

## MODERN GREECE AND THE SEPHARDIM OF SALONICA AN OVERVIEW

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The largest concentration of Sephardic Jews in modern Greece after the conclusion of the Balkan Wars of 1912-1913 was in the city of Salonica. By their numbers, they dwarfed the other Jewish communities in Greece. The city, however, was not the only place where Jews and Greeks would interact in contemporary times. That would actually start with the birth of the country.

In September 1821, the Greek insurgents led by Colocostronis, entered the city of Tripoli in the Morea. There a large civilian refugee population of some 30,000 people had gathered to escape the rebels in other parts of the peninsula. Among them were some 5,000 to 8,000 Jews- Sepharadis and Romaniotes<sup>1</sup>.

When the Greeks entering the town gave vent to their thirst for blood, less than a third of the inhabitants were able to survive. According to the

<sup>1</sup> The Jewish world is divided into 3 major ethnic and cultural components and a few lesser ones. The Sepharadis are the Western European Jews, the descendants of the exiled from the Iberian Peninsula, that were forced to leave the area starting in 1492. The vast majority of those Spanish speaking Jews went to the Ottoman Empire and a few eventually found their way to Northern Morocco, Central Italy, South-Western France, the Netherlands, England and the American colonies of the last three. Today, the Sephardic nation is one of the smallest components of the 3 major divisions of the Jewish world, about 500,000 worldwide, with 300,000 of them in Israel and about 100,000 in the United States.

The Mizrahim, or Afro-Asian Jews, originally from the Arabic, Berber, Ethiopian, Persian, Central Asian, Kurdish and Indian speaking areas of the Middle East and South Asia, are now the majority elements in Israel, with about 3 million people, out of a total of 4 million worldwide.

The Ashkenazim, or Eastern and Central European Jews, who speak a German dialect called Yiddish, form the majority of the 3 major components, with about 5 million in the United States and 2,5 million in Israel, out of a total of some 9 million worldwide.

The lesser components are represented by the Romaniotes, the old Byzantine Greek speaking Jews, the Italiotes that were found in the Peninsula since Roman times and the Corfiotes that spoke a Venetian dialect.

foreign supporters who joined the Greeks during that war, men, women and children, Turks and Jews were indiscriminately massacred<sup>2</sup>.

This was the first encounter between Greeks and Jews in modern Greece. To understand the hatred of the Greeks towards the Jews, three explanations are worth investigating: the faithfulness of the Jews to the Ottoman and later the Turkish nation, the religious anti-Semitism of some members of the Greek Orthodox clergy and population, and the economic rivalries between Greeks and Jews in the Eastern Mediterranean.

The few Jews who managed to survive the early years of the war in Greece and were included in the small independent Greek kingdom of the Bavarian prince, Othon I, were immediately shaken by the Pacifico affair in 1847. Traditionally, during the Greek Easter, an effigy of Judas, called the Jew in Greek, is paraded through the streets, stoned by the inhabitants and later burned. In that year, however, Baron Rothschild was visiting Athens, where the government, looking for a loan, decided to prevent this show of overt anti-Semitism. Furious at being denied their fun, the Greek mobs turned their fury at the house of one of the few Sepharadis living in Athens, David Pacifico. A British subject, born in Gibraltar, Pacifico managed to escape and take refuge in the British Consulate. Using the Pacifico affair to influence the government of King Othon, Great Britain asked for compensation for its subject and sent its fleet to blockade the harbor of Piraeus in 1850. The government of Othon finally acceded to Britain's demand, further poisoning the life of the few Jews who remained in the country<sup>3</sup>.

Fourteen years later, the Jewish population of Greece increased because of the annexation of Corfou and the other Ionian Islands to the small Kingdom, now under a British-supported prince from Denmark, who would

<sup>2</sup> For further information on the massacres of Tripoli see François Pouqueville, *"Histoire de la Grèce comprenant le récit des événements depuis 1740 jusqu'en 1824"*. Paris, Firmin Didot, 1825, Vol. III, p. 202; Maxime Raybaud, *"Mémoires sur la Grèce pour servir à l'histoire de la guerre de l'indépendance accompagnés de plans topographiques"*, Paris, Tournachon-Molin, 1824, Vol. I, p. 471; and William Leake, *"An Historical Outline of the Greek Revolution"*, London, John Murray, 1826, p. 55.

<sup>3</sup> For the Pacifico affair, see Louis Thouvenel, *"La Grèce du Roi Othon"*. Paris 1870.

become George I. He brought with him the Ionian islands which have been a British protectorate since 1815. Some 2,000 Italian speaking Jews lived in the city of Corfou, on the island of the same name, and a few hundred were found on the island of Zante. A Venetian colony for many centuries, the Jews did not fare very well under British rule, which at the insistence of the native Greek Orthodox population, excluded them from voting and from holding public offices, although they accounted for some 15% of the total population of the town.

Under the liberal rule of the new Danish prince, the Jews of Corfou were given back their full rights as citizen, which they had enjoyed when the islands were briefly occupied by France in the 1790's. They became an important element in the political and economic life of the island, but deep down, the anti-Semitism of the Greek Orthodox population of Corfou would soon counteract the good intentions of the Danish prince. In the 1870s an ambitious politician and journalist, Yakovos Polyilas, writing in the newspapers *Peripaiktis*, *Kodan* and *Rigas O Feraios* had started to attack the Jewish community. His sentiments found fertile ground among the Greek population of Corfou.

On April 2, 1891, the mutilated body of a young Jewish girl, Roubina Sardas, was found on the street next to the synagogue. Immediately Polyilas and his cohorts spread the rumor that the girl was really Christian and that the Jews had killed her for her blood. That year, Passover fell on April 23, 2 days after the Greek Orthodox Easter, a traditional time of trouble for Jews living among the Greeks. Ritual murder allegations spread rapidly throughout Greece and in Corfou, Greek mobs invaded the Jewish neighborhoods, killing and looting without police interference.

Afraid of the bad publicity Greece was getting in the European capitals, the government finally sent army reinforcements to Corfou in May of 1891, a month after the start of the pogrom. That same summer, massive emigration of Jews started from the Ionian islands, towards the Ottoman Empire and Western Europe. In Zante, from 271 Jews before the pogrom, the population fell to 30. In Corfou, over half of the Jewish population left the island. The few perpetrators arrested by the authorities for the murder and pillaging of

the Jews were finally tried the following year and given sentences ranging from 5 to 12 years, but the government refused to clear the Jews, including the father of Roubina Sardas who was accused of killing her. The murderer was never found<sup>4</sup>.

Six years later, the small Jewish community of Crete, still part of the Ottoman Empire, which had already faced a threat from the Greek rebels in 1866, was threatened once more when a new rebellion started in 1897. The few hundred Jews who still lived in Canea and Candia, and had maintained their faithfulness to the Sultan, were forced to flee to İzmir, when the big powers instituted an autonomous government for Crete, under the nominal suzerainty of the Sultan.

<sup>4</sup> Roubina Sardas was seen by another Jew being taken away outside the wall of the city by four Greeks. The next day her body was found in a bag outside her father's house. The police, instead of looking for the murderers, arrested the father and all the neighbors, including the president of the synagogue, and closed the Jewish neighborhood, not allowing anyone to go in or out. Two Jews who happened to be outside the walls, were killed by the mob, without any police interference, while the house of the Grand-Rabbi, Alessandro Da Fano was stoned, and the Jewish cemetery was desecrated.

