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## The Shadows Next to the Parasol.

### A story that cannot be told

Andreas Eberhardt

Crete, the southernmost island in Europe. A holiday destination for more than 5 million tourists every year. Countless brightly colored parasols decorate the long beaches. The island is one of Germany's favorite holiday destinations. The historic old town of Chania, the former capital of Crete, with its picturesque alleyways and the scenic Venetian harbor, is a tourist highlight for many cruise tourists. More than 80 years ago, other umbrellas characterized the picture. From 20 May 1941, thousands of paratroopers landed on the island, which was occupied after bloody battles. The German conquerors then used unprecedented violence against resistance fighters and the civilian population throughout Crete. More than 40 villages were razed to the ground. A past that has not been forgotten by many Cretan families to this day.

In May 1944, with the war long lost, German soldiers rounded up the 300 or so Jews living in Chania to take them on the small steamship *Tanaïs* to Piraeus and from there by railway to Auschwitz. Cretan resistance fighters and Italian prisoners of war were crammed into the holds with them. The steamer, sailing under the German flag, was torpedoed by a British submarine in the early morning of 9 June 1944 and sank off Santorini within a few minutes. All the prisoners drowned. The sinking ended not only the history of a centuries-old community, but also the history of the coexistence of the Chaniote Jews with their neighbors in the old town district, which is still called *Ovraiki* today.

The story of the sinking of the *Tanaïs* is almost forgotten. What remains is the name of the neighborhood, the old houses, the historic Etz Hayyim synagogue - and a photo. The photo shows two sisters, aged 20 and 22, a farewell gift to their best friend. Taken a year before they were deported to their deaths. If you look at the faces of Judith and Sara, you can imagine their life in Chania, what their wishes for the future were, perhaps you can even recognize their dreams. The photo was the starting point for our attempt to tell a story about the people from *Ovraiki*. A story that we don't know how it happened. A story that nobody knows, because there is nobody left to tell it.

We—Greeks, Germans—are nevertheless making the attempt. Why? In our search for the remains, we were surprised by small finds: The report of an American Jew who visited Crete and hardly found any Jews because they were not recognized. The text of a rabbi who complains about his congregation's lack of knowledge of Hebrew. The young woman who also learnt French at the nuns' school. Or the one who was trained as a concert pianist and played in a bar on the side for a living. The popular band of Christian and Jewish musicians who played for dances at the weekend. The young man who rode his motorbike—a BMW!—through the mountains, or the one who went on wild beach trips in his convertible. In short: we found people. Our surprise tells us a lot about the image we still have of Jews.



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"The history of the Holocaust cannot be told without the victims' perspective." Feliks Tych, long-time director of the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw and a child survivor of the Warsaw Ghetto, describes the dilemma and the challenge not only of historical research, but also of telling the story of the people who were victims of this genocide. Who can—still—tell it? With their deportation to the extermination camps, the memory of the people disappears from one day to the next in many places. This is also the case in Chania. What remains is a void—the houses newly inhabited, the synagogue derelict, the cemetery a building plot.

80 years after the sinking of the *Tanaïs*, we talk about the people in the neighborhood. An attempt that must be incomplete. But it attempts to fill the void with our imaginations, ideas and wishes for how things could have been. A life of people among people. Join in the story.

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## Theater-Educational Backpack

The theatre collage “The Shadows Next to the Parasol” is accompanied by the possibility for teachers to lead their own theatre workshop with their class - also independently of the play. The “Theater-Educational Backpack”, which was developed as part of the overall project, contains the necessary materials.

We want to give a voice to the Jewish inhabitants of Chania, to remember their fate by telling their stories. Using the few surviving documents and photographs and various theatre techniques, the students get closer to the people who were on the *Tanaïs*, expand on facts with their ideas about everyday life during the occupation and finally make connections to their own lives.

The workshop is by no means about reenacting or even empathizing with the situation of the Jewish citizens in prison or on the sinking ship. The units represent an attempt to make everyday life in Chania during the time of the German occupation more tangible for young people on the basis of the little information available and to develop a sharper view of their city.

