Introduction

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Abstract This issue of *Jewish History* presents articles that are the result of a June 2012 meeting on the history of Salonica's Jews organized by the Group for the Study of the History of the Jews of Greece (created in 2005). In its seminars and workshops, the group tried to distance discussions of the history of Salonica's Jews from the often narrow national(ist) perspectives that Greek, Jewish, and Turkish historiographies traditionally applied to the study of Salonica and of its Jewish population. In the wake of the initiatives undertaken by a similar group founded in the early 1990s, and of the publication of Mark Mazower's *Salonica, City of Ghosts*, the group sought to bring to the fore the history of Salonica's Jews; compare it, when possible, to histories of the Jews of the Balkans, the Ottoman Empire, the Mediterranean, and other port cities; and consider it in contexts created by analytical terms such as "tradition," "modernity," "migration," "diaspora," "identity," "hybridity," and "dissent." The aim was manifold: to acknowledge the role of Salonica's large Jewish population in the city's history; to insert the Jewish "element" in ongoing city affairs that also involved other groups; to transcend the identity politics with which Salonica's historiography had been colored; to challenge monolithic views of Salonica's Jewry; to insist on the variety and resulting tensions that characterized the city's Jewish population; and to historicize staple interpretations of Salonica's and Jewish Salonica's history.

Keywords Salonica · Jews · Modern Greece · Ottoman Empire · Turkey · Jewish historiography

Ten years after the publication of Mark Mazower's justly acclaimed *Salonica, City of Ghosts: Christians, Muslims, and Jews, 1430–1950* and its subsequent translation into Greek, Italian, Turkish, Hebrew, and other languages, *Jewish History* is devoting an issue to one of the three ethnic and religious groups whose histories, over more than half a millennium, were woven into this grand narrative of Salonica's history.¹ Thanks primarily to Mazower, over the last decade the landscape of Salonica's historiography has changed considerably.² In the pages that follow, several contributors touch upon some of

¹Mark Mazower, *Salonica, City of Ghosts: Christians, Muslims, and Jews, 1430–1950* (New York, 2003).

²The only possible exception to this assessment is the work of Kostis Moscof, *Thessaloniki: Tomi tis Metapraktikis Polis*, vol. 1, 2nd rev. ed. (1974). In the first and only published volume of a projected multivolume history of Salonica, Moscof sought to analyze the city's history in

the changes. Before the turn of the millennium, with a handful of exceptions, even the best publications on the history of Salonica were largely contributions to the knowledge of local history. They were often erudite and archive-based works inspired by the intense sense of localism and nationalism that was characteristic of the city's public culture for much of the twentieth century.³

Occasionally, especially in some French publications of the 1980s and 1990s, one could perceive that such narrow scope did injustice to the city's rich past and the many peoples and diverse cultures that had lived cheek by jowl in this important Mediterranean port for more than five centuries, each enjoying, for a few hundred years, a dominant position in its political, social, or economic life.⁴ Between the end of the fifteenth century and the middle of the twentieth, Salonica was never solely Christian/Greek, Muslim/Turkish, or Sephardic/Jewish. It was all of these, with Albanians, Serbians, Bulgarians, Vlachs, Armenians, Levantines, and others often making their presences felt in the city's life as well. However, Greek and Turkish national(ist) historiographies have insisted on homogenizing the city's past, inventing narratives of seamless and resilient continuities. Not so Jewish historiography, which has invariably highlighted four or five dates that represented new starts or violent ruptures: 1492, when the first Iberian Jews arrived in Salonica and turned it into a major center of Sephardic Jewry; 1912, when the city passed from the Ottoman Empire to the Greek state and power relations consequently changed among the city's ethnic groups; 1917, when the Great Fire destroyed much of the city's urban fabric and caused especially heavy damage to Jewish neighborhoods; and 1943, when, in the span of less than six months, the Germans transported the vast majority (by some counts, more than 95 percent) of the city's Jews to the concentration and extermination camps where they were to murder most of them. Historians of Jewish Salonica have often

a Marxist-Braudelian context. Moscoff did not continue his study of Salonica's economic and social history, instead diverting his attention to themes of neo-Orthodox theology and modern Greek ideology. I am grateful to Socratis Petmezas for discussing this point with me.

