

Forced Assimilation or Emigration: Sephardic Jewry in Thessaloniki, 1917 – 1941

Katerina Lagos

With the incorporation of Thessaloniki into the Greek state in 1913 by the Treaty of Bucharest, following the Balkan Wars, the administration of Eleutherios Venizelos appointed Minister of Justice Constantinos Raktivan as the new Governor-General of Macedonia. He was charged with removing “the tyranny and poor administration” of the Ottomans and bringing “the benefits of liberty to all the inhabitants” in the region.¹ While the new ethnic Greek citizens (Greek-speaking Orthodox Christians) did come to enjoy these benefits, other ethnic groups would not. For the Sephardic Jews in Thessaloniki, in particular, the city’s incorporation to the Greek state signified an end to their demographic prominence and cultural autonomy. Before 1912, the total population of Thessaloniki was roughly 120,000 with an ethnic composition of 60,000 Jews, 25,000 Muslims (including the *dönme*²), 20,000 Greeks, 10,000 Bulgarians, and 5,000 various other ethnic groups.³ Ethnic Greek Christians formed only 16%⁴ of the population of the city and 42.6%⁵ of the population overall in the entire Southern Macedonian region as noted by the United States State Department (USSD).⁶

Throughout the interwar period, successive governments undertook measures to “rectify” (in their view) the demographic composition of the area and to “re-establish” the Greek element. After the 1923 exchange of populations between Turkey and Greece, the Sephardim were no longer the ethnic majority of the city. By the end of the decade, the Greek government’s resettlement program resulted in the Greek Christian population comprising not only the ethnic majority of Thessaloniki but also 88.8% of the population in the entire Southern Macedonian region.⁷ The greatest amount of friction between the Sephardim and the Greek government centred on the new Hellenization, or cultural assimilation, policies during the interwar period.⁸

These policies were two-fold. On the one hand, they aimed to help ethnic Greeks maintain their language and knowledge of their history (including those who were “unaware of their Greek descent,” code for the non-Greek speaking Slavo-Macedonians). On the other hand, they targeted individuals who had clear and distinctly different ethnic backgrounds. For the Greek state, these individuals posed a significant challenge: in what way could non-Greeks be integrated—if not assimilated—into the Greek body politic?

Following the Asia Minor Disaster, the government of Eleutherios Venizelos pushed for “the complete assimilation of the territories which had been annexed in the course of the two Balkan Wars and the Great War, a plan which had been postponed for the sake of implementing the *“Megali Idea.”*”⁹ These assimilationist policies were upheld throughout the interwar period, up through the Metaxas dictatorship (1936-1941), despite considerable political instability. The Greek state’s attempts to assimilate the Sephardim of Thessaloniki into a “modernized” land and society meant that the Sephardim were in effect faced with only two viable choices: assimilation or emigration.

The state policies regarding the Sephardim show that successive administrations’ efforts at cultural assimilation superseded their concern for any given minority—regardless of the minority involved. Although anti-Semitism might have played a role in the Greek state’s agenda, the Sephardim (along with other Jewish communities in Greece) were not a pressing concern for government leaders during the interwar period, especially during the Metaxas dictatorship. Hostility to the Sephardim stemmed from their status as a “foreign element” and not from their Jewishness per se.¹⁰ The overarching concern of all interwar governments centred on territorial revisionism (resisting Bulgarian revisionism and Italian pressure) and Hellenic identity, and not on the activities of particular minority communities, except to the extent that these activities conflicted with the aforementioned state concerns. For the Sephardim, nonetheless, state policies, regardless of their origin or intent, left as their only options conformity with the new Hellenizing legislation or emigration.

The Thessaloniki Fire of 1917: Disaster as Opportunity

In 1917 a fire broke out in Thessaloniki that quickly decimated much of the city center. This was not the first time it happened—in the nineteenth century alone, Thessaloniki

experienced fires in 1840, 1846, and 1890.¹¹ At the time, the population of the city was increasing while the availability of water was decreasing. In the words of Joseph Nehama, the living quarters of the old city were often “a badly-done complex of buildings, typically made from wood and straw mixed with clay.”¹² This precarious construction led to frequent fires because “some summers, drought was so great that the smallest sparks would cause massive fires with the help of the northerly Vardar winds.”¹³ By the end of the century, the likelihood of fire had grown so strong that “special prayers against fire formed part of the local Yom Kippur service.”¹⁴ After each previous fire, the city was rebuilt predominantly according to the pre-existing ground plan. While a few changes were made (modernizing roads and port facilities and taking down portions of the city wall), the fundamental goal of reconstruction was for the inhabitants to “see themselves surrounded by the old familiar patterns once again.”¹⁵ This system of reconstruction based on pre-existing patterns of settlement collided with Greek state urban planning following the 1917 fire. Urban planning and city redevelopment were not novel concepts for the Greek state, as they had been a priority for many political administrations since the end of the nineteenth century. The dramatic increase in the Greek population during the late nineteenth century could no longer be sustained in the countryside and relived through emigration, and therefore led to significant urban growth. With only a few exceptions, most of the cities that had populations over 10,000 in 1870 witnessed 50% growth over the final decades of the nineteenth century.¹⁶ Athens and Piraeus experienced the greatest growth, and Greek politicians were forced to confront this in their urban planning. What emerges from this period is the concerted adoption by Greek politicians of European visions for urban development and the employment European architects and planners to ‘modernize’ Greek cities.¹⁷ This urban agenda soon came to dominate political visions for medium and small cities throughout the New Lands following the Balkan Wars. Medium sized cities such as Ioannina, Serres, and Kavala and small cities such as Grevena, Kilkis, Amintao, and Doxato would all acquire new city planning.¹⁸

Thessaloniki was the largest city in all of the New Lands and the 1917 fire offered a blank slate for the city’s Hellenization. The Venizelos administration consciously decided to recast Thessaloniki as a “Hellenic” and moreover “European” city, and to rid it of foreign influences, especially Turkish. The fire had destroyed over one square kilometer of the city’s historical centre, where most economic activities, administrative services, and major cultural and religious institutions were concentrated.¹⁹ According to Joseph Nehama and other Jewish

historians, the impact and repercussions of the 1917 fire proved to be one of the most significant pre-Holocaust events.²⁰ The decimated areas included the Jewish quarters, and a large portion of the Jewish community was left homeless and penniless. Approximately 9,500 buildings were razed, leaving over 70,000 individuals from all communities homeless; the total damage of the fire was estimated at 8 million British pounds sterling. Three-quarters of the Jewish districts, 45 synagogues, communal administrative and charitable institutions, schools, shops, factories, workshops, businesses, and clubs were either seriously damaged or destroyed completely. More significantly, 53,737²¹ Jews were left homeless out of a population numbering roughly 70,000.²² As a memoir noted, some 8,000 Jews were packed into partially damaged shops, workshops, and warehouses while 2,000 Jews whom the fire had not affected hastened to install themselves somehow or other in the city's surviving houses for exorbitant rents.²³

A Directorate of Fire Victims organised the relief effort to help all those affected find shelter – Jews, Muslims, and Christians.²⁴ (*Documents on the History of the Greek Jews* [hereafter DHGJ] 1998:80) - but the Central Jewish Relief Commission shouldered the majority of the responsibility for Jewish victims.²⁵ As the fire broke out during World War I, all remaining victims of the fire were temporarily housed in allied encampments of the Allied expeditionary force.²⁶ According to the Jewish Community's memorandum concerning the fire and the city's reconstruction, a decision was immediately reached that the city would be rebuilt according to a new plan and all repairs and construction were forbidden within the burnt zone.²⁷ The reconstruction did not occur immediately; the land was finally auctioned by 1924, and rebuilding began in 1928. From the perspective of the Jewish community, the reconstruction of the city was a priority for Venizelos, who decided that the city should be "Hellenized" and be "one of the finest cities in the Levant."²⁸ The reconstruction commenced with sweeping territorial and demographic changes. Not only were towns and villages renamed, but also their residents—many residents were forced to adopt Hellenized names.²⁹

