

On Nationalizing Minorities: The Education of Salonikan Jewry, 1912–1941*

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Introduction

The present essay addresses two topics of central importance to the history of education in general and Jewish history in particular. The first of these is the influence exerted by the transition from an imperial government to that of a nation-state upon the educational politics of minorities within a polity. The vast empires that stretched across Europe and the Middle East prior to World War I encompassed a disparate array of tribes and peoples, including minorities that typically enjoyed a certain margin of tolerance in the policies governing their education. The nation-states that arose on the heels of these empires, however, did everything in their power to ensure that the education received by children of minorities under their control would identify not with the aims of their own group, but with those of the nation¹. The transition from

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1. See Emine Ö. Evered, *Empire and Education under the Ottomans: Politics, Reform and Resistance from the Tanzimat to the Young Turks* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2012), 7–8;

the first state of affairs to the second invites us to consider the contours of the process. In particular, with attention to the internal politics of a minority under pressure from a nation-state, how much will such a group invest in order to entrench its boundaries and identity through education? Further, looking to the wider context, to what degree is the use of education to entrench the boundaries of a minority beneficial to the political standing of that group in society, be that setting imperial or national?

The second subject that this essay explores, which decidedly pertains not only to minorities within the nation-state, but to every human community, is the degree to which society is willing to invest in educating children whose parents cannot financially contribute to this enterprise. Specifically, in the case examined here, to what extent was the Jewish community of Salonika willing to invest in the education of its young during the final decades of its existence preceding the Holocaust?

1. On the State of Existing Scholarship

Modern scholarship of the education received by Jewish children in Salonika had its start some twenty-five years ago, when it emerged concurrently with research into the modernization of education among Jews in Istanbul². As with the latter, studies of education in Salonika

Nurcan Kaya, "Forgotten or Assimilated? Minorities in the Education System of Turkey" (London: Minority Rights Group International, 2009), European Country of Origin Information Network, http://www.ecoi.net/file_upload/1002_1237662172_mrg-turkey.pdf.

2. Aron Rodrigue, *French Jews, Turkish Jews: The Alliance Israélite Universelle and the Politics of Jewish Schooling in Turkey, 1860-1925* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990); idem, *Education, Society and History: Alliance Israélite Universelle and Mediterranean Jewry, 1860-1929* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Ben Zvi Institute, 1991); idem, "The Alliance Israélite Universelle and the Attempt to Reform Jewish Religious and Rabbinical Instruction in Turkey", in *L' "Alliance" dans les communautés du bassin méditerranéen à la fin du 19^e siècle et son influence sur la situation sociale et culturelle*, ed. Simon Schwartzfuchs (Jerusalem: Misgav Yerushalayim, 1987), 53-70; idem, "Abraham de Camondo of Istanbul: The Transformation of Jewish Philanthropy", in *From East and West: Jews in a Changing Europe, 1750-1870*, ed. Frances Malino and David Sorkin (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 46-56; idem, "The Beginnings

initially emphasized the final decades of the nineteenth century and the initial years of the twentieth, and gave pride of place to the activities of the Alliance Israélite Universelle³. That the work of scholars such as Aron Rodrigue, Esther Benbassa, and Rena Molho focused on the close of the Ottoman period and the contributions of the Alliance in Istanbul and Salonika was a consequence of the physical and the linguistic accessibility of that organization's archives, as opposed to challenges of both types that complicated reference to the archives of the Jewish communities at the heart of those studies. The result was a portrayal of the education received by Jewish children –be it Jewish education or one of the other styles of education given parts of that group– that skewed historical reality along two axes, stressing certain elements and ignoring others. First is the weight given to the Alliance model as the mainstay of education throughout these communities, an agent of progress standing against the alternative of a highly limited education of traditional character received by the vast majority of children –an alternative left in this telling bereft of any detail. Other modes of education, such as the various flavors of foreign schools, state schools, and private schools, go all but unmentioned in these studies⁴. The relationship between the

of Westernization and Community Reform among Istanbul's Jewry, 1854–1856", in *The Jews of the Ottoman Empire*, ed. A. Levy (Princeton: Darwin, 1994), 439–56; Esther Benbassa, "L'éducation féminine en Orient: L'école de filles de l'alliance Israélite universelle à Galata, Istanbul (1879–1912)", *Histoire, économie et société* 10, no. 4 (1991): 529–59; Esther Benbassa and Aron Rodrigue, *Sephardi Jewry: A History of the Judeo-Spanish Community, 14th–20th Centuries* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1995), 75–106; idem, *Juifs des balkans: Espaces Judéo-ibériques XIV^e-XX^e siècles* (Paris: Éditions la découverte, 1993), 154–58, 164–74.