³The most thorough and analytical overview of the changing landscape of Greek Jewish historiography is Henriette-Rika Benveniste, "The Coming Out of Jewish History in Greece," *Usages publics du passé*, <http://usagespublicsdupasse.ehess.fr/index.php?id=130>. Benveniste's article shows that interest in the history of Greek Jews began growing in the 1990s, a development for which she and a small number of other scholars were largely responsible. Her article contains a thorough bibliography on the subject. Here, it suffices to point to the first major publication by Benveniste and her colleagues, which was a collection of papers that aimed to bring Greek Jewish history to the forefront of modern Greek historiography for the first time: *Oi Evraioi ston Ellhniko Choro: Zitimata Istorias sti Makra Diarkeia; Praktika tou A' Symposiou Istorias, Thessaloniki, 23–24 Noembriou 1991* (Thessaloniki, 1995).

⁴Gilles Veinstein, ed., *Salonique 1850–1918: La "ville des Juifs" et le réveil des Balkans* (Paris, 1992).

added to these key dates the messianic crisis that heavily influenced Jews in Salonica and elsewhere in the Ottoman Empire. This crisis brought about the creation of the Dönme communities, which were substantial hybrid groups of Jews who had converted to Islam but maintained many of their Jewish traditions and rituals. Interestingly, in his chronology of the city's history and insistence on highlighting "violent endings and new beginnings," Mazower essentially adopted the cadences of Salonica's Jewish historiography.⁵ Works that have appeared since the turn of the millennium—such as Katherine Fleming's study of Greek Jewry during the nearly two centuries of the Greek state's existence and Rena Molho's numerous studies on the history of Salonica and of its Jews⁶—signal the exit of studies on Greek Jews from the ghetto of local and purely Jewish or Sephardic historiography.⁷

In part 2 of this issue, Efi Avdela, writing about Greek historiography, and Edhem Eldem, writing about Turkish historiography, show that national(ist) interpretations of Salonica's history are flat and ultimately unconvincing. Much the same could be said of the treatment of Salonica in Jewish historiography—which is discussed by Aron Rodrigue—as it has often conveyed the impression that Salonica, *madre de Israel*, was overwhelmingly populated by Jews from the sixteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth century. A linear account of the city's history that focuses on presumed Greek, Turkish, or Jewish hegemony will no longer do.

In 2004, the publication of Mazower's book highlighted the rich texture of Salonica's history, bringing to light not only the heroic deeds and admirable accomplishments of Christians, Jews, and Muslims but also the knotty and awkward junctures and the violent stops and starts that were more common in the city's long history than one would like to think. A history of Salonica would necessarily have to accommodate the dynamism of social relations and the tensions among the different peoples sharing the urban space of a port city whose prominence stretched back to the Roman, Byzantine, and Ottoman Empires and persisted even after 1912, when the city ceased to be part of a vast empire and was incorporated into the Greek state. In his book, Mazower wished to set Salonica's history in perspective. He highlighted the complexity of its past and questioned the claims of primacy that Greeks, in particular, had staked on the city's history. Some critics pointed out that, in his determination to cover half a millennium of history in a few hundred

⁵Mazower, *Salonica*, 6.

⁶K. E. Fleming, *Greece: A Jewish History* (Princeton, NJ, 2008). Of Rena Molho's numerous studies, see especially *The Jews of Thessaloniki, 1856–1919: A Unique Community* [in Greek] (Athens, 2001).

⁷Benveniste, "Coming Out," lists many of the works whose publications signaled the development of new interest in, and new approaches toward, the study of Greek Jewish historiography.

pages, Mazower tended to gloss over issues that would have required him to use sources written in languages—such as Hebrew and Ottoman Turkish—that he had not mastered. Thus, his presentation often did not do justice to the perspectives of the groups whose interlaced histories he wanted to examine.

