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Antisemitism as a Decision-Making Factor

The Migration of Salonica's Jewish Elite to the Habsburg Empire and its Successor States, 1867–1938

Abstract

This article examines the role Antisemitism had on the decision of Salonican Jews to migrate from Salonica to the Habsburg Empire and its successor states. The period under examination extends from 1867, when the December Constitution was proclaimed and equal political rights were given to the Jews in the Habsburg Empire, until 1938 and the Anschluss. The article examines how Antisemitism influenced the decision of people to leave Salonica and choose these states to settle in. It argues that, despite contemporary views about Antisemitism in the Austrian lands during the imperial and interwar period, the perception of it among the Jewry in Salonica was quite different. The application of Critical Discourse Analysis on two major Jewish newspapers demonstrates that Antisemitism was considered to be relatively marginal as a phenomenon, especially in comparison to other countries, such as France. While taking into account the significant events of the some seven decades in question, most notably the transition from empires to nation states, the article argues that it was the continuity of links between the persons under examination and the specific places that impacted their decisions, even during the interwar period. Moreover, and in line with recent research examining the impact of Antisemitism on the decisions of Salonica Jews to migrate elsewhere, the article argues that Antisemitism was not a push factor leading people to leave Salonica, as the main reasons for this choice were the potential financial opportunities in the Habsburg lands and the political upheaval in Salonica. However, as is demonstrated, Antisemitism functioned as a pull factor towards Austria-Hungary and, in particular, towards Moravia, where the majority of the Salonica Jews were to be found. The article aims to offer an account on the migration of Salonica Jews to the Habsburg Empire and its successor states, while also addressing the issue of Antisemitism in both the countries of origin and the destination, thus offering new insights on both major research topics.

Introduction

This article aims to present the migration currents of Salonica Jews to the Habsburg Empire and its successor states – more precisely, Austria and Czechoslovakia – and the impact that Antisemitism had on the decision-making processes of the actors under examination. The research presented here is part of a wider project that examines the migration of Salonica Jews to the region and the characteristics of this.

The time frame of the study spans the period from 1867 to 1938, that is, from the time equal political rights were granted in the Habsburg Empire until the Anschluss. This timeframe is quite extensive; hence, the conditions that prevailed at each given moment were not identical throughout the period in question. Therefore, the period can be divided into three sub-periods, roughly corresponding to the imperial era from 1867 to 1911, the war years from 1911 to 1919, and the republican period from

1919 to 1938. It is evident that differences existed even within the sub-periods, and what will be presented in this article is thus bound to include some inevitable generalisations, which nonetheless demonstrate the broader characteristics of the migratory movements.

Regarding the actors under examination, these include approximately 500 people who settled for shorter or longer periods in the Habsburg Empire and its successor states. Their main characteristic, as will be shown, is that they constituted part of the city's Jewish elite, as they were affluent merchants who often held offices within the Jewish Community of Salonica. Their settlement patterns were not identical – much depended on variables such as whether the settlement was permanent or temporary, without, however, changing drastically the broader patterns, since “migration involves a continuum from travel to lifetime emigration”.¹ As Klaus Bade states, migrations are not linear processes, but rather responses of the actors to the events that occur.² Therefore, the examination of the migration patterns of the Salonican Jewish elite during this longer period reflects the changes that took place in those years.

As will be demonstrated, the mobilities that took place during the interwar period were by-products of links that were established earlier, during the imperial era, due to the financial ties that were created between Salonica and the Habsburg Empire. That thus brings us to the question of how significant the Habsburg Empire was for Salonica and its Jewry – a question that has so far been the subject of only marginal scholarly interest.

The Establishment of the Habsburg Presence in Salonica

Despite the topic having been left largely unexamined by historiography, Austria-Hungary played quite an important role in Salonica during the approximately last fifty years of the empire's existence. Although it appeared in the city relatively late compared to other European countries – the first Habsburg delegation was founded in the 1760s – within a hundred years it managed to reach a point at which the majority of income processed by the city's port concerned Austro-Hungarian investments.³

The fact that the Habsburg Empire was able to consolidate its economic power in the region is also evidenced by the people who asked for its consular protection.⁴ Since the Habsburgs established their presence in the city relatively late, their influence was initially rather limited. For example, in 1833, based on the earliest registry preserved in the consular archives, one finds two lists with a total of sixteen persons registered as “Austrian subjects” and “Austrian protégés”.⁵ It is worth noting that everyone who was listed there was a Jew, at a time when Jews in the Habsburg Empire still suffered discrimination and were not equal citizens.⁶

Regarding the social composition of the lists, the following observations can be made. First of all, the list of Austrian subjects consisted of prominent Jews who

1 Dirk Hoerder, Andrew Gordon, Alexander Keyssar, and Daniel James, *Cultures in Contact: World Migrations in the Second Millennium* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 15.

2 Klaus Bade, “Historische Migrationsforschung”, *Historical Social Research Supplement* (2018) [2002]: 207.

3 Archives diplomatiques du Ministère des Affaires Étrangères/Salonique consulat/604POA/15/49.

4 On the issue of the protection of Jews by the Great Powers, see Eyal Ginio, “Jews and European Subjects in Eighteenth-Century Salonica: The Ottoman Perspective”, *Jewish History* 28, no. 3–4 (2014): 289–312.

5 AT-OeStA/HHStA GKA KsA Saloniki 138.

6 Hannelore Burger, *Heimatrecht und Staatsbürgerschaft österreichischer Juden: Vom Ende des 18. Jahrhunderts bis in die Gegenwart* (Vienna: Böhlau, 2014), 18.

spearheaded modernity and westernisation in the city, like Lazzar Allatini and Elie Fernandez. All of those persons on the first list were merchants. The second list, the protégés, contained individuals who had lower incomes – even though some high-profile actors, such as a fleet commander, can also be found there. Therefore, given the fact that the Habsburg consulate had only been established relatively recently in the city, the composition of these lists suggests that the Habsburgs were trying to increase their influence by mere numbers, that is, by providing protection to those who qualified, rather than by being concerned with the financial status of those protégés.

