

**THE TRAGIC END OF THE COMMUNITIES OF RHODES AND COS,
BROUGHT ABOUT BY HITLERIAN PLUNDER AND MADNESS.**

ABRAHAM GALANTE (1863-1961)

*Former Professor at the University of Istanbul, Executive member of the Academy of Sciences of Portugal
and former Deputy of the National Grand Assembly, (Parliament,) of Turkey, 1948.*

Translated from the original French into English by his great- nephew, Joseph Franco.

A SHORT BIOGRAPHY

Abraham Galante was born on January 4, 1873, in Bodrum, Turkey into a family of 11 children, 9 sisters and 2 brothers. He was one of the truly great Turkish Jewish personalities of modern times. He was a brilliant intellectual, a journalist, a historian, a linguist, and a social activist.

He was also a fervent Turkish nationalist who served as a deputy in the Grand National Assembly of Turkey. As a professor at the University of Istanbul, his influence spread among the young Turks of both religions. His father, Moshe, also from Bodrum was a civil servant in the service of the Ottoman government, while his mother, Djoya, belonged to the Kodron family, who lived in Rhodes. As Rhodes was at the time, a part of the Ottoman Empire, he maintained close ties with the island and 4 of his sisters married and lived there.

He lost 3 of them, 4 brothers-in-law, and several nephews and nieces during the Holocaust when they were deported to the camps, He himself never married and died in Istanbul on 9 August 1961, aged 88 years.

PREFACE

After the signing of the armistice in 1943, between the United States and England on the one side, and Italy on the other, Germany felt obliged to take a position in the Dodecanese Islands which at the time, belonged to Italy, and this hereunder, in fact is what took place.

The Jews of Rhodes, under the Italian administration had been suffering under Mussolini's racial laws which little by little applied more pressure to the population, but overall, were able to live their lives reasonably free of molestation. The German commander appointed to oversee the defence of the islands did not attach much importance to the Jewish inhabitants so generally, they were left to eke out a living as much as possible.

Within the population, there were some who wished to ingratiate themselves with the occupiers. During the second half of July 1944, members of the Gestapo landed in Rhodes with orders to impose the Hitlerian plunder, deportation, and extermination.

RHODES UNDER GERMAN OCCUPATION

While the German army, together with their Italian allies were based on Rhodes, the Jewish population, despite the Racial Laws, were generally left to their own devices, and there were hardly any reports of mistreatment or molestation. However, after the surrender of the Italian forces after a campaign of 4 days, the population now found itself increasingly under the jackboots of the German occupiers. Those few Italian officers and officials who objected were simply deported to Germany as prisoners of war or allocated menial tasks such as domestics.

The English air bombardment continued unabated and was focused mainly on the fortress, which was close to the Juderia, and this forced many to move to nearby villages. All told, 22 Jews were killed during the air attacks.

On July 2, 1944, the military commander issued an order limiting the times of visits outside the town, and permission was only given to visit the villages of Cremasso, Trianda, and Villanova.

This new situation was to be the forerunner of the storm that was to break. They had a stranglehold on the Jewish, Greek, Turkish, and even Italian radios and could disseminate any propaganda at will.

After the deportation these as well as pianos and bicycles were sent back to Germany. During the last days when communications with Germany were interrupted, they even burned in plain sight any broken bicycles, their stores of food and preserves so as not to let them fall into the hands of the British forces. A young Greek girl who simply tried to pick up a tin of jam was shot on the spot.

HOW THE ORDER OF THE DEPORTATION WAS CONVEYED

Mr. Bension R. Menasche, the eminent bank director, former honorary Consul-General, and past president of the community of Rhodes, wrote to me regarding what then followed concerning the decision taken by the German authorities relating to the deportation.

" It was Wednesday 19 July 1944 when a senior German officer came to my home at 3pm, thinking I was still the president of the community. After making him aware that I was no longer in office, I suggested if he was willing, I could accompany him to the home of Mr. Jacob Chalem Franco, the incumbent president. On arrival, he informed us that an order from the Supreme Command had arrived ordering all Jews to present themselves the next day at the air base at Tchemenlik. Our worries, until now were very serious, but it was on that day that the fate of the population was sealed, we could only imagine what lay in store for us. Our co- religionists in the city and in the neighboring villages were completely unaware of what was happening or taken place."

All the Jews, except for some unwell or crippled, duly complied with this order. The Germans appointed a small group comprising a senior military officer, his deputy, and an interpreter. Their task was to control and to take a roll call of the group after which all documents including their identity cards were taken and then they were locked up in the basement, overseen and guarded by the soldiers of the Gestapo. This was how it was that Rosenberg's Gestapo disciples ordered the President, Jacob Chalem Franco, who himself had been detained, to communicate to Jewish families the order to return to the same place within twelve hours with their luggage. To bring provisions for ten days and to produce their fortunes in gold, in jewels, and cash, because the Jews were to be transported temporarily to a small island close to Rhodes. The

German command made available to Mr. Franco, a car, a Gestapo officer, and an interpreter named Costa. Franco was responsible for communicating the German decision to the Jews, i.e., to urge them to present themselves as soon as possible within a maximum of six hours and to let them know that in case of delay, the husband of the family who did not answer the call would be shot immediately.