Even so, Mazower's aim was ambitious: to capture, in a picture that was at once synthetic and composite, the drama and complexity of a living urban organism. His accomplishment must be measured against his ambition. In Jan Morris's review of *Salonica*, he wrote in a somewhat breathless tone that this was a "tremendous book about a city unique not just in Europe, but in the entire history of humanity."⁸ In this case, the adjective "tremendous" is not misplaced. Mazower's *Salonica* is a "tremendous," or, somewhat more prosaically, a wonderful book. But the second adjective, "unique," used in reference to Salonica, is not convincing: it exaggerates and distorts the city's history. Other Mediterranean ports have shared some of the social, cultural, and economic characteristics that defined Salonica's history. These include Alexandria, Smyrna/Izmir, Istanbul/Constantinople, Trieste and Marseilles, perhaps also Algiers and Tripoli, even Odessa on the Black Sea. Greeks, Jews, Levantine Europeans, Arabs, and Turks dominated these cities' histories. Still, Morris's reference to the uniqueness of Salonica's history serves to focus the reader's attention on the very qualities of Salonica's history that most historians—Greek, Turkish, and Jewish—until very recently, and some even today, have tended to remove from their portraits.

In 2005, one year after the publication of Mazower's book, four friends of Salonican origin started an informal seminar on the city's Jewish past. The seminar of the Group for the Study of the History of the Jews of Greece convened regularly in Salonica for seven consecutive years and was open to the public.⁹ The timing of its formation and the publication of Mazower's book are suggestive, as is the continuity between the group's themes and direction and those of another group founded about fifteen years earlier by Henriette Benveniste and her colleagues.¹⁰ In the early years of the new century, there was an increasing awareness that the time had come to remove the veil of darkness with which Greek historiography had covered the history of Salonica. This was not simply a matter of neglect. Since 1913, when the city was conquered by Greece at the end of the Balkan Wars, Greek historians

⁸Jan Morris, "Islam's Lost Grandeur," *The Guardian*, September 18, 2004.

⁹The four original participants in the seminar were Yorgos Antoniou, who had recently completed his doctoral dissertation at the European University Institute; Henriette Benveniste, of the University of Thessaly; Paris Papamichos Chronakis, then a doctoral candidate in history at the University of Crete; and Anthony Molho. The group's activities are recorded in *Group for the Study of the History of the Jews of Greece* (blog), <http://histjews.blogspot.com>.

¹⁰Benveniste, "Coming Out."

have engaged in a systematic effort to hellenize its history. They have insisted that Salonica has been Greek all along, from the time of Alexander the Great through Hellenistic and Roman antiquity, Byzantium, and Ottoman rule. In this Hellenocentric view, Jews, Muslims, and other Balkan peoples were unwelcome intruders who had soiled the city's Hellenic character.

The project launched by the Group for the Study of the History of the Jews of Greece did not draw directly from Mazower, who had aimed to write an integrated narrative of Salonica's past. The group's project was more modest: to explore, in ways that will be suggested below, just one of the groups featured in Mazower's story. It conceived of its work in monographic terms, as a series of pointed and focused examinations of specific topics. But changes in approach and historiographic conception were very much in the air, and these changes animated the group's discussions. They sought to bring to the fore the history of Salonica's Jews, not for the purpose of privileging them in the city's history as Joseph Nehama—master of local Jewish historical writing—and others had done, but rather to place their history in different contexts. They compared it, when possible, to histories of the Jews of the Balkans, the Ottoman Empire, the Mediterranean, and other port cities and considered it with reference to analytical terms such as “tradition,” “modernity,” “migration,” “diaspora,” “identity,” “hybridity,” and “dissent.”

The aim was manifold: to acknowledge the role of Salonica's large Jewish population in the city's history; to insert the Jewish “element” in ongoing city affairs that also involved other groups; to transcend the identity politics with which Salonica's historiography had been colored; to challenge monolithic views of Salonica's Jewry; to insist on the variety and resulting tensions that characterized the city's Jewish population; and to historicize staple interpretations of Salonica's and Jewish Salonica's history. In short, the group worked to uncover a deeply buried past and its multiple (mis)appropriations. A local perspective was insufficient to uncover this past. It was important to invest the history of Salonica's Jews with an analytical robustness that previous discourses of Salonican Jewish history had often lacked. Thus, from the very start, the group's ambition was at once local and general. It was intent on not only defining specificities of Salonica's Jewish history but also expanding the discussion to broader comparative and analytical themes.

