather, Harry's father. Some verses described the plague and his decision to leave Cape Town. To my surprise, it contained information about his wife becoming ill. I showed the verse to a doctor, who identified the symptoms as possibly being of the plague. For the first time I realised that my great-grandmother, after whom I was named, had herself contracted the disease and that they had decided to leave because the community had blamed them. Here are the relevant verses in translation:

76) In the year *Taf Resh Samech Aleph* in the Boer War/People filled Cape Town like locusts/Rich and poor and immigrants/ They have traded in every trade./The prices of houses doubled/and like flies easily found gold /From buyers and traders and middlemen/ who came from all the corners of the country.

77) Since there were so many people, abandoned and crowded together/ the plague started to cut down the nation/ From under the ground, there were many small animals/ That were brought in ships from across the sea/ From dirt, neglect and lack of cleanliness/ Black and white fell fatally wounded/ Both the faint-hearted and men of vision/ dreaded death/ and walked like the shadows.

78) My wife was standing in the butcher shop/ when she noticed from afar the hurley-burley of the town/ As the wagon went by, painted red/ With the people working like devils against the disease/ In the sound of the congestion boys ran/ After the wagon that was taking the sick/ And she fell, fainted, without saying anything/ And her skin was covered with wounds and bruises.

79) She was almost dead and lay sorrowfully/ For about ten days in a critical condition/ And the moment she came out, her strength returned to her/ She saw the wagon with its canopy open/ And the whiteness of death covered her face/ And her illness returned with greater strength/ Her face became so swollen that her eyes could not be seen/ And she lay on her bed like a dead person.

80) When I saw from her that her disease was very bad/ and the quacks could not help at all/ She came to my business on her feet/ and the reproaches of the women fell on me/ "I was cruel"/ "I knew no mercy"/ "Even my small sons were suffering a lot"/ Then in the sorrow of my soul/ I swore in my anger

81) To leave Africa without returning.../

83) We passed the examination house with shaking knees/ Because the doctors of the town were examining every passenger/ And those who were forbidden to travel overseas... Only our possessions were taken...

[He details the destruction of their pillows, linen and clothes, but they succeeded in boarding the ship]

88) The disease attacked my wife again/ Through the night she became swollen as risen dough/ She slept without strength, as a dove she would moan/ And I could not call the doctor lest/ They would say the plague has started/ And I have worked hard to make her disappear from their eyes/ And my heart was sad that she would end and die like that.

89) Also she and her talking have pierced my kidneys/ because she believed they would throw her body into the sea...And to the servants of the ship.../ they believed that she had her period/ And I cleaned her room and changed her bed/ Changed her clothes from old to new.

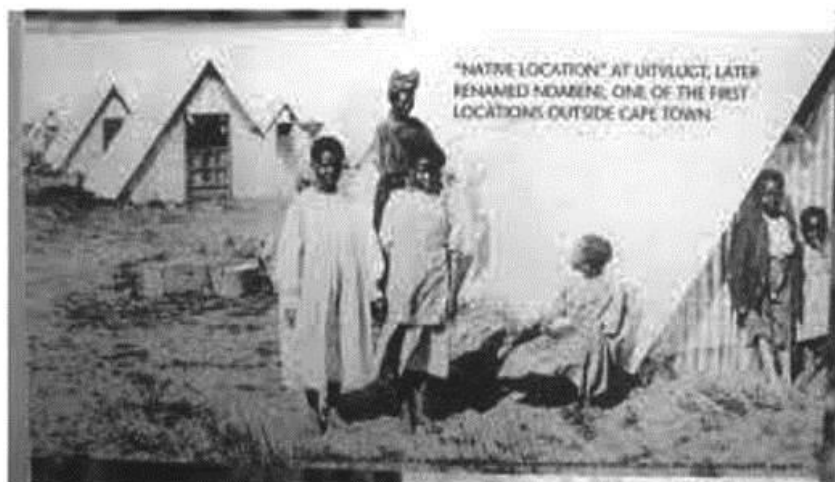
90) ...In two days/...we would come to London/ And her sickness has eased and her skin grew back/ And she had white freckles and scars...

91) With fear and trembling we went from the ship to the shore/ With ashes on her face and armpits...

Here is a first-person description of the conditions in the city when the plague struck and how it affected them in their butcher shop. The writer too accepts that the rat-borne disease was caused by “dirt, neglect and lack of cleanliness”, without the knowledge of the role played in its transmission by the random leap of a hungry flea. Boccaccio had complained that “no doctor’s advice, no medicine could overcome or alleviate this disease”— my great-grandfather would have agreed. He describes his wife’s symptoms, the panic in the street when the ambulance wagon chased by excited youngsters came by to take victims to the Uitsluiting Plague Camp, the criticism of their neighbours, the medical examinations at the docks and the destruction of their possessions that might have been contaminated. He describes their fear that the doctors might prevent them from boarding or leaving the ship and how they made use of ashes, in lieu of face powder, to disguise her scarred face and armpits (the glands affected by bubonic plague).

The 1901 plague had several results. Firstly the plague, according to Van Heyningen, gave respectability to the racism which was already entrenched. The unfocused prejudice was directed not only at Africans, but at almost every group which was poor and living in unhealthy conditions. The intolerance embraced all Asiatics, Russian Jews, Italians, Portuguese and others of Mediterranean origins and revealed a heightened jingoism which was not wholly indigenous.[49] Simpson, for example, thought the plague would have been stamped out had it also been possible to isolate in locations the Malays, the Coloured people and the poorer class of Europeans who were “seldom of British origin, but are foreigners from every part of the Continent, consisting largely of Portuguese, Italians, Levantines and Polish Jews”.[50]

Secondly, the Africans were removed from the city and placed in separate residential areas, a result of “a complex blend of prejudice, fear, expediency and paternalism”. They were the most severely affected and the biggest losers.



Thirdly, the prejudice equating Jews with dirt and disease made the climate more favourable to pass an act the following year to limit the entry to the Cape of these supposedly dangerous disease-harbours aliens.

Milton Shain held that despite suspicions that Jewish living conditions were a contributory factor to the epidemic, Jews did not receive differential treatment during the plague. This he attributed to the respect in which the Jewish establishment was held and the belief that the East European Jews were capable of improving with time.[51] However, the fear of contagion from these dirty East European aliens was more powerful than any respect given to the assimilated local Jews and provided a convincing reason to pass the Immigration Restriction Act hastily before the end of the 1902 parliamentary session.[52]

This was spelt out by Dr. Gregory, who said the Bill was aimed at the exclusion of Asiatics and, perhaps, Russian Jews, and should be framed to exclude undesirable persons by reason of their becoming a *danger to the health* of the community.[53] This association is clearly indicated in the words of a speaker at a protest meeting who said that the Colony was “infested from right to left with undesirable aliens.”[54] The subconscious choice of the word ‘infested’, one used for vermin, sends a clear signal.

Sadly modernity did not change this association. A Nazi propagandist, justifying the Final Solution, wrote:

A commendable achievement is also the far-reaching elimination of the Jews. If for instance Lublin, Lemburg and Reichshof during the last decades owing to the spread of the Jewish plague belonged to the most disgusting places of Middle Europe, now each of these cities, after the Jewish crust has been removed, ... has thus again become congenial to the German.[55]

And finally, my great-grandparents moved overseas temporarily, where my great-grandfather met a young lady who, like him, was a keen Zionist, could speak Hebrew and had even corresponded with Herzl. My great-grandmother decided she would make a good wife for their eldest son, and as for their second son, my grandfather, he was left behind to study in Frankfurt, becoming the learned man I faintly remember.