In these circumstances the interpreter Costa, who was a Greek from Salonica, spoke Ladino very well. He used all his considerable art of intrigue, sometimes through men and sometimes through threats, all with the sole aim of bringing in as many valuables as possible for the benefit of the Germans and for his own pocket. In the face of these threats, each did his best to escape Calvary. Jews of Turkish nationality and women of Turkish nationality who were married to Jews of Italian nationality but who had retained their nationality were thus exempted from deportation. This was due to the energetic intervention of the Turkish Consul, Selaheddin Ulkumem. He was instrumental in saving a number of Turkish/Jewish nationals from certain death, and he is commemorated as a righteous person at Yad Vashem.

On the same day, July 20, 1944, a third ordinance was published, informing the public to refrain from hiding or helping Jews. Anyone who dared to do so was to be immediately shot.

On July 21, 1944, the German High Command ordered the president of the community to remove the jewels, and the money in cash which each Jew possessed. This, said the commission, was the sole aim of concentrating the riches in the hands of a group made up of just 4 Jews, with the effect of creating a fund to purchase and distribute essentials for the benefit of the imprisoned 1700 Jews. Anyone who failed to pay the commission what he owed would be shot immediately. This order was of course executed with haste.

Costa then spoke to Franco and received from his hands all the wealth that the Jews of Rhodes possessed.

July 22 and 23. The Jews remained locked up without being able to go out and without allowing them any communication.

July 22. A fourth ordinance was issued announcing the sequestration of all property, movable and immovable belonging to the Jews.

July 24. The embarkation of those Jews who had lived on the islands under Turkish domination for 390 peaceful and happy years began. Nobody could have imagined that this was to have been the beginning of a journey that would ultimately lead to the gas chambers and the destruction of one of the most vibrant and oldest of Sephardi communities.

They were crammed into the holds of three small boats, each weighing 300 tons, heading for the port of Piraeus.

On that same day, the German command ordered the Italian civil government to deposit in its stores and depots, all the personal effects, furniture, everything that belonged to the Jews in its stores and put them on sale.

The Italian government bowed to this order and formed various committees whose work lasted two months. Once their tasks had been completed, the Germans then took the keys of the depots in which everything had been deposited and all that had belonged to the Jews was transported to Germany.

Note. I was given this information by Mr. Moise Elie Soriano who was saved from deportation thanks to his wife's Turkish nationality.

IN ATHENS

After having to jettison some corpses into the sea, suffocated as they were by the lack of air and the dirtiness of the holds of the boats which in effect were simply coal carriers, the deportees disembarked in Piraeus on July 31, in a deplorable state, and were herded like animals into a concentration camp called Haydari, near Athens. Once inside, they were very cruelly received by the Gestapo agents and the women and children were immediately separated from their menfolk. Scarcely had they arrived when a new and more meticulous search took place, during which a few small objects which had remained hidden were removed after all the women had been made to strip naked. The search was carried out with great brutality which included the flogging with whips on the naked bodies. On August 3, around noon, the order to continue the trip was given. The families were able to be together in the camp yard, where all shoes were taken off from almost all the men who were manhandled by the guards with whips.

Once this operation was completed, the deportees were then transported by trucks to the Ruf railway station and piled into the wagons. Towards evening the convoy left towards the north, probably on route to Zitowice in Czechoslovakia. After this the news becomes increasingly more vague.

HOW AND WHEN WE HEARD OF THE DEPORTATION

The war was in full swing. One could never imagine that such a fate would befall the Jews of Rhodes who had also suffered from the consequences of the Italian racial regime. The Turkish ports of Anatolia were closed because of the war and even communications between the German garrison of Rhodes and Germany had to be done via Piraeus.

Three months after the deportation of the Jews from these islands, a Greek from Rhodes, who was able to escape, met in a city of Anatolia, Hiskia Franco, the former president of the Jewish community of this island who had escaped the clutches of the Gestapo because he had been living on the island of Cos. This Greek told him that his (Hiskia's) son was among those who had been deported. Many different stories were being told and commented on in various ways, but it was believed that among the young people deported was his son. Fortunately, the young man, Albert, was removed from the train, at the very last moment, thanks to the effort of the Turkish Consul General who could prove to the Gestapo that his, (Albert's) wife, was indeed a Turkish national.

The Royal Navy and Royal Air Force continued to bombard Rhodes. One bomb stuck the Turkish Consulate causing many serious injuries. Unfortunately, one of the casualties was the wife of the Turkish Consul General who was heavily pregnant at the time. Sadly, she succumbed to her injuries but still was able to be delivered of a son. The Consul, without any communication between Rhodes and Turkey, had to plead with the Germans so that the wounded could be sent to Athens via Piraeus for treatment. The author, I, who at the time was an elected Deputy representing the Province of Nidge, in the Grand National Assembly, the Parliament, made an appointment to speak to the Minister of Foreign Affairs in order to inquire about the safety of the Consul, his staff, and those injured in the bombing. It was put to him that the minister should have endeavored to improve on this blatant lack of information.

WHY HAS THE DEPORTATION NEVER BEEN UNDERSTOOD OR EXPLAINED?

All enquires addressed to the Red Crescent and to the Red Cross were unsuccessful, but from time to time, we heard only echoes relating to the places where the deportees were concentrated, but there was nothing positive.

THE POSITION OF THE JEWS STILL LIVING IN RHODES AFTER THE DEPORTATION

Madame Victoria Soriano, who was a Turkish citizen and the wife of Moise Elie Soriano, described thus in these words, the situation pertaining to those left behind.