3. Rena Molho, *Salonica and Istanbul: Social, Political and Cultural Aspects of Jewish Life* (Istanbul: Isis, 2005), 139–50; idem, "Education in the Jewish Community of Thessaloniki in the Beginning of the Twentieth Century", *Balkan Studies* 34 (1993): 259–69; idem, "Salonika: Female Education at the End of the Nineteenth Century", in *Jewish Women's Archive Encyclopedia*, <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/salonika-female-education-at-end-of-nineteenth-century>.

4. Only in 2016 was a PhD thesis first written on the Italian schools in Salonika: Andreas K. Bouroutis, "Τα ευρωπαϊκά σχολεία της Θεσσαλονίκης (1888–1943): Πολιτιστική και κοινωνική τομή στην πόλη της ύστερης Αυτοκρατορίας" [The European schools in Salonika (1888–1943): At the cultural and social crossroads in the city at the

socioeconomic climate in these communities, not least the division of wealth, and the standing of their school systems is not even considered⁵. The imbalance in previous scholarly efforts comes across as well where they gloss over the history of education prior to the nineteenth century, a chapter of the subject that still awaits scholarly treatment of appropriate depth and breadth⁶. Studies of the entire spectrum of the Sephardic diaspora jointly produced by Benbassa and Rodrigue included general, and quite brief, treatment of education in the years between the 1492 arrival of the exiles from Spain and the mid-nineteenth century, but those few lines granted speak in each case of Jewish education as of a monolithic historical reality weathering multiple centuries with nary a change⁷.

The early years of the new millennium saw new scholarship on education in Salonika between the world wars, and an emphasis on the rate at which the Greek language penetrated the education and culture of Salonikan Jews following the integration of their city in the Greek state⁸.

end of the autocratic era], doctoral dissertation, Aristotelian University of Salonika, 2016.

5. For a preliminary step toward clarifying the connection between the socio-economic climate of these communities and their educational politics, see Minna Rozen, *The Last Ottoman Century and Beyond: The Jews of Turkey and the Balkans, 1808–1945*, 2 vols. (Tel Aviv: Goldstein-Goren Center, 2002–5), 1:77–130, esp. 94, 118–19; idem, *A Journey through Civilizations: Chapters in the History of Istanbul Jewry, 1453–1923* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015), 349–50, 376–77, 411–13 (on Istanbul), 137–82 (esp. 143–51), 164–65; idem, “Facing the Sea: The Jews of Salonika in the Ottoman Era (1430–1912)” (2011), Minna Rozen: Historian of the Jewish Diaspora, <http://minnarozen.co.il/documents/facing%20the%20sea%202.pdf>, 57–62, 64–65, 81–83 (on Salonika).

6. See Rozen, “Facing the Sea”, 11–14, 35, and sources cited there. On Jewish education in sixteenth-century Istanbul, see Minna Rozen, *A History of the Jewish Community of Istanbul: The Formative Years (1453–1566)*, 2nd ed. (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2010), 185–86.

7. Benbassa and Rodrigue, *Sephardi Jewry*, 50–51; idem, *Juifs des balkans*, 89.

8. Maria Vasilikou, “Εκπαίδευση των εβραίων της Θεσσαλονίκης στο μεσοπόλεμο” [The education of the Jews in interwar Salonika], in *Ελληνικός Εβραϊσμός* [Greek Jewry] (Athens: Moraitis School Association for Study of Modern Greek Culture and General Education, 1999), 129–47; Eyal Ginio, “‘Learning the Beautiful Language of Homer’: Judeo-Spanish Speaking Jews and the Greek Language and Culture between the Wars”, *Jewish History* 16 (2002): 235–62.