The consular registries of the 1880s provide a picture that reflects the increase in the overall Austro-Hungarian influence in the region.⁷ At this time, there were around sixty Jews listed in the consular registry. They constituted the majority of the Austrian “de facto” and “de jure” subjects,⁸ but they make up only about half of the entries. At that time, one could also find many Greek Orthodox and Muslim names, even Dönmeh, meaning Jews who had followed the self-proclaimed Messiah Sabetay Sevi and converted to Islam in the seventeenth century. Another notable change was that, at this time, one encounters only names of merchants and those practicing professions, like engineers, who held a prestigious status within the city and were among the most influential personalities of each community, a fact that goes beyond the Jews and concerns the Christians and the Muslims as well. Both the numerical augmentation, as well as the status of the persons whose names are found on the lists, suggest the great influence which the Habsburg Empire exercised and increased during the nineteenth century, as it formed an allegiance with members of the city’s financial and political elite.

It is evident from this description that the persons who were either Austrian subjects or Austrian protégés had a significant role within the city in general and within the Jewish community in particular. It is also evident that they were persons who had a high degree of agency and could employ several strategies when facing situations of adversity.

The First Period: The Imperial Period (1867–1911)

During the first years under examination, the settlement of Salonica Jews in the Habsburg territory was mostly temporary. People would come and go, mostly to conduct business but also to enjoy cultural events. Few of these persons were engaged with the Sephardi Jews who lived in Vienna. Some had businesses together with prominent members of the Sephardic community,⁹ and others contributed to the Salonican Jewish press, providing correspondence about what was happening in Vienna and what their fellow Sephardim were doing there.¹⁰ We can therefore conclude that, among the Salonican Jewish elite, there was sufficient knowledge about the situation in the Habsburg capital, and that it is highly unlikely that the individuals in question did not know what was happening in the region – both generally

7 AT-OeStA/HHStA GKA KsA Saloniki 139.

8 For a detailed examination of the Sephardic community in Vienna, see Martin Stechauner, *The Sephardic Jews of Vienna: A Jewish Minority Crossing Borders* (Vienna: University of Vienna, PhD dissertation, 2019).

9 Adolph Lehmann, *Adolph Lehmann's allgemeiner Wohnungs-Anzeiger: Nebst Handels- u. Gewerbe-Adressbuch für d. k.k. Reichshaupt- u. Residenzstadt Wien u. Umgebung*. (Vienna: Österreichische Anzeigen-Gesellschaft, 1908): 117, 288, 489.

10 *La Epoka*, 21 December 1883.

speaking, as well as particularly regarding Antisemitism. This type of mobility, back and forth to and from Salonica, with periods of settlement in Vienna, lasted until approximately 1903 and what has been framed as the Macedonian struggle, when there was a diminution of contacts which can be possibly attributed to the battles taking place in the Macedonian hinterland. The Young Turk Revolution and the establishment of the new regime in the Ottoman Empire in 1908 enabled the resumption of previous activities.

In order to evaluate how Salonican Jews perceived the phenomenon of Antisemitism, I will use the two major Jewish newspapers of the time, *La Epoka* (The Epoch, LE) and *Le journal de Salonique* (The Newspaper of Salonica, LJS). LE was issued from 1875 until 1911 and was written in Judeo-Spanish, while LJS was issued from 1895 until 1911 and was written in French. They were both owned by the same persons, initially Saadi Halevy and later his son, Sam Levy.¹¹ They appeared on different dates, usually every other day, three times a week, depending on their circulation at the time. These newspapers therefore offer a magnificent example of how things were presented by more or less the same contributors, but in different languages and to diverse audiences.

Saadi had close contact with Shem Tov Semo, the principal figure of Sephardic publishing in Vienna,¹² a fact which attests to my earlier conclusion that Salonican upper-class Jewry was well-informed about what was happening in Vienna. Moreover, Sam Levy was personally acquainted with Theodore Herzl, the two men often meeting each other “all the time he [i.e. Levy] passed by Vienna”.¹³ Given the ownership status of LJS and LE, it is safe to assume that the correspondence they published were provided by the same persons.

For the analysis at this stage, I will use discourse analysis since my sources are only narrative, due to the lack of other available archives. I shall therefore examine how issues related to Antisemitism were presented to different audiences, given that the broader sociopolitical context informs the creation of the text.¹⁴ In particular, the examination will focus on what sort of information regarding Antisemitism was or was not shared with the audience, and how Antisemitism was presented in different countries.

Antisemitism in Salonica's Jewish Press

I proceed with my analysis by examining how the issue of Alfred Dreyfus' pardon¹⁵ was presented in each newspaper, in order to understand their perceptions of Antisemitism through such an emblematic case. However, it is also worth examining the Dreyfus case in particular since a part of Salonica's Jewry was well acquainted with French culture because of the presence of the *Alliance Israelite Universelle* (Universal Israelite Alliance, AIU) in the city.¹⁶

11 Olga Borovaya, *Modern Ladino Culture: Press, Belles Lettres, and Theater in the Late Ottoman Empire* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), 94.

12 Stechauner, *Sephardic Jews of Vienna*, 236.

13 *L'Etoile du Levant*, 18 November 1949.

14 Ruth Wodak and Michael Meyer, *Methods of Critical Discourse Studies* (Los Angeles, London, New Delhi, Singapore, and Washington, DC: Sage, 2009), 10.

15 In 1899, Alfred Dreyfus was offered a pardon by the president of France, which he accepted. A few years later, he was exonerated and reinstated to the military.

16 Aron Rodrigue, *French Jews, Turkish Jews: The Alliance Israelite Universelle and the Politics of Jewish Schooling in Turkey, 1860–1925* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 148.

