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“The many faces of Zionism. Zionist culture, Jewish identity, and Hellenization in inter-war Salonica”*

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Zionism was a major political and cultural force in the history of late Ottoman and interwar Salonican Jewry. A latecomer, with a feeble presence in the last decade of the Hamidian era, it established itself as a major force after the Young Turk Revolution further expanding as well as diversifying during the post-Ottoman and interwar period. As the somewhat linear narrative indicates, its beginnings can be traced not further back than 1899 when Kadimah, a literary society catering for the cultivation of Jewish language and culture was founded in Salonica by a group of young graduates of the Talmud Torah. Following a trajectory reminiscent of other national movements, Salonican Zionism expanded and became more overtly political in its ideology as well as radical in its practices during the Second Constitutional Period. The efflorescence of associational life during the first year of the Revolution led to the establishment of the proto-Nationalist Cercle des Intimes (1908), and later on of the sports club Maccabi, (1908), the prestigious upper-class Nouveau Club (1910), the Lodge B’nei B’rith (1911), and a host of newspapers and periodicals. With regards to communal affairs, such societies and papers gave shape and voice to the upcoming Jewish middle-classes, challenged the political, ideological and cultural hegemony of the communal elite and eventually contributed to the passage from notable- to mass politics. With regards to inter-ethnic relations in turn, they promoted a more visible and assertive sense of Jewishness in the public space, taking over the defense of ‘Jewish interests’ from the reluctant notables and thus often entering into serious conflicts with the other communities of the city, especially the Greek Orthodox. The annexation of Salonica

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to Greece invigorated them further. Zionist associations and publications proliferated and diversified as Salonican Jews creatively engaged with different ideological strands within the broader European Zionist movement, from mainstream to Orthodox Zionism and Revisionism. Thus, in the new context of a nationalizing nation-state the words and deeds of Salonican Zionists left a critical imprint, dominating communal politics, determining the Jews' relations with the Greek state, and no less shaping Jewish identity itself, its self-perception as well as its self-representation¹.

Despite its historical importance Salonican Zionism (and especially its interwar phase) has fared less well in the historiography. Systematic accounts exclusively dedicated to the topic, principally those by Rena Molho, concentrate on its late-Ottoman and post-Ottoman phases and end in the late 1910s². Interwar Zionism is actually treated only within broader works that either examine intercommunal politics³ or focus on the process of assimilation by analyzing the strained relations between Salonican Jewry and the Greek state⁴. Zionist historiography thus follows closely the two broader trends that have for quite some time characterized the historiography of Salonican Jewry. On the one hand it features within histories of the community and hence primarily approached as a political party⁵. On the other hand, it is mentioned in accounts dealing with Greco-Jewish relations where it is chiefly depicted as a major force of opposition and resistance to the Venizelist policies of Hellenization⁶. Analyzed from this perspective Zionism thus stands as a metonymy for the

¹ See Rena Molho, "The Zionist movement in Thessaloniki, 1899-1919," in I.K. Hassiotis (ed.), *The Jewish communities of Southeastern Europe* (Thessaloniki 1997), 327-350; Minna Rozen, *The last Ottoman century and beyond. The Jews in Turkey and the Balkans, 1808-1945* (Jerusalem 2005), Chapter 7; Maria Vassilikou, *Politics of the Jewish Community of Salonika in the Inter-war Years: Party Ideologies and Party Competition* (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University College London 1999). "Le Sionisme à Salonique", report of Sam Yoel (19.8.1919), Archives of the Alliance Israelite Universelle, Archives Grèce I G 3; Nehama (Salonica) to Alliance (Paris) (19.5.1916), Archives of the AIU, Archives Grèce I G 3.

