

Naar, Devin: *Jewish Salonica. Between the Ottoman Empire and Modern Greece*. Stanford: Stanford University Press 2016. ISBN: 978-1-5036-0008-9.

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The preface of this excellent book begins with a Judeo-Spanish proverb (El ijo de mi ijo, doz vezes mi ijo), that situates in a very emotional way the work of the author in a family history that goes back to Ottoman Salonica, but also to the annihilation of Jewish life in the city by Nazi Germans. Reflecting on the often tragic itineraries of members of his family, Devin Naar also poses more general questions, like the development of a Greek national sentiment among the Jewish community of Salonica between 1912 and World War II and the complexity of identities in an era of competing visions of the relationship between individuals, communities and national ideas. The introduction (Is Salonica Jewish?) starts with a reflection by journalist and activist David Florentin in 1912: „Salonica is neither Greek, nor Bulgarian, nor Turkish; she is Jewish“ (p. 1). Devin Naar analyses on this basis the context of the debates of the year 1912 on the destiny of Salonica, with the ephemeral hypothesis of the creation of an international zone under Jewish governance. He also studies how the territorial changes of the period 1912-1923 considerably affected the condition of Jews in the city: „In the case of Salonica, Muslims (and Dönme) departed and a hundred thousand Orthodox Christians arrived (...) From a demographic plurality (or majority, depending on the statistics cited) in Ottoman Salonica, Jews ceased to serve as the sovereigns of the city and instead became a minority confronting unprecedented pressures from the new state and from their neighbors“ (p. 5). The introduction also discusses the „repertoire of strategies“ (p. 5) developed by Jews in order to negotiate their position into the new scheme and presents the various postures the book features. Further it presents the sources used for the research: family papers, communal archives and the local press, with its multiple languages, complex affiliations and evolving political projects. This mo-

ment of the book is also a first occasion for the author to describe the entanglement of layers of identity and political horizons, between Zionism, Socialism and Hellenism, with all the positions in-between. The context of the formulation of a post-Ottoman identity is also examined.

The first chapter (Like a Municipality and a State: The Community) describes how communal institutions played a central role in the governance of the Jewish community, with competences that went much farther than just religious or family matters. It follows the evolution of this system, inherited from the Ottoman Empire, after the integration of the city into the Greek national state. This analysis by Devin Naar is fascinating, as it illustrates the strength of these institutions throughout the whole period. The evocation of the *Konsilio Komunal* and of the *Asamblea Djenerala* leads to a reading in terms of political science of the governance scheme of the Jewish community of the city. The roots of this system are adequately described as having to do with the reforms of the era of the Ottoman Tanzimat between the 1850s and the 1870s. What is missing however is a consideration of earlier elements: those pertaining to the old regime Ottoman municipality, in which non-Muslim communities were given administrative autonomy. What might also be missing is a reading of the whole system: the municipality was not just made of the Jewish community, it was an entity that comprised and unified various communal autonomies. It was also part of the very definition of the Ottoman state and its local forms of expression. The role of Jewish notables and merchants as representatives of the community is presented in the following, as well as the challenges the post-1912 configuration posed to their influence in the community. The chapter then focuses on the dissolution of this system and the reduction by the Greek national state of the Jewish communal autonomy to the status of confessional minority. Interesting passages are dedicated to an examination of the geographical origins of the Jews of Salonica, which were a mirror of centuries of persecutions in Europe, from Spain and Portugal, to Italy and France and from Eastern Europe and Russia to the Caucasus. A very stimulating and precise study of the

archives of the rabbinic tribunal and of various family and communal archives allows the author to discuss matters of marriage, conversion, education and inter-communal relations during the 1920s and 1930s. Another important passage of this chapter is dedicated to questions of housing. Following the great fires of 1890 and 1917, that particularly affected the Jewish community, housing initiatives were launched. The Jewish population was redistributed within an evolving urban space. Devin Naar manages to analyse the consequences of this communal and spatial change on the governance scheme of the community and on the relationship between the community and the municipality, until the creation in 1926 of the Commission of Jewish Quarters. The passages on housing are also an occasion for the author to develop considerations pertaining to a social history of the community.