NOTES

[1] Giblin, James, *When Plague Strikes: the Black Death, Smallpox, AIDS*, Harper Collinc, New York, 1995, 6

[2] Du Plessis, ID and CA Luckhoff, *The Malay Quarter and Its people*, Balkema, Cape Town, 1953, 33

[3] The boat carrying the matzot broke down and arrived late .Abrahams, I, *The Birth of a Community: A History of Western Province Jewry from Earliest Times to the end of the South African War 1902*, CT Hebrew Congregation, Cape Town 1955 p 128

- [4] Minute Book of Cape Town Jewish Philanthropic Society 1897 - 1903, Alexander Papers, Archives of the University of Cape Town
- [5] Saron,G, and Hotz,L, *The Jews In South Africa: A History*. Oxford University Press, Cape Town, 1955.
- [6] Herrman, Louis, *The Cape Town Hebrew Congregation 1841-1941*, Mercantile-Atlas, Cape Town no date,
- [7] Coppin, B, *La Peste: Histoire D'Une Épidémie*, Gallimand, Paris. 2000,42
- [8] Quoted in Van Heyningen, E, Cape Town and the Plague of 1901, in Saunders, C and Phillips, H (eds) *Studies in the History of Cape Town*, Ed Saunders,C, Phillips,H, Van Heyningen,E (Eds) 4/1984.69
- [9] Wynberg district surgeon Dr Claude Wright 1902 medical report, quoted in Shain, *The Roots of Antisemitism in South Africa*, 1994, 45
- [10] Quoted in Shain, M, *Jewry And Cape Society; The Origins and Activities of the Jewish Board of Deputies*, The Cape Colony Historical Publications Society Cape Town,1983, 10
- [11] Quoted in Shain, 1994, 51
- [12] *Cape Times* 1908, Quoted in Shain 1994,52
- [13] Dr C Wright, 1897, Quoted in Shain, 1994, 33
- [14] Van Heyningen, 1984. p75
- [15] Van Heyningen, 71
- [16] Shain, 1983,23
- [17] McKenzie, R (editor), *Cape Journal*, No 1, 1998,8
- [18] Coetzer, Owen *The Road to Infamy (1899-1900: Colenso, Spioenkop, Vaalkrantz, Pieters, Buller and Warren*, William Waterman, Rivonia, 1996, 17-19
- [19] The rats – and their fleas - might also have come, like the ants, from Argentina in the hay for the horses.
- [20] The Salvation Army report, 1902, quoted in Hallett, R. Policemen, Pimps and Prostitutes- Public Morality and Police Corruption *Studies in the History of Cape Town* Saunders , C1/1984,pp 5,11,25,31 Some of the call girls were Jewish, as well as some of the pimps and brothel-keepers.
- [21] Kretzmar, T, Unpublished letter, by kind permission of the late Dr J Kretzmar, Cape Town.
- [22] Hallett, R., op cit, 31
- [23] Van Heyningen, 73-5
- [24] McKenzie, R, Cape Town Harbour, In *The Cape Journal*, 1, Cape Newspapers, Cape Town. 1998, 8,
- [25] 1884 Rules and Regulations, Quoted in Laidler, P.W. & Gelfand, M, *South Africa, Its Medical History 1652-1898 A Medical and Social Study*, Cape Town,1971, 433
- [26] *The British Medical Journal*, quoted in De Villiers, J.C. Hospitals in Cape Town During the Anglo-Boer War, *South African Medical Journal*, January 1999, Vol 89, No 1, p.76.
- [27] Van Heyningen, 69
- [28] Simpson lecture on plague, MOH 46 f668 22.5.1901 in Van Heyningen, 75.
- [29] Shain, *The Root of Antisemitism in South Africa*, Johannesburg, 1994,45
- [30] Van Heyningen, 79
- [31] *Ibid.*, 77
- [32] For this information I am indebted to Paul Cheifitz, who surveyed and recorded the burials in the cemetery.
- [33] Van Heyningen, 85
- [34] *The Cape Argus* in August 2007 had an article about a job-creation project for the Men at the Side of the Road organisation that planned to train people to kill rats. The SPCA had complained because the method of killing the rats would have been cruel to the rats.
- [35] Van Heyningen, 79
- [36] *Ibid.*, 80
- [37] *Ibid.*, 81-2
- [38] McKenzie, R (ed.), *The Cape Journal*, Album 3, 1998, Cape Newspapers, Cape Town. 1998, 29
- [39] My maternal grandmother's father bought her a pair of shoes on the Parade when they arrived off the boats in 1904. When he came home, he found that both shoes were for the same foot.
- [40] Shain, 1994,32

- [41] Giblin, JC, 51
- [42] Van Heyningen, 74
- [43] Ibid, 98-9, 82
- [44] Shain, 1994, 45
- [45] Van Heyningen, 96
- [46] He said that if the Government repaired the houses and placed coloured tenants in them, it would affect the value of the houses. Mr Levin demanded that the occupants be replaced with those of a more desirable class.
- [47] Van Heyningen, 102
- [48] Schrire, Harry, Unpublished memoirs, c 1960, type written manuscript in possession of his son, Arthur Schrire
- [49] Van Heyningen, 75
- [50] Ibid., 95
- [51] Shain, 1994, 45
- [52] Shain, 1984, 22
- [53] Dr Gregory's suggestions as to the framing of the Aliens Act 1902, Shain 1984, 25
- [54] Said at a 1903 ratepayers meeting held to protest about Chinese, capitalists and aliens, Quoted in Shain, 1984, 54
- [55] Dr Friedrich Lange, 1945, Quoted in Weinbreich. M, *Hitler's Professors: The Part of Scholarship in Germany's Crimes Against the Jewish People*. YIVO, New York, 1946, 168

THE 2004 TSUNAMI AND SOUTH AFRICAN JEWRY

David Saks

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When the ocean waters abruptly receded on the morning of 26 December 2004, it was a last-second warning to those lining the beaches throughout the eastern Indian Ocean that a massive catastrophe was about to unfold. A lucky few realized that something was wrong and began fleeing inland. Some would have been aware that a sudden withdrawal of the sea was a sure sign of an approaching tsunami, while others may simply have guessed that this extraordinary reversal of nature's course could bode little good. At any rate, in the absence of any warning system, the recession of the waters was just about the only indication of what was to come. For over 300 000 unsuspecting people, from Indonesia to Thailand, Sri Lanka and India and all the way across the Somaliland on the west coast of Africa, it represented a silent death knell.

Tsunami – the word means “harbour wave” in Japanese, although so benign, almost banal, a rendition belies the destructive force of a phenomenon whereby vast walls of displaced water are propelled at terrifying speeds across the ocean. The Indian Ocean tsunami began with a massive undersea earthquake, the fourth largest ever recorded, off the western coast of northern Sumatra, Indonesia. The quake in turn generated a correspondingly massive tsunami. Ships are hardly affected by such upheavals, but once the waves reach land, the consequences can be devastating. Such was the case on that fateful Boxing Day of 2004.

What made this tsunami an international event was the fact that it occurred at the height of the holiday season, resulting in holidaymakers from all over the world being caught up in the tragedy. Amongst them were over 2000 South Africans vacationing in Thailand, particularly those on islands like Phuket and Phi Phi along its South Western coast. Approximately 200 of these were Jewish community members.

At 09h30 on 26 December, Mandelle Bernstein was in her Phuket hotel room. Three times during the night she had been aware of some tremors, but thought little of it at the time. Her husband Stephen and children David and Lisa were in the dining room about to have breakfast. A second daughter, Jody, was out with a friend. All of a sudden, she recalled, “people started to scream and point to the

ocean. People started to run, just dropping their plates and screaming. It was just brown muddy water coming at one hell of a speed”.

Amidst scenes of panic and hysteria, the Bernsteins fought their way up to the fourth level of the hotel as the surging waves engulfed the streets outside and poured into the building. Wading through the incoming flood, they reached the stairs only just in time.

Meanwhile, similar scenes were taking place along coastlines throughout southern Thailand. Capetonians David Gordon, Rael Levitt and the Murinik family, Pam, Ralph and their son Dean, were breakfasting on the terrace of the Patong Beach Holiday Inn, while their friends Morris Isaacson and his long-time companion Dolores Ribeiro were out for a walk. It was Gordon who first saw the rapidly approaching wall of water and shouted a warning. He and Levitt were able to make their way to safety in the nearby hills, but the Muriniks were swept up by the water and together with fellow residents and floating debris of every description carried from room to room. They eventually ended up in the hotel conference room, by then to their necks in water; thankfully, the flood then began subsiding.

On Phi Phi island’s Charlie Beach Resort, Johannesburger Paul Sender and his companion from Pretoria Gabi Baron heard rather than saw the approaching deluge. Gabi remembered “a deafening hissing-rumbling noise like a jet engine at full throttle about to explode”, and which in that first moment of panic was assumed to signify a terrorist attack. Paul dragged her into the bathroom, moments before the bungalow was struck and within seconds demolished by a giant wave. Paul was probably killed outright by the collapsing walls. Gabi, badly injured but alive, was dug out two hours later. After lying on a beach for eight hours covered by a blanket, she was airlifted to the hospital in mainland Krabi.



