



MARK MAZOWER
SALONICA, CITY OF GHOSTS: CHRISTIANS, MUSLIMS AND JEWS, 1430-1950

Salonica was one of the greatest Ottoman cities. It was a confessional mosaic where the Greeks, Jews, Turks, Bulgarians, Albanians and others were created a micro-cosmos of the Ottoman Empire, similar to İstanbul, Jerusalem, Skopje, İzmir, Beirut and Plovdiv. However, one cannot easily recognize this history in the city today. Contemporary Salonica was a modern Greek metropolis constituted by thousands of apartment blocks, few Greco-Roman monuments, restored Byzantine churches and statues of Greek national heroes. Very little is left, reminding us the Ottoman, Muslim, Jewish and Bulgarian heritage of half a millennium. In fact, modern Salonica was an ambitious project of the Greek nation-building. Similar to others, the Greek nationalism was selective and forgetful of (sometimes destructive to) history. After the First World War, the Greek nationalists invented a "Greco-Byzantine Past" for Salonica and put the "Judeo-Ottoman Past" out of the official collective-memory. Obviously, this is not a unique experience in this part of the world. Most of the multicultural and cosmopolitan metropolises of the Ottoman Empire were monotonously

nationalized and provincialized by the revolutionary nation-states after the fall of the empire. While the multicultural, multiethnic and multi-confessional "Ottoman pasts" were associated with the dark age of the "Turkish Yoke" and destroyed (or simply forgotten such as in Turkey), "national pasts" were invented and "national cities" were constructed for the new designs of the nation-states. Salonica is only one of the examples of once upon a time Ottoman cities, which became Bulgarian, Turkish, Greek or Arabic in the 20th century.

Today, the "national cities" are being challenged by forces of immigration, international corporations and globalization of culture. Cosmopolitanism is striking back after a century of nationalization of space, memory and economy. Deterioration of the nation-states, consolidation of micro identities and new realities of global politics are inviting people to remember forgotten memories and re-invent their past. Bulgarian and Greeks are being prepared to reconsider their Ottoman legacy and recollect their Turkish and Jewish neighbors, while Turks are remembering Armenians and Greeks

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with whom once they lived together in Asia Minor. Linear national-histories no longer satisfy the emerging cosmopolitan intellectual elite. Yet, the question whether recollection of the past will serve peace or reinvent animosity is still unanswered. It depends on how we remember!

Mark Mazower, the Columbia University professor of European history, in his *Salonica: City of Ghosts*, not only uncovers a colorful (but not necessarily always peaceful) forgotten past of Salonica, but also shows how this past was forgotten and how the city became "Greek." He presents a narrative that challenges the modernist and nation-centered single-dimensionalism of linear history writing. Mazower's Salonica was neither merely Greek nor Turkish nor Jewish nor Bulgarian. It was a hometown for all, a melting pot for Islam, Christianity and Judaism, a port where European and Middle East met.

Salonica: City of Ghosts consists of three parts: *The Rose of Sultan Murad*, (or the making of the Judeo-Ottoman Salonica), *In the Shadow of Europe*, and *Making the City Greek*. The book begins with the Ottoman conquest of Salonica by Sultan Murad II in 1430. Throughout the 15th and 16th centuries, Salonica was transformed from a Byzantine into an Ottoman city. The Muslim Salonicans built mosques, market building, dervish lodges and public baths. The *waqfs* and *imarets* of the leading *ghazi* families invigorated the economic life. The domes, minarets and towers changed the skyline. The new Greco-Muslim physiognomy of the city made Hacı Halife to see Salonica as a "little piece of İstanbul."

Second wave of transformation of the city came with the arrival of the Safardim in the late 15th and throughout the 16th centuries. The massive Jewish emigration from Iberia added a Judeo-Hispanic component to the Greco-Muslim Salonica. When it came to the 17th century, the Jews were the largest community of the city. With the synagogues, libraries and vibrant intellectual and economic life of the community, it was impossible to imagine that the Jews had not always been there. A unique Judeo-Ottoman culture was emerging in Salonica. The follower of Sabbatai Zevi, the *Ma'mins*,

as well, considered the city their homeland, thanks to its cosmopolitan and embracing character.