"After the deportation on July 24, 1944, we, the 42 souls who had been saved thanks to the intervention of the Turkish Consul, lived in constant fear and anguish. Every morning at 8 am, we had to assemble in front of the Gestapo, who always seemed to keep us there for no obvious reason. These were nightmare times for us because of the constant fear of another deportation and of the unceasing bombardment by the British. On top of this, the Germans did not allow us to go to their shelters

"The lack of food and long vigils due to the bombings considerably weakened our morale enormously. Towards August 8 we received the order to be ready for us to go to Athens where our domestic and marital situations, in particular, would be reassessed, and those whose nationality was unclear would henceforth be deported.

"Mere words cannot describe our despair because we were all too aware of the tragic fate that would befall us, having learned of it from several letters from our brothers. The Italian sailors of the small boats which transported them were again given the task of moving us. Faced with this situation, we did not lose our cool and we resolved above all to save our children, either by having them adopted by Christian families or by entrusting them to the nuns. A week thus passed in the continual expectation of being deported after which we were informed that all our cases had now been examined and that the legitimate Turkish subjects would be allowed to remain, while about twenty of us would have to leave the next morning.

"We, the Turkish citizens had been saved, but our brothers had to leave us. Misfortune had so attached us to each other that the news of our release did not give any of us any joy or satisfaction. Among those destined to be deported the next day were my 74-year-old stepfather and 65-year-old stepmother. What a sad fate this was for two old people and their children to fall into the cursed hands of the Hitlerians."

"Without wasting any time and trying everything possible, we called the head surgeon of the Italian hospital who was a kind-hearted man and who understood our situation. He came to our aid by having my father-in-law operated upon on the pretext of a crippled hernia, and in this way, we saved him from Hitler's clutches."

"A commission from the International Red Cross was scheduled to visit Rhodes and the Germans decided to keep us away from them and get rid of us. On January 10, 1945, they gave us the order to all the detainees to leave for Anatolia, and after 3 days of detention in the concentration camp, we were embarked on small boats, barely five meters long and overloaded with men and luggage. Several of them were shipwrecked but we were saved, thanks to the presence of British ships who were patrolling in the vicinity of the islands."

INFORMATION ON THE JEWS OF RHODES IMPRISONED IN DACHAU

Special Edition 25 dated 2 June 1945:

Before leaving for France, after having been freed from the camp, 4 young Jewish girls from Rhodes, Laura Hasson, Sara Benatar, Anna Cohen, and Giovanna Hasson appeared before the president of the Italian Committee and gave the following testimony.

On July 20, 1944, at 7.am, the Germans ordered all the Jews of Rhodes to appear in front of the senior officers. We believed that the purpose of this call was to be given some work, which was why we had been arrested in the first place. At the same time, the women were ordered to remain present until ten o'clock in the evening of the same day. We were warned that if we did not adhere to this order, those persons would be shot.

An officer of Hebraic origin, Lieutenant Costa, advised them to take all the valuables such as the gold rings and bracelets they possessed, in order to be able, if necessary, to sell them and use the proceeds for their maintenance while everything, even the smallest things were being sequestered. After this, all the men and women were locked up in the buildings of the Air Commandant, where we remained for 3 days and nights without receiving any food or water.

When we were on our way to the harbour to embark, we were forbidden to raise our heads and look around, but on the contrary, our heads had to look down to the earth. Anyone who dared to raise their head were threatened with death. We boarded these small boats, that were usually only designed to transport coal and were forced down into the holds where it was so difficult to breathe any fresh air. Some women, received permission to sleep on deck, which, despite the incessant rain, was infinitely better than staying in those suffocating holds.

The journey from Rhodes to Piraeus lasted 10 days and for the first 3 days we were not given any food or water. When we arrived at Leros, the German commander provided us with something that tasted like the wood bark of trees to eat. From here, we were taken to Haydari, the concentration camp, where the men were separated from the women. The latter were completely and brutally undressed, and searches were conducted by the soldiers of the SS who looked for any hidden gold or hidden jewels. At the slightest sign of any modesty, we were slapped and castigated. The men were kept all day outside in the middle of July, under a blazing and merciless sun, and were then locked up in a barracks, some parts of which lacked water. The Germans refused all the many pleas to supply drinking water, and this resulted in five men dying of thirst. While we were still assembled in the yard and screaming for water, the SS finally said we could get some from a nearby fountain. Immediately, some of us began to run towards it, but hardly had we got there when the SS started beating us and pushed us back. This they did for fun and repeated it several times in the same day, regardless of sex or age.

In Haydari, we became objects of simple and criminal entertainment, such as the time that benzine was poured over Laura Hasson's father's head. the gasoline went into his eyes causing extreme irritation and pain for several days.

Having disembarked at Piraeus, one of the worst things to happen to us was the forcible removal of our shoes and making us walk everywhere barefoot. We continued to be castigated and were accused of being lazy and rebellious. Not even the women and children were spared from these insults.

Approximately, 1700 Jews, including those who were ill, and invalids, has been deported from Rhodes. During the voyage, a dozen people died, some in the railway wagons, some on the boats, and some another perished on the way from Piraeus to the Haydari concentration camp. Many of these deaths were because of beatings and assaults; a young mother and her child were among these victims.

Laura Hasson tells of an incident that happened after the deportees were locked in those cells. She asked one of the SS soldiers if he would allow her to take something to eat for her father. The soldier replied that it would be possible but before that she had to go to bed with him. He repeated the condition on two other occasions.