Names of streets were changed to eliminate all Ottoman and "foreign" references and in their place were Hellenic references such as Venizelos Street, Acropolis Street and others were introduced. Other aspects of Ottoman rule were erased from the region: minarets were razed on "the pretence that they were dangerous" while Turkish cemeteries were wrecked and the marble from the tombs was sold for other purposes, and inscriptions in Arabic script were removed or

covered in black paint.³⁰ Most importantly, the city itself became officially known as Thessaloniki.³¹ This was a deliberate means to eradicate other “foreign” appellations for the city—Saloniko (Ladino), Selanik (Turkish), Solun (Bulgarian)—a process that began during the period following the fire. In Southern Macedonia, the names of the nearby villages and towns were “systematically changed from Turkish or Bulgarian to Greek.”³² Not only were towns and villages renamed, but also their residents—many residents were forced to adopt Hellenized names.³³

The fire ultimately resulted in a radical reorganisation of the city’s landscape and ethno-religious groups.³⁴ In the years immediately following the fire, Jews still maintained their status as the city’s largest ethnic group³⁵ and sought to reclaim their residences and businesses, which comprised the heart of the city. Their aspirations would come to naught; Thessaloniki was to be considered a “blank slate” and rebuilt as a purely “Hellenic” city that followed Western principles of modernity.³⁶ The city would show “no continuity at all with its past (apart from the effort made to document certain parts of it, Roman and Byzantine, by giving prominence to selected historic buildings, though now totally divorced from their former functions).”³⁷ The new city plan destroyed the Ottoman pattern of ethnic-religious spatial organization; the Greek, Jewish, and Muslim neighbourhoods became low, middle, and high income districts.³⁸

This outcome was not unwelcome to the government. According to Mawson, “The fundamental purpose of the plan was to deprive the Jews of complete control of the city... but not to oust them completely.”³⁹ United States Vice Consul James S. Moore Jr. also considered the fire an added opportunity to “wrest commercial supremacy from the hands of the Jews.”⁴⁰ The burned portions of the city would be appropriated by a private broker’s agent association that would compensate the affected individuals through interest bearing bonds. A separate committee, including both city officials and property owners, was in charge of estimating the value of each property.⁴¹ This program was considered unacceptable to the fire victims for various reasons: [First] nobody had the right to turn down this offer... [secondly] the plan of the expropriation did not allow for individual indemnities ... [and] all fire victims were legally obliged to invest the money they would receive exclusively in the scheme for the reconstruction of the town.⁴² A final accusation levelled against the Greek government posited that the compulsory purchase of land in the city forced the Jews living there “to receive bonds

redeemable after twenty years [thus compelling them] to purchase land outside the burnt-out zone.”⁴³

Jewish community leaders took swift action in voicing their distrust of the government. Not only did individuals complain bitterly about the perceived arbitrary amount of compensation given to each property holder, but also about the lack of immediate assistance given to the fire victims by the Greek government. These complaints were sent to Jewish communities in both the United States and England. When President Woodrow Wilson received reports of Jewish mistreatment, he instructed the Secretary of State, Robert Lansing, to investigate the situation. Lansing delegated David Lubin, the American representative at the International Institute of Agriculture in Rome to contact the Greek Ambassador to discuss the situation. Lubin concluded that the accusations against the Greek government were groundless; Ambassador Koromilas provided Lubin with ample information to dismiss all of the aforementioned accusations,⁴⁴ though Koromilas may have been acting in his own interest in claiming that he had assuaged Lubin’s concerns. The British Anglo-Jewish Association had received a similar set of complaints in late 1917 stressing that the reconstruction plan “threaten[ed] the whole Jewish community with certain ruin.”⁴⁵ The Anglo-Jewish Association contacted Greek Ambassador Gennadios in London to address the situation. Gennadios, attempting to address the charges, requested that Prime Minister Venizelos himself send a telegram to the Association to reassure its members.

Within the Greek government, there had been considerable debate over the issue of Jewish resettlement and here there was disagreement between administrators in Athens and those in the Macedonian prefecture. The Minister of Foreign Affairs, Nikolaos Politis, wrote to the General Administration of Thessaloniki concerning the benefits of resettling the Jews outside of the centre of the city. Politis considered the fire to present an opportunity to distance the Jews from Thessaloniki because they sought “to neutralize the national policies of the present government.”⁴⁶ Other officials were wary of resettling the Jews in the areas surrounding Thessaloniki and voiced their disquiet. The Prefect of Evros, Nikolaos Kalogeropoulos, wrote to the General Administration of Thrace concerning the dangers that would arise if minority housing, especially Jewish, were built in outlying towns in the Macedonian region. Kalogeropoulos bluntly stated that Jews were generally bitter and resentful towards Thessaloniki’s Greek residents.⁴⁷ Instead, Kalogeropoulos asserted that for “ethnic reasons the

outlying region in Western Thrace and especially remote areas of this department, housing should be built exclusively for citizens with clear pro-Hellenic sentiments.”⁴⁸ He argued that the Jews were not sufficiently patriotic and would not acquire pro-Hellenic sentiments and conform to the laws of the state merely by relocating them to the new housing developments in the outlying region. Kalogeropoulos therefore concluded that, based on Jewish non-conformist behaviour, it would be most imprudent to pursue this resettlement plan.

Ultimately, the Greek government did honour most of its promises, especially those regarding immediate assistance to the victims of the fire. The one issue that the Greek government did not address was that of resettlement. The complaint that the Jews would be compelled to purchase land outside of the burnt-out zone proved to be legitimate. Despite the vociferous protests concerning the compensation plan, the devastated properties were auctioned by the broker’s agent association and sold to the highest bidders. While many wealthy Jews returned to the centre and bay area of the city, the overwhelming majority of Jewish fire victims did not return to their previous domiciles; they either resettled in the newly created suburbs of Thessaloniki or, for many, outside of Greece entirely.⁴⁹

The reconstruction of Thessaloniki marks the deliberate wresting of economic power from the Sephardic Jews. The Greek state, under Venizelos, sought to Hellenize both the visual aspects and the demographic composition of the city. The Sephardim were no longer the dominant ethnic group in the city; their economic supremacy was challenged, their customs undermined by new laws, and their interactions regulated by the Greek state that wished to assert its control over the region. Venizelos aspired to make Thessaloniki an example of western European city planning and local political leaders aspired to supplant the Jews in their economic, social, and geographic position. It must also be pointed out that all remnants of Ottoman Muslim existence were completely obliterated. Should the Muslims have remained in the city, it could be surmised that their treatment would have been similar to that of the Jews. In this regard, the claim that the Venizelos administration sought to wrest control of the city from the Jews in particular is only partly correct. To complete the picture, it must be noted that the Venizelos administration sought to wrest control from and supplant any and all minorities in Thessaloniki. Thus, the reconstruction of Thessaloniki served as a clear example of how the Greek state’s policies would supersede individual minority interests throughout the interwar period.

The Expropriation of the Thessaloniki Jewish Cemetery

An especially sore point following the rebuilding of Thessaloniki arose with the appropriation of portions of the Thessaloniki Jewish cemetery. The size of the Jewish cemetery, prior to 1936, totalled 357,246 square metres⁵⁰ and included the graves of nearly 500,000 individuals.⁵¹ The idea to expropriate portions of the Jewish cemetery arose with Ernest Hebrard's plan for the city's reconstruction. For Hebrard, the appropriation of the Jewish cemetery went beyond aesthetics; it also included issues of hygiene. It is unlikely that Hebrard's plan was developed with the sole intent to displace the Sephardim; rather, the entire region was considered a blank canvas to redraw the city landscape and modernize Greek urban planning along European lines. During the first decades of the twentieth century, the city itself had difficulty containing its population and, by 1922, new buildings were constructed to the east of the ancient city walls.⁵² Yet the debate over the expropriation of cemetery land took on ethnic and perceived anti-Semitic overtones. This conflict would continue throughout the interwar period and reflects the similarity in political perspective between the various Greek administrations. Between 1928 and 1937, the intended use of the Jewish cemetery for the newly established University of Thessaloniki would highlight the conflict between the state's needs and Sephardim's minority rights.