Unable to work in order to earn a living, the Jews of Corfou celebrated Passover on April 23, without any food, all the supplies being gone by now. On May 1, when the Greek Easter started, the mob, joined by the police entered the Jewish neighborhood and burned some building. The pogrom spread to the island of Zante where 4 Jews were killed. International pressure on Athens and the appearance of the British fleet off the coast of the island, forced the Greek government to send in the troops on May 16. By the 20<sup>th</sup> order was restored, but the fear among the Jews was so great that by the end of the year half of the Jewish population escaped to the Ottoman Empire, Egypt, Italy and France. The last of the 2,000 Jews left on the islands by the beginning of the Second World War will all be deported to the death camps when the Germans occupied Corfou in September 1943.

Writing to the headquarters of the Alliance Israélite Universelle in Paris, on May 31, 1891, the Grand Rabbi, Alessandro Da Fano and the Secretary of the community, Dr. Lazare Bellely, asked that the events not be given publicity in order not to endanger further the Jews of Corfou:

"L'exposition des faits que je vous envoie est très grave comme les faits mêmes dont nous avons été victimes.

Je vous prie pourtant de ne pas donner publicité à ce que je vous écris. Cela pourrait rendre plus grave notre situation; dans l'état où nous sommes il nous faudrait chercher des remèdes à nos maux et éviter d'exiter les esprits pas encore clames.

Nous sentons aussi le besoin absolu de ménager le Gouvernement et de nous assurer la continuation de sa protection, ce qui serait difficile à obtenir si on faisait connaître à l'étranger les excès dans toute leur étendue."

For the entire letter see Jean-François Renaud, *"Jessula Chronique, Corfou"*, Paris 1991, p. 81.

Those same powers had earlier forced the Ottoman Empire to relinquish the province of Thessaly and the district of Arta in 1881, but in 1897, during the rebellion in Crete, Greece declared war on the Ottoman Empire and suffered a quick defeat. Turkish troops entered Larissa, the capital of Thessaly which they occupied for a year, until forced by the big powers to return it to Greece. The small Jewish population of Larissa, Trikkala and Volos, accused of collaborating with the Ottomans by the returning Greek administration was persecuted by the Greek population which blamed the Jews for the defeat of its armies. In Trikkala, shots were fired into Jewish homes and an attempt was made to burn the synagogue. In Larissa, the mob, aided by the police, invaded the businesses and homes of the Jews; many were imprisoned, accused of having helped the Turkish authorities during the war. Soon a large Jewish emigration to the Ottoman Empire, especially to İzmir and Salonica followed the attacks of the mobs upon Jewish businesses and houses. Larissa was especially hard hit and saw its Jewish population shrink in numbers<sup>5</sup>.

The situation was no better in Epirus, still part of the Ottoman Empire at the time, where the Jewish community of Janina, both Sephardis and Romaniotes could only survive with the protection of Turkish troops. Jewish traveling salesmen, the economic life blood of the province were abducted and killed by Greek brigands and their ears dumped in the courtyard of the synagogue.

<sup>5</sup> An eyewitness report has this to say about the return of the Greek administration in Larissa: "Dès le premier jour du retour de l'administration grecque à Larisse, la foule a manifesté ses sentiments hostiles à l'égard des Juifs. Ils n'osent plus se livrer au commerce et restent enfermés chez eux depuis une semaine. Ceux, qui voulant faire acte de courage, s'aventurent dans les rues et essaient d'ouvrir leurs magasins, sont insultés et battus.

Un pharmacien de nos amis voulut donner l'exemple; il ouvrit les portes de son établissement; mal lui en prit, car il fut immédiatement assailli et dut refermer sa boutique; un autre, se rendant sur la place du marché pour acheter des provisions, fut battu comme plâtre.

Un chapelier et un marchand fruitier qui avaient essayé de renouveler la tentative du pharmacien furent pillés par la populace sous les yeux même des autorités, qui font semblant de vouloir rétablir l'ordre, mais dont, en réalité, l'incurie et le mauvais vouloir encouragent les malfaiteurs."

For the entire letter, see Bernard Pierron, *Juifs et Chrétiens de la Grèce Moderne*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 1996, p. 45.

It was however the Balkan Wars<sup>6</sup> that would dramatically alter the situation of the Jewish community in Greece, by bringing into the

<sup>6</sup> Afraid of Austria-Hungary's meddling in the Balkans after the failure of the Murzsteg meeting and the annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Russian Foreign Minister Sazonov tried to patch up the differences between Serbia and Bulgaria in order to present a strong front against Vienna. In March 1912 an alliance between Bulgaria and Serbia was signed, soon followed in May 1912 by a mutual assistance pact between Bulgaria and Greece and a military convention between the two in October 1912.

Sazonov's attempt at blocking Austria-Hungary backfired and the Balkan states turned their alliance against the Ottoman Empire. They were enticed to act now because of the Italo-Turkish war and the Albanian rebellion. Paul Cambon in a letter to his brother Jules on October 15, 1912, decried the attempts of Sazonov and Iswolski at forging such an alliance: "ces deux événements qui ont semé le vent comprennent seulement aujourd'hui qu'ils vont recoltér la tempête et ils ne savent que faire." Paul Cambon, *"Correspondance, 1870-1924"*, Paris 1940, Vol. 3, p. 24.

On October 8, 1912, Montenegro declared war on the Ottoman Empire, which broke relations with Serbia and Bulgaria on October 15 and declared war on the three states on the 17. Greece joined the war soon after, putting the Ottoman Empire at a disadvantage, especially because of the control that the Greek navy had of the Aegean Sea. The 120,000 soldiers that were massed in and around İzmir in expectation of an Italian invasion were unable to move across the Aegean to Salonica because of the Greek blockade. By the time the troops made their way overland to Europe, the war was lost.

For more information on the diplomacy of the Balkans see:

Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, *"Report of the International Commission to Inquire into the Causes of the Balkan Wars"*, Paris 1914.

I. Guechoff, *"L'Alliance Balkanique"*, Paris 1915.

G. Hanotaux, *"La Guerre des Balkans et l'Europe, 1912-1913"*, Paris 1914.

E. Helmreich, *"The Diplomacy of the Balkan Wars, 1912-1913"*, Cambridge (USA), 1938.

L. Lamouche, *"Quinze Années d'Histoire Balkanique, 1904-1918"*, Paris 1928. R. Poincaré, *"Les Balkans en Feu"*, Paris 1926.

P. Risal, *"La Ville convoitée Salonique"*, Paris 1914.

The first phase of the military operations saw the Serbs enter Uskub on October 26, 1912, while the Bulgarians were at Kirk-Kilisse and Lule Burgas. By November 8, the Greeks were in Salonica and on the 16, the Bulgarians reached the Chatalja lines, 20 miles from İstanbul, while the Serbs took Monastir on the 18 and would soon reach the Adriatic coast through Albania.

The Turkish forces were commanded by Zekki Pasha for the army of the Vardar with some 85,000 soldiers and 25,000 Albanian irregulars. Abdullah Pasha was in overall command in Thrace, while Shukri Pasha resisted in Edirne and Hassan Riza in Scutari. Tahsim Pasha commanded in Salonica.

After the battle of Lule Burgas where the Ottomans were commanded by Mahmoud Mukhtar Pasha, the front in Thrace stabilized at the lines of Chatalja where the Bulgarians were stopped.