The second chapter is dedicated to the Chief Rabbi. It begins with the evocation of the difficulties the community encountered at the turn of the 1930s to find one, between the challenge of preserving a distinct Sephardic identity in front of Ashkenazic influences and of the „new pressures of Hellenization“ (p. 90). It then focuses on Jacob Covo, whose period as Chief Rabbi covered the 1890s and the early years of the 20th century. Even if again a general picture of the old-regime and then reformed Ottoman municipality is lacking in order to interpret this period of change more comprehensively, Devin Naar manages to provide precious indications on the civic role of the Chief Rabbi and on how he represented the integration of the communal and municipal spheres. The author also analyses with great precision how Jacob Covo's arrival in this position represented an important turn compared to the previous form of Ottoman and communal governance. The period of Jacob Meir as Chief Rabbi (1908-1919), that began in the context of the Young Turk Revolution and of Empire-wide debates on the role of Chief Rabbis, from Jerusalem to Izmir, is then used by the author as an entry to unearth the complexity of the relationship between the local community (itself very diverse), the rest of the Jewish world and Ottoman imperial authorities. J. Meir, who was from a Rhodian

family of Jerusalem, spoke Arabic and French, but not Turkish. After 1912, one of his main roles was to manage the transition to Greek sovereignty and its consequences on both the everyday life and the identity of local Jews. The same kind of method is used as for the periods of Bension Uziel (1921-23) and Sevi Koretz (1933-1943), a Rabbi from Berlin whose attitude in front of Nazi persecutions is still the object of strong controversies.

The third chapter (More Sacred than the Synagogue) is about the Jewish school system. It underlines the centrality of institutions of education in Jewish life in Salonica, as well as the variety of horizons of representation the school system was the object of. Important passages are dedicated to the action of various institutions representing so-called „civilizing missions“ (p. 142), like Protestant missionaries, French Jewish educators representing the Alliance Israélite Universelle, and the Ottoman state. Issues of Hellenization, Hebraism, Zionism, Ottomanism, Modernism and Traditionalism are examined through the prism of education. Chapter four (Paving the Way for Better Days: The Historians) is dedicated to history writing within the community. This activity is described as central for the very definition of collective identities. The chapter, which could have linked this practice to the legacy of the tradition for a prominent notable, member of the communal/municipal assembly, of writing a chronicle -the civic annals of the community and of the city-, focuses on the post-1912 period, when history writing was a way for the community to position itself in front of Hellenization impulses and to „bridge the divide between the Ottoman empire and the Greek state“ (p.191). The life and work of Mercado Covo (1874-1940), Baruch Ben-Jacob (1884-1943), Joseph Nehama (1880-1971), Isaac Emmanuel (1896-1972) and Michael Molho (1890-1964) are analysed by the author, each time with the goal to confront their production to political changes and geopolitical transitions. Chapter five, „Stones that Speak“, is about the Jewish cemetery. The central argument is about its destruction and removal, first as part of plans by architect Ernest Hébrard for the post-1917 reconstruction of the city and then during Nazi persecutions.

In his conclusion, the author examines the question of Jewish memories in Salonica, from post-WWII elegies to present-day new narratives. Overall this book represents a very stimulating contribution to a reading of Jewish communal institutions in Ottoman and post-Ottoman cities that goes beyond paradigms merely centred on religious identities. The book illustrates that confessional communities had in Ottoman times a crucial role in urban governance and in social affairs in general and how this dimension shaped both the communities and their relationship to post-Ottoman authorities, even long after the fall of the Empire. The elements provided by the author are precise and precisely contextualized and interpreted. Therefore the book is highly useful not only for scholars of Jewish studies, but also for historians willing to revise interpretations on Ottoman coexistence and cosmopolitanism and on the mechanisms that killed them.

Nora Lafi über Naar, Devin: *Jewish Salonica. Between the Ottoman Empire and Modern Greece*. Stanford 2016, in: H-Soz-Kult 27.04.2018.