"In short," Mazower writes "the city found itself at the intersection of many different creeds. Through the Sufi orders it was linked to Iran, Anatolia, Thrace and Egypt; the Marranos bridged the Catholicism of the Iberian Peninsula, Antwerp and Papal Italy; the faith of the Sabbataians was carried by Jewish believers into Poland, Bohemia, Germany and eventually North America, while the seventeenth-century Metropolitan Athanasios Patellarios came to the city via Venetian Crete and Ottoman Sinia before he moved on to Jassy, İstanbul, Russia and the Ukraine, his final resting-place. Salonica lay in the centre of an Ottoman *oikumene*, which was at the same time Muslim, Christian and Jewish" (92-3).

By the second half of the 18th century, a new socio-political life was evolving: while janissaries and Muslim landowners of Macedonia became the political patrons of the city, the Greek merchants and Jewish bankers were dominating the economic life. Salonica was evolving into a commercial center for international trade backed by affluent Macedonian hinterland. The central control of the Ottoman Empire was diminishing and the city was gradually being integrated into the world economy. The Ottoman reforms throughout the 19th century consolidated the collective identities of the confessional communities and the role of the ecclesiastical leadership. "The real difficulty for the Ottoman authorities was asserting their power, not limiting it" (139).

In the second part of the book, Mazower analyzes the European impact upon the city. Craftily using vast possibilities of 19th century European travelers' accounts, the author presents layers of "Europe in Salonica." From the mid-19th century onwards, while the new socio-economic realities created multi-confessional class identities for the rich and the poor, the physical structure of the city was being prepared for modernity. The walls were demolished. Public spaces, state buildings, banks, hotels and fancy neighborhoods were constructed for the cosmopolitan elite. The Hamidian Salonica created a new balance between public and private

interests. Integration into European economic world and the Ottoman administrative reforms providing the infrastructure for this integration consolidated the cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism of the city.

By the end of the 19th century, Salonican cosmopolitanism was challenged by nationalism. Two competing nationalisms, Hellenism and Bulgarian Nationalism, came to claim Ottoman Macedonia. It was also the hometown of the emerging Turkish nationalism and radical movements in the Ottoman Empire. The Ottoman Salonica was not prepared for the age of nationalism. As a British traveler said, it is "historically Greek, politically Turkish, geographically Bulgarian, and ethnographically Jewish" (238-9).

The third part of the book examines the Hellenization of Salonica. The Balkan Wars handed Salonica in Greece. "Thanks to the remarkable performance of her armies, Greece had required less than three weeks to bring the Ottoman rule in Salonica to an end. But after nearly five centuries under the sultans the city would need longer than that to become truly Greek" (285). First implication of the Greek occupation was the demolition of the Bulgarian heritage. While Bulgarian Salonicans were leaving the city, the Greek refugees from the Bulgarian lands were being settled. In the first stage of the occupation, most of the Muslims and the Jews stayed in Salonica. During the First World War, the Hellenization was intensified with the Greek settlements and mal-treatments of the Muslims. The great fire of 1917, which devastated half of the city, was a tragic gift for the champions of Hellenization. The fire demolished the Ottoman city and its Jewish core. "Out of the ashes, an entirely new town began to emerge, one moulded in the image of the Greek state and its society" (301). Thomas Mawson's plan changed the center of Salonica, while the Jews were driven out from the center of the city. "Jews were what made the city Ottoman. One could not Westernize Salonica without uprooting the Jews" (306). "By 1930, only a small proportion of Salonica's inhabitants could remember the city as it had existed in the days of Abdul Hamid" (310).