After leaving Haydari, we were sent to Athens where we remained for 3 days, thankfully looked after by the Red Cross International, and then were informed we would shortly be transported to Auschwitz. We were put into railway wagons, formerly only used to transport cattle and 70 of us of both sexes were crammed into each wagon. We found in there, two barrels of water and some provisions that had been brought in by the Red Cross International.

During the trip, which took 15 days, we were allowed to exit the wagons only three or four times, which clearly was not enough time to stretch our legs.

One can only imagine that cramped as we were, we had no privacy and had to relieve ourselves in full view of everyone and whatever effluent we could accumulate in the empty tin cans, we had to jettison through the small narrow window of the cattle wagon.

After we had arrived in Auschwitz, the doctors of the SS began their process of selection by categorizing those assembled in front of them. First, they moved all the young people, who they believed would be able to work to one side, then they put the old and children, and the women with children to the other side. This second group was then taken to another place and were successively ill-treated. In this way did many children die, who did not want to abandon their parents, also mothers who did not want to be separated from their children, and husbands who did not want to abandon their wives with infants.

Laura Hasson remembers that when she was holding her little nephew in her arms at the station, a Greek from Salonica told her to " give this child to another woman but be careful that this person is an older woman." Laura Hasson did not understand what she meant, but In Auschwitz, she gave the child to Laura's mother-in-law, a young woman of 20 years old.

Those of us women who had been detained and were destined for work were taken to another room, and, in the presence of the men, were completely shaved by female barbers. (In this context, shaving here means shaving all the hair on the body.) From here, we were taken to another room, disinfected with a sack that had been soaked in petrol which was very unpleasant, and then allowed to have a very short shower, without so much as a hand towel to dry the body. When this was finished, we each were given a torn jacket or tunic, without any consideration if it would fit the body of the person to whom it was thrown. If we so much as asked if we could exchange these jackets amongst ourselves, we were immediately beaten by those Polish bohemians. This one jacket was to serve as our shirt, handkerchief, and hand towel. (Nothing was allocated for the needs of women in terms of cleanliness and hygiene.) We left the disinfection rooms at four in the morning having been given wooden clogs and had to run to the camp, which was four kilometers away. The barracks were overcrowded with ladies. There were only a few bunks, mostly just planks and 12 of us had to sleep in a space of less than two meters.

Our stay in Auschwitz lasted approximately two and a half months and every morning, we had to be on parade for several hours, kneeling on the ground, with our arms raised upwards. This always took place in the middle of the street of the camp. The barracks staff will always remain unforgettable because of their ferocious cruelty, particularly one of them, a Polish Jewess, Magda whom we nicknamed "the Savage." She seemed to derive great pleasure in using a whip to beat us on the head, the face, and the fingers.

In Auschwitz, a Jewish prisoner told us, " You, the young, will suffer a great deal, but the old people will not suffer." Another, A Jew from Rome warned us, "Never tell anybody you are sick, not even if you have a fever of 40 degrees." We now came to understand their meaning.

The work we were given was to move tiles, weighing 15 kilograms between 1 and 2 kms. It wouldn't have been quite so arduous if it wasn't for the extreme cold and the fact the tiles were very wet and difficult to grasp. Quite often, we also had to move barrels and do other such menial work.

It was forbidden to have any contact with those in the other barracks and we were also forbidden to help and console each other in any way. A young Hungarian lady was knocked senseless when she was found out talking with her own mother who was in a neighboring barrack.

This is the menu and variety of the food we were given.

In the morning, we were supplied with two buckets of watered-down coffee, that had to be distributed among 800 people. There was not enough to go around and unfortunately it resulted in some of us starting the day with nothing at all. At lunch time, there was always a type of roll call for those who be distributing the soup. The problem was that the ration would arrive at the most disproportionate hours of between 9:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m., so we never knew when the soup was available. No one had a spoon and we all had to drink it from the same cup. Anyone who dared to argue only invited the brutal intervention of the camp personnel. The soup was so disgusting that for the first few days, despite the hunger, no one drank it.

Those women who worked in the kitchen reported that a female SS doctor was adding some chemical into the boiler which gave the soup a tart flavour and caused a strong reaction in the mouth and then in the stomach and bowels.

This also led to itching on the belly, swelling, and red spots all over.

The woman SS doctor would visit us in the barracks every 2 days, and in full view of everyone, we were made to raise our garments in the presence of all, so she could check for any traces of swelling or some other wetness, because that would mean admission into the infirmary. We all experienced the same manifestations as described but not simultaneously. As a result of the diet and the chemicals added thereto, there was an immediate cessation of monthly menstruation in all of us. Even after ten months of treatment by the camp doctors had gone by, only two experienced the return of menstruation, the rest of us, not even once.

We believe that the sterilization attempts the doctors of the SS made on a trial basis had not succeeded, luckily because the time stayed in Auschwitz was only two and a half months. We also decided to try and eat as little of the vile soup as possible, preferring to eat the few raw potatoes which we managed to remove from the ploughs that were used to harvest them. When they were questioned, all the women of

various nationalities, (German, Hungarian, Polish, Russian,) all affirmed that they had eaten and seen others eating raw potato peels that were unwashed.

The most common ailments in the camp were dysentery and diarrhea in a very severe and fatally thick form. Almost all of us also suffered with herpes in our mouths which caused our tongues to crack and fester, thus making it almost impossible to eat. As a result, several women died because they could no longer swallow, their throats being full of herpes. All the women agreed that it was probably caused by the chemicals that were being added to the soup, because in other concentration camps, although the food was bad, this was not repeated and no further experiments were made.