When the truce was signed on December 3, 1912, Edirne, Janina and Scutari were still resisting, besieged respectively by the Bulgarians (helped by Serbian contingents), the Greeks and the Montenegrins. Greece refused to sign the truce, hoping to continue the conquest of the islands of the Aegean.

picture the large, progressive and assertive Sephardic population of Salonica<sup>7</sup>. The Jewish population of Greece would grow from 8,000 to more

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The Peace Conference in London opened on December 17, 1912, under the chairmanship of the French ambassador in the city, Paul Cambon.

While the Conference was taking place, a *coup d'état* on January 23, 1913 deposed the Grand Vizir Kiamil Pasha, while the Commander in Chief, Nazim Pasha was assassinated. Mahmud Shevket became Grand Vizir, while the trio of the C.U.P., Enver, Talaat and Djemal ruled the country. Shevket was assassinated on June 11, 1913. The Balkan allies left the Conference on January 28, 1913 and the war resumed on February 3, with disastrous consequences for the Ottoman Empire. Edirne fell on February 26, 1913, Janina on March 6 and Scutari on April 23. By then the Greeks had taken the islands of Chios, Lesbos and Samos. The London Conference resumed once more and the First Balkan War ended by the treaty of May 30, 1913.

The insistence of Austria-Hungary and of Italy on preventing Serbia from obtaining an outlet on the Adriatic Sea through what would soon become an independent Albania, made Serbia more reluctant to evacuate areas of Macedonia which were originally allotted to Bulgaria or were subject to arbitration by the Czar. In a note to Belgrade, Sofia expressed "son vif regret et sa stupéfaction de voir la Serbie contester la force obligatoire du traité", *Archives Diplomatiques*, 53e année, 3e série, tome 27, Juillet-Août 1913, #7-8, p. 47.

The question of Salonica was also a bone of contention between Greece and Bulgaria. On June 1, 1913, Greece and Serbia had signed a treaty of alliance, clearly aimed at Bulgaria. A Greek note to Sofia of June 27, 1913 complained about the concentration of Bulgarian troops close to the Greek zone of occupation. (*Ibid.*, p. 51)

Finally on June 29, 1913, Bulgaria launched an attack Serbia and Greece. A week later, Rumania, not satisfied with the cession of territory that Sofia had promised her, attacked Bulgaria, while the Ottoman Empire took back Lule-Bourgas, Kirk-Kilisse and Edirne by July 13, 1913.

Bulgaria compelled to sign an armistice on July 30 and to abide by the disastrous treaty of Bucarest, of August 10, 1913, with her former allies, Greece and Serbia, and with Rumania. On September 29, 1913, Bulgaria signed the treaty of Istanbul with the Ottoman Empire. (See *Ibid.*, 1914, Vol. 130, Année 54, Janvier 1914, for copies of the two peace treaties). The Ottoman Empire was left with 10,882 square miles in Europe, with a population of 4.5 million people, as compared to 65,350 square miles and 6 million people before the two Balkan Wars.

For further information on the war operations see:

E. Ashmead Bartlett, "With the Turks in Thrace". London 1913. H. Barby, "Les victoires Serbes", Paris 1913.

N. Buxton, "With the Bulgarian Staff", London 1913.

Col. P. De Mondesir, "Le siège d'Andrinople", Paris 1914.

M. Mukhtar Pasha, "Mon Commandement au cours de la Campagne des Balkans de 1912". Paris 1913.

J. Pélissier, "Dix mois de guerre dans les Balkans". Paris, 1913. R. Puaux, "De Sofia à Tchataldja", Paris 1913.

<sup>7</sup> For an economic overview of Salonica at the time see: Theano Tsiovaridou, "The Commercial Development and Economic Importance of the Port of Thessaloniki from the End of the Eighteenth Century to the End of World War I", in *War and Society in East Central Europe*, Vol. XXIII, Institute for Balkan Studies, Thessaloniki, 1988, p. 273.

than 80,000, the overwhelming majority Sepharadis, with the occupation of Salonica and the other smaller centers of Jewish life in southern Macedonia.

Under the liberal rule of the Ottoman Empire, Salonica had seen its Sephardic population prosper and grow to nearly two third of the 150,000 inhabitants of the town, at the time of the Greek occupation. The economic life of this port city, the gateway of the Balkans, was in the hands of the Sepharadis, which further antagonized the small Greek population of the town. Economic competition, cloaked in the mantel of Greek nationalism, and religious anti-Semitism would color the relations of the two communities until the extermination of the Sepharadis by the Germans and their Greek collaborators during the Second World War.

Salonica, at the turn of the century was a bustling commercial city, serving as the major outlet of Balkan trade. With the vast hinterland of Macedonia behind it, and with rail connections to İstanbul to the East, Monastir to the West, and Uskub to the North, Salonica was connected to the railroad that reached Central Europe through Belgrade. A port of call of all the major Mediterranean shipping lines, Salonica's harbor was in the hands of the Sepharadis, who kept it closed on Saturdays.

When the Turkish commander of the city, Tahsin Pasha, capitulated on November 9, 1912 to the advancing Greek troops, soon to be followed by the Bulgarians, the local Greek population gave vent to centuries of jealousy and frustration, by turning against the civilian Sephardic and Turkish inhabitants. Rather than containing the violent mobs, the Greek troops often joined them in their attacks.

Foreign observers from the international press filled their newspapers with articles on the atrocities of the early days of the Greek occupation. The Times of London of November 26, 1912, reported that the Turks and the

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The rail line to Uskub was opened in 1871 and continued to Belgrade in 1888; the line to Monastir was opened in 1894 and that to İstanbul in 1904.

In the European part of the Ottoman Empire that will be affected by the two Balkan Wars, there were some 150,000 Jews, most of them Sepharadis, before the conflict started. They lived mostly in the three major urban centers of Salonica, with 75,000 Sepharadis, İstanbul with 40,000 and Edirne with 17,000.

Smaller communities were found in Monastir, with 6,000; Rhodes with 4,000; Serres and Janina with some 2,000 each; Uskub with 1,700 and Siliври with 1,200. Except for the Romaniotes Jews of Janina and Kastoria, and a few hundreds Ashkenazim in İstanbul, 90% of the Jews were Sepharadis.



Sepharadis were stopped in every street and "rigorously searched from head to foot... (they) were robbed of their watches, purses and similar objects of value. Any attempt at resistance was met by personal violence. Greek officers were eye-witnesses of these incidents and raised not a hand to curb the zeal of their men." The same article pointed out that "the principal sufferers have been the Jews. Inaugurated by the local Greek press a crusade of anti-Semitism has spread over the armies, with the result that the unfortunate Israelites have been pillaged and mercilessly ill treated."<sup>8</sup>

*Le Temps* of Paris, in an article of November 26, 1912, pointed out that many Jews were maltreated, brutalized and robbed and that stores were pillaged and synagogues wrecked<sup>9</sup>.

*The Jewish Chronicle* of London, in an article of January 3, 1913, deplored the lack of response by the Greek authorities. "Owing to the perfect freedom from restraint enjoyed by malefactors here, excesses against the Jews are on the increase... Despite all the promises made, the lives and

<sup>8</sup> The article goes on describing the situation in the city, "we have here some 75,000 Jews, more than half the population of the city. This is what makes Salonica unique among the harbors of the Eastern Mediterranean where the Greek element always dominates.

They Jews have always been faithful Ottoman subjects... they have always enjoyed complete freedom of religion... (and) from the beginning of the war have acknowledged their support" *Times* of London, November 26, 1912, p. 11.