The most recent study on the subject, by Devin Naar, drew on a wide range of sources to offer us a far more expansive and richer portrait than previously available of the education received by Jewish children in Salonika, as well as the broader cultural and political setting in which they received it⁹. Refreshing as the broader cultural and political context are, however, the complete picture is not presented in that study, due to an incomplete grasp of the city's socio-economic and geopolitical history¹⁰. Further, Ladino sources that formed the basis of the study were selected and used unevenly to the point of offering an erroneous por-

9. Devin E. Naar, *Jewish Salonica between the Ottoman Empire and Modern Greece* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2016), 139–88.

10. For example, the author of the study sees the fact that the 1942 correspondence of his great-uncle Salomon Naar with Mattanot la-Evyonim, a Jewish nonprofit, was conducted in Greek as surprising and signifying a high level of assimilation (ibid., xiii). However, under German occupation, all inter-communal correspondence was required to be conducted in Greek. Salomon Naar may have had excellent Greek, but the correspondence cannot be taken as evidence of profound assimilation. Another circumstance used in the study as evidence of assimilation is the fact that Salomon's children were enrolled in the Valagianni School, a Greek private school, rather than a Jewish community school. However, this assumption does not take into account the realities of Salonikan social geography following the Great Fire of 1917. Salomon Naar resided in the modern neighborhood of Agia Sofia, in central Salonika. Few Jews continued to live there after the Great Fire, while most who did were of good economic standing and thus able to afford its newly built luxury apartments. Sending the Naar children to a community school would have meant giving them inferior schooling to that received by their Greek neighbors. They could have attended the Agia Sofia School, which the study (pp.159-60) erroneously identifies as a Jewish community school, but it was in fact a Greek public school for Jewish children, with standards just sufficient for the poor Jewish families that continued to live in shacks and hovels on the outskirts of the burnt zone. Alternatively, the Naar children could have taken a lengthy trolley ride to 46 Velisariou Street (near Agia Triada, on the eastern side of the city), where a good community school was opened after 1930. Thus sending them to a Greek private school was a matter of geography and social class, rather than acculturation alone (ibid., xiv). These two examples are instructive as to the study's much broader conclusion that a deep process of hellenization and identification with the Greek state took place in Salonika during the interwar period, which takes Katherine E. Fleming's thesis several steps forward; see Fleming, *Greece: A Jewish History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 93–94, 108.

trait of reality¹¹. Sources written in Greek, as well as Hebrew sources and studies, were not investigated. The daily reality of the different flavors of education in Jewish Salonika remained absent from the discussion, the role played by non-Jewish private education in molding the children of affluent Jews in the city was not given its due share of attention, and the same is true of the fact that the community school system was intended for the children of the poor. The socioeconomic context of education among Salonikan Jews, as seen from inside the community, was not contemplated, and the fact that thousands of Jewish children in the city went without an education of any kind is not disclosed in any way, and not given a place inside this wider reality. Owing to the problematic portrait of the past stemming from these lacunae, the present essay seeks to offer a detailed look at the state of the education of Jewish children in Salonika from the waning years of Ottoman rule until the German occupation, with particular emphasis on socioeconomic context.

2. On the Archival Sources

In preparing this essay, I utilized portions of Jewish communal archives confiscated by the Germans during World War II and now kept in the Center for Preservation of Historical Collections in Moscow (Tsentr Khraneniia Istoriko-Dokumental'nykh Kollektzii; hereafter, Moscow Archive)¹² and parts kept in the Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People in Jerusalem (hereafter, CAHJP). I have made use as well of material gathered by the institutions of the then-emergent Jewish state in Israel and preserved in the Central Zionist Archives, in Jerusalem (hereafter, CZA). Extensive use has been made of the protocols of the Salonika community's Supreme Education Committee, preserved at Yad Ben Zvi; the archives of Philippos St. Dragoumis, governor general of Macedonia from 1932 to 1934, located in the Gennadius Library

11. See, e.g., below, pp. 152, n. 84; 167, 170, n. 133; 176, 187, n. 198; 213, nn. 294-95.

12. This part of the archive was documented in video form for the Tel Aviv University Documentation Project of Turkish and Balkan Jewry (hereafter, Documentation Project of Turkish and Balkan Jewry), an initiative of the Goldstein-Goren Diaspora Research Center at that institution.

in the American School of Classical Studies at Athens (hereafter, Dragoumis Papers); and the archives of the Alliance Israélite Universelle, in Paris (hereafter, AIUA).