In 1925, initial discussions began to appropriate portions of the Jewish cemetery. This coincided with the exchange of populations following the Treaty of Lausanne and the exodus of ethnic Turks from the region. The Turkish cemetery, whose location was adjacent to the Jewish cemetery to the south, was expropriated for the use of the university. Thus, a precedent was set for future land expropriation. By 1928, concerted action began for expropriating portions of the Jewish cemetery. In 1929, the National Council of Ministers decided to expropriate 6,850 square metres of land which belonged to the Jewish community and included portions of the Jewish cemetery for the construction of an urban settlement for Asia Minor refugees.⁵³ Haim R. Habib, locum tenens of the Chief Rabbi, wrote to the President of the Jewish Community of Thessaloniki, Jakob Cazes, concerning the issue: belonging to wise Jews of international renown, these graves have been preserved intact for many centuries, constituting historical monuments of great value for the Hebrew people in general and for the Jews of our city in particular...use of these sacred places for other purposes is thus in itself a sacrilege for our religion, and the

removal of the remains of our dead is absolutely forbidden, as stated in explicit references in our sacred texts.⁵⁴

In his communication, Habib acknowledged that many other European countries had attempted to appropriate Jewish cemeteries for various state needs. In Vienna, Habib mentioned that a similar appropriation plan had arisen in 1898. Here, the Viennese authorities wished to construct a tramline through the Vahrungen Jewish Cemetery. However, as a result of the numerous Jewish petitions sent to Viennese state authorities, the purchase was cancelled. A law was ultimately enacted guaranteeing the inviolability in perpetuity of Jewish cemeteries. In France, none of the Jewish cemeteries had been expropriated; in fact, “the Jewish cemeteries at Bordeaux and Bayonne, in Alsace and elsewhere, have survived intact though they are no longer in use.”⁵⁵ For Habib, these European examples underscored the inviolability of cemeteries and also his belief that appropriate action on the part of Thessaloniki’s community would put an end to Greek authorities’ plans. Thus Habib concluded by stating, “It is an essential duty resting upon us to submit, with all respect, the views of the Jewish Community of the question of this compulsory purchase, in the conviction that the Government would look upon them with its usual favour.”⁵⁶ Unfortunately for Habib, the Greek government did not concede on the issue.

In 1930, Stylianos Gonatas, Governor General of Macedonia, invited the President of the Jewish Community, Jakob Cazes, and a Jewish Senator and Member of Parliament to broach the issue of the Jewish community relinquishing the particular portion of the cemetery. Cazes and the Senator listened to Gonatas, but would not concede to his request. He responded that, while the Jewish community would benefit from financial compensation offered by the state, Jewish law forbade the disturbing of buried remains. It also contained the tombs of distinguished Jews; at the least, they figured, it “ought to be classed as an archaeological site.”⁵⁷ The specific portion of the cemetery needed for the Physics building was, as the Governor-General explained, “small and is located at the edge of the cemetery, adjacent to the University building already standing.”⁵⁸ Gonatas stressed that great care would be taken in removing and transporting the inscribed plaques and would comply with any other religious formalities for the appropriated land.

However, the portion of land the University sought included the tomb of a rabbi considered a sage. While neither Cazes nor the Senator gave Gonatas a definite answer, because

they felt they had to confer with the Jewish Community Council before arriving at a decision, the Jewish press began a vehement campaign against the appropriation. Members of the Jewish press had consulted a religious expert, which partly helped to shape public opinion. As a result, Gonatas concluded that it was abundantly clear that the Community's response will in no circumstances be affirmative since even those who inwardly accept our views are incapable of stating this in public, considering that doing so would incur the wrath of the Jewish masses, who would be incited in this direction by their political opponents.⁵⁹

Gonatas, though, ultimately requested that Prime Minister Eleutherios Venizelos make the final decision. The response by Venizelos was to override Jewish petitions, and appropriate portions of the Jewish cemetery. The appropriation was approved on 4 August 1930 and was formalized in a decree on 21 March 1934. The editor of *l'Univers Israélite* concluded pessimistically that "all of the efforts made by the Jews for saving their cemetery, which has grand historical value, has failed; there is fear now that it will disappear soon."⁶⁰ Despite the fact that immediate action was not taken to use the appropriated land, the decree highlights the position taken by Venizelos to the Sephardim. The Jewish position in Thessaloniki, and all of Greece was subservient to the needs of the state and its Hellenization agenda.

While Venizelos may have held some sympathy for the Jewish arguments against expropriation, his plan to rebuild Thessaloniki into a Western—and Hellenic—city overrode all other concerns. During the Metaxas dictatorship, an additional 9,000-12,000 square metres were expropriated to enlarge the University of Thessaloniki, including the Department of Agriculture.⁶¹ Both Metaxas and Venizelos justified the expropriation of the Jewish cemetery on the grounds that "the needs of the living [were] superior to those of the dead."⁶² As a consolation to community leaders, government officials emphasized how the proceeds of the sale of the cemetery "would enable them to meet many of the urgent needs of the community."⁶³ In June 1936, the Metaxas administration⁶⁴ attempted to negotiate with the Jewish community to appropriate the needed territory for the university. Here, the Greek Minister for Public Instruction, M. Louvaris, visited Joseph Nehama to see if there could be an exchange of territory in return for the administration's relaxation in educational policies. However, these negotiations came to naught. By 1937, the Jewish community acceded to Metaxas' demands. Law 890 of 29 September 1937 stipulated the expropriation of 12,300 meters of the cemetery to be given to the

university for immediate use.⁶⁵ This would be one of the final instances where the Thessaloniki Jewish community would be consulted; by 1942, the Jewish community would be forced to relinquish the large remaining portions of the cemetery as part of the ransom demanded by Max Merten to release the Jewish workers from their forced labor obligations. The ancient cemetery was quickly appropriated and destroyed by the Greek municipality and General Administration of Macedonia on the pretense of military need during the Axis Occupation.

The Sunday Rest Day Law of 1924: Theological Vindication and Economic Boycott

Concurrent to the rebuilding of Thessaloniki, another piece of legislation was debated in parliament that sought to “regularize” the workweek in Greece. The Sunday Rest Day Law marked another point of conflict between the Sephardim and the state. Although Romaniote Jews throughout the country were also affected, the overwhelming majority of resistance came from the Thessaloniki Sephardim. The Sunday Rest Day Law marked another point of conflict between the Sephardim and the state. It would also be one of the rare instances where the Greek government would show any accommodation to Jewish religious law, albeit briefly. The underlying tensions in this law had existed since the late nineteenth century; however, with Greek control of Thessaloniki, the Sunday Rest Day Law offered the Thessaloniki Greeks an opportunity to gain control of economic power in the city and undermine Sephardic influence in commerce.

Since the incorporation of Thessaloniki, and all of the ‘New Lands’ (*Nées Chóres*, comprised of Southern Epirus, Southern Macedonia, and Western Thrace), Jews continued to observe the Saturday Sabbath as their official day of rest. As per religious law (ratified by a Royal Decree issued in February of 1920), all stores and businesses were closed, and families did not cook or clean in their homes. Yet this situation was about to be challenged. Some villages in the broader region attempted to circumvent the existing legal provisions by introducing a mandatory Sunday rest day law, meaning that Jewish businesses would be closed for two days of the week if they wished to observe the Sabbath. This was the case, for instance, with local authorities in the town of Drama. Their initiative was met with a swift outcry by Drama’s Jewish community which prompted the Governor General of Macedonia, A. Adossidis, to intervene.⁶⁶ He recommended that “it would be expedient ... that the measure taken by the authorities in Drama be lifted in order to prevent turmoil among Jews here and abroad.”⁶⁷ Eventually, the law

was rescinded, but it is safe to assume that many quietly harboured hopes that the Athenian parliament might enact legislation to re-establish Sunday as the official rest day of Greece.

