

**A "black" photo diary. The rare photographic material of the young German soldier Werner Range on Black Saturday in Thessaloniki (Andreas' Assael collection)**

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Let's travel back to Thessaloniki of 1942. On July 11, 1942 took place the first massive hostile move by the German authorities against the Jewish Community of Thessaloniki, motivated by Greek collaborators before the application of the racial laws and the deportation to death in February-March 1943. The chief executive of the military administration of the city, Karl Marbach ordered the official census of competent (κόμπετεντ) for work male Jews (from 18 to 45 years old) that would work in military projects undertaken by the companies Ioannis Müller and Bauleitung and the organization Todt. The approximately 7,000 to 9,000 men who went to pick up their work cards in Eleftherias Square (Liberty Square) ended up in being tortured for hours under the burning sun of July. "They forced the men to jump, roll on the ground, crawl through the dust and perform ridiculous exercises ..." writes Iakovos Hantali in his memoirs (Hantali, 1996, 51). The above picture is described in a multitude of written sources and testimonies as well as in the well-known pictures of the German Propaganda Office. **(ppt 2-3)**

The propaganda unit that accompanied the German troops in Greece was Propaganda Kompanien(PK) 690. In these units worked press photographers. Most of them had had either a career in photographic journalism before or had absolved a special training at a school for them, initiated in 1939 on the ground of the former Reimann Art School. (Sachsse 2016, 41)<sup>1</sup>. These photographers presented standard propaganda themes (hoisting the flag over the Acropolis, tanks in the streets of bigger cities and in the countryside, the warm welcome given to the troops by the Greek population etc.) as also punishments and crimes in order to control and regulate the population.

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<sup>1</sup> The third German group taking photographs in Greece has been a number of Art photographers using the opportunity to work with their love of antiquity; as the most famous protagonist of this group one can name Herbert List and his very young student Max Scheler. (Sachsse 2016, 41)

However, the German administration in Thessaloniki didn't rely on the common PK photographers when committing the crimes against the Jewish population of the city. For this purpose, they ordered the Cologne (Κολόουβ) journalist Walter Dick, fierce Nazi ideologist to come to the city. Dick was working for the state owned picture agency «Atlantic», which allowed him to get around the normal censorship procedures that were part of the PK administration. The propaganda photos of the «Black Saturday» belong to Dick. It is obvious that he wanted to present on the one hand a massive impersonal operation and on the other the Jews according to the anti-Semitic stereotype as ugly, inferior people. As Rolf Sachsse comments “There is no doubt that his images mark the lower moral standard possible by clearly illustrating how much he had in common with those committing the crimes (Sachsse 2016, 47-48) ppt 4,5,6, 7

But let's explain better these propaganda strategies by traveling back to the Germany of the 30s. After the installation of the Nazi government in 1933, the Ministry of Propaganda and Public Enlightenment was responsible for all communications following the model of fascist Italy. At the same time because of the Anti-Semitic measures there was a severe loss of Jews working in image journalism and picture press editors. In this context, the amateur photographer was seen as the only solution for the propaganda that would document the “good life” under Hitler. The regime (ρέιζιμ) needed both professionals and amateur photographers, the first to present the activities of the regime, the second to present happy families and picturesque countryside, as an education in facing away from politics, Nazi crimes and the Holocaust. This strategy was connected to the era and the technological evolution. Since the recession years the photographic industry had promoted cheap cameras to the market of Europe and the US, the worker's photography movement had been already the strongest in Europe and the first propaganda companies that had been formed for the Spanish troops in Spain had proved to be successful in supporting the war. Thus, during the war, all of the propaganda activities in Germany were directed towards their use in military context, both from the side of the amateur photographer as well as the professional side. The backdrop for these strategies was the aggressive expansion of the country and the racist conception of the Aryan reign.

Propaganda Kompanien had been formed by Goebbels since 1936-37 to document military operations and the Schutzstaffel (SS) had its own press and picture agency with dark room and printery.

At the same time, German soldiers used their amateur cameras in order to maintain memories of their time in the occupied countries and in Greece. Many of them were keen photographers since the late 30s. They were well trained in both propaganda as in amateur photography. These soldiers took millions of images that slowly came to light within the last two decades, mostly by albums from heritages sold on flea market or at auctions. This kind of amateur, photographic material is our material today: unknown till 2011, was found in Germany and came to shed more light on the Jewish tragedy in German occupied Thessaloniki. **(ppt. 8)** The personal album of Werner Range, contained shocking images from the gathering at Eleftherias Square. The photos of "Black Saturday (Black Sabbath)," as it is called the Saturday of July 11, 1942, were found by the Thessalonian Jew, Andreas Assael, in a German bazaar. The old salesman had just cleaned up the house of the musician in Burghausen, a town near Khemitz in Saxony.