² Molho, "The Zionist movement in Thessaloniki, 1899-1919." See also Πένα Μόλχο, *Οι Εβραίοι της Θεσσαλονίκης, 1856-1919. Μια ιδιαίτερη κοινότητα* (Athens 2001), 204-287; Sukru H. Ilıcak, "Jewish socialism in Ottoman Salonica," *Journal of Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 2/3 (2002), 115-146.

³ Vassilikou, *Politics of the Jewish Community of Salonika in the Inter-war Years*; Ιωάννης Σκούρτης, «Οι σιωνιστές και οι αντίπαλοί τους Εβραίοι στη Θεσσαλονίκη του μεσοπολέμου», *Θεσσαλονίκη* 4 (1994), 287-295.

⁴ Aristotle A. Kallis, "The Jewish Community of Salonica under Siege: The Antisemitic Violence of the Summer of 1931," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 20/1 (2006), 34-56.

⁵ Vassilikou, *Politics of the Jewish Community of Salonika in the Inter-war Years*; Katherine E. Fleming, *Greece. A Jewish history* (Princeton 2008); Mark Mazower, *Salonica, city of ghosts. Christians, Muslims and Jews 1430-1950* (London 2004), Chapter 21.

⁶ Kallis, "The Jewish Community of Salonica under Siege"; Rozen, *The last Ottoman century and beyond*; George Th. Mavrogordatos, *Stillborn Republic: Social Coalitions and Party Strategies in Greece, 1922-1936* (Berkeley 1983). Bernard Pierron, *Εβραίοι και Χριστιανοί στη νεότερη Ελλάδα. Ιστορία των διακοινοτικών σχέσεων από το 1821 ως το 1945* (Paris 1996, Athens 2004), Chapter 7.

strained relations between the Jewish community and the Greek state and for a self-contained, introspective and ultimately defensive Jewish identity.

Despite the fact that these historiographical accounts have successfully highlighted the vibrancy of communal politics as well as the intensely vocal stance of Salonican Jewry, they ultimately constitute a one-dimensional approach to Zionism especially with regards to its relations with Greek national culture; the place of the Jews in the broader Greek society; and no less their own sense of ethnic identity. Their nearly exclusive perception of Zionism as a force of reaction is to my view largely due to the use of a very limited corpus of sources one which is also external to the phenomenon itself. With very few notable exceptions (one being with us today)⁷, historians have so far primarily relied on archival material produced by determined opponents of Zionism, namely the Greek administration (as reflected in material found in the archives of the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs)⁸; assimilationist Jews (chiefly the correspondence of Joseph Nehama and other local Alliancists with international bodies in France and Britain)⁹; and to a lesser extent foreign consuls¹⁰. This lack of attention to sources emanating from the Zionist movement itself is coupled with a nearly exclusive focus on issues of Greco-Jewish conflict and a concomitant neglect of Zionism's presence and workings at the local level. As the (tense) relations between the Jewish community and the central state still dominate current historiography, other aspects of the Greco-Jewish encounter in the inter-war period and other spaces than national politics within which these unfolded are thus left unaccounted.

This paper is therefore essentially a first attempt to approach the Zionist movement in Salonica from the point of view of its agents and to examine it as part of the city's life. It is a rejoinder to some very recent work that has highlighted the much more complex nature of Zionist discourses, stressed their positive, creative engagement with the ideologies of Hellenism and analyzed them as a systematic attempt to rethink the contours and content of a Hellenic Judaism¹¹. Complementing these accounts I will concentrate not on discourses, but on practices, and will deal less with the prominent representatives of the movement and more with the many Zionist societies and their members –the young men in particular that

⁷ Devin E. Naar, *Jewish Salonica and the Making of the 'Jerusalem of the Balkans,' 1890-1943* (Unpublished PhD thesis, Stanford University, 2011).

⁸ See indicatively Kallis, "The Jewish Community of Salonica under Siege."

⁹ Pierron, *Εβραίοι και Χριστιανοί στη νεότερη Ελλάδα. Μόλχο, Οι Εβραίοι της Θεσσαλονίκης*.