Tsunami waves engulf grounds of a hotel, Phi Phi Island

Other South Africans also narrowly escaped death in the surging waves. Joanne Brown was swept up against a bungalow and her eighteen month-old daughter was wrenched from her arms. Miraculously, the infant somehow ended up in the arms of her nanny, Vicky Nwayo, who was nearly pulled into the sea but managed to wade to shore. Friends Lauren Isaacs, Jodi Kramer and Sandra Loeb were walking towards the beach in Phi Phi when the wave struck and swept them back towards their hotel. All three narrowly survived, in Isaacs' and Loeb's case by respectively hanging on to a pillar and a floating table and in Kramer's because a man was able to pluck her to safety from his balcony.

Those who survived to recount their experiences afterwards were among the lucky ones. For Morris Isaacson and Dolores Ribeiro, trapped in an underground supermarket, there had been no escape. Their friends eventually found them lying side by side among hundreds of piled-up bodies. Nor had there been any escape for Paul Sender, and for fellow South Africans Nicola Leibowitz, Avadya Berman, Roy Fitzsimmons, Daphne Coetzee, Anna Fitzgerald, Anita and Anthony de Gouveia, Lisa Sun Lung, Stefan le Roux, Magda Findlay and Bevan and Louis Panaino. Their lives and those of many thousands of others had been extinguished within minutes.

Yehuda Kay, National Director of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies, was on a Muizenberg beach when he received a call from Russell Kaye, National Director of the Community Security Organisation informing him that several South African Jews in Thailand had been caught up in an earthquake and might need assistance. Kay contacted the Department of Foreign Affairs, but learned nothing further. At this stage, the government too knew little about the unfolding tragedy.

Soon afterwards, Kay received a second call from the CSO – more names were coming through, with every indication being that this was only the beginning. By 18h00, a list of fifteen people affected by the disaster had been compiled. At 20h30, it was decided to activate the CSO's Incident Management System (IMS) to assist with incoming enquiries and gather information on those missing or injured. The IMS was designed in response to the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 and the double shul bombing in Istanbul, Turkey, in 2003. The system lays out how the CSO should deal with a disaster within the Jewish community, and how the various community structures would come together to manage any crisis that might arise. Although the IMS makes provision for possible natural disasters, it was never expected that it would be applied to assisting South Africans abroad. Kaye began putting a task team together, and by 21h00 that evening the call centre was operational.

Already, from its deceptively quiet beginnings, the initiative had mushroomed into a major nation-wide operation that would gather ever-increasing momentum in the frenetic days that followed. By mid-afternoon on Sunday, Kay was receiving a virtually unbroken string of calls from Jewish community members seeking information on relatives in Thailand. The initial list of missing persons he had

jotted down was sent on to Mandi Romain, his chief liaison in Johannesburg, with the instruction that it be conveyed, together with any other information obtained, to the CSO. He also alerted the SAJBD management committee, comprising National Chairman Michael Bagraim, National President Russell Gaddin, national vice-chairmen Lester Hoffman and Ivan Levy and Gauteng Council chairman Zev Krengel. Krengel was to be in the engine room of the Jewish relief effort at every stage of the process and acted as the Board's spokesperson once the Board's Communications Department, headed by Charisse Zeifert, swung into action.

It was clear by mid-day on 26 December that a general call to the community was needed, but the late December period was the worst possible time for this. An alert was posted on the SAJBD website and group e-mails sent out, but few were at their computers to read them and in addition most Board and CSO staff members and volunteers were on holiday. To make matters worse, the crisis had broken on a Sunday. The only recourse was to use cell phone technology, and in due course hundreds of SMS's were being sent out to every conceivable recipient, asking anyone who had information on Jews in Phuket to get in touch with the call centre. Recipients in turn SMS'd their groups, resulting in a ripple effect throughout the Jewish community. After the number had been given out over the radio, non-Jews too began utilising the service when they were unable to get through to the Department of Foreign Affairs.

The call centre, manned at all hours by volunteers on a rotational basis, provided an information resource and emotional support for community members affected by the tragedy. The IMS had prepared standard forms for all those calling in with information on missing individuals – who they were, whether they were missing or if they had since been found and their last known whereabouts. The details of the caller were also recorded so that they could be contacted at a later date if anything needed clarifying or if there was anything new to report. Netcare and the Department of Foreign Affairs were also operating call centres, while Discovery Health's insurance records likewise provided important data.

The key to the success of the operation was information exchange between all those involved. Mandi Romain, based at Netcare's Midrand headquarters, acted as the liaison between the Board, Foreign Affairs, Discovery Health and Netcare as information and enquiries flooded in over the next few days. She worked closely with Mande Taubkin, chief officer of Netcare's disaster management team. Sheer adrenaline only would get her and her colleagues through the week that followed, a time when sleep was snatched in minutes rather than hours. The general community assisted in many ways. Nussbaums kosher butchery and the kosher pizzeria Michelos provided meals free, or at a discount, for those manning the call centre and scores volunteered to assist in the centre at all hours.

Without the efforts of volunteers on the ground in Phuket, much less would have been achieved. CSO member Daniel Treisman and his companion Taryn were on Phi Phi Island when the giant waves struck. Originally, they had been occupying a

bungalow right on the beach, but had moved because of a double booking. The manager's error undoubtedly saved their lives. Their new bungalow stood on stilts and about 100 meters behind it was a hill. As a result, it was the only structure still standing after the waters had swept in and then receded with even more devastating effect, dragging the other bungalows with them like so many pieces of driftwood.

The couple, together with scores of others suddenly made homeless, spent a night on the nearby hill and then made their way to Krabi on the mainland. There, in the hospital, Treisman met Gabi Baron, who told him that Paul Sender was dead. He was then contacted by Rabbi Nehemya Wilhelm, head of Chabad House in Bangkok, who urged him to do all he could to find Sender's body. He thus embarked on what would be a non-stop three-day mission that developed into a mission to assist all fellow South Africans.

In a chaotic atmosphere of grief, chaos, confusion and fear, years of dedicated CSO training kicked in. Treisman, now in constant contact with CSO and SAJBD personnel back home, set about finding as many South Africans as possible and directing them to gathering points, assisting where he could with the injured and traumatised. All new information was relayed back to the call centre in Johannesburg. Newspapers all over South Africa later showed a young man whose white T-shirt bore the legend "Are you South African? Follow me". Treisman had penned these words himself to enable other South Africans needing assistance to come to him. Featured in newspaper reports countrywide, the slogan came to epitomize the Jewish community's effort on behalf of their fellow citizens.

Over the next few days, Treisman visited every hospital and morgue in Krabi. The search was an exceedingly grim one, entailing viewing many hundreds of bloated corpses already fast decomposing in the tropical heat. Unbeknown to him at the time, fellow CSO member Gavin Pearl was doing the same thing on Phuket. The two later met up at Phuket airport and thereafter worked together.



Tsunami heroes Daniel Treisman and Craig Pearl

Wrote tsunami survivor Mandelle Bernstein: “My praise and gratitude goes out to these young boys who amidst dealing with their own traumas got down to doing one of the hardest jobs ever and that was to locate dead and injured South Africans. They spent the entire two days running from hospital to hospital and from mortuary to mortuary trying to locate any South African. Above all, they were answering all our SMSs immediately and keeping us well informed as to what was happening”.

Other South Africans, most of them Jewish, also distinguished themselves. Ivor and Bernice Karan were at the time cruising around the world and had providentially stopped over for a few weeks in Phuket. Having at hand all the requisite facilities on their yacht, including e-mail, a colour printer and satellite phone, they were able to play a pivotal role in searching for missing South Africans, posting colour photocopies of those still unaccounted for and relaying the information back to the call centre. Bernice further hired a taxi and interpreter and went around all the hospitals looking for South Africans. The Karans were assisted by Jonty and Tanya Waksman, who spent many exhausting hours searching for missing countrymen, specifically Paul Sender and Avadya Berman, and made many harrowing visits to the morgues. The couple ended up making and receiving over six hundred phone calls. The most moving contribution, however, was surely made by Deanne Fitzsimmons, whose husband, Roy, had been amongst those engulfed in the killer waves but who nevertheless put aside her grief to do all she could to render assistance.