<sup>9</sup> "La grande majorité des israélites de Salonique ont fait aux Grecs un accueil correct, mais sans plus... Les hauts fonctionnaires, n'ont pu s'empêcher de dire tout haut que la population israélite aurait du mettre un peu plus d'empressement à pavoiser. Et ce ne sont pas les nombreuses manifestations antisémites, dont nous venons d'avoir le spectacle, qui sont susceptible d'arranger les choses... Une députation des notables israélites, conduite par le grand-rabbin, a été reçue ce matin par le roi Georges, qui a exprimé ses regrets des incidents des jours passés et déclare que les coupables seraient punis... Il ne faut pas oublier qu'il y a ici 70.000 ou 75.000 israélites, au bas mot, c'est-à-dire une bonne moitié de la population de la ville. C'est ce qui donne à Salonique une physionomie à part parmi les ports orientaux où presque partout domine l'élément grec..."

Les juifs se rendent bien compte de ce qu'ils perdraient en perdant les Turcs. Ils ont toujours été de loyaux sujets ottomans, et leur intérêt était en cela conforme à leurs sentiments... ils ont toujours joui de la plus complète liberté religieuse... Ils occupent vraiment ici une situation privilégiée qu'ils ne pourraient pas conserver sous un gouvernement hellénique. Dès le commencement de la guerre, ils ont hautement avoué leurs sympathies." *Le Temps*, Paris, November 26, 1912, p. 2.

Another French newspaper gave us a similar view to the Greek occupation:

"Un certain nombre de maisons sont fermées, comme en deuil. Ce sont les maisons Israélites. Car les Israélites de Salonique déplorent infiniment l'arrivée des Grecs dans une ville qu'ils considéraient jusqu'ici comme la leur."

*L'Illustration*, Paris, December 14, 1912.

property of our coreligionists are not yet secured." In its issue of January 24, 1913, it likened the fate of the Jews of Salonica to that of some persecuted Jewish communities in Russia and Rumania and warned that "if the present is bad, the outlook in the future is worse." In an editorial in its November 24, 1913 issue, the *Chronicle* blamed the situation on the "profound hatred and jealousy of the Jews (that is) deeply embedded in the hearts of the Greeks."<sup>10</sup>

One of the most serious incidents that occurred during the early months of the Greek occupation was the murder of two prominent Jewish merchants, David Amir and Jacques Franses, on December 24, 1912. The funeral procession for the two victims was vividly described in the *Jewish Chronicle* of January 10, 1913. "The entire Jewish population paid the last homage to the poor martyrs. All the Jewish warehouses and shops, and most of the shops belonging to the Mohammedans, were closed. An enormous procession, estimated at 12,000 followed the cortege." At one point they were blocked from advancing by the Greek authorities. "Captain Axialos, of the gendarmes, followed by some soldiers and gendarmes ordered those who were in the front ranks of the procession to disperse (and)...directed the

<sup>10</sup> *The Jewish Chronicle* of London had weekly reports on the situation in Salonica. The January 3, 1913 issue deplored the lack of response of the Greek authorities to the attacks on the Jews. "The Jews are continually made victims of robbery and all kinds of attacks." (P.14)

In the January 24, 1913 issue, another pessimistic report appeared. "Since the occupation of that town by the Greeks, we must admit that the position of that proud Jewish community has undergone a vast change. It has met with a fate which we have been wont till now to associate with some Jewish communities in Russia and Rumania." (P. 20)

In the November 24, 1913 issue, it pointed out that "profound hatred and jealousy of Jews are deeply embedded in the hearts of the Greeks, and we have to suffer sad results from these sentiments." (P. 15)

In the May 29, 1914 issue, the report of the fact finding mission of the Anglo-Jewish Association is published. "We are told of the complete ruin that has overtaken a large and once prosperous community, of emigration en masse being in contemplation, and that, generally not a glimmer of hope seems to be visible...Suspicion naturally falls upon the new masters of the city. The Greek occupation, we cannot forget, began in riot, and many Jews feared that it would eventuate in economic suppression...Meanwhile what we do know is that a great community has been beggared since the Balkan War." (P. 9)

The July 17, 1914 issue continues with the same pessimistic tone. "The Greek press campaign against the Jews continues unabated...the Jews are held up to execration because some of them continue to wear the fez, thus demonstrating their Philo-Turkish sentiments...the authorities...remain as inactive as they were when the outbreak began; thus by their silence they encourage those vicious papers." (P. 14)

soldiers to load their rifles."<sup>11</sup> The cortege, headed by Chief Rabbi Meir refused and continued on its way towards the lines of soldiers who backed down.

The numerous Sephardic schools in the city also suffered from the Greek occupation; parents were afraid to send their children out in the streets because of the Greek mobs. In a letter of December 4, 1912 to the Alliance Israélite Universelle headquarters in Paris, Albert Cohen, head of the Allatini school, one of the largest in Salonica, wrote that "all the self interested justification of the newspapers of Europe, all the lies which they have used to cover up the truth, can never destroy the impressions of the terrible anguish which marked the entry of the Greeks into Salonica. A week of terror and horror one can never easily forget...The mob has shown itself odious and the government weak...The incompetence of the Greek administration and the horrors inflicted by the soldiers has put them in a terrible situation."<sup>12</sup>

The concern for the atrocities committed on the Sephardis by the Greeks in Salonica, spurred numerous inquiries on the part of world Jewry. A joint commission of the Anglo-Jewish Association and the German-Jewish Hilfsverein, under Paul Nathan of Vienna, Elkan Adler of London and Bernard Kahn of Brussels, toured the Balkans in January 1913 and reported that the situation for the Jews in Salonica was far worse than that in Serbian and Bulgarian territories. Another commission of inquiry sponsored by the Shield of Israel of the United States, sent Henry Green to the area. Writing in the *New York Times* of March 9, 1913, Green pointed out that "the treatment that our people have already suffered at Salonika under Greek domination is appalling."<sup>13</sup>

<sup>11</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, January 10, 1913, p. 13.

<sup>12</sup> Quoted in Stanford J. Shaw, *The Jews of the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic*, New York, 1991, p. 195.

<sup>13</sup> The Delegation was in the area from January 10 to the 29, 1913 and visited the major Sephardic communities affected by the war. From Belgrade it went to Sofia and then to Salonica, where the three delegates met with the Jewish Communal Council and stayed at the house of Jacob Modiano. From there Kahn went to Monastir, while Adler and Nathan went to Serres. On their return to Salonica, they met with representatives of all the Jewish clubs of the city and then left for Cavalla and İstanbul.

The American Jewish Committee, headed at the time by Louis Marshall asked the United States government to intercede in order to protect the lives of the Sepharadis in Salonica. Herbert Friedenwald, secretary of the Committee, issued a request for the State Department to protest, pointing out that "when Salonica was captured by the Greeks, a number of Jews were murdered, their houses and shops pillaged and the women outraged. Similar excesses have occurred in several places in the possession of the Greeks."<sup>14</sup>

Adolph Kraus, international president of the B'nai B'rith sent a strong letter to American Secretary of State Knox, asking him to protest the behavior of the Greek troops in Salonica. "The Greeks are plundering the Jewish quarters in Salonica, destroying synagogues and attacking women. The German and French ambassadors have protested at Athens. We pray the American Government to do likewise."<sup>15</sup>

The small Sephardic Jewish community in the United States held an emergency meeting on November 24, 1913, under the leadership of Dr. De Sola Pool and Dr. Pereira Mendes, to coordinate the response to the Greek atrocities.