The issue of LE published on 2 June 1899 referred to Dreyfus' pardon by the president of France, devoting two full-page articles to the topic. It reads:

“Triumph”

[...] The impression the news made in Paris was intense. The antisemites were left disappointed [...]. The triumph is even more glorious since it was necessary to *break so many networks*, defeat so many obstacles, *disarm billions of enemies*. Good people, how many times has the Epoka advised you, begged you to be patient, and let justice do its work? How many times do we see our dearest friends, in the voice of some antisemitic prank, running around asking in agony: “what to do?”

While one can detect an implied trust that French justice will rise to the challenge and do its duty, in this extract one can notice the emphasis put on people being worried about antisemitic events and the extension of antisemitic networks in France.

The LJS issues that chronologically are more proximate to this issue of LE appeared on 1 and 5 June of that year. In both issues, there is just a short reference to Dreyfus, while other articles, like one regarding the waterfront of Salonica, take up more space. By paying attention not only to what is written, but also to what is not written, it becomes clear that the editor deemed the news to be not equally as important for his French-speaking audience, and he only devoted a couple of lines.

In another example, on 6 January 1907, an article in LE about the Austrian parliament notes that “[t]he antisemitic deputies take advantage of their position and cannot be arrested despite agitating the people against the Jews. Antisemitism is quite strong in Austria.” The preceding and following issue of LJS had no mention at all of any related subject.

We can therefore easily deduce that the issue of Antisemitism was depicted differently in the French- and the Ladino-language press, in the cases presented above and when it concerned other issues. Such issues included the Kishinev pogrom, which did not receive any mention at all in the editions of LJS in April 1903, contrary to LE, which did provide coverage, albeit only brief, of the events.¹⁷ This difference was not a novel phenomenon. The French-speaking press was regularly read by the other communities (at least by their journalists) and often contained pieces that were more “Europeanised”, both because of the orientation of the newspaper as well as the fact that the editor knew it would be read by “outsiders”. On the contrary, LE was addressed to people who had not received a European-style education and probably did not speak French – or, even if they did, likely preferred the Judeo-Spanish language – and could hence be considered, albeit somehow simplistically, more traditional. In other words, LE was more internally oriented compared to LJS, and therefore published articles on more “Jewish” issues. Since LE could not be read by “outsiders”, it allowed for a more in-depth discussion of issues like communal administration, Antisemitism, and ideological currents. On the other hand, LJS was addressed to all people who felt part of the western-like Levantine milieu. Just like LE was perceived as the organ of the Jewish community (even though it was privately owned), LJS was the newspaper read by the upper-middle class of the city, irrespective of religious and/or national affinities, as can be deduced by the fact that it even hosted announcements from Catholic French-speaking schools.¹⁸

¹⁷ *La Epoka*, 10 April 1903.

¹⁸ *Le Journal de Salonique*, 20 August 1900; Sam Levy, *Salonique à la fin du XIXe siècle: mémoires* (Istanbul: Isis Press, 2000), 76.

Given the distinct characteristics of these two newspapers, and the different audiences they were addressed to, for an examination of that era to be fruitful, one has to focus on only one of the newspapers and not on a comparison of the two, as the examination of one, seminal event has demonstrated. By employing discourse analysis on LJS's articles only, I can demonstrate the differences in Antisemitism throughout Europe as they were perceived by the readership of LJS. Since it was the Salonican middle and upper classes who constituted LJS's readership, and given that it was people from these classes who, as was demonstrated earlier, had connections with the Habsburg Empire, I will in fact demonstrate how Antisemitism throughout Europe was perceived by persons who had links with the Austria-Hungary.

Antisemitism in LJS

My analysis will focus on two issues which are indicative of how Antisemitism was perceived by Salonican upper-class Jews during the first period under examination here, that is 1867 to 1911.

The first issue is a more general depiction and discussion of Antisemitism(s), and the second one concerns a comparison of how two prominent cases, the Dreyfus and Hilsner affairs, were presented by LJS.

Even though, as stated earlier, LJS treated subjects of wider interest to non-Jews, it nonetheless from time to time published pieces regarding Jewish matters. In this framework, articles regarding Antisemitism or the situation of Jews in various European countries were one of the subjects which were now and then written about, and these articles were usually about half a page long.¹⁹

Looking into the articles touching upon the issues of Antisemitism in France and the Habsburg Empire, there is a noticeable difference. While in the French case Antisemitism as in issue is presented as relating to the whole of France, as a collective trait and, hence, responsibility, in the Habsburg case it is presented as an individual characteristic of some people who, however, do not represent the whole of the empire. Furthermore, the figure of the Habsburg emperor is presented as a protective figure of the Jews, a perception widespread among the Jews of the Habsburg Empire as well, even at times of antisemitic events.

The treatment of the Dreyfus and Hilsner affairs offers an instructive insight into how Antisemitism was perceived to be in France and the Habsburg Empire. The affairs differed in various aspects, since the Dreyfus Affair involved high treason charges against an army officer while the Hilsner Affair concerned ritual murder accusations against a "vagrant". Moreover, in the Dreyfus Affair, high political echelons were involved, whereas in the Hilsner Affair fault was attributed to some judges who "were blinded by antisemitism".²⁰

And here lies the most crucial difference between the two cases, as presented in LJS. The Dreyfus Affair was used as an exemplification of the widespread Antisemitism that could be found in France. And the proof of that was exactly the meticulous planning of the accusation against Dreyfus and its "secular" aspect. Even though the sentences of the two were similar, the Dreyfus Affair, even after his eventual pardon, continued to stir controversies regarding the treatment of Esterhazy and his accom-

¹⁹ *Le Journal de Salonique*, 21 July 1900.