The rare photographic material reveals a distant cynical “touristic” view of the German soldier, as he was trained to do so, but at the same time, these photographs are exceptional for two reasons:

- They portray special details and contribute with elements of microhistory to a clearer and detailed narrative of that day of July 1942 that meant the beginning of the end for the Jewish community of the city.
- As far as it concerns Greece, it is a rare example of amateur photos that present war crimes, violence and humiliation of the Jews.

The young soldier Werner Range was a trombone player and a band member in an Engineering unit of the German Army. He arrived in Thessaloniki - after staying in Edessa and Kavala - in February 1942. During his stay in the three Macedonian cities, he captured pictures of everyday life on streets and squares with a photo camera (probably Leica). In Thessaloniki, he stayed in an apartment in Mitropoleos Street - next to today's “Olympion” cinema – and from his balcony took pictures of Aristotelous Square, of the old seafront, of Thermaikos Gulf. He has photos with his

co-soldiers, photos of the band as it plays in streets, in Aristotelous Square, in music halls, photos from birthday gatherings, etc.<sup>2</sup> (ppt 9)

Range except of the several everyday life photos, witnessed the gathering at Eleftherias Square and captured the facts of that day with his camera.

In **photo-slide no 10**, which was taken at the beginning of the day - as one who knows the orientation of Thessaloniki can understand from the shadows - we can see a lot of men, young and old, standing in the upper part of Eleftherias Square, while at the background dominates the Stein building (preserved till today). Most of the men were wearing their “Sabbath clothes” either in their poor or in their sophisticated version, summer shirts, white trousers the younger, jackets the older men. These clothes probably indicate that the men in the Square didn’t have an idea of what would follow. They thought that the bureaucratic procedure of the registration would be over soon and that they could continue their day by going to the synagogue, by visiting friends, Jews or Christians, by strolling through central points of the city.

Someone can also observe that the men, while they were standing in the row under the burning sun, they found an opportunity to discuss with each other. It is worth mentioning the troubled and hesitant bow of the tall young man with the white clothes on the right side of the photo while talking to another person with darker clothing. In absolute contradiction to Dick Walters’ photos and probably regardless of Range’s will, we see handsome, innocent, frightened but good will men trying to be obedient and to avoid problems.

In the depth of the image, on the left, some of the men were trying to protect themselves from the hot sun of July, a move that in many cases was not allowed by the Germans or was a cause for beating and torturing that day. On the other hand, in

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<sup>2</sup> In the last two decades several studies have accentuated the relationship between Warfare and tourism in World War II. Hence, German organizations such as the Deutsche Arbeitsfront (DAF, German Labor Front) and Kraft durch Freude (KdF, Strength through Joy), together with in France. The Kraft durch Freude organization was a giant structure that, from the rise of the National Socialists to power, had provided the framework for all leisure organizing low-cost cultural events, factory beautification programs, Sports, and especially, mass tourism. Although forced to curtail its tourism during the world, organization’s troop and civilian entertainment became integral to the German war effort. (Katsaridou-Motsianos 2016, 85-86)

the foreground on the left side of the photo, the men on Mitropoleos str. were lined up and probably they were ready to be registered for forced labor, registration that took place in the building of the Ionic bank (today's Alpha Bank), where the German administration had been established.

The Greek gendarmes, that have been called upon to assist the Germans, also talk to each other, as we can see in the picture. The German order for the gathering in Eleftherias Square was carried out by the general governor of Macedonia Vassilios Simonides, who activated the Greek police; a tactic that was followed by the Germans on many issues concerning the city and its inhabitants, both in Greece and in the rest of occupied Europe. (Apostolou, 2000, 165-196)

The forced labor registration was proceeding slowly. On the pavement of Ionos Dragoumi str. in front of the bank stood those already listed. Some kept their registration paper in their hand (**photo 11**), when they were forced to adopt squatting position and beaten if they fell over. In the photo we can observe that the men were appalled by what was happening, by the humiliation.