The accusation of ritual murder which some members of the Greek Orthodox clergy propagated among masses of fanatic people, had its usual effect in Salonica and was especially serious in that year since, according to the *New York Times* of April 3, 1913, "a general massacre of the Jewish inhabitants is imminent on the occasion of the Greek Easter and the Jewish Passover celebrations, which fall at the same time."

The Greeks also complained that Jewish houses and stores did not put out the Greek colors to celebrate their entry into Salonica. The Greek press of the city, in particular the newspaper *Embros*, started an anti-Semitic campaign, accusing the Sepharadis of treason because they did not show their enthusiasm for the entry of the Greek troops.

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In an interview with the *Jewish Chronicle*, Elkan Adler, assessing the situation, pointed out that "the Jews possess neither torpedo ships or dreadnoughts to back up their just claims. I hope that their future destiny will not be worse than their former position." February 7, 1913, p. 21.

Green also pointed out that "the Jews in Turkey have always enjoyed the utmost liberty. They are now feeling the lash of the conqueror. Heavy Jewish emigration from the former Turkish provinces to the United States is inevitable." *New York Times*, March 9, 1913, p. 4.

<sup>14</sup> *New York Times*, February 10, 1913.

<sup>15</sup> *New York Times*, November 22, 1913, p. 2, 18.

Writing about those events in a book published after the Balkan Wars, British historian Crawford Price, interviewing the Chief Rabbi of Salonica, Jacob Meir, wrote that the Rabbi believed "that his people were Ottoman citizens, (and) felt the keenness of the Turkish defeats as such, and it was but natural that they should appear more mournful than jubilant."<sup>16</sup>

The fate of Salonica at the London Peace Conference called by the major powers, and presided over by the French Ambassador in that city, Paul Cambon, was especially important for the Sepharadis. Their fate was being decided without consulting them and they had no voice in the eventual disposition of the city, although they represented the bulk of the population. Cambon clearly foresaw the difficulties that Salonica would present for the parties involved. Writing to his brother Jules, on April 20, 1913, Paul

<sup>16</sup> W.H. Crawford Price, *The Balkan Cockpit*, London 1914, p. 145. The accusation of ritual murder was also spread by the Greeks in Salonica and in other parts of the Ottoman Empire. In Tchesme, across from the island of Chios, which the Greek had occupied, there were about 30 Sephardic families among the 15,000 Greek inhabitants. Writing to his brother, David Joseph, in New York city, on March 22, 1913, Jacob Joseph of Tchesme tells him that "all our supposed Greek friends turned out to be our enemies. They are accusing us of having kidnapped a Greek child and using the blood for our coming Passover. Young and old are maltreating our people wherever they see them, stoning them... At a mass meeting held the other night they decided to boycott the Jews, not to buy anything of or sell anything to them..."

The day after the meeting, the Greek priest came with a pail of so called 'cursed water' (aforissimos) and sprinkled it about so as to prevent any Greek from passing by our stores, for as you know, they believe any Christian stepping on that water must eventually die, unless the priest revokes the order.

Yesterday Vassil Simyakou, who was supposed to be a friend of yours and for whom you did so many favors when you were here, went with a revolver to the landlord of our store and threatened to kill him if he did not put us out of the store by April 1.

So you understand now what kind of situation we are in. It is not a matter of changing store and paying more for it. They are simply taking the means of our livelihood. Some of our people have begun to emigrate because of this state of things. I am afraid that if no one interferes in our favor they are going to put us out of our home.

Please ask the newspapers and the organizations to interest themselves in our plight, as the Greeks will surely kill us the first chance that they get. Our Haham Bachi made the Government write to the Greek Patriarch that he should advise the Greeks of our city to stop their outrageous conduct against us.

The chief Greek priest here received a letter and posted it on the door of the church with a remark under it, sealed by himself, telling the Greeks that the Jews are such evil-minded people and have so much influence with the Turkish government that they brought pressure upon our holy Patriarch to write us a letter in their favor against his own wishes."

*The New York Times*, April 3, 1913, p. 5.

The Turkish army had to interfere to protect the 30 Jewish families in Tchesme.

Cambon pointed out that "the Jews, who are 75,000 against 25,000 Greeks and 10,000 to 12,000 of other mixed nationalities, fear the Greek domination...Yesterday I received the delegates of a Jewish-Turkish Committee who are asking for the formation of a smaller Macedonia with Salonica as its capital."<sup>17</sup>

The leader of that delegation was a Sephardic official of the Ottoman Empire, Rouso Bey, Chief Secretary of the Turkish Ministry of Finance, who, in a letter to the *Jewish Chronicle* of May 16, 1913, advocated the formation of an autonomous territory, under the guarantee of the great powers.

The Alliance Israélite Universelle which had opened numerous schools throughout the Ottoman Empire during the previous 40 years, was especially fearful of the nationalistic and anti-Semitic agenda of the Greek government. Its Secretary-General, Jacques Bigart, writing to Paleologue, the Director of Political Affairs at the Quai d'Orsay, expressed his fear for the well-being of the 52 schools of the Alliance, serving some 10,000 Sephardic students in the provinces lost by the Ottoman Empire<sup>18</sup>.

Another plan advanced by the Zionist leader Max Nordau, in a letter to the *Times* of London, on December 30, 1912, would have made of Salonica a free international city under the protection of the big powers. "In such case the Jewish element which forms the relative majority in Salonika would be called upon to play the leading part in the organization of the new Commonwealth."<sup>19</sup> Austria-Hungary was also in favor of such a plan.

<sup>17</sup> Cambon. op. cit., Vol. 3, p. 46.

<sup>18</sup> "L'Alliance Israélite Universelle se préoccupe vivement des répercussions que peuvent avoir pour ses établissements scolaires les négociations actuelles de Londres...En dépit des protestations d'amitié que ces pays font actuellement aux juifs, il n'est pas douteux que notre tâche éducatrice nous sera rendue extrêmement difficile le jour où la Bulgarie et la Grèce auront annexé à leur territoire telle localité de la Turquie...La fermeture des institutions de l'Alliance dans la presqu'île balkanique porterait sur une masse de 10.000 enfants environ. C'est particulièrement à Salonique que le préjudice serait grave. Salonique est le groupement juif le plus important, le plus influent de toute la région. Les Juifs forment la grande majorité de la population et occupent dans toutes les branches de l'activité économique et morale une situation prépondérante...Que Salonique devienne grecque ou bulgare, toute cette oeuvre risque de sombrer. Salonique serait hellénisée ou bulgarisée."

Letter of Jacques Bigart, Secretary General of the Alliance, to Maurice Paléologue, Director of Political Affairs at the French Foreign Ministry, in André Chouraqui, *L'Alliance Israélite Universelle et la Renaissance Juive Contemporaine, 1860-1960*, Paris 1965, p. 165.

<sup>19</sup> *Times* of London, December 30, 1912, p. 3.

For the Sephardim, whose first choice was the restoration of the city to the Ottoman Empire, any other political disposition, other than Greek annexation, was much more appealing. The memory of the pogrom of 1891 in Corfou did not speak too well of Greek intentions<sup>20</sup>.

Both Greece and Bulgaria tried to gain the alliance of Jewish public opinion at the opening of the London Peace Conference and to obtain the support of the Sepharadis of Salonica, the major prize of this war.