¹⁰ Fleming, *Greece. A Jewish history*; Mazower, *Salonica, city of ghosts*.

¹¹ Naar, *Jewish Salonica*.

joined the various Zionist sports clubs in the 1920s and 1930s. I will thus focus on what has been termed ‘practical Zionism’¹², the formalized rituals *and* the informal practices that sought to reshape the lives of the local Jewry by redefining their middle-class sociability. I will nonetheless examine these practices as part of broader life courses and will thus argue that although a distinct Zionist subculture can be seen as taking shape in inter-war Salonica, Zionism was also an important conduit for the younger generation to negotiate its place with the broader urban and Hellenic culture.

Zionism was instrumental in the expansion and politicization of Jewish associational life. In the late 19th century the modernization of the community and the formation of a communal public space was effected through the establishment of numerous, (principally charitable and leisure), associations¹³. By introducing new forms of formal sociability, these promoted a set of western middle-class values and worked towards the creation of a secularized bourgeois Jewish identity largely following on the footsteps of western-European assimilated Judaism¹⁴. Beginning in the early 1910s Zionism impacted heavily on this associational landscape. To begin with, the sheer number of Zionist societies established challenged the hegemony of the assimilationists in the community’s public life. Moreover, similarly to the cheap Zionist press (which had significantly widened the Jewish reading public), these Zionist associations dramatically expanded the field of associational life itself bringing within it (and hence empowering) the lower strata of the community¹⁵. While it questioned class boundaries Zionism also worked through them. Zionist associations were class-specific but not class-bound. While some associations catered for the lower strata¹⁶, others such as the Nouveau Club¹⁷, the old and venerable Grand Cercle

¹² Anat Helman, *Young Tel Aviv. A tale of two cities* (Waltham 2010).

¹³ Π. Ριζάλ (Ιωσήφ Νεχαμά), *Θεσσαλονίκη, η περιπόθητη πόλη* (Skopelos 1997), 175-176.

¹⁴ Paris Papamichos Chronakis, *Οι έλληνες, εβραίοι, μουσουλμάνοι και ντονμέ έμποροι της Θεσσαλονίκης, 1882-1919. Ταξικοί και εθνοτικοί μετασχηματισμοί σε τροχιά εξελληνισμού* (Unpublished PhD thesis, Rethymno 2011), Chapter 1.

¹⁵ Nehama (Salonica) to Alliance (Paris) (19.5.1916 and 19.11.1909), Archives of the AIU, Archives Grèce I G 3.

¹⁶ Such as the Zionist society Ahadout (est. 1914) whose purpose was the offer judicial assistance to persecuted Jews. See also “Al torno dela quinta koferensya de los sionistas de Grecia. El lavoro en los foburgos,” *La Renasensia Djudia* (22.4.1927), 4, where the need to act in the working-class neighbourhoods is emphasized.

¹⁷ In 1915 the membership dues of the Nouveau Club were fifty drachmas. Statute of the Nouveau Club, Historical Archives of Macedonia, Archive of the Associations of Thessaloniki.

Commercial (which the Zionists had managed to win over)¹⁸ and the respectable Lodge B'nei B'rit¹⁹ functioned as places of sociability for the communal elite. Thus, next to the community's council, the Zionists were able to hold the majority of the Interclub, a federation of the eight most important Jewish associations and one of the community's chief public spokesmen and policy-makers²⁰.