The tsunami disaster attracted worldwide Jewish assistance, even though only a few dozen Jews at most were amongst the estimated 300 000 victims. Israeli rescue teams like Zaka, an emergency-aid group formed by ultra-Orthodox Israelis whose tasks include ensuring proper Jewish burial for the victims of suicide bombings, rendered invaluable assistance to anyone who needed it, whether they were Jewish or not. This was true, too, of Rabbi Wilhelm and Chabad in Bangkok. All three Chabad branches in the country were turned into crisis centres. Incredibly, the South African Embassy in Bangkok was closed on 27 December on the grounds that it was a public holiday in South Africa.

Many stranded South Africans in Phuket and other parts of Thailand needed more direct assistance. Some were injured or seriously traumatised while others had lost nearly all their possessions, including travel documents. Netcare, the SAJBD, Discovery and the Department of Foreign Affairs therefore cooperated in chartering a Boeing 767 from the Nationwide airline, sharing the R2 million cost. Since there was no direct flight to Phuket, the Department also intervened to arrange fly-over rights with those countries concerned. Ezra (the CSO’s emergency medical response division) and Discovery Health sent five doctors (all of whom, as it happened, were Jewish), while Netcare brought ten paramedics and five nurses as well as equipment to assist all but those patients requiring intensive care. The operation was called “*Buyise Khaya*” – Bring Home.

Because another flight was scheduled, the rescue team had only five hours in which to gather injured survivors in the various hospitals. It was not known how many South Africans would want to return on the plane, which could seat 198 people only. Hence, it was decided that places would be allocated on a triage basis first to the sick and injured, then to children, women and, space allowing, men. Five journalists who were on board were warned beforehand that they might have to be left behind should their seats be required.

Treisman, Pearl, Fitzsimmons, the Waksmans and other volunteers were a vital link in making those who needed to be evacuated aware of the flight and brought in good time to the airport. South Africans were systematically tracked down in hospitals and hotels. Those who were mobile and wanted to be on the flight were instructed to make their own way to the airport. The Board and its representatives worked with the local authorities in Phuket to ensure that ambulances and taxis would be available to the South African mission on its arrival.



South African Tsunami survivors awaiting evacuation, Phuket Airport

The plane departed on Tuesday morning, 28 December and arrived at approximately 20h30 South African time, which was 01h30 in Phuket. Fortunately, fewer South Africans than expected were awaiting evacuation and ultimately 65 people boarded the flight. A number were leaving family members behind and were unsure whether or not they had survived the catastrophe. Fifteen of the passengers were Jewish, amongst them Treisman, Pearl and the Bernstein family. Also on board were the bodies of the first four South African victims to be discovered, Morris Isaacson, Dolores Ribeiro, Daphne Coetzee and Roy Fitzsimmons. The SAJBD worked with the Chevra Kadisha in Johannesburg to ensure that the requisite Halachic procedures were followed in conveying home the Jewish dead. Permission was obtained from the Department of Health to bring back the bodies, despite the normal regulations regarding the embalming of incoming corpses not having been properly observed.



Seeing to the injured before take-off

Back home, the long list of those unaccounted for gradually shrank as more and more of the missing turned up safely, but not all the endings were happy ones. From the outset, it was known that at least four South Africans had lost their lives, and the list would steadily grow. Three of the next seven South Africans to make that tragic final journey back were Jewish community members, Nicola Liebowitz, her companion Avadya Berman and Paul Sender. Board and CSO members had been on hand throughout to offer support to the bereaved families when any last lingering hopes were finally dashed.

Berman's body was identified in a makeshift mortuary in Krabi on 4 January. Together with Sender and Liebowitz, he was buried in Johannesburg's West Park Jewish Cemetery. All three had been under 35 years of age. Morris Isaacson's funeral had taken place ten days earlier at the Pinelands Jewish cemetery. His fellow choristers from the Green and Sea Point Shul Choir sang in tribute to him. They included his friends David Gordon and Dean Murinik, survivors of the catastrophe that had taken his life.

The Board's communications department was also extremely busy throughout the tsunami period, achieving an unprecedented amount of media coverage. Charisse Zeifert was in constant contact with the media, issuing press releases, providing updates and making spokespeople available at every opportunity. It resulted in regular daily coverage in seventeen newspapers, and on the same number of radio stations, where the Board . was mentioned every hour on the hour on every news

broadcast for three days. SAJBD National Chairman Michael Bagraim was interviewed by e-tv, and SABC's Fokus and M-Net's Carte Blanche both featured at length the role of Board and Ezra in the tsunami rescue operations. Zev Kregel was regularly quoted in the print media and interviewed on SABC Africa and CNN Inside Africa. The media were happy to utilize Board spokespeople since the latter were in a position to supply accurate, up to date information on a constant basis. The Board further helped arrange for well-known journalist Paula Slier to travel to Phuket on the rescue flight.

Once South African needs had been taken care of, the Board set up a special tsunami disaster relief fund on behalf of the hundreds of thousands of other victims. Within three weeks, over R800 000 had been raised. The funds were formally handed over on behalf of the Jewish community to the Department of Foreign Affairs, which in turn send them on to the International Red Cross.

As the last South Africans made their way home and normalcy at last began returning to the devastated lands on the other side of the ocean, survivors and participants in the drama looked back on what they had experienced and what could be learned from it.

For Michael Bagraim, the one silver lining in the very dark cloud was that ethnic and religious differences had been forgotten as people the world came together to render desperately needed assistance in the wake of what had been a truly global catastrophe. The tsunami relief effort, he said, had represented a textbook example of how government and civil society could work together for the mutual benefit of the country as a whole. It had further demonstrated how the SAJBD and the CSO, the two organisations whose primary mandate was the protection of Jewish life and the Jewish way of life, could reach out and assist members of the Jewish community who needed it even when they were halfway across the world.

Kregel believed that the Board's response to the crisis rated amongst its finest hours, but what had to be remembered in the end was that it had been an enormous tragedy for the Jewish community. Four had lost their lives, others were seriously injured and scores more otherwise affected. It was a miracle that every South African Jew had been accounted for, since thousands would never know what happened to their loved ones.

Mark Notelovitz, National Chairman of the CSO, was proud of the high operational standards the CSO had achieved during this period. The crisis had provided a test run for the CSO's Incident Management System, which had been put together in the event of a major incident taking place in South Africa. Thus it had been possible to swing into operation immediately and not put together a reactive strategy from scratch. In addition to providing technical and logistical skills, CSO training also sought to instill a culture of service and commitment to protecting Jewish life in its members. This ethic had very much come to the fore for those CSO members on the ground in Phuket, and subsequently for their

counterparts back home, making possible the swift, efficient and dedicated response that would be in evidence throughout the operation.

The SAJBD's role in the Thailand rescue mission was recognised by the City of Johannesburg, which at its Council meeting on 27 January 2005 adopted a motion that congratulations be sent to the Board and its team for its efforts. On the same day, a memorial services marking the sixtieth anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz was held in Johannesburg and Cape Town. Addressing a packed Oxford Synagogue Rabbi Yossy Goldman, chairman of the SA Rabbinical Council, digressed briefly from his keynote address to commend the Board and CSO on their work during the tsunami crisis: "I take this opportunity to express, on behalf of the Jewish community of South Africa and, indeed, on behalf of *all* of South Africa, our deep sense of gratitude and respect for the outstanding manner in which the Board, assisted by the CSO, became the catalyst and the driving force in the recent Rescue Mission to Thailand for the Tsunami Survivors. Very well done. *Yasher Koach*".

OUR JOHANNESBURG

Lionel Slier

Lionel Slier is a veteran contributor to South African Jewish publications, including *Jewish Affairs* and the *South African Jewish Report*.