By 1923, these hopes were revived by the unprecedented demographic change resulting from the Treaty of Lausanne, which made Greek Christians the ethnic majority in the area. The mandatory population exchange between Greece and Turkey resulted in 163,000 Greek refugees settling in areas of the immediate and broader perimeters of Thessaloniki.⁶⁸ The more economically disadvantaged Jews quickly clashed with the newly-settled refugees over various religious and economic issues. These conflicts coincided with a push by many politicians in Athens to enforce a nation-wide Sunday rest law.

In 1924, the matter came to a boil in national politics. The opportunity to pass such legislation presented itself with the change in government. With King George taking a leave of absence in 1923, and following Venizelos' assumption of the premiership between January and February 1924, Alexandros Papanastasiou and his Republican Union Party (RUP) formed a short-lived government. Papanastasiou's government used the influx of Asia Minor refugees to establish a conducive political and electoral situation for exercising Greek cultural and religious dominance in Thessaloniki and other northern Greek territories.

A parliamentary debate was ignited over a proposed law that required all Greek citizens, regardless of their religious persuasion(s), to close their businesses on Sunday out of respect for Orthodox Christianity. While Jewish politicians opposed the legislation, they proved to be in the minority. At the Municipal Council of Thessaloniki, the voting resulted in seventeen votes in favour of the new law, and six opposing; all six opposition votes were cast by Jewish representatives. The change in Jewish influence in local politics closely paralleled the shift in the city's demographic composition. The influx of Greek refugees also changed the electoral composition of the city; out of a total of approximately 190,000 votes, 110,000 were estimated by local Greek officials to have been cast by refugees (USSD 1929:62). Political alliances of refugee Greeks were predominantly republican and Venizelist. In contrast, Jews tended to support the royalist and conservative political factions.⁶⁹

The debate over the Sunday Rest Law proved exceptionally vociferous. Refugees pushed strongly for the passage of the law as an indirect means to reduce the commercial strength of the

Jewish community.⁷⁰ American Vice Consul James S. Moore, Jr. argued that the shopkeepers and small traders, especially Jewish butchers,⁷¹ suffered greater financial impact than the larger businesses, which “had never transacted much business on Sunday.”⁷² Moore, however, stressed that the main Jewish complaint was not so much the legislation’s obvious economic discrimination but, as he put it, the impression that it was “frankly anti-Semitic.”⁷³ In addition, he asserted that the Jews felt the measure to be “a blow to the communal privileges, and ... only the first in a campaign by the government to dislodge the Jews from Macedonia where they have been established for about four hundred years.”⁷⁴ Moore’s analysis was underscored by the rise in anti-Jewish agitation; refugees began spreading rumours that the Jews were “undesirable and disloyal.”⁷⁵ Newspapers began publishing articles claiming that the Jews had voted, almost to a man, for a restoration of the Royalist regime.⁷⁶

Although U.S. State Department officials observed that the “better elements” of the Greek population did not share such sentiments, they did stress that the vast majority of refugees did not doubt the legitimacy of the attacks, since they saw in them opportunities to further their own political and economic interests. Even Greek officials, such as the Prefect of Evros Nikolaos Kalogeropoulos, specifically cited the Sunday Rest Law as an issue of contention between the Jewish minority and Christian majority of the city, and stated that the Jewish community was extremely reluctant to abide by the new law. Kalogeropoulos was very suspicious of the manner in which the Jews courted international assistance and intervention to overturn the newly-enacted legislation.

Jewish representatives described to various Greek officials the disastrous impact the Sunday Rest Law had on their community. Those who supported the Liberal government told Athanasios Protonotarios, Greek state inspector following the 1923 population exchange that “the existing situation which compels all Jews to observe Sunday as a day of rest is damaging for them.”⁷⁷ What seemed especially odd to Protonotarios was the claim by Jews, including the editor of the Jewish newspaper *El Pueblo*, Elie Veissi, that the Sabbath rest day law for the Jews should also not be reinstated; this would lead to the material detriment of many in the community.⁷⁸ What would be preferred was a law that allowed the Jews the freedom to observe Saturday as a day of rest.⁷⁹ In 1929, another attempt was made by Jewish officials to overturn the Sunday rest day law. At this point, Venizelos had returned as Prime Minister and would

remain in office until 1932. The President and Secretary of the Zionist organization, Joseph Mizrachi, sent a petition to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs stating that the Jews of Thessaloniki “believe that it is a grave offence to the freedom of the human conscience to compel the Jews, in violation of their religious duties, to work on the Sabbath.”⁸⁰

Mizrachi demonstrated how Jews had historically observed the Sabbath, and emphasized to the Minister for Foreign Affairs that “a constitutional, liberal and religiously tolerant state such as Greece ought to allow its citizens to rest on whatever day of the week they wish.”⁸¹ The new law placed the Jews in a difficult dilemma: either to observe both rest days, at a large economic cost, or to violate their religious beliefs. Mizrachi stressed that the Jews should not be compelled to choose the second option. He cited how in France, Germany, America and elsewhere, Jews were free to conduct business on Sundays. Mizrachi concluded his petition by offering the Minister a possible legal solution that would satisfy the Jews: include an amendment to the law stipulating that Jews could choose either Saturday or Sunday as their day of rest. Despite the protests about the Sunday rest day law, the law remained in place. The fact that the Jews were no longer numerically prominent in Thessaloniki and could not convince Greek authorities to overturn the law meant that other issues of Jewish concern would be at the mercy of Greek authorities.

Although the Venizelos government passed the Sunday rest day law, officials did not rigidly enforce the law, mainly due to practical and economic considerations.⁸² The Ladino-language newspaper *La Verdad* claimed in 1930 that this was a “Victory for the Jewish Tradesmen.”⁸³ The article declared that “the law concerning Sunday as a day of rest will not be enforced fully in Thessaloniki ... [because] [t]he Ministry of the National Economy has officially announced that this law cannot for the moment be implemented in this city.”⁸⁴ The economic impact of the law was severe enough that the Ministry was able to suspend implementation of the law. By 1934, Jewish petitions for exemption from the new law were granted; many Jewish merchants were given permission to continue to observe the Sabbath, and conduct trade on Sundays.⁸⁵ Phillipos Dragoumis, General Governor of Macedonia, recounted how both grocers and butchers had been exempted from the law, because of the negative impact it would have on their commercial interests.⁸⁶ These exceptions were slowly eliminated as the decade progressed.

Eventually the Sunday rest day law and the poor economic climate prompted many Jews to emigrate to Palestine and France, but most chose to remain in Greece and open their stores on Saturdays.⁸⁷ Others went into partnerships with non-Jews or employed non-Jews. Many Jews perceived the new law as a “choice between economic ruin or freedom of religion,” and ultimately “as an affirmation of state policy to ... rid Salonika of its Jews or, at the very least, to decrease Jewish prominence in the country’s commerce.”⁸⁸ For the Greek state, the Sunday rest day law was indeed an effective means to decrease Jewish economic prominence. In this way, the economic tensions of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were finally resolved in favour of the Orthodox Christian Greeks.

Educational Policies and the Greek Language: The Push for Linguistic Assimilation

A significant area of conflict between the Sephardic Jewish communities in the New Lands and the successive interwar governments centred on the increased implementation of Greek language instruction in the various community and Alliance Israélite Universelle schools. This conflict originated with an educational law passed by Venizelos during his second substantive term in power (1928-1932). While the Romaniote Jews of ‘Old Greece’ were integrated into Greek society and culture, the majority of Sephardic Jews in the New Lands spoke Ladino primarily as a first language and French as a second language, attended minority or foreign schools, maintained their own newspapers, and organized their own Jewish cultural associations. For Venizelos, linguistic assimilation was a primary objective for the New Lands; as a result, legislation was quickly enacted as a means to diminish, if not outlaw, the use of foreign ‘dialects’ by minorities.