Moreover, the diversity of Zionist associations coupled as it was with Zionism's intention to fundamentally transform Jewish selfhood, meant that Zionist societies expanded beyond the scope of philanthropy and leisure (the main staples of bourgeois sociability) to deal with many more areas of social activity which they also treated as inherently interrelated. Lending libraries, reading sessions, Hebrew classes, and regular lectures about the Jewish past and present organized by such cultural associations as the "Max Nordau" introduced a novel, more assertive understanding of Jewish identity²¹. This intellectual work was coupled by the new concept of the Jewish (male) body sports societies like Maccabi and Akoah propagated²². Espousing a more overtly politicized idea of sports than that of the late Ottoman sports clubs, and tying physical exercise to national regeneration, these associations challenged the hitherto hegemonic model of middle-class masculinity the figure of the revered philanthropist Moise Allatini embodied²³ and promoted in its stead the new ideal of muscular Judaism, of a strong, virulent Jewish masculinity²⁴.

A dense program of events organized the time and space of those societies' members. Shared beliefs were accompanied and strengthened by shared action. Zionist societies worked together on a regular basis, coordinated their activities, and participated and

¹⁸ Alfonso Levy mentions the association as one of the three major Zionist associations of Greek Salonica. Private archive of Alfonso Levy.

¹⁹ See the names of the founders of the Lodge. Bulletin de Grande Loge de District XI (Constantinople 1913), 79-81.

²⁰ Cohen (Salonica) to the president of Alliance IU (Paris) (12.11.1912), Archive of AIU Grèce I C 51.

²¹ Statute of the society Max Nordau, Historical Archives of Macedonia, Archive of the Associations of Thessaloniki.

²² See the images in *La Renasensya Djudia*, 3.12.1926, p. 1.

²³ On Moise Allatini as the preeminent philanthropist see Henri Nahum, « Charisme et pouvoir d' un medecin juif. Moise Allatini (1809-1882), 'le pere de Salonique' », in Meropi Anastassiadou (ed.), *Médecins et ingénieurs ottomans à l'âge des nationalismes* (Paris 2003), 49-62. On gendered conceptualizations of the philanthropist in the late Ottoman Empire, see Έφη Κάννερ, *Φτώχεια και φιλανθρωπία στην Ορθόδοξη κοινότητα της Κωνσταντινούπολης, 1753-1912* (Αθήνα 2004).

²⁴ See Todd Samuel Presner, "Clear Heads, Solid Stomachs, and Hard Muscles': Max Nordau and the Aesthetics of Jewish Regeneration", *Modernism/Modernity* 10/2 (2003), 269-296; Gideon Reuveni, "Sports and the Militarization of Jewish Society," in Michael Brenner and Gideon Reuveni (eds.), *Emancipation through Muscles* (Lincoln 2006).

assisted in each other's events²⁵. A dense associational network was thus established providing the basis for interaction and sustaining a sense of belonging to a greater and yet tangible collectivity. The regularity of open and closed meetings, the re-signification / 'nationalization' of major Jewish holidays²⁶ and the introduction of new temporal points of reference, chief among them the celebration of the Balfour Declaration²⁷ and Herzl's birthday re-signified time and colored it as Jewish anew at a period when traditional markers of Jewish time in Salonica, such as the Saturday rest, were either eradicated or retreating due to secularization, while simultaneously a systematic attempt to establish a national, homogenous Greek time in the city was in full swing²⁸.

The creation of a Jewish-Zionist sense of what might be called 'counter-time' was accompanied by new spatial practices. These worked in four interconnected levels –the individual, the urban, the national and the European recreating a multi-layered Jewish-Zionist geography with Salonica at its center. For the members of the Zionist associations, especially the young athletes and scouts of the Maccabi and of the other sports clubs, the club venue, the track field, the football ground, and no less the regular excursions to the countryside as well as the public demonstrations, the kermesses, or the city-wide charitable campaigns, constituted new uses of space and functioned as new spatial referents²⁹. At a time when an older Jewish urban topography was fast fading away due to de-judaization of the port, the devastating effects of the Great Fire, the destruction of the synagogues, the rebuilding of the city center, the uprooting of its former Jewish inhabitants, and the continuing attacks and doubtful future of the Jewish cemetery³⁰, these Zionist spatial practices redefined the contours of communal-Jewish space in interwar Salonica. Although

²⁵ To give just one example, in 1928, the Nouveau Club and the Grand Cercle Sioniste joined forces to organize a ball for the benefit of the Jewish National Fund. "La grande aksyon de pores. 100 mil drahtes por el Keren Kayemet," *La Renasensia Djudia* (18.2.1927), 4.