The group met several times a year for seven years. Its members were occasionally joined by Greek, Israeli, Turkish, western European, and North American scholars. They explored, with varying degrees of conviction, different contexts within which the history of Salonica's Jews could be examined. By happy coincidence, at the very moment it became clear that the group was beginning to lose some of its original energy, one of its members received an invitation from this journal to prepare a special issue devoted to the history of Salonica's Jews. Two other scholars were invited to share the

task, and the three proceeded—despite the diversity in their views—to organize this enterprise. Both in substance and in approach, this issue of *Jewish History* bears the mark of the discussions and explorations undertaken by the group and this issue's guest editors.

A call for papers was issued. In addition to the guidelines for contributors, it included a statement outlining the editors' general aims:

Our collective work intends to highlight the internal diversity, characteristic of Salonica's Jewish history, as well as the multiplicity of contacts Salonica's Jews established with the city's other ethnoreligious groups, with local authorities, as well as with other urban centres across and beyond the Mediterranean and the Balkans. The concept of "community" that has been at the core of many previous discussions of Salonica's Jewry has marginalized these important issues. We therefore welcome proposals that focus on intra-communal and inter-ethnic *relations* and deal less with institutions and more with social interactions and their cultural significations. . . . Instead, we seek works that place the Salonican Jews in the context of Ottoman and Modern Greek history, and/or use the case of Salonica's Jews to draw broader theoretical conclusions about particular notions or concepts (as for example the notion of "public sphere", "cosmopolitanism", "sociality", "mixed city", "social networks", "assimilation", "diaspora within a diaspora"). Our ultimate aim is to analytically insert the history of Salonica's Jews into more general contexts—cultural, economic, and geographic—thus opening up new analytical and historiographic horizons.

The editors cast a wide net—perhaps too wide for the purposes of this project. Well over a dozen statements of interest were received, and ten were selected. In June 2012, the authors of these ten proposals, and a small number of other scholars, were invited to attend a two-day conference at International Hellenic University on the outskirts of Salonica.

The group gathered in Salonica on a pleasant June day. The Sunday before the opening of our meetings, we were greeted by a stern sermon by the Most Reverend Metropolitan Anthimos, the city's archbishop, in the church of the Three Hierarchs. In the sermon, this pugnacious defender of Hellenism darkly suggested that our seminar and other comparable initiatives posed a serious threat to the city's Hellenic identity.¹¹ The good metropolitan's grouching turned out to be a blessing in disguise, for it offered us an even keener

¹¹The section of the archbishop's sermon that deals with the workshop is reported in "Yper YMATH kai kata Synedriou o Anthimos" [Anthimos in favour of YMATH (Ministry of Macedonia and Thrace) and against meeting], *salonica!news* (blog), <http://www>

sense of the task ahead: not to undermine the city's identity, but rather to enrich it by considering its diversity. All of us in the workshop felt the public quality of scholarly discussions. Over the course of two days of discussion, there was a series of intense exchanges often focused on questions of method and approach. Eventually the editors selected five potentially publishable papers to fit the project's needs.

Shortly before convening the conference in June 2012, the editors had discussed the fact that the papers to be published would be monographic and that their eclectic character required a conceptual cohesion. They decided to add to these monographic papers four distinct but overlapping essays. Each of the four essays would place the history of Salonica's Jews (and, by extension, the history of the city itself) in the broad context of a major historiographic tradition: the history of modern Greece, that of the Ottoman Empire, that of diasporic Judaism, and, finally, that of the Mediterranean. It is fair to say that each of these fields of historical research seldom if ever communicates with the other three. It is also true that Salonica's Jewry was largely overlooked over the past half century or more (with the major exception of the attention it received in Jewish historiography), and the reasons for this neglect are different in each case. Thus, the editors hoped that a kaleidoscopic coverage of the history of Salonica's Jews from four different angles of vision would suggest new possibilities of study and new approaches to an analytic and comparative understanding of their history. What is more, shifting the analytical scales from the monographic approach of the five studies, each of which is sharply focused on an aspect of the history of Salonica's Jews, to synthetic surveys of broad fields in which Salonica and its Jews did not always occupy a central place, was likely to enrich and, it was hoped, even to complicate the perspectives from which readers could rethink the history of Salonica's Jews.