Since the beginning of the twentieth century, the Greek government established laws regulating foreign schools in Greece. In the 1911 constitution, specific mention was made for the operation of foreign schools. Supplementing this constitutional right came laws 997 of 1917 and 1405 of 1918 which specified the manner of operation of private schools and how Greek state administrators were to supervise these schools.⁸⁹ By 1928, permits to establish foreign schools began stipulating the qualifications of the instructors and also the scope of the curricula adopted by each school. Law 2456 in 1929 provided the Thessaloniki Jewish community with the opportunity to receive state funding but at the price of increasing the ‘Hellenic’ portion of the community schools’ curricula.⁹⁰ The intent of this education law was clear both to the Greek

government and Jewish communities. Officials in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the General Administration of Macedonia communicated the desired intent of the new law; the teaching of the Greek language in the Jewish foreign schools would result in “the assimilation of the youth linguistically and steadily spiritually, and will bridge the chasm and eliminate all misunderstandings (which did not exist in Old Greece) between the two brother factions.”⁹¹ This statement reflects two assumptions: 1) ‘misunderstandings’ did not exist between Greek Christians and Jews in Old Greece, and 2) Hellenization policies were not targeting all Jewish communities throughout Greece, only the Sephardim.

The Thessaloniki Press Bureau added, “It is equally right that the money to be made available by the Greek state should be used to educate true Greek citizens and to teach them the Greek language.”⁹² These requirements proved restrictive to various groups in the Jewish community. Zionists (such as the *Association des Jeunes Juifs* and others)⁹³ objected to the language imposition because it would speed assimilation into a predominately Christian population, while others considered it “idiotic” and complained about the reduction in the teaching of French and Hebrew.⁹⁴ A final argument the Zionists put forward was the insistence that “adopting the ideas connected with ‘assimilation’ of the [Greek] language would mean to neglect Jewish education and upbringing, thus destroying the feeling of Jewishness.”⁹⁵

Despite the opposition to the 1929 legislation, the educational measures were strictly enforced by successive governments following Venizelos’ electoral defeat in May 1932. In 1936, when Ioannes Metaxas established his 4th August Regime, he not only maintained the 1929 legislation, he also expanded on it and aggressively pursued the law’s compliance. Both the Alliance Israélite Universelle schools and the local Jewish minority schools continued to resist implementing the educational policies aimed at increasing the linguistic assimilation of the Jewish students. Less than six months after Metaxas assumed power, the Alliance Israélite Universelle School in Ioannina began sending reports to the Alliance headquarters in Paris concerning the continued pressures being placed on Jewish schools in the area by the new Metaxist regime. Moisis Kofinas, President of the Ioannina Jewish Community, reported to officials in Paris in January 1937 that recently a local Jewish primary school had been converted to a Greek state school. Kofinas argued that this transformation was the result of the Hellenization educational policies implemented in 1929 under Venizelos. The use of Greek as

the primary language of communication in the Jewish secondary schools had a direct and deleterious effect on the enrolment in both the Jewish primary and secondary schools.

Although Kofinas did not explain the reasons for the shift in enrolment in Greek secondary schools, he attributed the rise in Greek primary schools to the growing Hellenization of the students. Kofinas stated, “Since our students began attending the state secondary schools, they felt the need to know Greek better.”⁹⁶ The new 1936 education law⁹⁷ augmented the 1929 law, and was comprised of two parts: “the creation of the General Inspector for Foreign and Minority Schools position, and the obligatory instruction of the Greek language which will become the language of learning.”⁹⁸ Kofinas also stated that one of the key tasks of the Inspecteur Générale was to keep vigilant control over “proselytism ... and all education that does not satisfy the new directives of the national government.”⁹⁹ The Metaxas government had not established this new position as a means to combat Jewish proselytising, but rather as a result of the “good number of Orthodox and Jews who embraced Catholicism.”¹⁰⁰ Although the Metaxist regime perceived the Catholics to be a more significant threat, Jewish schools still suffered a great deal due to the new language and curricula requirements. Another contributing factor to the mandatory language requirement was the regime’s desire to foster an attachment to the Greek homeland and national culture. Regime officials considered that the primary means of accomplishing this was through increasing the number of hours of instruction in the Greek language, history and culture.

Such information could be found in a report written by Athanasios Papaeugeniou, the General Overseer-Administrator of Foreign and Minority Schools, on May 21, 1940, which focused specifically on Jewish schools for the entire Macedonian province.¹⁰¹ The issue raised in this report was the level of fluency Jewish teachers had in the Greek language. Papaeugeniou began his report by stating that law 818/1937 and section 19 of law 2029/1939 required all minority school faculty be examined in their competency of the Greek language. He stated that since three years had passed, the Ministry had issued a directive stating that the Greek language examination be completed within a six-month period. Papaeugeniou compared the examinations of the Jewish teachers to that of the Muslim teachers. He argued that while the Muslim teachers did not meet the Greek language comprehension levels, there were mitigating circumstances in

their case. According to Papaeugeniou, Muslim teachers lived in more rural areas of the Macedonian province, and had less contact with Greeks than that of other minorities.

In contrast, Jews resided in the more urban areas of Macedonia and had greater contact with Greeks, and could not justify their poor examination results due to their living conditions. Papaeugeniou argued that only “characteristic lack of interest, if not to say bad motives, helps explain the lack of learning of the Greek language by the Jewish [teachers] and of course after so many years since the independence of Macedonia.”¹⁰² He surmised that the only explanation for the blatant disregard for laws 818/1937 and section 19 of law 2029/1939 was that the Jewish faculty considered the laws to be “dead letters.”¹⁰³ While many of the faculty were exempted from the examinations due to their enrolment in a two-year Greek language program, fifty faculty members sat through the examination. Thirty-three of the fifty demonstrated satisfactory comprehension of Greek, nine mediocre comprehension, and eight poor knowledge of Greek. Eventually the Greek government took action on what they perceived as the obstinate attitude of the Sephardim towards learning the Greek language when it informed the Jewish faculty that their required examinations would be scheduled for December 28 and 29, 1939. While many of the faculty were exempted from the examinations due to their enrolment in a two-year Greek language program, fifty faculty members sat through the examination. Thirty-three of the fifty demonstrated satisfactory comprehension of Greek, nine mediocre comprehension, and eight poor knowledge of Greek.

In fact, of the final eight teachers who exemplified poor knowledge of Greek, four “did not know a word of Greek.”¹⁰⁴ Papaeugeniou asserted that four of the eight teachers were of an advanced age—68, 67, 57, and 55 years old—and had all lived in Thessaloniki since 1912. The only explanation Papaeugeniou had for this blatant lack of knowledge of Greek was “blind fanaticism, so that we do not characterize this fanaticism as hatred towards everything Greek, allows us to explain this phenomenon.”¹⁰⁵ Papaeugeniou recommended that the examinations be repeated at a later time, because it was only under duress that the Jewish teachers would learn any Greek, and Papaeugeniou was concerned that they not “unlearn what they have learned.”¹⁰⁶ While Papaeugeniou did not mention the consequences for Jewish teachers who failed the language exam, he did state that similar standards were held for other minority teachers, including those who were not obligated to take the examinations. Papaeugeniou stressed that

although Armenian teachers, for example, were exempted from taking the examination; it was common knowledge that no Armenian teacher would be hired if he or she did not know Greek.