²⁶ Thus already in December 1912, Rosh Hashana was celebrated "with great publicity" in the Cercle Sioniste. *Ισραηλιτική Επιθεώρησις* 10-12 (10.1912 - 1.1913), 158.

²⁷ «Le Sionisme à Salonique», Report of Sam Yoel for the AIU (19.8.1919), Archives AIU, Archives Grèce, I G 3.

²⁸ As Yoel again remarked, «La Federation a organisé tous les ans des manifestations importantes dans des établissements publics. Les manifestations sont ou périodiques ou improvisées. Le Yom Achekel, le Yom Aivri (fete de l'hébreu), Hanouka, le jour anniversaire de la naissance de Theodore Hertzl, le deuil de Tich ha Beav reviennent tous les ans». *Ibid.* On the debate around the compulsory Sunday rest see Pierron, *Εβραίοι και Χριστιανοί στη νεότερη Ελλάδα*, 187-193.

²⁹ On such activities see among other mentions "La ekskursyon dela Max Nordau," *La Renasensia Djudia* (10.6.1927), 4; "El grande concerto de Keren Kayemet," *La Renasensia Djudia* (13.5.1927), 4; "La kompanya del Shekel en Saloniko," *La Renasensia Djudia* (1.4.1927), 4.

³⁰ See Mazower, *Salonica, city of ghosts*, Chapters 16, 18, 21, 22.

related to leisure, these Zionist uses of space were also highly politicized thus acquiring a broader symbolic value. The Maccabi brass band and the parades of the young Maccabeans in the main streets of the city when returning from excursions or when welcoming eminent Zionist leaders, such as Zobotinski, were the principal means of reclaiming Salonica as a Jewish space with a reference not only to the past but also to the present and most crucially to the future³¹. Similarly, in 1926 Jewish communists attacked members of the Maccabi while training in their gym³²; and in June 1931, right before the arson of the Jewish neighborhood of Campbell, the club's venue was sieged by the indignant supporters of the EEE violently protesting against Maccabi's anti-Greek stance³³. In the eyes of the Greek Christians as well as the Jews, it was the visibility of the Maccabi and more broadly of the Zionist youth that was increasingly defining an assertive Jewish presence in the modernizing city.

It was also Zionism that inserted Salonica into a broader, kaleidoscopic Jewish imaginative geography. The Zionist Federation of Greece, the first attempt to overcome communal insularity and coordinate action at a national level, rendered Salonica the center of the newly-minted entity of Greek Judaism surpassing the traditional divide between Romaniote and Sephardim³⁴. Similarly, the regular visits to Salonica of Zionist athletic teams from all over the Balkans and to a lesser extent Central Europe and Mandate Palestine, and conversely the periodic travels of the Maccabi teams abroad (among other places in Novi Sad, Sofia and Monastir), added to the extensive coverage in the local press of the Zionist movement worldwide and of its progress in Eretz Israel specifically to insert Salonica within a broader Zionist-Judaic network³⁵. In particular, regular encounters and exchange visits with other Zionist sports associations in Bulgaria and Yugoslavia gave substance to the newly-introduced appellation of Salonica as the "Jerusalem of the Balkans"³⁶; whereas ultimately unrealized contemplations to host there a Sephardic

³¹ On the visit of Zobotinski in Salonica, see "La grande demonstrasyon sportive dela Makabi en onor de sr. Zobotinski," *La Renasensia Djudia* (3.12.1926), 1.

³² «Διχόνοια ισραηλιτών. Μακαμπή-Κομμουνισταί», *Μακεδονία* (1.11.1926), 4.