Bulgaria mounted a major propaganda drive in order to convince the Sepharadis and world Jewish organizations that Sofia would treat its Jewish citizens better than Athens. Dr. Daneff, Bulgarian chief representative at the Peace Conference, in an interview with the *Jewish Chronicle*, pledged that "the Jews in the new Bulgarian provinces...would be treated with the same justice and good will as the Jews in Bulgaria have hitherto been treated,"<sup>21</sup> Daneff further pointed out that 45,000 Jews already lived in Bulgaria and that the Bulgarian economic market presented better opportunities for the Sepharadis of Salonica than the Greek markets. If annexed to Greece, Salonica would lose its preeminence as the commercial center of the Balkans because of Greek custom tariffs.

To add weight to its campaign, Sofia enlisted the help of its Chief Rabbi, Dr. Ehrenpreis, who introduced to the King the Delegation of International Jewish Organizations touring the area. In a report published in the *Jewish Chronicle*, the Delegation reported that "the King...was most benevolent and friendly."<sup>22</sup>

In an interview with the French newspaper *Le Matin*, Dr. Ehrenpreis stressed the two major reasons why the Sepharadis of Salonica would be better off under Bulgaria than under Greece: first the Greeks are anti-Semitic and second the vast hinterland of Bulgaria was necessary for the economic survival of the city as an international transit port and a major commercial center<sup>23</sup>.

<sup>20</sup> Shaw, op. Cit., p. 194.

<sup>21</sup> January 17, 1913, p. 14.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., January 31, 1913, p. 13.

<sup>23</sup> The interview was translated and published in the *Jewish Chronicle* of May 2, 1913, p.

In May, Dr. Ehrenpreis went to London in order to add more weight to the Bulgarian claims over Salonica and tried to convince the Conference of Ambassadors, the press and the international Jewish community that the Sepharadis would be better off under Bulgarian than under Greek control. Pointing out the similarity of professional pursuits between the Sepharadis and the Greeks in the commercial field, and the traditional Greek anti-Semitism, Dr. Ehrenpreis predicted that "if Salonica becomes Greek, the Jews will be forced to emigrate" while the 80,000 Sepharadis of Salonica and its surrounding area, if joined to the 45,000 Jews in Bulgaria, would feel more comfortable with Sofia than with Athens, especially since the "Greek population is not favorably disposed and the government cannot control them."<sup>24</sup>

Recalling his personal experience in Edirne which he visited when Bulgaria occupied the city for a while, Dr. Ehrenpreis described the looting of the Jewish houses by the local Greek population and the beginning of a pogrom, which he stopped by intervening with the Bulgarian authorities to restrain the Greeks. Ending his interview, the Chief Rabbi declared that "none of the difficulties to which I have referred would arise if the city (Salonica) were controlled by Bulgaria."<sup>25</sup>

In the face of the Bulgarian campaign, there was very little that Greece could do to convince the Conference of Ambassadors, the international Jewish organizations and especially the Sepharadis of Salonica that they would be better off under Athens than under Sofia.

Venizelos, the Prime Minister who headed the Greek delegation at the Peace Conference, denied the charges made by Danoff, but also realized that the bad press that Greece was getting over the atrocities committed by the Greeks on the Sepharadis in Salonica, could jeopardize the claim that Athens had.

In order to counteract the Bulgarian campaign, he asked a few leaders of the small Jewish community in Greece that did not reach 8,000 souls, to go to Salonica. At the end of 1912, Constantinis, Cohen and Gani, respective leaders of the Jewish communities in Athens, Larissa and Volos, arrived in Salonica, where they were received by King George, but were unable to win

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., May 30, 1913, p. 20.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.



over the Sephardic leadership of the city. As Ottoman citizens, the Sepharadis of Salonica and the other areas conquered by Greece, had no reason to change the *status quo* and lose the benevolent rule of the government of the Sultans. Neither Greece, nor Bulgaria, nor Serbia, could ever match the friendly relations that had existed between the Sepharadis and the Turks in the Ottoman Empire. The Sepharadis realized however that the Conference of London would never return Salonica to the Ottoman Empire and would not take into consideration the wishes of the local populations, be they Jews or Moslems. They therefore tried at least to prevent a Greek annexation, the worse of all possibilities for the Sepharadis.

Summing up the efforts of Venizelos and of Greece to present a better image to the world, the *Jewish Chronicle*, in an editorial, found no reason to cheer; "notwithstanding all these conciliatory measures, the end desired has not been attained, for the Jews continue to regard the Greeks as enemies, owing to the acts of violence which are still being committed. Shops and houses are being looted as before, and no one is being punished. How in such conditions can we put faith in fine phrases?"<sup>26</sup>

There were many contradictions between the statements by Athens and the behavior of the authorities in Salonica. Although King George and his troops occupied the city, the army did not restrain the local Greek population and did little to allay the fears of the Sepharadis.

*Le Temps*, of Paris, in an article at the end of 1912, pointed out that "parmi les problèmes macédoniens qu'on a à coeur à Athènes de résoudre au plus vite, c'est de faire disparaître l'antisémitisme de la Macédoine...Le gouvernement grec donne des instructions de nature à convaincre les Israélites de Salonique que la liberté et l'égalité parfaites seront garanties et que les Juifs trouveront auprès des autorités grecques protection et sympathie."<sup>27</sup>

Upon arriving in Salonica, the Delegation of International Jewish Organizations met with King George and raised its concerns over the atrocities committed during the occupation, the change of the weekly

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., January 3, 1913, p. 16.

<sup>27</sup> *Le Temps* of Paris, November 16, 1912, p. 2.

market day to Saturday, which prevented the Jews from attending, and the general attitude of the authorities in not punishing the perpetrators of the attacks on the Sepharadis.

Venizelos himself went to Salonica at the beginning of 1913, where he met with the Chief Rabbi. In an interview given to the *Jewish Chronicle* after the meeting, Rabbi Meir said that Venizelos "frankly admitted that we had ample reasons to be attached to the Turks who had accorded us important communal privileges and he assured (me) that one of the first cares of the Hellenic Government would be to maintain and extend all those privileges both as regards the Gabellas (communal taxes) and...the Chief Rabbinate, so that our community might prosper more and more."<sup>28</sup>

Relations between the Sepharadis and the Greek occupying forces were further strained when King George was assassinated by a deranged Greek. The local Greek press in Salonica and in other Greek cities immediately accused the murderer, Skinas, of being Jewish and Jews were attacked in the streets. Even in İstanbul, the Greek newspaper *Neologos* quickly spread that lie, and in Edirne, occupied then by the Bulgarians, the Greek Metropolitan of the city told the Chief Rabbi, Haim Bejerano, "that the Jews had rejoiced at the death of the King."<sup>29</sup>

The Second Balkan War, which saw the defeat of Bulgaria, gave the city of Salonica to Greece by the Treaty of Bucharest of August 10, 1913. The efforts of the Sepharadis to prevent such a development had failed and their worse fears were realized. A few months later the First World War saw Greece divided between a pro-Allies government under Venizelos in Salonica and a neutral government, leaning towards Germany, under King Constantine in Athens. Soon Allied troops landed in Salonica, bringing some economic relief to the city that had suffered from the Balkan Wars. By 1917, Venizelos entered Athens and forced the abdication of Constantine in favor of his son Alexander, while joining the side of the Allies in the War.