The materials form the basis for various workshops lasting between 45 and 90 minutes. There is also an introductory unit (45 minutes) that can be used directly before the workshop or at a preparatory meeting with the participants.

We are happy to make the backpack available to schools and extracurricular educational institutions in Greece, Germany and other countries.



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## The Historical Background

### The situation of the Jews of Crete

In Greece, the first deportations of Jews to Auschwitz took place in March 1943 from Thessaloniki. Deportations from Athens did not take place until March 1944 after corresponding orders had been issued from Berlin, which was relatively late compared to the situation in the rest of German-occupied Europe. In many cities and also on some islands, such as Crete, Jewish life had continued relatively undisturbed until then. This was mainly due to the three different occupying powers in Greece. Italy and Bulgaria, the other occupying powers alongside the German Reich, were much more reserved in their approach to the issue. The deportations therefore apparently came unexpectedly for many, but then in a drastic form.

Only a few European countries occupied by the German Reich lost a higher proportion of their Jewish population than Greece; it is estimated that around 90% of Greek Jews were murdered.

The Jewish community of Crete, which comprised around 300 people and lived almost exclusively in Chania, was initially registered by the Germans in 1941. Jewish businesses were banned for Germans. A second registration took place in 1943. On May 12, 1944, the German commander received the deportation order and on May 20, the Jewish population was rounded up by German soldiers—there were no SS units on Crete—and initially taken to Ayias prison. On June 4, 1944, they were transported to the Makasi Fortress in Heraklion, from where they were taken to the steamship *Tanaïs* on June 8. Together with Cretan Andartes (resistance fighters) and Italian prisoners of war, they were crammed into the narrow holds of the small steamer. They were initially to be transported to Piraeus and from there by rail to Auschwitz. The steamer, which flew the German flag and was not marked as a prisoner of war transport, was torpedoed by a British submarine after setting sail in the early morning of June 9, 1944 and sank off Santorini in just a few minutes. All the prisoners drowned.

### A story that cannot be told: our sources

There is hardly any evidence of the lives of the Jewish inhabitants of Chania during the German occupation. They all drowned with the *Tanaïs*, except for very few survivors like Josif Kohen, who managed to escape. He survived in hiding with the Andartes in the mountains, later emigrated to Israel and told Yad Vashem about the events in Chania. We have used his testimony.

A few members of the community, such as Iossif Ventura, were able to reach Athens before the deportation; he survived there. His descriptions of life in Chania gave us important clues. There are also several eyewitness accounts from neighbors who were interviewed decades later. The love story of Lambis the violinist and Jenny the pianist has become the basis of a novel. A few newspaper reports deal with the fate of the people who drowned on the *Tanaïs*. All these sources were written retrospectively, sometimes decades later, in the knowledge of community's eventual fate and shaped by many different influences. We must therefore always view them critically.

Nichos Stavroulakis wrote down the story of the photo of Judith and Sara. Without him, his research and his commitment, the cultural center Etz Hayyim Synagogue would not exist today.

The German registration files have been preserved. They are our most important source on the names, places of residence, dates of birth and occupations of the Jewish inhabitants of Chania. All the names of the Jewish residents used come from these lists. The historical photos from Chania were made available to us by the Federal Archives (*Bundesarchiv*). They were taken by German soldiers or war correspondents and therefore reflect the view of the occupying forces. At that time, the possession of private cameras was forbidden on Crete. The excerpts from the German newsreel



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(*Deutsche Wochenschau*) no. 561 used in the performance with the footage of the invasion of Crete, accompanied by Wagner's "Ride of the Valkyries", were also obtained from the Federal Archives.

### **The War History**

In one of the largest airborne operations in military history to date, the German army invaded Crete, the last unoccupied part of Greece, on May 20, 1941. In addition to the battles in Rethymnon and Heraklion, the battle for the area around Maleme airfield (known as *Height 107*) was a particular focus. The Germans finally captured the airport after heavy losses three days after their landing on May 22, 1941; they captured Chania after further heavy fighting on May 27 and the port of Souda on May 28.