During the period of imprisonment our hair was shaved only once, unless lice were found which then required another shaving and disinfection.

Prior to leaving Poland for Germany, we were given another change of clothing which was not allowed to be swapped or exchanged.

We left Poland, and were taken to Germany, to Kaufering, Camp 2, where we spent the six weeks clearing the snow in the camp itself, pushing the army tanks, doing maids work in the SS rooms, and cleaning the latrines. To do this work, we had to walk 8 km to get there, and 8 km to get back. We rose at 4 a.m. and returned at 6 p.m.

Camp 2 was hell. There was no fixed time for "Brot Zeit" (a fixed time to eat.) The barracks were horrible, without any beds. We slept on a very long floor, on one level, covered with a little straw. the attic was so low that you could not even sit down and the roof did not leave more than 10 cm of free space for your feet. These were not barracks, they were just very dirty, awful kennels.

We women, managed to keep ourselves reasonably clean and with less lice, because we managed to obtain soap in exchange for the bread which we gave to the men. They were dirtier and full of lice than us. The roll call was always made in the open air. Not all were entitled to the midday soup and it was especially the women in charge of the hardest work, who were deprived of this soup. Most of us interns had neither shoes nor capes to keep out the rain and cold and we worked wrapped in rags. Those who did not work were entitled to only one soup per day. Those who were in the work group were more fortunate and had one serving at noon and another in the evening, together with a slice of bread with a bit of margarine or salami or something else.

From Camp 2, we were sent to Camp 8, but to get there we had to walk 20 km. On arrival, we went for two days without eating because this camp was completely empty. We had no shelter and slept on straw bales. The cloakrooms and the food depot were completely empty. From day 3, however, we were given half a litre of soup, but we were not given any work. We stayed at Camp 8 only for 15 days.

Dr. Blanca, the SS doctor who oversaw the surveillance in the camps and who followed the women on their pilgrimage, conducted her examinations in the open air. Mostly, we were barefoot, without a hood, standing in the snow, and with the temperature several degrees below zero. These examinations were done to see if we were still strong enough and those who failed were transferred to the sick bay. This was the case with those who were already ill or extremely debilitated.

From here, we were then sent to Camp 7 where we remained for 4 months. It was not bad because in the first days, we were considered sick and then because the camp was subject to quarantine because of

typhus petechial, we were spared the forced labour. During this time of our internment, we received a litre of soup every day.

After our stay there, we were transferred to Camp 11, a terrible camp. We had to wake up at 4 am to get rid of the debris from the small town of Oberigling that was over 18km away. In the morning we were normally given 1/8 bread, or 1/5 if it was mouldy, together with salami or margarine or something else. At noon, NOTHING, and the work was extremely hard, especially for the small forces of the almost exhausted ladies. In the evening, on our return, we were served soup. This famine camp was the most terrible of all, but luckily for us we only stayed 10 days, because of the build-up of American troops.

The camp was cleared and burned so that the Americans would not witness the horrors of these barracks. Some ladies were taken to Camp 1 whether they were sick or not and other women were taken on foot elsewhere. All traces of them were lost.

We stayed in Camp 1 for only 3 days, and then we continued the journey in uncovered wagons, normally used to transport animals and goods headed for Dachau. It rained all night. At one point the SS abandoned the train, fearing the Americans were fast approaching, and our train thus remained abandoned and closed, and shunted next to another train carrying goods and ammunition. During this trip, the convoy was shot at and bombarded several times by the Air Force planes. In some of the wagons male prisoners had been locked up. 5 women died because of the air attacks and several others were injured. Among the men, the number of the deaths was very high. Although it was freezing and we were shivering during this stop, we were unable to get out of the wagons because the doors had been locked, but we were able to force them open. The men called out to warn us that the train which flanked us had been set on fire by the SS, so as not to let the cargo fall into the hands of the enemy.

Terrorized, we hurriedly threw ourselves from the train and began to flee through the countryside, in the night, towards the woods. While we were running, it was the sound of the explosion of the train and the flames jumping into the sky that kept us together.

Before us we could see the lights of Landsberg, in flames. In order not to fall back into the hands of the Germans, a group of ladies walked towards the cannonade, reckoning, that the front must not be too far away, if the sounds of the explosions were anything to go by. But while they were running, German soldiers, equipped with machine guns, started to fire on them, forcing them to retreat towards the railroad. There, they saw that the railroad tracks were strewn with corpses, especially of men, many who had died because of the bombardment. Some, because of their debilitated state, could not abandon the wagons or move away to safety, and were thus killed in the burning wagons when the train exploded and burned. Some who got off the train, but were extremely weak, remained dying on the roads and were destined to be crushed by the convoy, which had resumed its march. Others fell from the wagons and could not get up and again. The Germans pushed them all back into the wagons with force. Nevertheless, many of the able-bodied hid under the trees or in the undergrowth. When all the prisoners had been returned to the train, it unexpectedly left, crushing all those who were already dying on the tracks. Several of the weakest, who were unable to stand or hang onto a support, simply fell from the moving wagons. The convoy arrived in Dachau on April 28, and on the 29th, the camp was liberated by the American troops.

The torture, bestiality and hardships suffered by these extremely few and perhaps unique survivors of the group of Jews from Rhodes (who had been deported to Germany) was now ended. The recording secretary is Giovanni Melodia.

The original document that was given to the Italian Committee, bears the signatures of Laura Hasson, Sara Benatar, Anna Cohen, and Giovanna Hasson.