That same year would see a most disastrous fire hit the city of Salonica on August 5. Within a few hours, the entire commercial heart of the city

<sup>28</sup> *The Jewish Chronicle* of London, February 28, 1913, p. 15.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, April 28, 1913, p. 20.

would be destroyed and over 70,000 people, among them 52,000 Sepharadis and 11,000 Turks, would lose their houses and their livelihoods. Over 2/3 of the city and some 8,000 buildings would be destroyed, the majority owned by the Sepharadis. The fire of 1917, which spread so quickly and which has never been fully explained, would do more to destroy the Sephardic character of Salonica than anything else Athens could have done.

American journalist Charles Upson Clark, writing in the *New York Times*, two years after the fire, pointed out that "the government never issued a satisfactory explanation and the natural suspicions of the inhabitants were accentuated by the shouts of joy raised in the leading Liberal daily of Athens over the disappearance of the ancient ghetto of Macedonia."<sup>30</sup>

Taking advantage of the calamity, a week after the fire had died, the government decided to confiscate all the land affected by the fire and to rebuild the city on a completely new plan. The old landowners would receive government bonds equivalent to the nominal value of their land and could then bid on the lots when the government plan was implemented. More than anything else, this would reduce thousands of Sephardic families to destitution and would be the most devastating blow to the economic power that the Sepharadis held in the city for the last four hundred years.

Visiting the town, nearly 10 years after the fire, Israel Cohen, writing in the newspaper *Menorah Journal*, had this to say about the city. "I was taken to the scene of desolation...Here, before the war, a tumultuous traffic swarmed; but now the ships in the gulf were few and small. Fronting the sea for the length of a mile, and a little distance away from it, lay the charred

<sup>30</sup> "These suspicions were changed to despair when the Government issued the provisions of the so-called Mawson plan for the rebuilding of the city - a plan which the Venizellist Minister of Communications...frankly characterized as 'confiscation pure and simple...It is drawing near the end of the second year since the fire, and much of the homeless population as still remain camp out in hovels and in tents and eke out as best as they can a scanty existence...Can there be a plainer proof that it is not fair to leave any of the great Spanish Jewish centers of the Levant - Saloniki, Constantinople, Smyrna - to a single Balkan government to administer? Considering besides that Saloniki must be the natural port of Serbia, of much of Albania, and of Bulgarian Macedonia, the only solution would seem to be the internationalization of the city and its administration by a committee or delegate of the League of Nations."

*New York Times*, January 19, 1919, III, p. 2.

ruins of the once famous Ghetto, a somber succession of collapsed walls, battered buildings."<sup>31</sup>

The arrival of Greek refugees from Asia Minor would also change the demographic picture of Salonica, making the Sepharadis a minority in a city where they had always been a majority. Athens' policy was to eradicate 400 years of Ottoman and Sephardic history and presence in Salonica. With the exchange of population with Turkey, agreed upon at the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923, the Turks and the Domneh left Salonica, leaving only the Sepharadis to face the Greek policies of Hellenization.

For the next 20 years, the Sephardic community of Salonica would be further eroded by the anti-Semitic policies of Venizelos and his Liberal party which will controlled the newly formed Republic from 1924 to 1936, when King George II was restored to the throne.

The economic power of the Sepharadis already diminished by the loss of the markets in Salonica's hinterland in the Balkans and in the other parts of the Ottoman Empire and later on in the Republic of Turkey, would be

<sup>31</sup> "You asked what the Government has done for the victims of the fire? Said my friend. The Christians were given grants and lodgings; the Jews nothing at all. In fact, the Jews were absolutely forbidden to rebuild their homes. The Government decided to replace the entire city in Greek interests. So it expropriated the entire area laid waste, confiscated one-third of it, and made a pretense of purchasing it from the former owners by nonnegotiable (bonds) payable on indefinite dates. The result was that thousands of Jews were reduced to beggary. Moreover, though important sites have been reserved for churches, not a single plot of land has been allotted for a synagogue to replace the thirty destroyed. But, grave as these sins are, they are only what one might call sins of omission.

Now for the sins of commission. In December 1923, after the proclamation of the Republic, the Revolutionary Committee decided that in elections for the Constituent Assembly the Jews of Salonika should form a distinct electoral college.. Suspected of being monarchists, it was feared that if the Jews were allowed to vote with the general population we would influence the result in favor of the monarchy...The results is that we boycotted the elections. Of 7,000 electors only fifty-two took part, and the four deputies returned are not our most worthy representatives.

Then came a movement to ruin us economically...nearly half a million Greeks were compelled to quit Turkish territory...Most of them came to Salonika, so that the population of the city was almost trebled. In the pre-war population of 190,000, the 80,000 Jews had formed the largest national group...But in a population of 500,000, the Jews became a small minority. The economic conflict began with an agitation against Sunday trading...the law was passed. Think, for hundreds of years Jews in Salonika had been allowed to trade on Sundays. On Saturdays they rested, and the whole city, since all the commerce was in Jewish hands..."

*Menorah Journal*, 12-5-1926, p. 522.

further eroded when Greece imposed a series of discriminatory measures. A high protective tariff; change of the market day to Saturday, the Jewish Sabbath, so that the Sepharadis would not be able to participate; the change of the weekly day of rest to Sunday; import permits issued by the government which favored the Greek Orthodox importers and drove the Sepharadis out of business; the imposition of Greek, a language that no Sepharadis knew, as the only language allowed in government transactions and in keeping the books; and finally the immigration of boatmen from Piraeus who were favored by the authorities over the Sepharadis who had monopolized all jobs related to the harbor for the last 400 years; these were some of the measures taken by the government to destroy the economic power of the Sepharadis.

With a sharp decline in the economic power of the Sephardic community, the Greek government started to attack the Jewish educational system and closed many of the foreign schools, the majority of which, especially the French schools, catered to the Jewish students. It also forbade elementary school children from receiving an education other than in Greek, a language that was never spoken by the Sepharadis, while keeping the Jewish communal schools under strict governmental control.

In the political arena, the Venizelos government established a separate electoral college for the Sepharadis in Salonica and for the Turks in Western Thrace, thus diluting the vote of the minorities. By voting against Venizelos and his xenophobic policies during the first all inclusive elections of June 1915, the Sepharadis incurred his wrath. From then on, until his fall in 1936, the Sepharadis of Salonica would be openly demonized by Venizelos and his cohorts.

The culmination of Venizelos' anti-Semitic policies occurred on Monday June 29, 1931, when a mob of some 2,000 Greeks ransacked the Sephardic suburb of, Campbell, housing some 220 Jewish families. Hundreds of Sepharadis were wounded and fled to the center of Salonica, while the Greek mob set fire to the houses, including those of the rabbi and the doctor, the synagogue, the community center and the school. The Greek police stood by outside the neighborhood and only went in after the fire was set.

In Athens, the President of the Republic, Alexander Zaimis, and Prime Minister Venizelos, who came back to power in 1928, had never reined in the

extreme, xenophobic and anti-Semitic newspapers and political groups. The Governor-General of Macedonia, Gonatas, and the Mayor of Salonica, Harisios Vamvakas never responded adequately to the request of the Jewish community to disband the extremists' parties.

A few days before the pogrom of Campbell, a Greek mob tried to attack the Sepharadis in neighborhood #6 of Salonica, but were repulsed by a self-armed local Jewish force, while the police stood by.

Anti-Semitic pamphlets were distributed by the National Association of University Students, under the leadership of Karakandas and Asthenides, while the extremist rabble rousers of the Ethniki Enosis Ellas, the National Union of Hellas, commonly called the Three Epsilon, EEE, led by Kosmidis and Haritopoulos, sacked the Maccabi recreation center. Other anti-Semitic groups such as the National Legion and the Pavlos Melas organization joined in the general harassment of the Sepharadis in Salonica.