The Allied defenders of the island decided to evacuate their troops to Egypt on May 27. Of the approximately 32,000 Allied soldiers—who came from Great Britain, Australia and New Zealand—18,000 were able to disembark for Egypt via Chora Sfakion in the south of Crete, 12,000 were taken prisoner by the Germans and 2,000 died in the fighting. 1,500 of them are buried in the Commonwealth war cemetery in Souda Bay. A total of around 14,000 German soldiers, some of whom were brought to the island via the port of Souda, conquered the island by June 1, 1941. 4,465 of the approximately 6,500 fallen soldiers are buried in the German war cemetery in Maleme.

Around 500 Allied and other Greek soldiers remained hidden in the mountains, supported by the rural population and numerous Andartes. The Cretan population's will to resist came as a surprise to the German occupiers. In the course of the occupation, numerous war crimes were committed by the Germans in an attempt to break this resistance. A total of 8,575 Cretans died during the occupation. The German commander General Bruno Bräuer was executed for war crimes after the war. His grave is located in Maleme today.



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## Production Team

### Artistic Direction

Jürgen Zielinski, one of the most renowned directors of theater for young audiences in Germany, is the initiator and artistic director of the project. From 2002 to 2020, he was artistic director and director of the *Theater der Jungen Welt* (TDJW – Theater of the Young World) in Leipzig, where he staged the groundbreaking play “Children of the Holocaust”, among others. Zielinski directed the Kampnagel Youth Theater in Hamburg and the children's and youth theater at the Landestheater Tübingen, directed over 150 productions in Germany and abroad (including in Wroclaw as part of Capital of Culture) and worked for eight years as a freelance director, primarily in evening productions at municipal and state theaters. During this time, he directed “Nathan the Wise” by Gottfried Ephraim Lessing on behalf of the Goethe-Institut in Karachi, Pakistan. He is a prizewinner of the International Association of Theatre for Children and Young People.

His productions have also been shown on numerous stages in Germany. His production “Children of the Holocaust”, for example, has been performed in Germany, Poland and Israel, while his play “JULLER” about the German-Jewish national soccer player Julius Hirsch has been performed in numerous theaters in German soccer cities. He has developed numerous outdoor performances and led workshops at international festivals.

### Dramaturgy

Dr. Andreas Eberhardt is a German social scientist and former foundation director who has held leading positions at the German-Israeli Future Forum Foundation, the Foundation Remembrance, Responsibility and Future and the Alfred Landecker Foundation, among others. He is the founder of the consultancy Design Democracy+. His work focuses on strengthening a democratic civil society in Europe and promoting a modern culture of remembrance.

### Cast

Giannis Dassios  
Emilie Haus  
Laura Hempel  
Loukia Karakosta  
Sven Reese  
Annika Schüffler  
Elia Verganelaki

### Artistic Direction

### Dramaturgy

### Set Design

### Choreography

### Production

### Choir master

### Coordination

### Assistant Artistic Direction

### Lights and Sound

Jürgen Zielinski

Andreas Eberhardt

Peny Korre

Vassiliki Doudoulaki

Ioannis Poulakas

Loukia Karakosta

Anja Zuckmantel

Chara Poulakas

Ioannis Lykos (enaDyo Polymesa – ενάδυο ΠΟΛΥΜΕΣΑ)

Accompanying Educational Project

Bettina Frank (Heldenfabrik) & Katarina Adamara



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**Tickets** for the upcoming performances of the theater collage “Shadows next to the Parasol” on 20, 21, 22, 23, 25 and 26 October can now be booked on our website: <https://www.etz-hayyim-hania.org/events/>

Tickets are free of charge but need to be pre-booked due to limited space.

The performance uses a variety of theatrical means: choral, verbal and non-verbal, with music and installations at changing locations inside and outside the synagogue. The scenes are played in **Greek** and **English**.

Please note that the premiere is already sold out.

**Project website:** [www.tanais.de](http://www.tanais.de)

**Contact Etz Hayyim Synagogue:** [info@etz-hayyim-hania.org](mailto:info@etz-hayyim-hania.org)



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