Much to my disappointment, I have been unable to obtain access to the archives of the Greek Foreign Ministry. Therefore, materials from this archive other than those in *Documents on the History of the Greek Jews: Records from the Historical Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, edited by Photini Constantinoulou and Thanos Veremis (Athens: Kastaniotis, 1998), are based on photocopies that were kindly provided to me by Mr. Manolis Kandilakis of Thessaloniki, to whom I am deeply grateful.

3. Times Past

The Jewish community of Salonika was founded primarily by expellees from Spain and southern Italy: individuals who left behind property, roots, connections, vistas, history, friends, and sometimes family, and embarked upon a long and perilous journey often punctuated with crises in order to settle in a place where they would be able to live as Jews. It thus is unsurprising that on arrival at their destination, they pursued their children's education, to which they attached considerable importance, with the better part of their energy and resources. They established an institution unparalleled in any other diasporic community until that time: the Great Talmud Torah, which functioned not only as a school, but also as the seat of community governance. Suffice to note that the Great Talmud Torah provided education at no cost to boys from approximately age five until they turned thirteen, the age of ritual maturity. Poor students were provided once annually with a new set of clothing, or *albasha* (Ladino from Hebrew: halbasha). The most gifted among them were eligible for three years of further education, and the cream of this crop were permitted yet another two years of education, all financed by the community. The operation of the Great Talmud Torah, much like the Ottoman *vakıf*, was principally financed by a system of economic establishments owned by the community whose proceeds were invested in its upkeep. A central part of the backdrop against which this unique institution emerged is the exceptional demographic position of the Sa-

lonikan Jewish community, which comprised the majority of the city's population for generations, and the economic efflorescence it enjoyed over the course of the sixteenth century¹³.

In the first hundred years of its existence, beginning in the early sixteenth century, the pupils of the Talmud Torah studied not only Judaic subjects, but also Hebrew writing, mathematics, Spanish reading and writing, geography, and astronomy. During the early seventeenth century, the Salonikan wool industry, which had afforded its inhabitants their livelihood during the century following the expulsion from Spain, declined. The middle class that had taken form around this sector proceeded to contract, and as of the eighteenth century, the bulk of capital held by Jews was concentrated in the hands of a small and dwindling few, resulting in the atrophy of communal economic enterprises. It was against this backdrop that the Great Talmud Torah first began to decline from its grandeur of yesteryear. The structure housing it was affected by a fire in 1820, and from that point until the mid-nineteenth century, studies were conducted as well in private homes, synagogues, temporary facilities, and even caves. The extent of the education received by most students came to be limited to learning to read, but not comprehend, the words of the prayers; study of Torah in Ladino; and a meager measure of basic mathematics. Those pupils who remained were the children of the destitute; a great number of Jewish children received no education at all¹⁴. Families of greater means sent their children to private schools, hired private tutors, or sent their offspring abroad¹⁵.

13. Abraham Sha'ul Amarillio, "The Great Talmud Torah of Salonika" [Hebrew], in "The Book of Greek Jewry III", special issue, *Sefunot* 13 (1971–78): 272–308; Joseph Nehama, *Histoire des Israélites de Salonique*, vol. 7 (Salonika: Communauté israélites de Salonique, 1978), 659; Rozen, "Facing the Sea", 11–14, 35, nn. *ibid.*; Georgios Tzioumakis, "Ο εβραϊκός πληθυσμός της Θεσσαλονίκης και η εκπαίδευσή του, πριν και μετά την ενσωμάτωση της πόλης στο ελληνικό κράτος" [The Jewish population of Salonika and its education before and after the unification of the city with the Greek state], master's thesis, Aristotelian University of Salonika, 2009, 40–44.