Not long ago, I read an article in an Australian publication where the following informed guess was made about the number of Jews living in South Africa: “In the early 1970s, seeking more secure futures, Jews commenced immigrating (sic) to Australia, Canada, New Zealand, USA, UK and Israel and by the year 2000 about 50 000 of the 120 000 had emigrated. [Nasty note to writer of this article: I wish he/she would work out the difference between immigrating and emigrating!] Of the remaining 70 000 it was estimated that 48 000 lived in and around Johannesburg, 15 000 in Cape Town, 3000 in Durban and 1000 in Pretoria. The remaining 3000 were scattered mostly in Port Elizabeth, East London and Bloemfontein. Then there are the Israelis living here. Nobody knows how many there are. One doesn't know whether they are permanent or transitory. Certainly they don't sign census counts or register as voters. This is guesswork, of course, but reasonably correct at least up until a decade or so ago. A recently released survey of the community conducted by the Institute for Jewish Policy research and the Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies and Research at the University of Cape Town estimated that in 2019, the Jewish population had declined to 52 300.[1]

Not so long ago the fifty thousandth Jew was buried in West Park Cemetery, making the bizarre statistic that there are now more Jews in that cemetery alone than actually living in Johannesburg!

Most of the (live) Jews in Johannesburg can be found in the north-eastern suburbs. Here are some: Glenhazel, Raedene, Kew, Norwood, Highlands North, Sandringham, Savoy, Waverley, Orchards, Oaklands and Fairmount. Glenhazel and its immediate neighbours are jocularly referred to as ‘The Shtetl’.

Houghton, once the base for the rich and elite, seems to have lost that aura a little. There was the old time joke that a Jewish snob was one who moved from Doornfontein to Houghton without first staying a while in Yeoville, up the koppie from Doornfontein! Now many houses here have been redesigned as business offices. Similarly many apartments in next-door Killarney are losing Jewish residents.

There is a small but solid enclave of Jews in Greenside and Emmarentia to the west but they have very little effect upon the character of Johannesburg's Jewry. Victory

Park slightly to the north here holds up its hand as a Jewish area and its excellent King David School is testimony to this.

The last figure I saw about the number of Jewish places of worship in Johannesburg was 66, mostly by far in the north-east suburbs. Oddly enough the Great Park Synagogue is in Houghton, just beyond the greater Jewish population.

Now to those Temples of modern life - the Shopping Malls. There is the story of a lady who came to Johannesburg from the country with the intention of seeing 'The big five'. When friends asked her when she would be going to the Kruger National Park, she replied, "What are you talking about? The Big Five are here in Johannesburg - Sandton, Hyde Park, Killarney, Rosebank and Melrose." Now here is the irony. These centres are outside the borders of 'The Shtetl' but all are very easily accessible.

Two that are within the Shtetl are Balfour Park and Norwood Mall. The latter has a distinctly Jewish feel about it, which the former does not. Norwood Mall is unmistakably Jewish. Shoppers say that if they do not meet at least five acquaintances there by chance, that would be the unusual. The mall itself, oddly enough, is not actually in Norwood itself but in Oaklands and Gardens and its northern border ends in Highlands North. It has been built on what had been market vegetable gardens. There were two, called Portuguese Market Gardens and Madeira Gardens, as I recall. The Gardens were well-known for selling 'tickey soup green' - a tickey being three pennies or today's equivalent, two and a half cents!

This north-eastern area is the Jewish Johannesburg! Yet strangely enough, there are no theatres, no cinemas, no concert halls, two libraries, one in the Jewish Centre, Beyachad, both not booming. However it has its Hasidic elements, also strictly Orthodox families, Modern Orthodox, Masorti and some secular. But try and find parking by a shul on a Friday night or a Saturday morning or Chagim. Not easy, but this is mostly for security reasons. Johannesburg at night is not a walk in the park. There are many excellent places of learning and top quality Jewish schools. Look at the matric marks every January.

In Johannesburg, there are elements of New York, of London's Stamford Hill, Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. But it is mostly genuine Jo'burg or Joeys and long may it remain so. There was this young couple walking in Glenhazel. He was casually dressed and the girl was also pretty. They stopped to talk to another young couple. The man had his shirt unbuttoned and he was wearing a golden coloured chain from the bottom of which hung a solid silver Magen David. Close enough, one could hear the girl's first words, which were, "Oh mi Gard!"

[1] See <http://www.kaplancentre.uct.ac...>

FICTION

BACK THEN

Zita Nurok

Zita Nurok, a regular contributor to Jewish Affairs, is an elementary school teacher who grew up in South Africa. She is a member of the National League of American Pen Women, and has served as Vice-President and President of the Indianapolis branch. The two watercolours, painted by architectural historian and artist Jay Waronker in 2005, show the exterior and interior of the Doornfontein Hebrew Congregation (aka 'the 'Lions Shul'). The editor thanks Mr Waronker for his permission to reproduce them.

Doornfontein – the suburb of meaningful beginnings that grew into big happenings in the bustling city of Johannesburg. Businesses both Jewish and non-Jewish were established in this suburb, especially along the main thoroughfare of Beit Street where each contribution was sewn into the fabric of the growing city, creating a colourful quilt that enriched the society.....butcheries, bakeries, tailor-shops, groceries, dairies, liquor stores, shoe-maker shops, barbers, and more.

The deli is the place where Jewish people meet not only to shop on a Friday for Shabbos, but also to slip comfortably into their home-tongues of Yiddish that they refuse to relinquish even years after immigrating to South Africa in search of a ‘bigger’ life. They came off the boats to seek their fortunes in the city of gold – Johannesburg. Behind the counters plump Jewish mamas relate stories to each other in heavy accents as they wait for customers. They exchange gossip of the week past.

‘Yes dahling, what can I do for you?’ one of the mamas asks a customer who is deciding what to buy. She enumerates a long list of tempting foods too great to resist, as the customer makes her decisions. Cold cuts for the family who come for lunch on Sundays, coleslaw, beetroot salad, lokshen kugel... the herring counter offers salt herrings, chopped herring prepared mama’s way, sweet Danish herring, and cream herring all in large covered bowls.

A blue box marked JNF with a map of Israel engraved on it, waits on the counter. Customers put small change into the slot until it is finally filled, even before the end of the day.

An African child stands on shoeless tiptoes as he stretches over the counter. ‘Give me some bread.’ he begs. He’s dressed in shredded khaki shorts and an oversized colorful, checked shirt. His cracked and dry little hands reach out as the kindly assistant gives him two day - old buns. He runs out to sit with his friends on the sidewalk in the sun.

‘Who’s next please? Yes dahling, can I get you something?’ Her voice rises above the bustle of the deli, and out onto the sunlit street through the open door. ‘*Hamantaschen* for Purim, *perogen* for soup, *gefilte* fish for Shabbos, brown or white *taiglach* to have with lemon tea....’

New limousines parked outside the deli are noticeable against the backdrop of old shops and washing hanging out of the windows of flatlets above.

The fruit and vegetable shop further on has its own enticing atmosphere. Colors of fresh fruit and vegetables packed in thin tomato-box trays dazzle the eyes as customers walk in, some with their grass-woven shopping baskets. The choices of fruits are overwhelming, and sweet smells penetrate the senses, filling customers with a yen to reach out, to touch and taste each piece of produce.