²⁰ *Le Journal de Salonique*, 19 October 1900.

plices. Whereas LJS treated the Hilsner case as an individual, almost private case, “a stupid accusation against a poor Polish Jew”.²¹

What becomes evident is that, around the turn of the century, Antisemitism in Europe, as perceived by the upper- and middle-class Jews in Salonica, differed among the different states. It is certain that the Salonican Jewish elite was aware of the antisemitic events that occurred in various places. What arises from the study of the newspapers’ content is that, despite what one might think today, Antisemitism was perceived as more widespread and deeply rooted in French society than in the Habsburg lands, as demonstrated, for example, by the fact that antisemitic publications were quite widespread, something that Salonica Jews who lived in France often commented on.²² While, of course, antisemitic events did take place even in Austria-Hungary, they were not considered representative of the entire population.

In other words, the discourse analysis of the French-speaking Jewish newspaper of Salonica regarding the perception of Antisemitism confirms what Peter Pulzer wrote almost a century later: “at the time of the Dreyfus Affair, French antisemitism had reached such a high degree of intensity that nothing similar could be found in Germany before 1933.”²³

The Second Period: The Italo-Ottoman War, the Balkan Wars and World War I (1911–1919)

The year 1911 marks a turning point for the Salonican Jews, since it constitutes the beginning of an era of wars that would last until 1919, when the last Entente forces left the city. It was the era of transition, a time that functioned as a passage from the Ottoman to the Greek period of the city, bearing elements from both of them without belonging clearly to either.

While Salonica was not directly affected by the military operations of the Italo-Ottoman War (unlike during the Balkan Wars), their repercussions deeply impacted the city. The Jews who resided in the city and were Italian subjects/protégés were to be expelled from the Ottoman territory, an event that bore significant consequences for the entire city.²⁴ To avoid that, there was an effort to change their status and declare their allegiance to another state. This was precisely the moment when a wave of naturalisations started taking place in the Habsburg consulate of Salonica. The first to apply was the then president of the Jewish community, Sam Modiano. According to the consul’s reports, he was considered to be crucial for the strengthening of Habsburg influence in the region, since the Modiano family had a significant fortune and participated in various economic fields and niches.²⁵ After the Modiano family, many followed in the wave of naturalisations, the peak of the applications being in 1913.

It is noteworthy that, out of the ninety-nine heads of households who were naturalised in this period, eighty were given “*Heimatsrecht*”²⁶ in communities in Moravia.

21 *Le Journal de Salonique*, 29 October 1900.

22 Shmuel Almog, *Nationalism and Antisemitism in Modern Europe: 1815–1945* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1990), 45; Levy, *Salonique*, 118.

23 Peter Pulzer, *Jews and the German State: The Political History of a Minority, 1848–1933* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 14.

24 Evangelhos Hekimoglou, *The Modiano Affair: A Banking Crash in Thessaloniki, in 1911* (Thessaloniki: self-edition, 1991), 11.

25 OeStA/HHStA GKA KsA Saloniki 458.

26 The Heimatsrecht (homeland’s right) was the cornerstone in the process of obtaining Austrian or Hungarian citizenship in the Habsburg Empire, and it was also central to the relationship between the state and its sub-

The first naturalisations that took place were more “personalised”, in the sense that the administration tried to find a place that would allow for the justification of an applicant’s naturalisation, mostly by association with their profession. For example, the Modianos were naturalised in Steinschoenau/Kamenický Šenov in Bohemia, because they were (among others) merchants of glass. However, the total number of “personalised” naturalisations concerned only six families.

It can thus be deduced that the choice of Moravian communities was not coincidental. The wishes of the Habsburg authorities to naturalise in specific places in order not to change the quota of the population might have influenced the choice of the community. However, this was not the main criterion. The correspondence between the attorney handling all the cases and the consul in Salonica indicates two factors determining the community of naturalisation: the community’s willingness to accept them and the preferences of the applicants themselves, mostly related to the financial burden, such as “elective” expenses they had to make in order to prove their willingness to belong to the community.²⁷ Hence, it is necessary to examine the role of a person’s agency in choosing Moravia when they had no other connection that would justify their naturalisation in other places, which in turn leads us back to the issue of the perception of Antisemitism by upper-class Salonica Jews. Of course, the fact that they were naturalised there does not mean that they actually lived there. Nevertheless, even if not originally in the plans, some indeed settled in the places where they were naturalised – while some later migrated elsewhere and others returned to Salonica.

As I have established earlier, the perception of Salonica’s Jewish elite in the previous period was that Antisemitism in the Habsburg Empire was relatively low compared to other countries. There were antisemitic events and people knew about them; nevertheless, Antisemitism before World War I was in “apparent decline” anyway,²⁸ and since the persons under examination had connections with the Habsburg Empire, they were probably aware of the situation and potential problems. It can therefore be concluded that they actively sought naturalisation in Moravia and not in other regions, such as in Vienna as one might have expected, which was known for its Antisemitism.²⁹

Despite the common treatment of Moravia along with Bohemia, the two regions should be studied separately when it comes to the issue of a Jewish presence and its repercussions.³⁰ Among other differences, Moravia had one significant peculiarity: even after 1867, it had distinct Jewish *political* communities, along with the non-Jewish political communities and/or the Jewish cultural communities. In other words, in one locality, there were sometimes two political communities, a Christian one and a Jewish one.³¹

jects, since it was linked to social and other benefits. See Andrea Komlosy, “Der Staat schiebt ab: Zur national-staatlichen Konsolidierung von Heimat und Fremde im 18. Und 19. Jahrhundert”, in *Ausweisung – Abschiebung – Vertreibung in Europa: 16.–20. Jahrhundert*, ed. Sylvia Hahn, Andrea Komlosy, and Ilse Reiter (Innsbruck and Vienna: Studien Verlag, 2006), 89–91.

27 OeStA/HHStA GKA KsA Saloniki 450.

28 Bruce F. Pauley, *From Prejudice to Persecution: A History of Austrian Anti-Semitism* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 45, 59.

29 *Le Journal de Salonique*, 31 October 1904.