The Campbell pogrom was followed by the destruction of the synagogue in the neighborhood of Harilaos and by a mob attack upon the Sepharadis in suburb #15. When the authorities finally decided to rein in the extremists, prodded by the bad publicity that Greece was receiving overseas, and brought the leaders of the attacks to justice, they were all acquitted<sup>32</sup>.

Among the leaders of the anti-Semitic campaigns in Salonica was Nikos Fardis, editor of the newspaper *Makedonia*, founded in 1911. More than anything else *Makedonia* was responsible for the pogrom of Campbell<sup>33</sup>.

The abolition of the Republic and the return of King George II in 1936, would soon be followed by the establishment of a military dictatorship under general Metaxas. For the next five years, the Sepharadis of Salonica and the other Jews of Greece would be free from any of the excesses of the anti-Semitism that was prevalent under the Republic of Venizelos.

<sup>32</sup> Report of the Jewish Council in Salonica to Mr. Recanati, then in Palestine, sent secretly and written in Hebrew on July 3, 1931. The Greek government had imposed an immediate blackout of news after the pogrom. All letters, telegrams and newspapers sent by Jews overseas were intercepted and never reached their destinations.

For a complete translation of the report, see *Erencia Sefardi*, Fairfield, Ct. USA, #18 to #22, 1997-1998. See also Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Greece, P. Constantopoulou et al., ed., *Documents on the History of the Greek Jews*, Athens 1998, p. 192

<sup>33</sup> For information on the *Makedonia* and its editor Nikos Fardis, see Pierron, op. cit., chapter 9, p. 173.

Things would take a turn for the worse with the declaration of war by Italy on October 28, 1940, soon to be followed by Germany's entry into that war, which had seen the Italian advance repulsed. By April 24, 1941, Greece capitulated to the German, Italian and Bulgarian alliance. In the Bulgarian zone of occupation, which covered most of Western Thrace and Eastern Macedonia, including the towns of Kavala, Serres, Drama, Komotini and Alexandroupolis, the 11,000 Jews, most of them Sepharadis were handed over to the Germans for shipment to the extermination camps and eventual slaughter. The Italian zone, covered most of the country except for Piraeus, Western and Central Crete, the islands of Lemnos, Lesbos and Chios, the strip of land next to Turkish Thrace, and especially Salonica and its hinterland, the heart of Sephardic life in Greece. Until the Italian capitulation on September 8, 1943, Jews in Italian-occupied Greece were not persecuted, unlike the policy that the Germans established immediately after they entered Salonica. Such policies were quickly extended over the rest of Greece, when Germany took over the Italian zone.

Upon entering Salonica, the Germans immediately closed down all Jewish newspapers and resurrected the old anti-Semitic republican movements, such as the EEE and the Pavlos Melas, which resumed their activities. Jewish homes were expropriated, the community's treasures ransacked and a few Sepharadis were shot for so-called subversive activities. For over a year, until the summer of 1942, the 56,000 Sepharadis of Salonica, three-fourths of the total Jewish population of Greece, managed to survive the persecutions of the German army and their local Greek collaborators. Their mouthpiece became the newspaper *Nea Evropi*, which started printing on April 15 1941, under the editor-in-chief Papastratigakis just six days after the Germans entered Salonica.

On July 11, 1942, the German army commander of northern Greece, General von Krenzski, ordered all the male Sepharadis to gather in the center of town in Freedom Square, in order to receive their work card for civilian labor. Surrounded by armed men, with the local population watching from the sidewalks and the balconies, some 10,000 Sepharadic men were kicked and beaten by German soldiers for the entire day. The next day they were at work in the malaria infested swamps to the west of town.

By February of 1943, the SS took over from the army and sent Dieter Wisliceny and Alois Brunner to start the transport of the Salonican Jews to the extermination camps with the help of Dr Max Merten, the head of the city's military administration. Jews were told to move into several large ghettos. They had to start wearing the yellow star and were subjected to a special curfew. On March 15, the first transport of Sepharadis from Salonica had begun from the Baron Hirsch camp at the railroad station. The last transport left in August of that year.

The Greek collaborators were of course overjoyed at the fate of the Jews. The Governor-General of Macedonia, Vasilis Simonides, who was appointed in December 1941 by the collaborator Prime Minister General Tsolakoglou, soon followed by Professor Logothetopoulos and by Rhallis in 1943, took advantage of the German occupation to take over the entire large Sephardic cemetery of Salonica and not only the small part that the Germans had allowed the municipality to expropriate in order to expand the University. Mobs of Greeks soon rampaged through the 450 year old cemetery, breaking the tombstones and appropriating them for building materials, that can still be found in the city today, in the walls of houses, on the pavements and even in the courtyard of Agios Dimitrios church<sup>34</sup>.

Likewise, Jewish apartments and businesses were ransacked or turned over to Greek collaborators. Synagogues, schools, community buildings, libraries, were all knocked down by the new owners for the building materials and the land was resold. Of the more than 30 synagogues that once belonged to the Jewish community, only one was left intact at the end of the war.

In general, outside of Salonica with its tradition of anti-Semitism brought over by the Greek refugees from Asia Minor, the Jews stood a better chance of survival, thanks to the support of the Greek population and especially of the resistance movement of EAM/ELAS. Furthermore the flat

<sup>34</sup> "Finalement, d'entre les matériaux de démolition des cimetières israélites la Métropole et la Municipalité prirent la part du lion. La hideuse basilique Saint Démètre est bâtie avec des plaques tombales brisées des Juifs...Par ailleurs la plupart des caniveaux des trottoirs de Salonique sont faits avec les augustes marbres des tombes juives...De toute façon la valeur des matériaux de construction est nulle comparée à celle de la superficie du cimetière qu'a absorbée l'Université" Pierron, op. cit., p. 223, quoting and translating Greek author Elias Petropoulos.



terrain around Salonica made it more difficult for the Sephardis to escape to the mountains. Among the most important defenders of the Jews against the Germans and the Greek collaborators was a group of intellectuals, professionals and clerics under the leadership of the prelate Damaskinos, Greek Orthodox Archbishop of Athens and all Greece<sup>35</sup>.

When the war ended, less than 10,000 Jews, out of a pre-war population of some 80,000, were alive, the majority having found shelter in the mountains. Few returned from the camps, and those that did, found Salonica a very hostile environment, with the authorities refusing to return properties to their rightful owners and the collaborators still in power. In the midst of a civil war when the Second World War ended, Royal Greece forgot the collaborators and at times enlisted their support to fight the EAMBLAS, former resistance fighters who were now embroiled in the international politics of the cold war.

Many of the Jews left and the small Jewish community, concentrated in Athens, with a few hundred in Salonica has had to endure the vicissitudes of Venizelos' ghost and the pro-Arab and anti-Semitic policies of most of the succeeding governments, especially the Socialists.

Salonica, the heart of the Sephardic nation in the Ottoman Empire is no more. Even the souvenir of its Jewish presence has been eradicated after the great fire and the leveling of the Jewish cemetery. Sometimes one can see some Sephardic names on some of the stores, hastily covered by the new owners with a Greek sign. On November 23, 1997, nearly fifty years after the end of the Second World War, the memory of the Holocaust has finally been remembered in Salonica, with the erection of a monument to its Sephardic martyrs.

<sup>35</sup> For the entire letter, see Constantopoulo, *op. cit.*, p. 250.