14. See below, pp. 149,156.

15. Abraham Sha'ul Amarillio, "The Great Talmud Torah of Salonika" [Hebrew], in "The Book of Greek Jewry III", special issue, *Sefunot* 13 (1971–78): 272–308; Joseph Nehama, *Histoire des Israélites de Salonique*, vol. 7 (Salonika: Communauté israélites

In the mid-nineteenth century, a group of Jews of Tuscan (later Italian) citizenship, called Francos by the locals, brought modern industry to Salonika, which called for educated workers such as the feeble religious education offered was unable to provide. This need was accompanied by the Tanzimat reforms undertaken in the Ottoman Empire in that period, not least the Education Act of 1869, which aspired to systematize education across the empire and sought, at least in declaration, to leave no Ottoman child without an education. These forces in combination brought two of the Francos, Dr. Moïse Allatini and Salomon Fernandez, to take the initiative to bring modern education to Salonika. In 1859, as a result of their initiatives, Rabbi Yosef Lippmann was brought from Strasbourg to serve as the new principal of the Great Talmud Torah. When his reforms to the curriculum of the school were rejected, he opened classes outside the school with the sponsorship of wealthy Salonikan merchants. By 1863, however, he had had enough, and departed¹⁶.

Missionary work in the city, including missionary schools, was on the rise at this time, and those institutions doubtless were an option for the city's Jews, the destitute in particular. However, the view that efforts during the mid-nineteenth century aimed at modernizing Jewish education in Salonika were due to a need to compete with the Protestant mission in the city should be revisited¹⁷. Although the Protestant mission was conducive to the development of new Ladino textbooks¹⁸ and its activities initially precipitated a wave of excommunications visited

de Salonique, 1978), 659; Rozen, "Facing the Sea", 11–14, 35, nn. *ibid.*; Georgios Tzioumakis, "Ο εβραϊκός πληθυσμός της Θεσσαλονίκης και η εκπαίδευσή του, πριν και μετά την ενσωμάτωση της πόλης στο ελληνικό κράτος" [The Jewish population of Salonika and its education before and after the unification of the city with the Greek state], master's thesis, Aristotelian University of Salonika, 2009, 40–44.

16. Joseph 'Uzzi'el, "The Educational Institutions of the Salonika Community" [Hebrew], in *Salonika, a Jewish Metropolis* (Jerusalem and Tel Aviv: Institute for the Study of Salonikan Jewry, 5727 [1967]), 74; Rozen, "Facing the Sea", 59–60.

17. Naar, *Jewish Salonica*, 143–44.

18. Rachel Saba Wolfe, "From Protestant Missionaries to Jewish Educators: Children's Textbooks in Judeo-Spanish", *Neue Romania* 40 (2011): 135–51.

on whoever used its schools or books¹⁹, the mission's activities were not sufficient to change the attitude of local lay leadership toward modern education, let alone mass education²⁰.

Significantly, Protestant educational efforts were directed only at girls. In Jewish patriarchal society, on a fundamental level, the education of boys mattered but that of girls did not. A school for boys thus could spark a major scandal far exceeding the commotion that ensued the founding of the girls' school. Until the establishment of the Alliance school for girls, in 1874, there tellingly were no educational opportunities for Jewish girls in the city. With the arrival of the Alliance school, a great number of female students at local Protestant schools switched to it; the fact that a dormitory was built in 1881 for the Protestant school suggests that it was left mainly with orphaned girls who required shelter²¹. The burden of their upkeep was in this manner lifted from the shoulders of the community. Protestant missionary activities thus cannot be considered the main motive, or even a main motive, for

19. Leah Bornstein-Makovetzky, "Activities of the American Mission among the Jews of Istanbul, Izmir and Salonika in the Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Empire" [Hebrew], in *The Days of the Crescent: Chapters in the History of the Jews in the Ottoman Empire*, ed. Minna Rozen (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 1996), 303.

20. According to Leah Bornstein-Makovetzky's upcoming study of Protestant mission activities among Jews in the Ottoman Empire, the Reverend Peter Crosbie, a Scottish missionary, founded a school for girls in Salonika in 1851. The school remained active with brief intermissions until Crosbie's death in December 1904. Over the course of this period, an average of 150 girls attended the institution each year, studying the Old and New Testaments in French and Ladino as well as the French, English, and Ladino languages, reading, writing, geography, history, arithmetic, sewing, and singing. Following an initial period in which Crosbie and his school were shunned by the Jewish leadership, he gained their trust and esteem, not least because he never tried to persuade students to convert. After Crosbie's death and the arrival of a different principal, most parents withdrew their daughters from the school. By then, thousands of Jewish girls had been educated in the school, but not one had converted to Christianity; Bornstein-Makovetzky, "Protestant Mission" (unpublished manuscript, last modified 20 June 2018), Microsoft Word file. See also below, pp. 148-49,51.