Four distinguished scholars—Efi Avdela, Maurice Aymard, Edhem Eldem, and Aron Rodrigue—were invited to contribute these essays, and their ready acceptance shows the interest that this initiative generated among historians who had not previously placed the history of Salonican Jews at the center of their studies. Each of these scholars was given *carte blanche* and asked to reflect on the presence—or, if appropriate, the reasons for the absence—of

[.salonicanews.com/2012/06/blog-post_3804.html](http://salonicanews.com/2012/06/blog-post_3804.html). The recurrent motif of his barely concealed antisemitism was that "Jews are flirting with Salonica"—as in, Jewish businessmen are trying to acquire prized real estate on the city's waterfront so that they can build luxury hotels; Jews insist on presenting themselves as victims; seminars on Jewish subjects are held in the city and, worse yet, these meetings are supported by a public university and partly funded by the municipality of Thessaloniki. All this could not but amount to a major conspiracy. "I hope you won't come back to me later to complain about this. I am warning you now," said the city's premier ecclesiastic.

Salonican Jewish history in her/his historiographic field. Two of these essays deal with two different national/imperial historiographies; the third, with the broad course of Jewish historiography since the second half of the nineteenth century; and the fourth, on Mediterranean history, places the history of Salonica's Jews in the context of a French-inspired (read: Fernand Braudel-inspired) tradition of post-World War II studies on the Mediterranean. Yet another scholar, Katherine Fleming, was invited to reflect upon the entire enterprise, and her gracious acceptance resulted in the collection's concluding essay.

The core section of this issue of *Jewish History* comprises five articles, all of which are concentrated on the Ottoman and immediate post-Ottoman eras. For reasons that were beyond the editors' control, the most recent Greek period of Salonica/Thessaloniki's history is not examined here (except marginally by Papamichos Chronakis); this is, of course, a matter of regret. Yet, perhaps the focus on the Ottoman period lends this collection of articles a greater degree of cohesion than might otherwise have been the case. There are topics that are not covered in the pages that follow. Gender as an issue does not receive any special attention, nor is there an explicit discussion of religion or of Salonican Judaism's unexpected religious turns, such as, for example, the vast millenarian movement in the seventeenth century that provided a major challenge to the Jewish leadership and that could be usefully compared to other millenarian movements in the seventeenth-century Mediterranean. Also lacking is any substantial discussion of business and other networks that linked Salonican Jews with other groups—Jewish and non-Jewish—in other parts of the world.

In this far from exhaustive list of silences, one should include the question of the weight—cultural, economic, and demographic—of the impressively diverse geographical locations from which Jews had moved to Salonica during the Ottoman era. The term "Sephardic" may be too broad and may not sufficiently color the cultural identities of the numerous Iberian groups whose members settled in Salonica. In addition to the presence of diverse groups of Sephardim—for a long time, each group frequented a synagogue bearing the name of its Iberian region of origin—in Salonica there were Romaniote Jews, whose language was Greek rather than Ladino and whose presence in Hellenophone territories could be traced back to the time of Saint Paul's visits to Salonica and other cities where Greek was the dominant language; Italian Jews primarily from Livorno and Trieste but also from smaller towns on the Italian littoral of the Adriatic coast; Ashkenazi Jews from central and central-eastern Europe; Russian Jews; and probably—although their presence is not well documented—Jews from Arab-dominated regions of Asia and Africa, from the Maghreb to Palestine, Syria, and Iran. We know next to nothing about relations among members of these groups. Linguistic, social,

economic, and more broadly cultural differences among them may have been just as important as their common adherence to religion and shared experience of the consequences of various Christian persecutions.

Then, there is this issue's deafening silence on the Holocaust. At first sight, it will seem inexplicable—indeed, some might find it offensive—to dedicate a special issue of *Jewish History* to Salonica's Jews without discussing the major event in their history: their destruction by the Germans during World War II. However, a teleological perspective has all too often (at times unwittingly) determined the telling of the histories of Salonica's Jews. There has been a tendency to see everything about their past through the lens of their terrible end, or to memorialize their past in the knowledge that it was violently destroyed. In this collection of articles we make an effort to reach back in time—before the blackness that the memory of the Holocaust casts on the history of Salonica's Jews, before the shame that the memory of the Holocaust casts on mid-twentieth-century Salonica—and, in the course of our analytical dialogue with the records, to present histories that often have been concealed by the passage of time and buried underneath the understandable weight of the Holocaust in retelling the history of Salonica's Jews.