END OF THE REPORT

* This report, made and signed by the four ladies who escaped death and returned home, was originally written in Italian, and bears the number N25. We have therefore translated it into English.

WE REPRODUCE HEREUNDER, IN CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER, THE TEXTS, OR PARTS THEREOF OF LETTERS AND POEMS THAT DESCRIBE THE SUFFERINGS OF THE DEPORTEES WHO ESCAPED DEATH, AND OF THOSE PARENTS WHO LOST THEIR LOVED ONES. THE STYLE OF THE POEMS EXPRESS, ABOVE ALL, THE EMOTIONS AND THE PAIN OF THE AUTHORS.

"IT IS THE SOUL THAT SPEAKS."

** Please note, poetry and verse are almost impossible to translate and retain its beauty. Therefore, they are published hereunder in their original form.

1. My niece, Lucia Franco, (my sister Rosa's daughter,) had been, together with her friend, Fortunee Menasche, incarcerated first, in Auschwitz, Poland, then successively in Landsburg, and Turkan, both in Bavaria, Germany, and from there she was liberated by the Americans and found her way to Italy.

Herewith is a portion of the letter I received from her, written in Florence on January 22, 1945.

" I am sure, dear Uncle, that you have heard of the tragic destiny which befell the happy Jewish people of Rhodes. I am one of the survivors whose number is unfortunately very small, and this was, I think, because of my courage and my energetic resistance. I had the good fortune to survive the horrible sufferings of which almost all of us were victims. But I also had the misfortune of losing my beloved mom and dad and David, the youngest of my brothers. Talking to you about my pain and my sorrows is so very sad and without remedy. God willed it that way!

At this time, I am in Florence, the most beautiful city in all of Italy, and famous for the number of sculptors and painters it has produced. I was invited to speak on the radio about the suffering endured in the concentration camps. My interview appeared in the Italian press. "

2. "My dear Sava,

I don't know when or if you will receive this letter. I am now about thirty km from the French border, free, but unable for the moment, to return to Greece, because it is so difficult. It has been a year since we were in the hands of the SS. The Americans freed us from them. Mommy and Lina died from burns and asphyxia at the hands of the German SS. and I haven't heard from Nisso; where he is, or whether he's dead or alive. Currently, I am writing to you coldly and calmly, but there are many times when I think I am going mad. I can't stand to be alone; to be without my parents, to know that my mother and my sister no longer exist. It's very easy to go crazy, to feel so alone and not have any news from daddy. I don't even

know where he is and how he is. He is the only one person I have left of my family, and I don't even know if he is alive. You will understand what that means, my Sava. You remember what a happy family we were. Now it is over, it is only a dream that I carried with me throughout the unimaginable and incredible tortures and ill-treatment. I have suffered too much and seen too much; I am withered. I want you to believe it and understand it.

We are doomed, me, my first cousin and two other girls from Rhodes to stay here for two or three months, until the situation calms down and it does not look like it will happen soon. I long for daddy and I feel so lonely, so lost, so empty, that I have to make a tremendous effort not to let myself go. It is fortunate that we are at least alive, four out of 1,700 deportees. We have no news from the rest, Sava. It is appalling. If only I could have a letter, a note from daddy, or some news from you telling me where he is, this would be very helpful. I cannot imagine that all this nightmare, this hard work, this human suffering, and especially the loss of my dearest family is real. Sava, It might be better if you write to me via Paris, or to the Greek Embassy and from there to Offenburg, or even to the Red Cross. I must find out where my father is. Your letters will help me live more than anything else. Please, do not leave me alone. Don't waste any time. See you soon, I kiss you."- Lily Soriano.

My address is: Lily Soriano, Repatriation Centre for Foreign Deportees, Offenburg, Germany.

3. The following passages are excerpts taken from a letter, dated 26 August 1945, that Mr. Jacques M. Menasche, originally from Rhodes, sent from Paris to his master nephew, Maitre Gad Franco, who lived in Istanbul. Menasche was a classmate of mine at the Israelite school in Rhodes.

" After landing in Greece, the Germans transported the Jews to a camp and ordered them to undress, men, women and children. This was under the pretext of looking for any jewelry and valuables that they might have been able to conceal. Michel, (the brother of the author of this letter) had the courage to protest vehemently about this indecency. He was a religious man and this exhibition seemed to him a monstrosity. The Germans, furious at this attitude, beat him so cruelly that death ensued. The prisoners were then loaded into cattle wagons and the journey took seven days to arrive in Germany, the destination being the sinister camp of Auschwitz, where almost all were gassed and incinerated.

Among the very few survivors were two young Soriano women and a young lady named Cohen who reached Paris in a lamentable state and we understand that there are still a few survivors in the Russian sector. Unfortunately, Michel's family seems to have been wiped out and you can imagine how painful this tragic news was for me.

His son Jean (Samy) who is established in Paris where he has been successful with his work and makes a pretty good situation for himself has been greatly tested by this appalling new of the fate of his beloved parents.

The loss of dear Michel was not the only misfortune to strikes me. On the night of September 13, 1943, during the occupation of Nice by the Germans, the Gestapo arrested my poor brother Armand and his wife Maya, nee Tabet, at the Neresco Hotel. The latter, who had resolved never to let herself fall into the hands of the Germans, poisoned herself by absorbing a tube of veronal. She died in unspeakable agony. The German officer refused to allow Armand to call a doctor who, maybe, simply by forcing her to bring up, just might have been able to save her. She was buried in Nice. As for her devastated husband, he was sent to Drancy, from where he was deported to Germany on October 7, 1943. Since then, we have had no

news from him or from any other sources, and he most probably has been gassed and cremated. We however just have that faint hope of ever seeing him again.