30 Markéta Weiglová, “Jews as a Barometer of the National Struggle in Bohemia and Moravia, 1890–1910”, *Judaica Bohemiae* 43 (2007): 94.

31 Peter Urbanitsch, “Die Politischen Israelitengemeinden in Mähren: Entstehung und legistische Grundlagen, ihre politische Rolle im Nationalitätenstreit, Trennung ihrer säkularen und religiösen Aufgabenbereiche”, *Judaica Bohemiae* 53, no. 1 (2018): 42.

These communities, and by extension the Jewish population, were for long considered to have influenced disproportionately the outcomes of the *Reichsrat* (Imperial Council) elections, since they mostly voted for the German liberal party.³² They also belonged to the urban curia which provided more constituents compared to the rural curia, even though the Jewish political communities sometimes had fewer inhabitants than towns belonging to the rural curia.³³ While this idea of disproportionate influence is exaggerated, the Jewish political communities indeed influenced political life, mostly in the sense that their vote allowed for the German liberal political spectrum with its different branches to maintain its stronghold in this region, at the same time that it was losing traction throughout the empire. Because the local German-speaking population was able to maintain its status, German Antisemitism in Moravia was very late to appear, mostly after 1933.³⁴ Since the frustration of the German-speaking population was a crucial element in the rise of Antisemitism in the Habsburg Empire, a lack of such bitterness due to the maintenance of the previous political status quo for the German-speaking population can explain the lack of Antisemitism in Moravia compared to other regions.³⁵ This, along with the fact that the big urban centres in Moravia mostly had a majority German population, as opposed to Bohemia, did not let Czech Antisemitism flourish there either.

What is important to note here is that none of the individuals in question was registered in a Jewish political community – they all preferred the non-Jewish ones. Thus, we can perhaps detect at this point a detachment from the Jewish identity – or at least from what these individuals thought “Jewish” could mean in a central European setting as opposed to what it meant in the context of Salonica. This active avoidance of the Jewish political communities may have several different explanations, such as the effort to minimise any possible aversion from the locals, or the cultural differences between Sephardi and Ashkenazi Jews. However, it is definitely indicative of the understanding which the Salonica Jewish elite had of the region and its characteristics, including Antisemitism.

Greek Rule

The beginning of Greek rule in the region of Salonica until the stabilisation of the political situation, that is the period from 1913 to 1919, was marked by a migratory wave with many destinations. Many Jews headed to France and the United States.³⁶ This was due to the fewer economic possibilities which merchants in Salonica came to have because of the changes that took place in the Balkan peninsula, such as the fragmentation of the Macedonian hinterland after its division among different nation-states, as was understood by contemporaries regardless of their political and ideological orientations.³⁷

Even though one might have expected Antisemitism to play a role as a push factor, leading the Jews out of Salonica, it appears that, at least in the period that is being

32 Marsha L. Rozenblit, “Jews, German Culture, and the Dilemma of National Identity: The Case of Moravia 1848–1938”, *Jewish Social Studies* 20, no. 1 (2013): 79.

33 Weiglová, „Jews as Barometer”, 106–107.

34 Rozenblit, “The Case of Moravia”, 99.

35 Almog, *Nationalism and Antisemitism*, 37.

36 Devin E. Naar, “From the ‘Jerusalem of the Balkans’ to the Goldene Medina: Jewish Immigration from Salonika to the United States”, *American Jewish History* 93, no. 4 (2017): 448.

37 Levy, *Salonique*, 109; OeStA/HHStA PA XII Tuerkei, memorandum sent to the organizational committee [of the World Zionist Organization] in Berlin.

examined here, this was not the case. There were some antisemitic events, especially during the first days of the city's occupation by the Greek army, which reinforced the arguments of the Jewish community that sought the internationalisation of the city. However, in an effort to secure Salonica's incorporation into the Greek state, the then prime minister Eleftherios Venizelos tried to cater to the demands of the Jewish community, in order to ease possible concerns in Europe about their mistreatment. To this end, there were often articles³⁸ published in and statements made to the press by Venizelos and other officials regarding the equality that Greek Jews enjoyed.³⁹ Moreover, due to the economic influence of the Jewish bourgeoisie, Venizelos must have anticipated that its representatives would side with him once Salonica's incorporation into the Greek state was finalised, since he politically represented Greek industrialists who sought to expand their economic interests beyond the state's borders.⁴⁰

The year 1915 marks what has been called in Greek historiography the "national schism", that is, the intense disagreement between the king and the prime minister on whether Greece should join World War I and on whose side. The fact that Venizelos was pro-Entente, while the king favoured the Central Powers and for tactical reasons advocated for the neutrality of Greece, led to the support of the royalist ticket by a large segment of the Jewish community, including Zionists and, paradoxically, socialists. Their position was dictated by the fact that neither the Zionists nor the socialists wanted to fight a war that was not their own alongside Venizelos, who was the representative of Greek irredentism at the time. Moreover, they hoped that a possible victory of the Central Powers would bring the proposal for the internationalisation of Salonica – which, as previously mentioned, they desired – back to the table. This stance of the majority of Salonica's Jewish population continued being an issue for more than a decade, as it was considered undeniable evidence of their "mishellenic attitude".⁴¹

Despite winning a parliamentary majority in the elections of May 1915, Venizelos' list did not elect even one deputy in the constituency of Salonica. In order to explain this divergence in the votes locally and across the country, the nationalist view of Greek history has coined the term "unbearable oxymoron" (*aforito oxymoron*), claiming that the seats of the electoral periphery of Salonica were determined by "ethnically alien" populations (mostly Jews, but Muslims as well) and that this was the reason the most notable representative of the expansionist Greek Megali Idea lost.⁴² This view of the electoral behaviour of Salonica Jews was the starting point of a series of laws that would last until 1936, when a dictatorship was imposed. These laws tried to minimise the influence of Salonican Jews (and, for some time, also that of Thracian Muslims) in the country's politics, by practically excluding them from the body politic – an antisemitic policy which was supported, openly or not, by both main parties.