³³ Kallis, "The Jewish Community of Salonica under Siege."

³⁴ "Federasyon Sionista de Grecia," *La Renasensia Djudia* (13.5.1927), 4.

³⁵ *Μακεδονία* (19.7.1927), 3; *Μακεδονία* (19.11.1927), 3; *Μακεδονία* (20.5.1931), 5.

³⁶ Naar, Naar, *Jewish Salonica*. See also "Salonica Largest Jewish Balkan City," *Jewish Daily Bulletin* (25.5.1934); "Knowledge of Hebrew Widespread in Salonica, Leading Jewish Center in Balkans," *Jewish Daily Bulletin* (16.12.1930).

Congress in support of Zionism backed the city's fashioning as a "Sephardic metropolis"³⁷. If in the late 19th century Salonica's place in the map of a European Jewish modernity was made possible through the educational work and ideological impact of the Alliance Israelite Universelle, in the interwar period the Zionist movement, and in particular its youth clubs, were instrumental in conceiving and materializing new imaginary topographies of Judaism which both coincided with and transcended national boundaries.

Practical Zionism was therefore instrumental in the reconfiguration of a Jewish public space, real and imaginative, within and beyond a Hellenizing and modernizing Salonica. Are we therefore observing in the field of associational strategies the formation of what David Sorkin has termed a "Jewish subculture", a middle-class, but distinctly Jewish, social space one operating parallel to though separate from the broader Hellenizing public sphere of the city and replicating its forms of formal sociability and their respective norms and values?³⁸ After all, the Dror Maccabis were a Jewish rendering of the Boy Scout movement. I will attempt to provide a first answer to this question by briefly examining how Greek national culture informed the objectives of the Zionist associations and the background and social relations of their members.

Many of the statutes of Zionist associations did not limit their aim solely to the propagation of Zionist ideals or the cultivation and spread of Jewish culture. For several prominent clubs, such as the Maccabi, the scope of the society was actually two-fold – educating the Salonican youth to be good Jews *and* at the same time loyal Greek citizens³⁹. Although such declarations of intention could be read as echoes of a Jewish Ottomanist ideology (a defense of communal autonomy coupled with a loyalty to the state), they were nevertheless at least formally in tune with a civic version of national identity espoused in principle (though admittedly less so in practice) by the Venizelist leadership⁴⁰. Zionist youth associations hence formally responded to the dilemmas and predicaments of assimilation by promoting the formation of what Michael Berkowitz has termed a 'supplementary nationality' – a 'double' identity sustained by the belief that one could be

³⁷ "Sephardic Congress Will Be Called," *Jewish Daily Bulletin* (22.1.1924).

³⁸ David Sorkin, *The transformation of German Jewry, 1780-1840* (Detroit 1999), chapter 5.

³⁹ Statute of the society Maccabi, Historical Archives of Macedonia, Archive of the Associations of Thessaloniki.

⁴⁰ On the Venizelist concept of the nation see Σπύρος Μαρκέτος, «Η ενσωμάτωση της σεφαραδικής Θεσσαλονίκης στην Ελλάδα: το πλαίσιο, 1912-1914», στο Εταιρεία Σπουδών Νεοελληνικού πολιτισμού και γενικής Παιδείας, *Ο Ελληνικός Εβραϊσμός*, Επιστημονικό Συμπόσιο 3-4 Απριλίου 1998 (Athens 1999), 65-92.