What often resulted for Jewish teachers who did not pass the Greek examination was, at best, suspension from their duties, but, more commonly, dismissal from their posts. Kofinas recounted the fate of the teachers of Hebrew and foreign language in Ioannina, in his letter to the President of the Central Committee of the Alliance Israélite Universelle in Paris. Kofinas began his letter by stating that he hoped that the President had been informed of the “past difficulties that had arisen from the specific regulations that the inspector general has applied to our school.”¹⁰⁷ Kofinas explained how as a result of failing the Greek language exam, “the professors of Hebrew and other foreign languages can no longer continue with their duties.”¹⁰⁸ Adding insult to injury, the inspector “claims that Mr. Pitchon is not able to speak Greek correctly, and must be replaced by another teacher from the staff of the school, especially as Mr. Pitchon is paid by the Alliance, which is a foreign organization.”¹⁰⁹ Kofinas responded that Pitchon had lived in Greece for a long time and his strong command of the language caused him to be insulted when he was requested to take the Greek language examination. Both of Papaeugeniou’s reports underline the displeasure of the Greek government towards foreign and minority schools that reflected anti-Hellenic sentiments in their curricula or had teachers who did not have a proper level of Greek language comprehension. Alliance administrative officials understood that “our schools, despite these various prohibitions, continue to be the object of unconcealed suspicion: we are the agents of a society that has its headquarters abroad, we face protests, we pay salaries disproportionate to rates used in the rest of the country, etc.”¹¹⁰

For Alliance administrative officials, the substitution of Greek for French as the primary language of instruction had other motives than just identifying instructors who refused to accept Hellenization. For many Jewish parents, instruction in French was central for their children to continue their education at “private schools and – after a certain age – at schools abroad.”¹¹¹ Alliance officials also recognized that the implementation of Greek in their schools might possibly result in a reduction in student enrolment. When the Greek Minister for Public Instruction came to Thessaloniki in June 1936 for an official visit, Joseph Nehama, principal of the Alliance Israélite Universelle School, met with him to discuss the education laws. While M. Louvaris “knew the Salonika Jews well and considers many of them good friends,” his reaction

to the concerns raised by Nehama proved more self-serving than understanding. Louvaris promised to “fix everything... on the condition that the community cedes him a portion of the cemetery adjacent to the University which he affirmed was indispensable to the creation of laboratories, classrooms, etc.”¹¹² Louvaris’ response reflected the government’s interest in acquiring additional portions of the Jewish cemetery to expand the new University of Thessaloniki. Maintaining French in the Alliance schools would be possible, but only at a price.

Conclusion

The policies begun by Eleutherios Venizelos in 1917 and continued in varying form up through 1941 by Ioannes Metaxas were geared to, in their view, securing Greece’s territorial boundaries through the promotion of a common ethnic identity. The various interwar governments maintained a relatively consistent approach to the Hellenization of the new territories. To them, Hellenization was a top priority for domestic policy. The impact of Hellenization would ensure that the nation-state become as homogenous as possible, while also countering the threat of territorial revision from neighbouring Balkan states.

The Sephardim of Thessaloniki were a casualty of these Hellenization policies, which undermined their historic prominence and identity. The rebuilding of Thessaloniki is a seminal and symbolic juncture for the Sephardim; this marked the point whereby the Sephardim’s prominence would be deliberately reduced through political policies of urban planning. This decline would continue through the interwar years, as successive administrations would rectify the demographic prominence of the Jews, their location within the city, and their cultural influence in business and commerce.

Yet, another factor emerges from examining the national policies directed toward the Sephardim. The inconsistency of policy implementation reflects the differing pressures and concerns of political officials. The national policies created in Athens were not always adhered to by local officials. This is most evident in the discussions over the Sunday rest day law and the potential relocation of the Sephardim following the 1917 fire. For the Sunday rest day law, local administrators prevaricated and mitigated the impact of the law on Jewish businesses. The fact that these local officials were able to preclude the full implementation of the rest day law reflects both the agency of local administrators and also their needs and concerns differed from their

national counterparts. For the prime minister and other government officials in Athens, the Sephardim were a small minority population in the country. However, for officials in Thessaloniki and the greater Macedonian prefecture, the Sephardim were large constituency and could not be ignored.

With each piece of legislation, the Sephardim were faced with two options: emigration or assimilation. By and large, members of the community acquiesced to the legislation. The only notable exception to this occurred over the Sunday Rest Law. Here, a significant number of Sephardim left the country. A final pre-WWII exodus occurred in Thessaloniki following the 1931 Campbell Riots. In this case, legislation was not the centre of controversy. The rise of the anti-Semitic EEE (*Ethnike Enosis Ellas*, National Union Greece which was informally known as the Greeks Eliminate Jews) capitalized on the existing national economic crisis and local tensions of the Asia Minor refugees and generated a violent outburst in the Jewish neighbourhoods of the city. The EEE targeted the Thessaloniki Maccabee sports association and claimed that they were both separatist in orientation and also politically disloyal. Attacks on the Maccabee club offices and the city's Jewish neighbourhood number 151, the Campbell District, quickly ensued. Over 300 shots were fired in the Campbell District and three different locations in the district were set ablaze. While many of the residents ultimately returned to their homes, a large number emigrated to Palestine, then under the British Palestine Mandate.

By the time Metaxas came to power, he undertook a concerted effort to foster better relations with the Thessaloniki Sephardim, including banning anti-Semitism in the press. Relations did improve significantly; by 1937, Rabbi Zvi Koretz of Thessaloniki presented Metaxas with membership into the Golden Book of the Jewish National Fund and thanked him for re-establishing an atmosphere of peace and calm for the Jews of Greece. Yet, despite the improved relations, Metaxas remained undeterred in the Hellenization policies of his predecessors. At this point, he did not perceive these assimilationist policies as uniquely Greek defensive nationalist policies. Rather, they were *au courant* of the political current of Central Europe at the time; national rejuvenation and cultural homogenization were dominant themes in European authoritarian regimes. By the late 1930s, the Hellenization policies evidenced growing success; following the Italian invasion of Greece, Yomtov Yakoel, a prominent lawyer in Thessaloniki, stated that there was an enthusiastic and patriotic response of many Sephardim to

the invasion. Yakoel emphasized that roughly 9,000 Sephardim enlisted in the army¹¹³ to fight the Italians not as Jews living in Greece, but as Greeks.

References

- Documents on the History of the Greek Jews: Records from the Historical Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs* (DHGJ), edited by Photini Constantopoulou and Thanos Veremis. Athens: Kastaniotis Press, 1998.
- Hastaoglou-Martinidis, V. “The Jewish Community of Salonica after the Fire of 1917: Unpublished Memoir and Other Documents from the Papers of Henry Morgenthau, Sr.” Pp. 147-74 in *The Jewish Communities of Southeastern Europe*, edited by Ioannes Hassiotes. Thessaloniki: Institute for Balkan Studies, 1997.
- Hekimoglou, Evangelos. *Θεσσαλονίκη. Τουρκοκρατία και μεσοπόλεμος. Κείμενα για την ιστορία και την τοπογραφία της πόλης*. Thessaloniki: University Studio Press, 1995.
- Kagalidou, Zapheiroula. *Εκπαίδευση και Πολιτική: Η Περίπτωση τού Καθεστώτος της 4^{ης} Αυγούστου*. Thessaloniki: Ekdotikos Oikos Adelphon Kyriakidi, 1999.
- Kretikos, Giorgos. *Εκπαίδευση και Ελεγχος του Χώρου: Από το Οθωμανικό Μιλλέτ στο Ελληνικό Κράτος του Μεσοπολέμου*. Athens: Exantas, 2010.
- Lagos, Katerina. *The Metaxas Dictatorship and Greek Jewry, 1936-1941*. PhD thesis, St. Antony’s College, Oxford, 2005.
- Mazower, Mark. *Salonica: City of Ghosts*. London: HarperCollins, 2004.
- Molho, Rena. The Zionist Movement in Thessaloniki, 1899-1919. Pp. 327-50 in *The Jewish Communities of Southeastern Europe*, edited by Ioannes Hassiotes. Thessaloniki: Institute for Balkan Studies, 1997.
- . *Salonica and Istanbul: Social, Political and Cultural Aspects of Jewish Life*. Istanbul: The Isis Press, 2005.
- . *Οι Εβραίοι της Θεσσαλονίκης. Μια ιδιαίτερη κοινότητα*. Athens: Themelio, 2001.
- Nar, Albertos. *Κειμένη επί ακτής θαλάσσης*. Thessaloniki: Ekphrasi, 1997.
- Nehama, Joseph. *Ιστορία των Ισραηλιτών της Θεσσαλονίκης*, 3 vols. Thessaloniki: Israelitikes Koinotes Thessalonikes, 2000.
- Pierron, Bernard. *Juifs et Chretiens de la Grece Moderne*. Paris: L’Harmattan, 1996.