In August 1917, a huge fire destroyed Salonica's historical centre which was mostly inhabited by Jews. The new urban planning that was proposed attempted to erase

38 *Makedonia*, 22 January 1913.

39 *Makedonia*, 2 February 1913; *Washington Post*, 28 July 1919.

40 Giorgos Th. Mavrogordatos, *Stillborn Republic: Social Coalitions and Party Strategies in Greece 1922–1936* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 254.

41 *Makedonia*, 4 September 1927.

42 Dimosthenis Dodos, *Οι Εβραίοι της Θεσσαλονίκης στις εκλογές του Ελληνικού κράτους: 1915–1936* [The Jews of Salonica at the Elections of the Greek State: 1915–1936] (Athens: Savvalas, 2005), 11. The irredentist Megali (great) Idea was a political concept that sought to expand the borders of the Greek state by including territories where Greek-speaking populations lived.

from the landscape anything that was not considered to be Greek. Moreover, people were not allowed to rebuild their houses. Instead, the lots were converted to bonds called *ktimatografa*, which would later be used in auctions, where the former owner could take part, in a somehow privileged way, however without any guarantee that they would take back the land which they had previously owned. This legislation was perceived by the Jews as threatening. The aim of Venizelos was not to cast out the Jews in general, but rather the (mostly poor) Jews who used to live in the city centre, in order to Europeanise it.⁴³ The fact that it was not race but rather class that motivated Venizelos' policies is also attested by the memoirs of migrants,⁴⁴ who claimed that they had to leave Salonica because the auctions and consequently the reconstructions were taking forever and they could not survive anymore, so they sold their bonds. Interestingly, in most cases, it was upper-class Jews who bought out these bonds from their coreligionists who fled the city.

As Giorgos Margaritis framed it,

[a]fter 1913 the Jewish presence in Salonica appeared progressively to be an obstacle for the process of national homogenisation of the space – so urgent within the Balkan fluidity. It is hard though, in this case, to speak of structured antisemitism for a long time. There is a disposition for suspicion and competition from the local population and policies with an anti-Jewish disposition on behalf of the administration. The rearrangement of the Jewish neighbourhoods in Salonica after the fire of 1917 is an example of this, indicative of the administration's policy, which however hesitates to cross certain boundaries in these turbulent times, full of menaces. In the social space the anti-Jewish sentiment is enlarged and takes its shape mostly after the population exchange and the arrival of a great number of refugees in the city".⁴⁵

While this does not mean that "Venizelos' administration showed tendencies of minority protection, Antisemitism, which in Salonica was mainly connected to financial issues, was mostly a marginal phenomenon".⁴⁶

In other words, during this period, Antisemitism did not function as a push factor out of Salonica since, despite its increase after the occupation by the Greek army, Antisemitism was still a relatively marginal phenomenon, due to the political assurances the Greek state had to provide in order to secure the annexation of the city. However, the perception people had about Antisemitism in certain places acted as a pull factor towards these countries and regions within them. This meant two things: a preference for the Habsburg Empire over France, and within the Habsburg Empire, a preference for Moravia over other regions in which Antisemitism was more widespread.

43 Alexandra Gerolympos, "La part du feu", in *Salonique, 1850–1918: la "ville des Juifs" et le reveil des Balkans*, ed. Gilles Veinstein (Paris: Autrement, 1992), 263.

44 Giorgos Karatzoglu, *Ο αφανισμός των Θεσσαλονικέων Εβραίων της Γαλλίας 1942–1944: ένα kadish για τους δικούς μας "Γάλλους"* [The Annihilation of the Salonic Jews of France 1942–1944: A Kadish For Our "Frenchmen"] (Thessaloniki: Epikentro, 2014), 30–32.

45 Giorgos Margaritis, "Ελληνικός Αντισημιτισμός: Μια περιήγηση, 1821, 1891, 1931 [Greek Antisemitism: An Overview, 1821, 1891, 1931]", in *Ο Ελληνικός Εβραϊσμός. Πρακτικά Επιστημονικού Συμποσίου (3–4 Απριλίου)* [The Greek Jewry: Proceedings of the Scientific Symposium (3–4 April 1998)], ed. M. Stephanopoulou (Athens: Association of Studies on modern Greek Culture and General Education, 1999), 22.

46 Spyros Marketos, "Η ενσωμάτωση της σεφαραδίτικης Θεσσαλονίκης στην Ελλάδα: το πλαίσιο, 1912–1914" [The Incorporation of the Sephardic Thessaloniki into Greece: The Context, 1912–1914], in *Ο Ελληνικός Εβραϊσμός. Πρακτικά Επιστημονικού Συμποσίου (3–4 Απριλίου)* [The Greek Jewry: Proceedings of the Scientific Symposium (3–4 April 1998)], ed. M. Stephanopoulou (Athens: Association of Studies on Modern Greek Culture and General Education, 1999), 67.

The Third Period: The Interwar Period

Czechoslovakia

In the first Czechoslovak Republic, anti-Jewish statements were rarely expressed in political circles.⁴⁷ There were antisemitic incidents in the years immediately after the formation of the new state, but these subsided quickly and they were mostly characterised by anti-German rather than anti-Jewish elements, due to the previously described association of Jews, mainly in Moravia, with German culture.⁴⁸ This association, in fact, continued for the most part throughout the interwar period, albeit minimised. However, the diminution of the number of Jews ascribing to themselves German nationality did not result in a concomitant augmentation of Jews declaring themselves as Czechs. Rather, it enhanced the category of (national) Jewish belonging, which in the census was separate from religious Jewish belonging.⁴⁹ In general, “anti-Semitism during the First Republic may be described as minor, verbal and bearable”, especially compared to neighbouring countries.⁵⁰