What, then, do we think these articles collectively contribute to the history of Salonica's Jews in the long Ottoman era? To begin with, all five articles question the notion of a self-contained, clearly defined Jewish identity and community. What emerges is an image of the city's Jews as an internally diverse, integral part of the city, of a social class, and of a state (or states). In fact, the articles in this issue—especially those of Ginio and Varlık—deal with the close relations between the Jews and the state and use approaches that no longer emphasize narratives of repression, resistance, and peaceful coexistence. The focus—especially in the articles of Akyağın Kaya, Papamichos Chronakis, and Naar—is on the relations between Jews and the city, which is seen as a dynamic, multiethnic, social and political reality. Papamichos Chronakis, Ginio, and Naar deal with Salonican Jewry in periods of transition. They point to the early stages of shifts in relationships between Jews with the local authorities and representatives of foreign powers in the Ottoman Empire (Ginio); in relationships between the city's Jewish and Greek business leadership (Papamichos Chronakis); and in the symbolic representation of the Jewish past at the turn of the twentieth century (Naar).

Collectively, these articles challenge the conventional periodization of Salonica's Jewish history and point to the complexity of historical transitions. They also underscore the variety of sources—those that are external to the community and to the city itself, and those that are internal to the city's Jewish population—from which a historian can draw. The existence of such a rich and variegated base of sources indicates the extent to which Salonican Jews were engaged, directly or indirectly, in so many facets of Salonica's life. Unlike a long and resilient historiographic tradition, we do not claim that Jews

were the dominant ethnic group of Salonica's past. Instead, we insist that the history of Salonica itself—and the histories of the various ethnic, religious, and linguistic groups that inhabited the city—cannot be understood without knowing the degree to which Jews were entwined in the city's history.

These articles also point to the degree to which the histories of Salonica's Jews intersected with the histories of the Ottoman Empire, of the Greek nation-state, of the Jewish diaspora, and of the Mediterranean Sea and its ports, such as Trieste, Livorno, Izmir, and Alexandria. If the category of "port Jew" allowed Lois Dubin to write productively and interestingly about the history of the Jews of Trieste, then it is conceivable that the same analytical category would make it possible to launch a fruitful comparison of Salonica's Jews with the Jews of other port cities.¹² And if Francesca Trivellato's concept "familiarity of strangers" enabled her to write an imaginatively perceptive account of contacts forged by Livornese Jews with merchants as far away as India, Central America, and northern Europe, then a comparable concept might help one discuss the contacts between Salonica's Jews and other inhabitants of Salonica, and between Jews and others living and working far from the southern Balkans.¹³ These are examples of strong and effective concepts that two scholars usefully applied to their studies. Studies of Salonica's Jews will surely profit from the application of comparable concepts that help to unlock their lives in the city itself and far from it, raising questions of both local and general—or, as today's fashion has it, global—history.

Salonica's Jewish history demands a field of inquiry that is not circumscribed by the contours of local history but, more interestingly and ambitiously, is also open to the interactions between the local and the general. It is the conviction of the editors that the articles presented here collectively point in this direction. Others will have to decide whether this is the case and how these articles can be used as a starting point for writing a new chapter in the historiography of Salonica's Jews.

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¹²Lois Dubin, *The Port Jews of Habsburg Trieste: Absolutist Politics and Enlightenment Culture* (Stanford, CA, 1999).

¹³Francesca Trivellato, *The Familiarity of Strangers: The Sephardic Diaspora, Livorno, and Cross-Cultural Trade in the Early Modern Period* (New Haven, CT, 2009).

the Ben Zvi Institute for the Study of Jewish Communities in the East in Jerusalem, Misgav Yerushalayim, The Center for Research and Study of Sephardi and Oriental Jewish Heritage at the Mandel Institute, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and the Forum for Turkish Studies at the Institute for Asian and African Studies, University of Jerusalem. I am grateful to my friends, and to this volume's coeditors, Eyal Ginio and Paris Papamichos Chronakis, for their valuable help and their encouragement. Perhaps most importantly, we are indebted to Francesca Trivellato, coeditor of *Jewish History*, for the chance she gave us to launch this project.