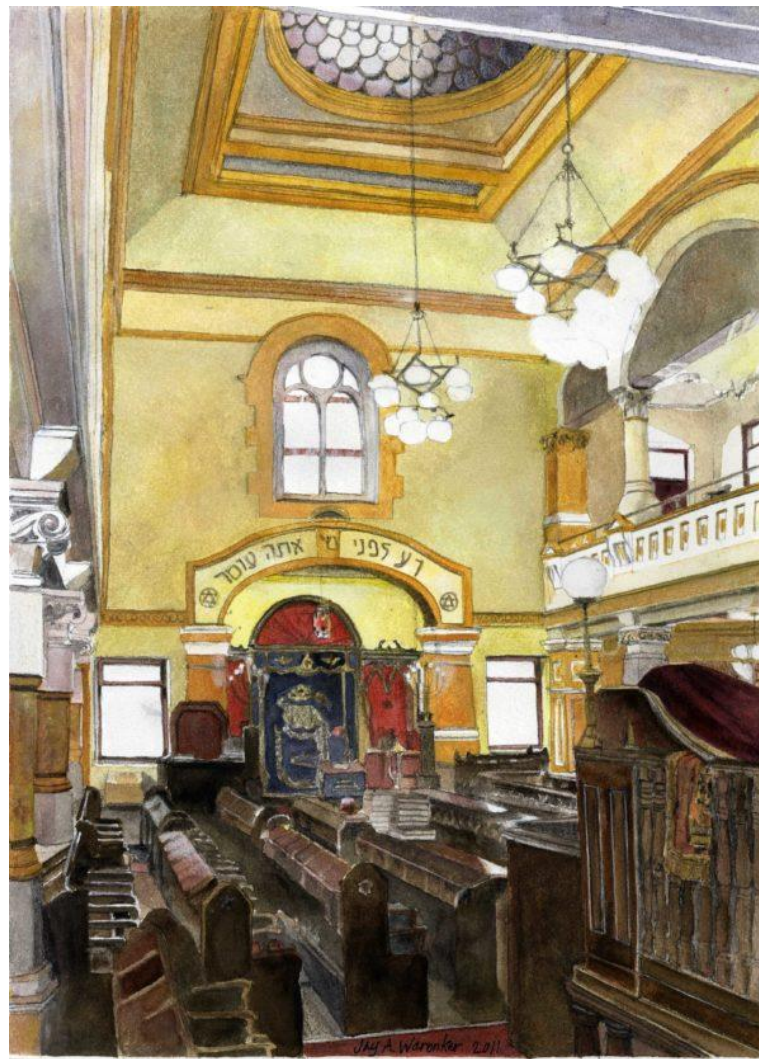
The market gardener is usually Portuguese. A heavy odour of cooked garlic pervades the area in which he moves. His nails and hands are stained from handling fresh sandy potatoes, pulling off the tops of beetroot and carrots, or from wrapping his sales in newspaper. His worn shoes are a muddy brown.

‘Yes missus, can I halp you?’ he asks a bejewelled lady perusing the produce. His accent too is heavy. In the early days of his business he realized that people bargain with him, so he ups his prices, waiting for a counteroffer. His black hair hangs on an over-worked brow as he looks at his customers with dark eyes. He repeats the same well-versed words to each customer: ‘I give it to you cost price. You buy two, I give you cheap.’ He confidently wraps the choice he has made for her. ‘You want mangoes?’ he points to the ageing yellow fruit. There are two types: the kidney-shaped, or the round, fleshy, juicy ones. When the lady agrees he throws in an extra one as a gesture of smart salesmanship.

‘Manuel,’ he yells in the direction of the backyard. ‘Come and halp with the box.’ A wiry teenager springs from the back of the shop. He picks up the now filled box and follows the woman carrying her basket to her shining new car. The veins on his arms bulge with weight as he places it into the boot of the car. He waits for a tip, then dodges vehicles on the busy road, and returns to his job.

Adding to the hum of Beit Street, small groups of pot-bellied Jewish men gather on street corners smoking pipes, reminiscing about ‘*der haym*’ in Europe where the tomatoes were redder, the potatoes fatter, the bread fresher, the goats gave sweeter milk, and the cheese richer. They look forward to meeting again at shul on a Friday night or Saturday morning.

The Lions Shul on Beit Street was built back in 1906. It has been said that the two lions that adorn the front, refer to the tribe of Judah, one of the twelve tribes described in the Torah. The walls of this shul hold stories of those Jewish immigrants from Europe who arrived in Doornfontein, started over, and built new lives for themselves and for their families. Religious books brought from Eastern Europe years ago, give special meaning to the prayers, songs, and words that continue to remind loyal congregants of their connections to life in this old suburb as they return from other parts of the city, often on Shabbat and on High Holidays.



Interior of the Doornfontein Hebrew Congregation synagogue (Jay Waronker, 2005)

Asher's Kosher Butchery, just one of the butcheries on Beit Street, invites shoppers to come in. The butcher is indeed a meaty looking individual with excess fat hanging over the belt of his wide-legged grey pants. His overpowering voice can be heard down the road before people even get to the squeaky wood-framed swing door. The roar of his voice above the sounds of the machines that saw the carcasses instils dread in his workers. A carpet of sawdust covers the cold cement floor. It absorbs any remaining dripping blood from animals fresh from the abattoir, slung over the plastic mackintoshes of workers who deliver prey to the

butcher. Sheep, lamb, and cow are heaved into a cold soulless walk-in ice chest at the back of the butchery. The sawdust is swept up each evening, then a fresh layer is poured onto the floor.

Beit Street continues to be an exploration of lands and cultures.

Next door to Asher's is Nicky's café. The handsome Greek and his wife Tina, own it. During the week their two children Georgina and Christophoulos run home from the local school close by to help their parents. As decreed by the Board of Health when customers buy bread, they must wrap the loaves of sandwich bread, home-made brown, or rye bread in rectangular tissue paper which lies in a pile beside the cash register. During an infrequent lull they unpack boxes, rearrange stocks, and read comics. Cigarettes, candy bars, gum, boxes of chocolates, matches, biscuits, and canned goods, overload the shelves behind the till. Newspapers are stacked in piles where people enter. *The Rand Daily Mail* sells out as it comes in. *The Evening Star* too sells out almost as it's put down on the cement floor. Large pickles, green and black olives fill trays in a closed counter. When its doors are opened for sales, rich smells of feta cheese escape into the store.

Nicky's outgoing manner encourages female customers to flirt with him. He teases and laughs, enjoying the flattery. His wife laughs with him as she busies herself. She is beautiful enough to contend with her husband's habits. Greek friends lounge on counters, heavy in conversation, oblivious of the traffic in the shop. Sounds



from two pin-ball machines at the back of the cafe compete with the ringing of the cash register. The popping of bottles being opened on the opener which hides inside the cold-drink refrigerator doorframe, are like steady rain drops on a corrugated iron roof. Greek music playing on the radio, muffles the noise of passing traffic. African workers from a building site down the road invade the café at lunch times. They each purchase half a loaf of bread, and a small carton of milk which they devour out in the sun, sitting on the curb in front of the café. On Saturday mornings children from the surrounding neighborhood constantly stream in and out for ice-cream, suckers, bubble gum, lucky packets, and sweets which Nicky slaps across the counter at a remarkable rate.

Doornfontein Hebrew Congregation
(Jay Waronker, 2012)

But as the years passed increasing changes heralded a different world, and a different multi-cultural South Africa. 1982 saw hypermarkets opening throughout the city. Shoppers adapted to busy parking lots, shopping carts to fill as they entered the store, aisles stocked with varieties of the same items, causing a different type of dilemma for those deciding what to buy, numerous check-out counters, workers in uniforms. This concept of 'bigger' foretold the world that was to come: busy freeways, challenging traffic, numerous high-rise buildings, crowded and sparkling shopping malls, all with relevant job opportunities fueled by the advances of technology. This was to become the new way of life.

And so, the businesses and special places on Beit Street are left to nestle cosily in our memories of 'life as it used to be' back then.

We are left to wonder "Is bigger better, or was smaller richer?"

FICTION

REALITY

Clark Zlotchew

Dr Clarke Zlotchew is Distinguished Teaching Professor at State University of New York. He is the author of seventeen books, including anthologies of short fiction, translations from the Spanish of short stories and poetry by Nobel Laureates and literary criticism of Spanish and Latin American authors. His short stories have appeared in both his Spanish and English versions in the U.S. and Latin America, as well as in Jewish Affairs (<http://www.clarkzlotchew.com>)

The slim twenty-eight-year old man had finished his day of teaching at the high school and was ambling along Main Street, on the way to his Liberty Street apartment. It was 3:45 on a typical spring afternoon in early May, and he had no reason to rush. The cloudless sky was clear blue, the air diaphanous. David Berg felt relaxed, contented, despite having just taught a lesson on World War II. *After all*, he reasoned, *that was then; this is now*. A chorus of cheerful bird chatter emanating from Barker Commons, the beautiful little park on the other side of the street, reminded David of Vivaldi's music. The scent of budding flowers gave way to the stronger aroma of pizza, beer, and grilled meat that wafted out of restaurant doorways and streamed through the air in a savory current. *Nothing*, he mused, *absolutely nothing could go wrong on a day like this*.