In fact, what differentiates the first Czechoslovak republic (1918–1938) from the short-lived second Czechoslovak republic (1938–1939) and all its surrounding states is precisely the relative tolerance it demonstrated towards its Jews, a fact which has led to the creation of the perception of the modern-day Czech Republic as an “anti-semitism-free” state.⁵¹ While there was an antisemitic current, mostly in the agrarian segments of the population, which even subtly associated president Tomáš Masaryk with the Jews because of his involvement in the Hilsner Affair,⁵² it nonetheless remained quite marginalised, and it certainly did not affect the rights enjoyed by the Jews. For example, not only were they allowed to maintain their own schools, which (in Moravia) were mostly German-speaking at the gymnasium level, but these schools were also attended by the Christian German-speaking minority, which was compelled to shut down its own schools.⁵³ It was within this framework that some of the Salonican Jews previously discussed opted to remain in the new state of Czechoslovakia, where the communities in which they had been naturalised belonged after 1918. It was also within this framework that, after 1933, the Czech part of Czechoslovakia received many émigrés from Germany and Austria.

Austria

During the interwar period, the situation regarding Antisemitism was different in Austria than in Czechoslovakia. In the immediate years after the collapse of the Habsburg Empire, Vienna saw an incredible rise of Antisemitism, mostly associated with the perception that Jews (either as big industrialists or as socialists) were responsible for the terrible financial situation that befell the country.⁵⁴ There were several attempts to exclude Jews from economic and social life, private enterprises, clubs, and even universities. The momentum of Antisemitism subsided after 1923,

47 Ján Drgo, “The Legislative Definition of the Term ‘Jew’ in the Second Czechoslovak Republic, First Slovak Republic and Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, 1938–44”, *Historický časopis* 62, no. 2 (2014): 304.

48 Blanka Soukupová, “The Socio-Historical Contexts of Czech Anti-Semitism and Anti-German Sentiments Following the Establishment of the Czechoslovak Republic and their Reflection in Contemporary Caricatures”, *Slovenský národopis*, 67, no. 1 (2019): 12.

49 Rozenblit, “The Case of Moravia”, 82.

50 Miloš Pojar, *T. G. Masaryk and the Jewish Question* (Prague: Karolinum Press, 2019), 149.

51 Pauley, *A History of Austrian Anti-semitism*, 73.

52 Michal Frankl, “The Background of the Hilsner Case: Political Antisemitism and Allegations of Ritual Murder 1896–1900”, *Judaica Bohemiae* 36, no. 1 (2000): 80–81.

53 Urbanitsch, “Die Politischen Israelitengemeinden in Mähren”, 62.

54 Pauley, *A History of Austrian Anti-semitism*, 74.

when the financial situation also improved, so that the late 1920s were characterised by fewer antisemitic events. However, once the financial crash of 1929 reached Austria, things began to change again with regards to Antisemitism.⁵⁵ The situation worsened so much, including physical violence and multiple attempts to undo legal rights, that several organisations and authorities, including the American embassy in Vienna and the British Foreign Office, intervened multiple times in order to request the protection of the minimum legal rights that Jews should enjoy. These antisemitic events made the headlines in the Salonican Jewish press, which echoed the progressive Viennese press' indignation that the authorities only dealt with the matter because the American embassy intervened.⁵⁶

Salonica

The interwar period brought many changes to the overall situation of Salonica. The year 1923 especially marks the beginning of a series of events which saw the rapid deterioration of the position of Jews in the city. In that year, the government imposed separate electoral lists (only for Salonican Jews and not for the other minorities), a provision which is considered to be the government's first openly antisemitic measure. Moreover, there was a massive influx of refugees coming from Asia Minor, after the defeat of Greece in the Greco-Turkish War that followed World War I. These refugees would completely alter the ethnic composition of the city's population and enter into fierce competition with the Jews for control over similar niches in the city's economy in which these refugees were also experienced. While the refugees were strong supporters of Venizelos, every government tried to befriend them by introducing measures that appealed to them, such as the imposition in 1924 of Sunday as a day of rest, which inevitably favoured the refugees over the Jews. This led to massive Jewish emigration from Salonica, mostly towards France, which peaked in the years from 1922 to 1924.⁵⁷

In 1927, a fascist organisation called *Ethniki Enosis Ellas* (National Union Hellas, EEE) was formed in Salonica, appealing mostly to those refugees. The most significant antisemitic actions at that time were attacks in the poor Jewish neighbourhoods that had been formed after the 1917 fire. These attacks culminated in a pogrom in the Campbell neighbourhood in 1931, under the pretext of alleged antinational actions in which members of the Maccabi sports club had participated while in Sofia. Regarding the Campbell events, "Venizelos acknowledged that the accusations against the Maccabi and its representatives were false and made-up".⁵⁸ However, an article written in 1934 in the Venizelist newspaper *Eleuthero Vima* (Free Platform) wrote that:

Mr. Venizelos stated that the Jews of Salonica do not consider themselves Greek patriots [...] Jews can practice their religion like the Turks and the other citizens of a different faith. They can also elect their two members of the parliament. Beyond that, they have no rights. They will not be allowed to take part in the general elections. I will not bow to anyone, all the more so to the Jews. I will not allow them to influence Greek politics.⁵⁹

55 Harriet P. Freidenreich, *Jewish Politics in Vienna 1918–1938* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991), 8.

56 *La Renesensia Djudia*, 4 November 1932.

57 *Aksyon*, 13 April 1932; Karatzoglou, *Our Frenchmen*, 30.

58 Margaritis, *Greek Antisemitism*, 23–24.

59 *Eleuthero Vima*, 5 September 1934.