- Plaut, Joshua Eli. *Our Dwelling Place in all Generations: Individual and Communal Jewish Life in the Greek Provinces Before and After the Holocaust, 1913-1983*. PhD diss., Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, 1986.
- Political and Economic Effect of Refugees in Greek Macedonia, Vice-Consul James S. Moore, Jr., 23 December 1929, p. 64, Greece: Foreign Affairs, USSDA.
- Skopetea, Elli. *Το Πρότυπο Βασίλειο και η Μεγάλη Ιδέα. Όψεις του Εθνικού Προβλήματος στην Ελλάδα (1830-1880)*. Athens: Polytypo, 1988.
- Vassilikou, Maria. *Politics of the Jewish Community of Salonika in the Inter-War Years: Party Ideologies and Party Competition*. PhD. thesis, University College, 1999.
- Yacoel, Yomtov. *Απομνημονεύματα, 1941-1943*. Edited by Frangiske Apantzopoulou, Thessaloniki, 1993.
- To Mr. Montefiore from Lucien Wolf, 17 October 1917, Greek Archive GVIB 27-33, p. 2, AAIU.
- Yerolympos, Alexandra. Thessaloniki (Salonika) Before and After 1917. Twentieth Century Planning Versus 20 Centuries of Urban Evolution. *Planning Perspectives* 3, 1988, pp. 141-66.
- “To the General Administration of Thessaloniki,” 16 August 1918, No. 7259, Dossier V, HLHA.
- “To the General Administration of Thrace,” 7 August 1925, No. 275, Folio V, p. 5, HLHA.
- Haim R. Habib, locum tenens of the Chief Rabbi, and J. Cazes, President of the Jewish Community of Thessaloniki to the Prime Minister, 29 December 1929, Jewish Archive, No. 40. in Constantopoulou and Veremis, p. 144.
- S. Gonatas, General Governor of Macedonia, to the Political Office of the Prime Minister, 21 November 1931, Jewish Archive, No. 60 in Constantopoulou and Veremis, p. 198.
- Minutes of the discussion between E. Venizelos, Greek Prime Minister, and Representatives of Jewish Associations in London, 23 April 1918, Jewish Archive, No. 6 in Constantopoulou and Veremis, p.78.
- “Εκθέσεις περί της Λειτουργίας των Ισραηλιτών και Ξένων Σχολείων Θεσσαλονίκης,” 10 July 1929, Jewish Archive, Folio XI, p. 8, HLHA.

“The Thessaloniki Press Bureau to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs,” 23 December 1926, in *Documents on the History of the Greek Jews*, P. Constantopoulou and T. Veremis, eds., (Athens, 1998).

‘The Director of the Thessaloniki Press Bureau to the Press Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs,’ 29 September 1926, No. 29, in Constantopoulou and Veremis, p 117.

Z. Kon, Inspector of the Jewish Community Schools of Thessaloniki, to Mr. Frances, editor of *La Renacencia Giudia (sic)*, 5 September 1926, No. 28, Attachment B, in Constantopoulou and Veremis, p. 117.

D. Kalapothakis, Director, the Thessaloniki Press Bureau, to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 8 April 1927, Jewish Archive, No. 33 in Constantopoulou and Veremis, p. 127.

Moisis Kofinas to the Secretary General, 5 January 1937. No. 255, p.1, AAIU, p. 2. “Report about Attempts to Examine Jewish Teachers who are Serving the Schools of the General Administrative Region of Macedonia,” 21 May 1940. Jewish Archive, No. 769, AMFA.

To the President of the Central Committee of the Alliance Israélite Universelle from Moisis Kofinas, 27 January 1940. No. 138/2, Grece II B 11-16, AAIU.

To Monsier Halif from Joseph Nehama, 2 June 1936. No. 1832/7. Grece XIX E202, pp.1-232, p. 2, AAIU.

“*Notice sur l’Alliance Israélite et les Ecoles Communales Israélite de Salonique désignées sous cette dénomination,*” 1 June 1936. No. 1832/6, Grèce XIX E202, 1-232, p. 6, AAIU.

Service Intelligence Report on Greece,’ 1938, No. 211, FO 371/22355, p. 17, PRO.

United Kingdom. National Archives. *Foreign Office* (NAFO). FO371/22355, 21150.

United States. State Department (USSD). *Greece: Foreign Affairs, 1929*.

France. Archives Alliance Israélite Universelle (AAIU). *Archive of the History of the Greek Jews*.

Greece. General Archives of the State (GAS). *Metaxas Archive*.

———. Hellenic Literary and Historical Archives (HLHA). *Jewish Archive*

———. Archives Ministry of Foreign Affairs (AMFA). *Jewish Archive, ‘Various’ (Foreign Schools in Greece), Yugoslavia: 1938-39*.

———. Parliamentary and Newspaper Archive (PNA). *Efimeris tis Kyverniseos: 1937-39*.

¹ Mark Mazower, *Salonica: City of Ghosts* (London: HarperCollins, 2004), p. 301.

² These are Jewish individuals who converted to Islam. This term comes from the Turkish word ‘to turn’ and had comprised roughly 20,000 individuals by the turn of the twentieth century. Maria Vassilikou, *Politics of the Jewish Community of Salonika in the Inter-War Years: Party Ideologies and Party Competition*. PhD. thesis, University College, 1999, p.12.

³ Vassilikou, *Politics*, p. 14.

⁴ Rena Molho’s figures for the Greek Christian population of Thessaloniki one year later in 1913 are significantly higher and give the population percentage to be 25.3%. Pierron, *Juifs*, pp. 201-2. *Οι Εβραίοι της Θεσσαλονίκης. Μια ιδιαίτερη κοινότητα* (Athens: Themelio, 2001), p. 43.

⁵ George Mavrogordatos also places the Greek Christian population in the Southern Macedonian lands to be 43%. See Mavrogordatos 1983: 226.

⁶ USSD (United States. State Department). *Greece: Foreign Affairs, 1929*. P.64.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Perceptions of Jews as being politically suspect were compounded by the notion that they resisted acculturation, especially in regards to learning the Greek language. From the period of the Greek War of Independence up until the early twentieth century, Greek Christian-Jewish relations were predicated on shared support of the state’s irredentist ambitions, known as the Megali Idea. From the interwar period, these relations were predicated on the willingness of Jews—especially the Sephardim—to assimilate to Greek society. Thus, while nineteenth century relations between Christians and Jews were based primarily on attitudes towards Greek expansionism, twentieth century relations were characterized by the additional perception of cultural isolationism (Lagos 2005).

The *Megali Idea* (or Great Idea) was first articulated by Prime Minister Ioannes Kolettis in 1844. This concept of territorial expansion by the Greek state sought to incorporate the European and Asia Minor territories that had large concentrations of ethnic Greeks. The capitol of the new Greek state would be Constantinople. For an excellent discussion of the concept’s origins see Elli Skopetea, *Το Πρότυπο Βασίλειο και η Μεγάλη Ιδέα. Όψεις του Εθνικού Προβλήματος στην Ελλάδα (1830-1880)*. Athens: Polytypo, 1988.

¹⁰ Yomtov Yacoel, *Απομνημονεύματα*, 1941-1943. Edited by Frangiske Apantzopoulou, Thessaloniki, 1993.

¹¹ Mazower, *Salonica*, p. 514.

¹² Joseph, Nehama, *Ιστορία των Ισραηλιτών της Θεσσαλονίκης*, 3 vols. (Thessaloniki: Israelitikes Koinotes Thessalonikes, 2000), p.1019.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Nehama, *Ιστορία*, p. 321.

¹⁵ Alexandra Yerolympos, Alexandra. Thessaloniki (Salonika) Before and After 1917. Twentieth Century Planning Versus 20 Centuries of Urban Evolution. *Planning Perspectives* 3, 1988, p. 144.

¹⁶ Ibid, p. 224.

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 223.