Our family misfortunes did not end with this sad event. Naim, Raoul and Roger were also deported to Germany. Naim and Raoul were picked up in Paris and Roger in Cap Ferrat, near Nice.

Raoul died in Auschwitz in the infirmary, having succumbed to double pneumonia, brought on by the hard work that was imposed on him in the middle of winter. We were informed about this by a certain Matalon, a survivor of the same camp who returned to Paris and who told us he witnessed his final moments. Naim was gassed; we saw him leaving in the trucks that carried the condemned to incineration, but he found a way to write a note to Raoul who was still alive at the time, ordering him to be courageous. It's horrible.

Victoria, (the niece of the author of this letter) is in Paris (she is currently in the countryside.) This bereft woman does not doubt that her only son Lucien, was shot by the Germans who had taken him into the bush. He was only 24 years old. This misfortune struck her after losing her husband in 1942 in Lyon and she is really to be pitied. In Nice where we took refuge from March 11, 1943, we were the object of numerous searches by the Gestapo. Thank goodness I was able to convince them that I was a Muslim and this and other combinations of circumstances allowed us to escape the threat hanging over our heads. Miraculously, my four children, my two sons-in-law, my two grandchildren, my wife and I survived this adventure unscathed. My brother-in-law Said was never worried. We're all fine now, and I'm ending this very sad tale here. "

4. Here below are some of the statements made Mr. B.R. Menasche.

He is a former director of one of Rhodes's banks, a former honorary Consul of Sweden, and currently vice-president of the community of Rhodes. In a speech delivered on August 16, 1947 on the occasion of a meeting, organized in memory of the victims of Hitler's brigandage, he reported as follows, the words of a deportee who had returned to Rhodes.

" No sooner had we got out of the wagons, said the deportee, that what we saw were tall chimneys with smoke rising from them and we smelt the odour of linen and burnt human flesh. After a sad, long, and tiring journey, many of us simply could not stand up. The children who were pitiful to see, clung to the necks of their mothers in a state of despair. The SS soldiers began to beat the older men and the young children, who fixed their eyes on to their mothers begging for help. The ferocious conduct of these soldiers forced the mothers to be immobile, while the fathers, in a state of despair and love, sought, by any means possible, to alleviate their suffering. Unable to tolerate or witness this paternal love, those brutal soldiers intervened and by dint of many punches tore the little ones from the arms of their mothers, without so much as not allowing them to kiss the babies for the last time. This done, the trucks left carrying these poor mothers who were casting their last glances at their little darlings and crying out to them, "God be with you."

The survivors are unanimous in saying that the cremation of the Rhodian Jews took place on August 14, 1944. This date was fixed as the day of mourning for the Rhodians.

5. The beautiful poetic verses in Ladino will follow but please allow me, the writer of this so very sad report to shed some tears for the dearly departed members of my family.

- A) My older sister, Lea, and her husband, Yuda Notrica.
- B) My brother-in Law, Ruben Cohen, his sons Hiskya and Nissim, their wives and children.
Ruben was married to my late sister, Rachel.
- C) My sister, Mazaltov and husband, Moshe A. Franco
- D) My sister Rosa, her husband Behor Franco and their son David. They lived in Cos.

It is so difficult to name all my many cousins and various other relatives, but I must mourn Rahamim Cohen, my childhood classmate and good friend. Cohen was several times the president of the Jewish community of Rhodes.

The following poem written in Ladino, was first published in "la Boz de Turkiye" on March 15, 1947. The author lives in Salisbury, Southern Rhodesia and he is an Influential member of the Community there.

Doctrina y justicia desaparecio,
D'entre la cogregacion llena de oracion,
Conocida por su gloria en la nacion,
Que de alli ciencia judia nacio.
Amante la justicia y observante d'encomendansas,
La doctrina santa ella esclarecio;
Criminal se paro para matar y destruir,
Que con ovras y actos malicia ajunto,
Por ver la prospera luz estenguir,

Hasta que fuerza en su cuerpo resto.
Engrandecio, prospero, enfortecio;
Tierras y ciudades el conquisto;
En cada logar que su fuerza acerco,
Judios espavorecieron con grande temor.
Savia que su fin a mal iv'arivar,
Y que fuerza del derito devia reclamar,
Con sania y crueldad percuero de desrancar,
La potencia y armada de la libertad.
En la ambre y en la sed nuestros hermanos quedavan,
Y con sangre al terreno artando estavan,
Y por apresurar tal fin que nunca l'asperavan,
El cruel, en el gaz, el resto asfisiava.
Extermino, desparessio y, de sus vidas el privo,
Cayendo y moriendo sin ninguna resistencia,
Reunidos con espanto, temblor y horror,
Por ver la fin de sus existencia.
A miles de inocentes & Inas l'opporessor sin peiudad,
Barro de Rhodes la chica comunidad,
Que la chica Yerushalaim llamada era la ciudad
En la cuala reposa la eterna solidad.

Un preto velo se paro despues de la guerra,
 Dejandonos abbatidos, fin al povlo de la tierra,
 Que en el 28 del triste y desafortunado mes,
 Vieron la luz por la ultima vez.
 Este triste sentimiento a nos servira,
 Como punto de partencia, a perseguir y esperar,
 De nuestros avuelos las usansas, afirmar y practicar,
 Y sus memoria en nuestro corazon eternamente conservar.

