

The House By the Sea

Rebecca Camhi Fromer

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At first glance, *The House By the Sea* appears to be yet another book detailing the horrors of the Holocaust. Just as often as not, first glances can be deceiving, which is the case with this, Fromer's third book. *The House By The Sea* is a recapitulation of the devastation wreaked on the Jewish population of Greece during the Holocaust presented largely through the experiences of Elia Aelion, one of the few survivors from the seaport of Salonika.

The House By The Sea is reminiscent of Elie Wiesel's Holocaust literature, specifically *Night*, but where *Night* communicates on an intensely emotional level, *The House By The Sea* communicates on a personal level that is somewhat removed from the horrifying, gut-wrenching point of view Wiesel evokes. This has the effect of a more intellectual, perhaps rational perspective from which to process these no less horrifying events. In essence, *The House By The Sea* reads more like a history than a personal narrative.

This is a moving and enormously enlightening history of the Nazi occupation of Salonika and, more specifically, Elia Aelion's family, immediate and extended. Interwoven throughout is a thorough recounting of events that comprised the Nazi occupation and eventual decimation of the Sephardic culture of Greece. These are events that have been largely overlooked, ignored or simply forgotten throughout the world and its attempt to deal with the Holocaust and its infinite residue on humanity. To cite a chilling example, the Atlas Hotel located in Salonika served as a refuge and haven for innumerable Jews during the Holocaust. Yet, when an inquiry was made of the staff of the Jewish Museum in Athens, no one knew of its existence or the role it played in the lives of so many people. It is incredible to think that Salonika has never commemorated its Holocaust victims. In that light, *The House By The Sea* becomes significant as not only a major historical work, but also as a bridge to the past that might have been lost forever.

JIM FILKINS (May / June 1998)

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