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 245

¹⁹ V. Hastaoglou-Martinidis, The Jewish Community of Salonica after the Fire of 1917: An Unpublished Memoir and Other Documents from the Papers of Henry Morgenthau, Sr. Pp. 147-74 in *The Jewish Communities of Southeastern Europe*, edited by Ioannes Hassiotis. Thessaloniki: Institute for Balkan Studies, 1997. p.148.

²⁰ Nehama, *Ιστορία*; *Nar Kειμένη*; Hekimoglou, *Θεσσαλονίκη*.

²¹ There is a discrepancy in the number of casualties given for the fire. The General Secretary of the Macedonian General Command, Alexandros Pallis, stated in a report that 53,737 Jews were left homeless (Constantopoulou and Veremis 1998:73). Rena Molho cites 52,000 Jewish homeless, and 40,000 completely destitute from the fire (Molho 2001:120).

²² Hastaoglou-Martinidis, *The Jewish Community*, p.148.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ (*Documents on the History of the Greek Jews* [hereafter DHGJ] 1998:80) - *Documents on the History of the Greek Jews: Records from the Historical Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, edited by Photini Constantopoulou and Thanos Veremis. Athens: Kastaniotis Press, 1998, p.80.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Hastaoglou-Martinidis, *The Jewish Community*, p. 149.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ AAIU (Archives Alliance Israélite Universelle. 1917. p. 2). Due to the nature of the task, a seven-member International Commission for the New Plan of Thessaloniki was established by a special royal decree (Yerolympos 1996:105). The Commission included Ernest Hebrard, a French architect and planner; Thomas Mawson, a British

landscape architect; Joseph Pleyber, a French military engineer; Aristotle Zachos, a Greek architect and head of the City of Thessaloniki Planning Department; Konstantine Kitsikis, a Greek architect; Angelos Ginis, an engineer and rector of the Athens Polytechnic; and Konstantine Angelakis, Mayor of Thessaloniki and Chair of the Commission. Mawson, who had assisted Venizelos in his plans to improve Athens in 1914, served as an inspiration for the reconstruction. Although he was personally invited by Venizelos to advise him on the reconstruction plans, Mawson did not stay for the duration of the reconstruction (AAIU 1917:2). After completing his first sketches of the new city plan, Mawson left Thessaloniki. As a result, Hebrard quickly assumed the leadership of the Commission and gained the trust of Venizelos' cabinet minister Alexander Papanastasiou (Yerolympos 1996:107).

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ USSD, 1929, p. 65.

³¹ In 1937 the Metaxas dictatorship announced that "postal packets, telegrams, and cables must be addressed to Thessaloniki, failing which they will not be delivered there" (*London Times*, 14 July 1937).

³² USSD, 1929, p. 65.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Hastaoglou-Martinidis, *The Jewish Community*, p. 169.

³⁵ This status would change with the influx of Asia Minor refugees towards the end of the 1920s.

³⁶ DHGJ, 1918.

³⁷ Yerolympos, *Thessaloniki*, p.103-104.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Cited in Mazower, *Salonica*, pp.326-7.

⁴⁰ USSD, 1929, p.2.

⁴¹ DHGJ, 1918, p.71.

⁴² Vassilikou, *Politics*, p. 18.

⁴³ DHGJ, 1918, p. 85.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ DHGJ, 1943, p.76.

⁴⁶ Elia (Hellenic Literary and Historical Archives, 1918.

⁴⁷ ELIA, 1925. p. 5).

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Rena Molho, *Salonica and Istanbul: Social, Political and Cultural Aspects of Jewish Life*. (Istanbul: The Isis Press, 2005) p. 121.

⁵⁰ DHGJ, 1929, p. 258.

⁵¹ (AAIU 1937:1).

⁵² Pierron, Bernard. *Juifs et Chretiens de la Grece Moderne* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1960). P. 200.

⁵³ DHGJ, 1929, pp.144-45.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ DHGJ, 1931, pp. 198-99.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Pierron, *Juifs*, pp. 201-2.

⁶¹ (AAIU 1937:2) were expropriated (GAS 1937)

⁶² (AAIU 1937:2)

⁶³ (DHGJ, 1931, p.199.

⁶⁴ Metaxas was prime minister of Greece at this point. He would become dictator on 4 August 1936.

⁶⁵ Pierron, *Juifs*, p. 202.

⁶⁶ DHGJ, 1920, P. 99.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ USSD, 1929, p. 63.

⁷⁰ USSD, 1929, p. 73.

⁷¹ DHGJ, 1930 p.149.

⁷² USSD, 1929, p. 73-74.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ DHGJ, 1920, p. 102.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ DHGJ, 1929 pp.146-7.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² In contrast to the Liberal governments, Metaxas took steps to enforce the Sunday rest day laws. In 1939, Metaxas passed over twenty-three laws that required numerous stores and businesses throughout Greece to close on Sundays. Only two of these laws required partial closures of stores or businesses. These two exceptions were: partial closure of restaurants and wineries of Kyparissia (law 289/1920) and partial closure of grocery stores in Savvaleon, Elias Prefecture, Peloponnesus (law 289/1920) (Parliamentary and Newspaper Archive [hereafter PNA] 1939: 117-264).

⁸³ DHGJ, 1920, p. 102.

⁸⁴ DHGJ, 1930 p. 149.

⁸⁵

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Joshua Eli Plaut, *Our Dwelling Place in all Generations: Individual and Communal Jewish Life in the Greek Provinces Before and After the Holocaust, 1913-1983*. PhD diss., Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, 1986, p. 43.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Giorgos Kretikos, *Εκπαίδευση και Ελεγχος του Χώρου: Από το Οθωμανικό Μιλλέτ στο Ελληνικό Κράτος του Μεσοπολέμου* (thens: Exantas, 2010) p. 162.

⁹⁰ The community schools that were operating in Thessaloniki, including the Kalamaria, Aghia Paraskevi, No. 151, No. 6, were under the control of the Alliance Israélite Universelle. See Molho 2005: 131.

⁹¹ HLHA, 1929, p.8.

⁹² The Director of the Thessaloniki Press Bureau to the Press Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 29 September 1926, No. 29, in Constantopoulou and Veremis, p. 117.

⁹³ According to Rena Molho (1997:329; 334), there were various Zionist organizations in Thessaloniki during the early twentieth century. The Zionist movement began in Thessaloniki in 1899 when twenty young Talmud Torah graduates founded the first association in Thessaloniki, called *Kadima*. Other Zionist organizations such as the *Intimes*, *Bnei Zion*, and *Bnot Zion*, *Mevassaret Zion*, *Association des Jeunes Juifs*, the *Maccabee*, and others were later established. The Zionist sporting club *Maccabee* (founded in 1908), proved to be the locus of tensions from which the Campbell Riots of 1931 resulted.

⁹⁴ Constantopoulou and Veremis, *Documents*, p. 117.

⁹⁵ Ibid, p. 127

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ This educational law was also itself augmented by the Royal Decree, ‘Περί των Καθηκόντων τού γενικού επιθεωρητού των ξένων και μειονοτικών σχολείων’, Β. Δ. 1 July 1937, *Εφημερίς της Κυβερνήσεως*, AGPNC. Kangalidou (1999:147) also discusses how in September 1936, the Minister of Education had the ability to oversee the functioning of foreign and minority schools. In addition, she mentions other laws enacted in 1937 and 1938 concerning the functioning and administration of foreign schools: ‘Περί διοικήσεως της εκπαίδευσως’, άρθρο 42, Α. Ν. 767, 5 July 1937, and ‘Περί συμπληρώσεως και τροποποιήσεως εκπαιδευτικών τινών νομών’, Α. Ν. 1297, 6 July 1938, (p. 149).

⁹⁸ AAIU, 1937, p.2.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ AMFA, Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1940.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ AAIU, 1940 pp.11-16.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ AAIU, 1936, p.2.

¹¹¹ Ibid, p. 6.

¹¹² AAIU, 1936, p.2.

¹¹³ For a more detailed discussion of Jewish participation in World War II, see Derek J. Penslar's *The Jews and the Military: A History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013).