both a good Jew and a loyal Greek⁴¹. Examining the background of some of the leaders of the Zionist movement in Salonica renders substance to this understanding of Greek Jewishness and shows that it was more than a political stratagem, an attempt to placate the Greek authorities. Key figures like the lawyers and community leaders Ascher Moissis and Yomtov Yakoel were not native Salonicans, products of the local Sephardic and aliancist culture. Born in Trikala, educated in Greek schools and having graduated from the Law School of the University of Athens before settling in Salonica in the early 1920s, they were essentially cultural mediators moving easily between the broader Greek and the local Sephardic world⁴². More indicatively, Josef Matalon, the president of Maccabi in the 1930s, was a native of Larissa who moved to Salonica in the 1920s, a decorated officer who had fought with the Greek Army in both the War of 1897 and the Balkan Wars⁴³. Nurtured in a Greco-Jewish cultural environment, these fervent Zionists were initially ‘foreigners’ to the post-Ottoman Salonican Jewish community. Their life stories make evident the “Greek” aspects of Salonican Zionism. They indicate at once the latter’s many different local *and* non-local origins as well as the importance of the exposure to Greek nationalism. Hence they point to Zionism as also being an attempt to positively rethink Jewishness as a distinct but integral part of the Greek nation.

Furthermore, a set of practices indicate the extent that sports and leisure constituted privileged fields for the cultural expression of such elaborations of citizenship. In 1927, after a long negotiation, the Maccabi finally settled its differences with the local branch of the Greek boy scouts⁴⁴. The club’s band was a regular feature of the public celebration of national holidays –the public face of the Jewish community⁴⁵. Whereas its various teams as well as those of the other Jewish sports clubs were already from the start participating in the local championship, they were often organizers of pan-Thessalonican athletic events, and

⁴¹ Michael Berkowitz, *Zionist culture and West European Jewry before the First World War* (Cambridge 1993), xv.

⁴² Ασέρ Μωυσής, *Κληροδότημα* (Athens 2012), 18-22.

⁴³ «Μνήμες για τους εκλεκτούς. Αβραάμ Σαλβατώρ Ματαλών», *Η Καθημερινή* (14.12.1987). «Οι Βούλγαροι Μακαμπή δεν θα διέλθουν εκ Θεσσαλονίκης», *Μακεδονία* (20.3.1932), 6.

⁴⁴ “Maccabees and Boy Scouts in Salonica Settle Differences,” *Jewish Daily Bulletin* (11.2.1927).

⁴⁵ «Η εορτή του Βασιλέως. Πρόσκλησις προς τον λαόν Θεσσαλονίκης», *Μακεδονία* (19.5.1921), 1; «Η εικοσαετηρίς της καταλήψεως της Θεσσαλονίκης», *Μακεδονία* (27.10.1932), 3. «Ευχαριστήρια», *Μακεδονία* (31.12.1929), 3.

their athletes were regularly included in mixed teams representing the city⁴⁶. Football games and other sports encounters with local Christian teams could obviously turn into occasions for a vocal expression of ethnic animosity (though only one such case was ever reported in the press)⁴⁷; but they also helped promote the idea of a shared locale, that of Salonica, at least in the newspaper discourse. Zionist athletics were therefore one of the chief means through which the younger generation negotiated its place into the popular culture of the city.

In the 1930s in particular this younger generation was fast becoming Hellenized being more systematically exposed through education and leisure to the Greek language and culture⁴⁸. At the same time, many among them formulated their Jewish identity as much through a liberating participation in various Zionist youth organizations as through the time-honored channels of family and religion⁴⁹. It is difficult to assess the relation between these principal means of socialization, -education, leisure and Zionist activities-, and even more so to gauge their impact on *individual* subject formation and sense of nationhood. However, fragments of information gleaned from a few oral testimonies indicate a sometimes symbiotic and not necessarily always conflicting perception of Greek and Jewish nationalism among the young Salonican Jews of the 1930s. Charles Molho remembers with pride how his “life was all sport” as he belonged not only to the Betar, the Misrachi and the Maccabi Zionist athletic associations but also to the YMCA where he enjoyed playing basketball and water polo and socializing mainly with gentiles who “never singled me out”. “I was treated like everyone, like every Greek. You were a Greek”, he would insist⁵⁰. Similarly, in a moment of revelation, Leon Perahia, a boy scout, and boxer of Maccabi remembers how steeped he was in both “Greek history” and the “Boy Scout movement” and how these two influences eventually gave birth to “an admiration for