It is important to mention here, that in Nazi occupied Thessaloniki, a call by the German authorities for unemployed people to work in public constructions (not yet "forced labor") was a fairly common phenomenon since 1941. However, the public humiliation of the registered workers during the bureaucratic procedure was not so common. There were incidents of violence and abuse by the Germans against the workers, but mainly at the workplace, related to low work performance, to indications of disobedience, etc. Thus, humiliation and torture were unexpected, and the response to the call from the Greek Jewish citizens was massive firstly because it would be difficult to disobey a German order but also because they thought that the registration would be a procedure similar to what they had experienced earlier. In fact, it seems that it was the first registration for "forced labor" in Thessaloniki, a measure that would cause a storm of social reactions and resistance later on. (Kavala, 2015, 64-65)

The Thessalonian Jews couldn't imagine that they would experience a ritual of public humiliation, similar to the one that had taken place back in 1938 in Vienna, just after Germany's annexation of Austria, when Jewish men and women were forced to

scrub the streets to remove political slogans that were critical of the Anschluss. Forced labor before being introduced officially in camps as an “economic” procedure (in fact during 1942), was originally intended to humiliate “racial enemies” and assert Nazi power. In forcing Jews to perform manual labor, the Germans acted upon anti-Semitic ideas about Jews being unproductive, lazy, and over privileged. Nazi officials encouraged children and crowds to watch and participate in these kinds of ritual humiliation, which could last hours or even days. In doing so, Nazi officials also sought to create public acceptance for the exclusion of the Jews. (Gruner, 2006, 105-109)

In the **photo above (no 11)**, the Germans ordered ridiculous gymnastic exercises, to which people necessarily obeyed... The second man in the first line, to the right of the photo, has a light smile. Maybe he thinks of what is happening as a bad joke... Testimonies say that the main theater of humiliation was right in front of the Ionic bank, while those at the bottom of the square were not tortured, so they were ordered to re-appear on Monday, July 1. At least 1,000 people did not go to the second call because of the fear of a repetition of the violence ...

Another shot in front of the Ionic Bank, seen from the right (**photo 12**) shows two Germans, a Wehrmacht captain on the left, and a naval officer on the right to supervise the torturing while the orders were given by someone on their left. The Jewish men seem silent, perhaps angry, they endure...

Testimonies point out that the gathered men were released thanks to the intervention of the representative of the Belgian Red Cross, who threatened to brief the incident to General Wilhelm Siegmund Walther List, head of the German forces in the Balkans, if the abuse did not stop (Stroumsa 1997, 34). Others remember that the German sailors came down from a building in Eleftherias Square and they started the humiliation of the concentrated citizens (Kounio-Amarilio, Nar, 1998, 384). The fact that several Wehrmacht military units, as it is obvious in the amateur photos, were involved creates the impression that this was not an SS action but a decision of the German local authorities aiming at the marginalization of the Jewish community and trying to make the public willing to accept what was going to follow. Besides, German authorities had used this type of public humiliation in the early stages of

persecution in other countries earlier as in Austria and Poland. Even though, the forced labor had just been transformed into a large-scale program, even though ill-treatment and torturing could be at the expense of the plan to gather workers, dehumanizing and marginalizing the Jews were priority

In **photo no 12** the tortured men literally ran to escape when they released them. They left towards Tsimiski str. Many of them were in very bad shape. The shadows again testify that it was already afternoon, confirming relevant testimonies ... The registration work continued according to testimonies for 4 days, without any repetition of the public humiliation.

A few days after the registration, the registered men were called through the newspapers. Range took photos from the balcony of his apartment this time. The gathering of the registered workers that were ready to live for forced labor took place at Aristotle's Square. In **photo no 13**, the "workers" are ready for departure, everyone with a small toad. Between each group, we can see some gendarmes that keep the order. Right on the corner a summer cinema and the harbor reminds the many Jewish workers, porters and customs in the past. On the left there is a black German car, perhaps the company's car.

Several sources reported that 3,500 people were arrested for forced labor, 3,000 for road construction, 500 for the construction of Sedes Airport, and 34 for mines, while another source reported that a total of 5,000 Jews were used in road construction and ore mining by October 1942. In two and a half months, at least 3-12% of men died under awful conditions. The Community was trying to help its people, and after long talks and negotiations with Max Merten (who had come from August in the city), it reached a payment agreement of 2 billion drachmas to the German administration. The amount had to be paid by the 15<sup>th</sup> of December of the same year. (Kavala 2015, 66) They couldn't imagine what would follow.

Some preliminary thoughts for the end. Ranges' photos prove the strength of the amateur images that regardless of the desire or the aim of the amateur photographer, openly reveals complexity and contradictions which allows to come closer to the truth of events and to undo at some point the work of official propaganda photography. Moreover, they bring back in a new dynamic, issues such as the central

anti-Semitic policy of the Third Reich, the role of technology kai totalitarianism in the genocide, the ignorance of the Jews because of the German's deceptive policy, the development of "ordinary" Wehrmacht soldiers to cynical photographers, merciless torturers and cold killers, the significance of the local actors (Greek authorities, police, collaborators) in the occupied areas. (Browning 1998; Goldhagen 1996, 4; Guerin, 2016, 62-63; Papanastasiou-Fleischer 2007, 101-149)

Amateur photos could be proven valuable historical document not for their often annoying, cynical touristic style but for their inherent ambiguity.