We can, therefore, observe the complete transformation of Venizelos' rhetoric within twenty years: from someone who sought to befriend Jews to someone who steadily tried to oust them, employing typical antisemitic rhetoric at the moment when he no longer needed them. While his tolerant attitude in the early years has often been regarded as sincere, this article demonstrates that he exhibited antisemitic behaviour, reflecting the attitude of a great part of Salonican society and its antisemitic turn. The article that appeared in *Eleuthero Vima* was not the first in which Venizelos voiced his new attitude towards Salonica Jews; he had not hesitated to mention similar views – albeit less intensely – in the Judeo-Spanish newspaper *La voz de Oriente* (The Voice of the Orient) that appeared in Istanbul in 1931.⁶⁰ This change in his attitude corresponded to the diminution of the financial affluence of Jews, since the most well-to-do part of Salonican Jewry had already left the city, compelled to do so by Law 4837 of 1930, which stipulated that only those who held Greek citizenship could be members of the Jewish community. As a consequence, those who remained were mainly from the lower classes. This law in practice deprived the community of its income, since the Jews who were citizens of another state were mostly middle- and upper-class members.

Mobilities

During the interwar period, there do not seem to have been new waves of migration from Salonica to the Habsburg Empire's successor states. Some of the persons who had settled there before 1918 returned to Salonica prior to 1923. Others moved within the former Habsburg space, from Moravia and Lower Austria to Vienna, after 1923, when the financial situation in Vienna improved and Antisemitism subsided. Others remained where they had been naturalised, most notably in Moravia, until well into the interwar period, while they often maintained a business branch in and contacts with Salonica. In fact, the preservation of their Czechoslovak citizenship allowed them to bypass antisemitic legislation and practices in Salonica, for in the interwar period, and especially after the 1929 crash, the Greek and Czechoslovak governments had mutual financial agreements.

It appears, therefore, that for those who stayed in Austria or Czechoslovakia, remaining there was still a better option than going back to Salonica, even after the rise of Antisemitism anew. After the collapse of the Habsburg Empire, they did not choose to emigrate to France (only two of them moved there, and probably after 1931). In other words, even after all the turbulence, remaining in Central Europe still seemed a better option. Those who had remained in Austria only left when the future became more ominous than it had ever been until that moment.

Conclusion

If the rise of Zionism, as Rena Molho writes, was developed as an answer to persecution and the rise of national sentiments, and since Zionism was quite late to appear in Salonica, we can deduce that Antisemitism was quite latent as well until the Young Turk Revolution,⁶¹ as contemporaries recall.⁶² The situation deteriorated progres-

60 Abraham Galante, *Histoire des Juifs de Turquie*, vol. 8 (Istanbul: Isis Press, 1986), 49–50.

61 Rena Molho, *Οι Εβραίοι της Θεσσαλονίκης 1856–1919: Μια ιδιαίτερη κοινότητα [The Jews of Thessaloniki, 1856–1919: A Unique Community]* (Athens: Pataki Editions, 2014), 228.

62 Levy, *Salonique*, 106; Meir Yoel, *The Memoirs of Doctor Meir Yoel: An Autobiographical Source on Social Change in Salonika at the Turn of the 20th Century* (Istanbul: Isis Press, 2011), 14.

sively under the Greek administration. Despite the government's attempt to appear lenient towards the city's heterogeneous ethnoconfessional groups, there were still outbreaks of antisemitic events which targeted the poorer persons among the Jews.

In response to the shifting setting around them, some members of the Salonican Jewish elite chose to seek protection from other states. Many of them, despite their Sephardic roots or their Francophonie, opted for the Austro-Hungarian Empire. In this process, Antisemitism was not the main reason that drove them out of Salonica; it was rather the economic prospects in the Habsburg lands along with political insecurity in Salonica, whether the latter emanated from the Ottoman or the Greek administration. While financial and political reasons were the first and foremost that led them to leave the city, it was nonetheless their perception of Antisemitism in the places in which they opted to settle, whether temporarily or permanently, that also played a role in their decisions. For all their French-speaking culture, French education, and French ties that they had, they were also aware of the challenges which they might face if they moved to France. This led them to cultivate their relationships with the Habsburg Empire and to insist on being naturalised mostly in Moravia.

However, the collapse of the empires rendered for many the scheme that they had constructed for their salvation to be obsolete and irrelevant in a new world. Some chose to return to Salonica, remaining there for the most part throughout the interwar period – a fact which was their doom in World War II. Some stayed in the former Habsburg territory, sometimes moving across the new borders as if the empire had never been dissolved.

By examining the issue of Antisemitism as a decision-making factor in the migration patterns of Salonica's Jewish elite, this article has aimed to contribute to a wider discussion about people's agency and their survival strategies when facing adverse circumstances. It also inscribes itself in the wider discussion about the role that Antisemitism has played in similar situations. The findings that have been presented here, albeit focused on a particular region and countries, are in line with other studies that address the issue of Antisemitism and migration, whether it was directed towards the west, such as to France, or to the east, like to Palestine.⁶³ Consistent with those findings, this article has argued that Antisemitism alone cannot be considered a push factor that led people to emigrate from Salonica. It can be considered, however, a pull factor towards certain countries and regions.

With all this in mind, this article has aimed to go "beyond the valley of tears", as Devin Naar has framed the frequent attitude towards the history of Salonica's Jewry during the interwar period.⁶⁴ Instead of viewing it as pending destruction, I have sought to see the persons' actions, individually and collectively, within the context of opportunities and dangers that formed the framework within which they functioned and formulated their strategies. Thus, we can approach the issue of Antisemitism as a decision-making factor for the migration of Salonican Jews to the Habsburg Empire and its successor states in a manner inspired by Marc Bloch's suggestion:⁶⁵ aware of the events that followed and yet ignorant of them.

63 Shai Srougo, "The Thessaloniki Jewish Pioneers in the Haifa Waterfront, 1929–32", *Israel Affairs* 18, no. 3 (2020): 883.

64 Devin E. Naar, "Beyond the 'Valley of Tears': Reassessing the Narrative of Decline in Salonican Jewish Historiography", *Études balkaniques* 3 (2018): 536–567.

65 Marc Bloch, *The Historian's Craft* (New York: Vintage Books, 1953): 46.

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