Thoughts of his girlfriend Tracy, who would soon join him, pasted a silly smile on his handsome face. More people passed by, now that he was in the small downtown area of Fredonia. Everyone, whether he knew them or not, returned his greeting or simply smiled and nodded. He passed the bank on the corner of Water Street, crossed to the other side and turned left, on his way to Darwin's Health Club. *Need to keep my muscles toned up*, he told himself. As he passed Charlie's Barber Shop, he waved to Randy, who glanced out the window and returned the greeting with the hand wielding the scissors. David combed his fingers through his dark brown hair, wondering if it might be time for a haircut.

It was great to be alive. Classes were going well, and his girlfriend Tracy had looks as well as brains. He lived in a well-ordered little town populated by friendly citizens. His students were lively and liked his wacky sense of humor. What more could he ask for? A voice called his name from the bank side of the street. Turning, he saw it was Brook, one of his best students. Seeing her reminded him that he needed to talk to her about scholarships. He turned and began to cross the street. For a split second, he was puzzled by the abrupt shift from a smile to a look of

horror on his student's face. She suddenly extended her arms full length toward him, the palms of her hand facing him. He froze in place, but a loud sound made him turn his head to the right to see a greyish blur hurtling toward him. Then he saw black.

###

Twenty-eight-year old David Berg was dead-tired and dying to have something, anything, to eat. More urgently, he was parched, and needed water. The young man was crushed in this cattle car among the others. David had lost track of time on this seemingly-endless journey, breathing the increasingly foul air issuing from the bucket in the corner that served as a latrine. Suddenly, the train lurched to a halt with a piercing screech of braked steel wheels on steel tracks that set his teeth on edge. No one fell, only because they were packed so tightly that there was no room to fall. The doors slid open with the squealing of rusty rails and the bang of the sliding door slamming against the frame. Finally, fresh air. But there was a faint, sickeningly sweet smell in the air that was completely unfamiliar to David. He shivered from the sudden drop in temperature. The slate-colored sky seemed a heavy lead weight pressing down on his shoulders. It glowered at him. The sounds of furious barking combined with voices bellowing in German assailed his ears.

He had been told he would be shipped east to a work camp. This was an outrageous abuse of power by the Nazi government, breaking up families, uprooting decent men and women from their ordinary lives, shoving them onto cattle cars like livestock. But he could put up with it for a year. He tried to convince himself that it wouldn't be so bad: working with his hands in fresh air could only benefit him. It would tone his muscles, maybe even grow more muscle. It would be an interesting experience and surely would last no more than a year. Maybe two. By then, the German people would be fed up with National Socialism and vote that government out of power. Then things would return to normal. But what about the older men here with him? Surely, they wouldn't be expected to perform physical labor. And where were his parents and sisters? What were they doing? They would probably be given desk jobs. But did the authorities really need these vicious dogs, the guns, the haste? David and all the others weren't hardened criminals. Then why?

###

David awoke to find himself in bed feeling as though sledge hammers were pounding his brain to mush. He scanned the room and realized he was in a hospital. One arm was in a sling, one leg in a cast was held by a pulley a foot above the sheets. Tracy had been seated but, noting his stirring, rose and stood by the bed, anxiety imprinted on her face. David saw a blurry double image of her. He blinked several times, and tried to focus, but his vision improved very little. Attempting to raise his arm and touch her, he found his forearm had a needle stuck in his vein, with a tube attached to a plastic pouch containing some sort of liquid.

“Tracy, honey,” he croaked, “what happened? Where am I?”

“Oh, David, sweetie, you’re in Brooks Hospital.”

He repeated, “What happened?”

“You got hit by a car yesterday. A drunk driver whipped around the corner from Canadaway Street. It...”

“Yesterday?! What day is this?”

“Friday, baby.” Anticipating his next question, she added, “And it’s five past two in the afternoon.”

“What?! But I was supposed to be teaching.” He tried to sit up again, but his head felt as though it would explode. He sank back to the pillow.

She placed her hand on his chest and shook her head slowly. “Are you joking, David? Teach? Don’t worry about it. The school has brought in a substitute. You just concentrate on getting well. Soon.” She paused, then, “David, you were muttering something in your sleep. It sounded something like ‘the dogs, the dogs.’ And other things I couldn’t make out.”

He thought. “Oh, yeah. I was having this weird dream. Really weird.”

“Well, I have to get back to the bakery now. You be a good boy, and just take it easy. Okay?” She smiled. “Dream about me.”

###

The uniformed guards were shoving the men forward through the arched gateway, hurrying them by poking their backs with batons. Other guards stood there holding submachine guns. An officer who held a Luger pistol at his side oversaw the proceedings. Dogs, barking ferociously, strained at their leashes. They kept lunging at the captives, their lips drawn back, displaying sharp teeth in slobbering mouths, no more than a foot away from the prisoners. David looked up at the arch just before passing through. It bore the slogan, *Arbeit macht Frei!* (Work makes [one] free!). He began to wonder when they would receive water and food. Surely, they didn’t expect them to work on empty stomachs. He told himself that once they settled in, they would be well fed so they would have the strength to do their jobs, whatever they might be.

###

David opened his eyes to see a nurse in white slacks and colorful smock checking the level of liquid in the plastic bags. She turned to him, smiled and said, “Oh, you’re awake now. Okay, Mr. Berg, I’m going to check your vital signs. But, tell me, how are we feeling today?”

After a moment, the patient remembered where he was. He paused briefly, and said, "Oh, I'm just dandy. Having a ball." His voice was gravelly, his tone sarcastic.

"No, Mr. Berg. Really now." Her tone was soothing.

"Sorry," he said. He sighed. "I'm not sure. The pain isn't as bad as it was last time I was awake. It feels like it's just under the surface, though. Know what I mean?"

She smiled. "Yes, of course. You're getting a drip of pain killers in addition to nourishment. You should feel as though you had a few martinis."

"I have to say, I wouldn't have thought I'd be glad to be back here again."

The nurse cocked her head in puzzlement. "Glad? *Back* here. Again?"

"Yeah. Not in that rotten dream. A really bad dream."

She smiled. "Well, those pain killers can produce all kinds of strange dreams." She added, "Now look. If you need help, just press this button, and somebody will be here very soon. Good night." She hesitated for a moment. "Pleasant dreams, now."

###

David was in a long line, at the head of which a German officer in black uniform and gleaming black boots stood, facing the line of prisoners. David noticed that the officer sent some men to the right and some to the left. To one side of the line, several feet back, a grey-uniformed army man was squatting, manning a machine gun. A second soldier was beside him to feed ammunition. David observed that healthy young men were sent to the right while the elderly and infirm were directed to the left. He figured those on the right would be given heavy manual labor but those on the left would be assigned less strenuous jobs.

A white-bearded old man had staggered to the head of the line, and now faced the officer. He wore a threadbare black coat and wide-brimmed black hat. The officer glanced at him and pointed to the left. The man just stood there, gawking at the officer. Or past the officer. Gazing into space. David thought the elderly prisoner seemed stunned or dull-witted. The officer shoved him toward the left, but the man moved one foot to the left simply to keep his balance, then simply stood there. The German yelled at him, "*Zum links, schweinhundt,*" and pointed to the left again. Still, the man just stood there, blank-faced. The officer, an air of insufferable boredom shrouding his face, rolled his icy grey eyes, sighed in exasperation, raised his hand, casually placed his Luger on the man's forehead, and fired. The old man dropped to the muddy ground like a bundle of dirty laundry. A tremor traveled through the men on line. *My God! The rumors must be true,* it suddenly dawned on David. He scanned his surroundings, hoping to detect a possible escape route.

###

David awoke with a start. He looked around and realized that, thank God, it was just a bad dream. Again! It disturbed him that every time he had this nightmare, it continued from where it had left off. It was a serial nightmare. That had never happened before. And it seemed so real. He was perspiring profusely. He did not want to go to sleep ever again, but, of course, that was totally unrealistic. *Okay, okay*, he told himself, *it's only a dream. Probably caused by the pain killers.*

A man who appeared to be in his fifties, dressed in a grey tweed sports jacket, pink shirt and blue necktie, strode over to David's bedside. He introduced himself to the patient as Dr. Blackburn, Head of Surgery. The smile on his ruddy face inspired confidence. He looked down at David and spoke in soothing tones.

"Mr. Berg, you've had a nasty accident, as, of course, you're now aware. I need to tell you this: There is a small blood clot within your cranium, and it's exerting pressure on your brain."