⁴⁶ «Αι αμερικανικά παιδιά εις τον αθλητισμόν. Το Μακεδονικόν ποδόσφαιρον και αι πρόδοί του», *Μακεδονία* (1.1.1930), 6. «Οι ποδηλατικοί», *Μακεδονία* (15.5.1926), 2. «Οι Παμμακεδονικοί Αγώνες», *Μακεδονία* (24.8.1925), 3. «Η χθεσινή έκθεσις των προσκόπων μας», *Μακεδονία* (31.3.1930), 4.

⁴⁷ «Χθες ηπειλήθησαν και πάλιν επεισόδια μεταξύ ελλήνων και ισραηλιτών αθλητών», *Μακεδονία* (26.8.1931), 4.

⁴⁸ Μαρία Βασιλικού, «Η εκπαίδευση των Εβραίων της Θεσσαλονίκης στο Μεσοπόλεμο», in Εταιρεία Σπουδών Νεοελληνικού πολιτισμού και γενικής Παιδείας, *Ο Ελληνικός Εβραϊσμός*. Επιστημονικό Συμπόσιο 3-4 Απριλίου 1998 (Athens 1999), 129-147.

⁴⁹ Miriam Venezia, “Youth in ‘Maccabi’,” in Avraam Rekanati (ed.), *Zikhron Saloniki. La grandeza y la destruycion del Yerushalayim del Balkan*, 1 (1972), translated in English by Shimon Ouziel. Available at http://www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/Thessalonika/thev1_020.html (accessed 10.11.2013).

⁵⁰ Audiovisual testimony of Charles Molho, Shoah Foundation Institute’s Visual History Archive VHA 17796.

Zabotinski”. “I say it and I am ashamed to be saying it” he would confess, “I do not have the mentality of the pre-war Salonican Jew. I grew up with the Greeks (Ρωμιούς) and I am thankful for having grown among the Greeks because it was them that made me understand that I have to be strong and take risks”⁵¹. In the case of Leon Perahia, Zionism and Greek nationalism were not just compatible but actually mutually reinforcing working through a common reprimanding critique of the effeminate and emasculated diasporic Jew and providing in lieu the basis for the formation of a strongly virile, self-assertive, and agonistic Greek Jewish identity.

In its various guises and through a multitude of practices Zionism was therefore instrumental in redrawing the boundaries of Jewishness as well as reconfiguring its public presence in interwar Salonica. In the era of the masses and of an exultation of youth, the parades of the uniformed Maccabi scouts, the sounds of the band, and the cries of its supporters were the new -sensory and embodied- indicators of Jewish presence in the contested spaces of the socially torn city (and no less so of a Jewish Salonica in a reimagined Jewish Europe). However, these boundaries were porous, established in order to be traversed. Broadly perceived as reactionary, introspect and exclusionary by adversaries and historians alike, Zionism, -when approached from the point of view of its bearers-, actually developed a fertile relation with the Greek national culture. The trajectories of several of its leaders as well as the life histories of some among its youthful rank-and-file hint at a creative engagement with the ideology of Hellenism. In fact, their experiences indicate that Zionism was as much an integral part of the Greek political culture as it was of the Jewish one. Attending to such cultural crossings can therefore help us pose the question whether the Jews were actually becoming Greek as they were becoming Jewish, whether, that is, a certain sense of Greekness was in reality the flip side of a certain sense of Jewishness. To answer this question however, would surely require another paper. Until this time comes, I can only thank you for your attention.

⁵¹ Erika Kounio-Amariglio and Alberto Nar, *Προφορικές μαρτυρίες Εβραίων της Θεσσαλονίκης για το Ολοκαύτωμα* (Thessaloniki 1998), 337-345.



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