Salisbury: Salvator M. Alhadeff

L'auteur de cette poesie, Elie Sichem, est originaire d'Izmir (Smyrne). Apres avoir termine A Jerusalem Pecole d'arts et metiers de l'Alliance Israelite Universelle, il vint en 1896 a Rhodes ou il fonda un atelier de serrurerie, tout-A-fait moderne. Quelques annees apres, il quitta Rhodes et alla s'etablir a Paris, on il s'occupe toujours de son metier. Sichem est un bon hebraisant, tils intelligent et possede un don poetique ainsi que l'indique son ouvrage, en vers intitule *Sion et Sinai*, publie a Paris, en 1947. Cet ouvrage decrit le drame de la deportation et implore la misericorde divine. C'est son sejour a Rhodes et sa connaissance de la vie juive de cette ville qui lui inspirerent la podsie suivante.

Pleurez mes yeux. Pleurez de Rhodes
 la mine Livree a l'incendie, au vol, a la
 rapine

Pres de deux mille Juifs vivaient IA, tres heureux. Tout semblait leur sourire, assurer leur bonheur; Population sage adonnee au Saint culte. Leurs oratoires pleins de vieillards et d'adultes Jours et nuits priant Dieu de sauver Israel De la main du mechant, l'opresseur eternel.

Pleurons Rhodes cette ile au soleil radieux
 Fertile comme Eden aux fruits delicieux.
 Un peuple sclerat ami de l'Italie
 Conduit par un chef atteint de la folie
 Debarqua, par malheur, dans l Ile de beaute.
 A partir de ce jour, ce fut l'adversite!
 Car le peuple Germain mauvais comme la peste
 Se promit d'un seul Juif n'en laisser aucun reste.
 Aussi, sans pitie massacra les enfants
 Les arrachant de force aux bras de leurs mamans.
 Les femmes, les vieillards furent conduit en file
 A bord de petit bateaux abandonnant leur
 Inquiets, mesurant la profondeur de la mer.
 A chaque minute ils voyaient s'ouvrir l'enfer.
 La faim, la soif, brillaient leurs entrailles
 Pour toute nourriture un pain, petri de paille.
 Des mine sept cents Hebreux jetes dans ces bateaux;

Plusieurs dizaines pour le moms trouverent leurs tombeaux.
Mon coeur se déchire en pensant au sort funeste
Qui devait liberer par la morte tout le reste.
Insultes, maltraites, vivant comme les chiens
Aux yeux de l'Allemand l'Hebreux compte pour rien,
Condamnes a perir, soumis a la torture,
Le fond des mers devait servir de sepulture
Ou bien la chambre a gaz d'invention moderne,
Ou le four crematoire allume la nuit terne.
Par millions les martyrs Juifs furent calcines
Au hitcher infernal par le sort destines!
Prends courage Israel. Ta delivrance est proche.
Parmi les Nations, demeure sans reproche,
Repands partout to Loi, l'amour pour son prochain
De ce noble principe enseigne le chemin.
Comme ton patriarche offert en sacrifice,
Continue ici-bas a redresser le vice.

E.Sichen

Paris, 12 Aout 1947

Sous le titre "**La Vida del Lager** (campement) **en Germania**" deux demoiselles
decrivent en judeo-espagnol les souffrances des deportortes.

De muestras casas mos
quitaron A l'aviation mos
entraron
Nuestros tesoros mos
tomaron Al vapor mos
embarcaron

Al vapor mos
embarcaron Como
sardellas mos estifimos
14 dias navighimos
Al Pireo desbarquimos

Munchos queridos alli
perdimos Y para Haidar
prosequimos A Haidar ya
arrivimos
De haftonas mos consomimos

Tres dias ayi
estovimos De
ansias mos
abatimos Al
vagon mos

entraron Sin
corner mos
decharon

Quatorze dias viajimos
En Auschwitz desbarquimos
En Auschwitz mos desbarcaron
De nuestros queridos mos separaron

Al banyo mos
entraron Los
cavejos mos
cortaron Desnudas
mos decharon Los
vestidos mos
tomaron

Al Block 20 mos
mandaron A las tres
de media noche Al
Block 20 arrivimos

Los appeles empezaron

En los frios mos apurimos
Aufstehen! (En pies!) con
haftonas A l'appello mas y
mas
Block i stubovas con crueldad

Mos aharvavan
sin piedad
Yorando noche y
dia
Yamando siempre
madre mia Mos fue
dicho i assigurado

Que nel fuego fueron
quemados En el fuego
fueron quemados En el
gaz asfiksyados
Las creaturas sin pecados

Al son de la musica
exterminados
Desgrasiado Auschwitz

Que rovino, muestras
famillas Embesadas en
muncho y bueno

Arrastadas sin mania
Los transportos mos
cansaron De lager en
lager mos arrudiaron A
la fin de la tragedia

A Belsen mos condenaron
Belsen tomba umana
Onde pedrimos nuestra ermana
Se depedrieron y munchas muchachas

Por la ambre y
vida mala Non
ay tinta ni papel
Para describir la vida
de Belsen Caschcaras
de rapas a comer

Y agua de balsas a
biver El 12 Avril, un
dia claro Arrivaron
los Aliados Quien
riendo y quien
iorando

De ser a la fin liberados.

Rhodes: Violette et Sara Maio