David, brow wrinkled in consternation, eyes wide, wordlessly stared at the surgeon. Noting no verbal response from the patient, Dr. Blackburn continued in gentle tones, "Well, you see, Mr. Berg, that clot must be removed, and..."

"With some blood-thinning medication?" David blurted out.

The surgeon looked at the floor for a moment, then continued, "We have been trying anti-coagulants for two days now." The doctor sighed. "I'm afraid it's just not working."

"Then, what?" Beads of perspiration appeared on David's forehead.

The smile Blackburn directed at his patient was not convincing. He explained, "We can't take the chance of leaving that clot in place any longer, Mr. Berg. We need you to sign papers giving us permission to operate."

David remained speechless, staring at the surgeon.

Blackburn noticed the silence, and continued, "Your chances are very good for a swift recovery." Blackburn smiled in a failed attempt to encourage the patient.

Finally finding his tongue, David asked, "Chances? Only *chances*?" His pallor increased. "What, exactly, are the odds?"

"Mr. Berg, it's very difficult to answer that question, because no two cases of this type are identical. So, no two procedures can be identical, either. The precise size and location of the clot varies from patient to patient. And this could make a difference." Detecting the creased forehead, the narrowed eyes and the rapid breathing of his patient, the surgeon added, "Mr. Berg, whatever the odds may be, we need to perform this surgery and remove that clot. If we do not remove it, and very soon, your odds of survival will not be good, I'm afraid."

###

Once he saw that elderly man shot right before his eyes, David realized that the rumors he had heard were not the fevered imaginings of paranoid minds: this was *not* primarily a work camp, though no doubt the stronger men would be given work. And would work until they dropped. *Until I drop*. In that one moment of clarity, he knew they would all sicken from extremely low caloric intake combined with heavy labor. This in all kinds of weather, wearing nothing but striped cotton pajamas. He could not help thinking that ultimately, they were all scheduled to die, one way or the other. He now believed, against his will, that the peculiar smell in the air of Auschwitz-Birkenau was that of burning flesh. Human flesh. This camp was the antechamber of the Angel of Death. The odor that hung in the air was Satan's foul breath. He furtively scanned his surroundings. *There must be some way to escape and join the partisans in the forests. I'd rather die fighting, a gun in my hands. Not like a rat in a trap.*

###

David awoke soaked in sweat in his hospital bed. He couldn't get that cursed dream out of his mind. It seemed so real when he was dreaming it. But, thank God, he was back in the real world, he told himself. Although the real world wasn't that promising either. He had signed the permission for his surgery. The pain-killing drip calmed him enough to make the preparatory head-shaving bearable. *I'd rather be sitting in the barber's chair, at Charlie's, getting a nice haircut from Randy*. Unexpectedly, he chuckled at the absurdity of his thought. The effect of the drip actually was something like the nurse's description: Three martinis on an empty stomach. Incongruously, he found himself smiling at times. The three-martini effect was pleasant. In fact, it made the hospital room, the nurses, the doctor, seem somewhat unreal, insubstantial. But David knew that when he fell asleep he would find himself in that damned nightmare again. He tried to resist sleep, but of course, that was impossible. The powder-green walls of his room seemed to fade in color, to become less distinct, wavering, receding, the color turning cloud-grey. The nurse's voice sounded like a distant echo...

###

David had been breaking stones with a sledge hammer for three weeks, with only the striped cotton pyjamas to fight off the cold and wind that licked at his perspiration. He was losing weight rapidly, becoming skeletal. The diet of watery cabbage soup and a thin slice of stale bread twice a day were not designed to promote health. The sledge hammer was getting harder and harder to heft. His energy level had been diminishing each day.

A soldier who held a clipboard approached him. "Number 43028?" demanded the guard. The prisoner looked at the blue tattoo on his forearm and nodded. The guard ordered, "Drop the hammer. Come!"

David felt like lifting the hammer and bringing it down on the soldier's head, but lacked the strength to do it fast enough. Instead, he did as commanded. After all, any break from this brutal labor had to be a good thing. He plodded along after the guard, occasionally stumbling, until they came to a red brick structure the interior of which he had never seen. The guard opened the door and shoved the prisoner into the building. They proceeded down a short hallway to a door with a small plaque affixed to it that read: *Herr Doctor Josef Mengele*.

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David's head, which had been shaved in preparation for brain surgery, glowed under the overhead lights. Two burly male nurses lifted the patient, who was still groggy from the intravenous sedation, and shifted him to the gurney. It struck David that one of them resembled the guard in his dream. They wheeled him to an elevator. When the doors opened, they pushed the gurney through. The injection of tranquilizer was doing its task very well. The patient felt relaxed, at ease. Yet, there still remained a trace, a slender threadlike vein of terror submerged deep under the calm surface, tapping at the door of his lulled consciousness.

They exited the elevator and proceeded down a long hallway. David tried to count the overhead lights as he floated down the corridor, but his clouded mind lost track after the third. He contented himself by simply enjoying the lights passing overhead. The injection weakened the substantiality of his surroundings so that the overhead lights merged into one bright sun. The walls seemed to lose their solidity, their substance. They were fading. The drugs suffused his surroundings with an aura of unreality.

The gurney pushed open the doors of a brightly-lighted chamber. Looming over him were men and women who wore mint-green smocks and caps, and white surgical masks. The only uncovered part of them the patient could distinguish were their eyes. A delicate hand in a rubber glove passed a gleaming blade to an equally gloved but sturdier hand. David felt a needle pierce his forearm. He plunged into blackness.

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David lay on a cold metal table. His arms and legs were firmly strapped to the table. A merciless bright overhead light made his eyes water. A man in a tweed jacket, white shirt and red tie leaned over the "patient." The pleasant face bore a moustache –very un-militaristic-- which lent an air of respectability, even benevolence. This person had the appearance of a kindly family physician. In fact, he resembled David's primary care-giver in the real world. No uniform. A break from the ubiquitous grey army uniforms, the sinister black garb of the S.S., and the stinking striped pajamas he and his fellow inmates wore. This reminder of normal civilian life calmed the prisoner for the briefest moment.

“Good morning. Allow me to introduce myself: I am Doctor Mengele.” The man spoke as he pulled on the rubber gloves, making them snap. “You are here to aid in the noble cause of furthering scientific research. We need to constantly experiment with various kinds of medical conditions that might strike our valiant troops under battle conditions.”

David couldn't believe his ears. They were going to utilize human beings the way scientists use laboratory rats? No, no, not possible. *I want to wake up! Now!* Yet he knew he was not imagining this. He very distinctly heard what the doctor said. He was not hallucinating this room, this very solid metal table, cold at first, on which he was lying. The straps holding him to the table were cutting into his wrists and ankles. This could not be a delirium. This was reality. Brutal, horrific reality.

Two men in white coats appeared beside the doctor. One of them handed Mengele a white coat. David saw the blood stains on that coat, reminding him of a butcher shop. He shuddered. Mengele smiled and, in a very warm voice, said, “By *volunteering* for this experiment...” The doctor chuckled. “By volunteering for this experiment, you see, you are performing a noble service for the Fatherland.”

Mengele grasped the stainless-steel instrument handed to him by one of the aides. The overhead light glinted on the blade. He said, “Oh, and I'm afraid we don't have any anaesthesia for these experiments, sorry to say.” He smiled. “We have orders to conserve anaesthetics for use on our brave, wounded soldiers. I'm sure you understand.”

The surgeon perceived the patient's raised eyebrows, the rapid movement of his head from side to side, as though he couldn't believe this was really happening. Or as though he was attempting to reject this reality. Mengele looked down at him and repeated what he had said to other experimental subjects, “The more we do to you, the less you seem to believe we are doing it.” The surgeon shrugged his shoulders, and said, “Very well, let's get on with this.”

David closed his eyes as though to cut off the overwhelming reality of the moment. He fervently wished he could escape to the dream world now, that fantastic world of kindly doctors and nurses. Civilized medical people who used anaesthesia in surgery. Who didn't use human beings for experiments. And that beautiful, loving, young woman named Tracy, who lived in that picture-book little American town where people smiled and greeted him on the street, where his students were fond of him. Where he lived on a street named *Liberty*, and the scent of flowers combined on Main Street with the aromas of pizza, beer and grilled beef. Yes, grilled beef. Not burning human flesh.