The Muslim exodus was another dramatic phase. The final stage of the Muslim emigration was the population exchange between Turkey and Greece after the Treaty of Lausanne. In 1924, Salonica became a city without Muslims. The Greek nationalists celebrated the exodus: "One after the other, the symbols of a barbarous religion fall crashing to the ground" (328). "The voice of the *muezzin* will no longer bother our ears, he and his voice will disappear in the depths of their new country... Nothing, nothing at all must remind us again of the epoch of slavery" (329). When the Salonican Muslims left the city, Anatolian Christians were settled. In the 1920s, Salonica was a city of refugees. The Hellenization was creating its own internal tragedy. "They brought strange clothes and unfamiliar customs, harsh dialects and even, ironically, the Turkish language, which many of them spoke much more fluently than Greek. In fact, many still only understood Turkish, and thought of themselves as 'Anatolian Christians,' or 'Christians from the East,' rather than 'Greeks'" (337). The Salonican Muslims left, but the Anatolian Christians added their flavor to the political and culture life of the city. The growing socialist movement, as a result of rapid proletarianization of the emigrants, was accompanied by the melancholic tunes of *Rembetica*.

Muslims went to Turkey, but where were Salonican Jews to go? Salonica was resisting the grand project of Greek nationalism. Most of the Salonican Jews still described themselves as "Salonicans," when they were asked about their nationality. Interwar period witnessed growing conflicts between the Jewish collective identities and the claims of Hellenization. "Faith remained the key marker of ethnic difference. Greek liberals and socialists accused Jews of preserving what they called their 'Ottoman mentality,' by still seeing themselves as a separate collectivity. And indeed among Jews the term 'Greek' was often used as a synonym for 'Christian' - as when one man described his sister, who had converted, as having 'become Greek'" (390).

The German occupation of Salonica in the Second World War was, no doubt, the most tragic episode of the city of ghosts. Around 45,000 thousand of

Salonican Jews were killed in the gas chambers in Auschwitz. But perhaps, what was as tragic as the genocide, if not enthusiasm, was the silence of their fellow Salonican Greeks to the deportation of Jews to Poland. Most of the Jewish houses were occupied by the refugees. Synagogues were demolished. On the antique Jewish cemetery, the Aristoteleion University was built. When a few of Holocaust survivors came back to Salonica, they did not find the city as they left. To Jacques, one of the Holocaust survivors, his old Greek friend said: "I understand you, Jacques, you don't really know any more where to go in Salonica, the city where you once knew every stone." "And that is how it was" Jacques writes (428).

Mazower, not only uncovers the Ottoman Salonica, but also tells the story of the uprooting of the Ottoman past and the invention of a new one. While Ottoman Salonica was lost, the Greek Salonica recovered the Byzantine spirit of the city (as the Athens represents the Ancient Greece). "The centuries of Ottoman rule were written off as a long historical parenthesis, a nightmare of oppression and stagnation. Any surviving remains associated with them not only lacked historical value but potentially threatened the new image of the city was creating for itself. This was the primary explanation for the demolition of the minarets and the total destruction of the Jewish cemetery, and an answer to why Greek archaeologists published learned articles on the ancient inscriptions that came to light on the reverse side of many uprooted Jewish tombstones, whilst ignoring their Hebrew, Portuguese or Judeo-Spanish epigraphs. Anything post-Byzantine in the city was at risk, except for the White Tower which had

quickly achieved such symbolic status that most people refused to believe it was an Ottoman construction" (433).

Professor Mazower deftly deconstructs competing narratives of several collective actors and suggests a multi-dimensional and multifarious narrative of Salonica. Then he shows how one of the actors triumphed over others and made the city hers. He rigorously penetrates the minds of the observers and actors of Ottoman Salonica, and vocalizes them. The reader is able to hear in a single chapter a Jewish banker, a Turkish (-Muslim) administrator, a European traveler, a Greek merchant and a Bulgarian *komitadji* speak. He builds his account with aptly chosen quotations and masterfully combines them with his subtle arguments. Beyond the secondary literature on Salonica, he uses multiple types of sources in several languages: travelers' accounts, newspapers, statistics and archival documents (with the exception of the rich Ottoman-Turkish material that would have dramatically enhanced the polyphonic character of the book.)

This was a great contribution not only to history of Salonica, but also to the growing discussion about how Greeks, Turks, Bulgarians, Serbs, Bosnians, Albanians and others should conceive a new history, a common history, especially on the eve of the expansion of EU. Mazower gives a great lesson: We should be less greedy when we look at our history. "They all claimed the city for themselves in God's name. Yet is it not said: where God is, there is everything?" (440).

Ali YAYCIOĞLU
Harvard University