21. Bornstein-Makovetzky, "Protestant Mission".

educational reforms in the Salonikan Jewish community. The explanation instead lies elsewhere: in the socio-economic realm.

First and foremost, modern education entailed the study of foreign languages –French, Turkish, Italian– knowledge of which opened innumerable doors to those fortunate enough to acquire it. Wealthy Ottoman subjects in the community had no interest in the financial outlay required to provide modern education to the masses and deployed ideological claims to scuttle the notion. Modern education remained a private matter reserved for the children of the wealthy, while most children of the community continued to receive three to four years of education prior to entering the workforce²².

A step toward changing this state of affairs was made when the Alliance Israélite Universelle entered the picture in 1873, working with the Italian citizens among the city's Jews and with the chief rabbinate to expand the school system and the range of subjects taught²³. Rabbi Moshe Ya'aqov Ottholengi, who was brought in 1880 from Livorno as principal of the Great Talmud Torah, brought new life to instruction within it. The Great Talmud Torah concurrently was renovated and expanded in 1885, only to burn again in 1898. An intensive effort by patrons from Salonika and abroad then enabled its reconstruction as an imposing building with space for five thousand worshippers²⁴. In the summer of 1907, Rabbi Ya'aqov Me'ir arrived from Palestine to serve as the chief rabbi of Salonika²⁵, where his spiritual and political leadership would be the foundation of the rise of Zionist education²⁶.

22. Rozen, "Facing the Sea", 35–41, 57–60, nn. *ibid*.

23. Rena Molho, *Salonica and Istanbul*, 139–50.

24. On the history of the Great Talmud Torah prior to the Young Turk Revolution, see Amarillio, "Great Talmud Torah", 275–305.

25. Pinhas Ben-Zvi Grayevsky, *Mi-Ginzei Yerushalayim 110, Dedicated in Honor of Rabbi Ya'aqov Me'ir* [Hebrew], Marheshvan 5694 [October/November 1933]: 20.

26. Abraham Elmaleh, "Men of Renown among the Sepharadim: Rabbi Ya'aqov Me'ir (On His Biography and Public Activity)" [Hebrew], *Ha-Mevasser* [The herald] 2, no. 4 (12 Shevat 5671 [10 February 1911]): 45–48; Grayevsky, *Rabbi Ya'aqov Me'ir*, 21; Naar, *Jewish Salonica*, 154–55.

4. From the Young Turk Revolution to the First Balkan War (1908–1912)

The 1908 Young Turk Revolution created a brief opportunity for authentic political activity within the Jewish community. The erstwhile latent Zionist idea now gained expression, and the opposing ideologies of the Alliance and of Zionism clashed on the battleground of education. The Alliance, which espoused a blend of French culture and Jewish identity, championed the right to live a Jewish life anywhere, not necessarily in the Land of Israel, whereas for Zionism, being Jewish was tied up with Zion, the mytho-historical land of the Jewish people. The contrast between the two competing ideologies was reflected in language education.

The Young Turk Revolution and the Turkish nationalism of the regime that it ushered in gave Zionists a powerful tool for contending with education of the Alliance persuasion. The Ottoman Empire saw itself as one whose ruling dynasty had been chosen to implement God's will, and God's will meant that the law of Islam prevailed over any other judicial system, Turkish was the language of law and state administration, and the ruling class was that of the Muslims. At the same time, the empire tolerated the existence of the judicial systems, school systems, and languages of minorities within its borders. The Young Turks who deposed Sultan Abdulhamid II did not intend to replace his tyranny with a liberal regime; to the contrary, their goal was to save the empire. Reacting to the winds of nationalism that blew around them and shook its foundations, theirs was a movement away from the idea of an inclusive empire and toward a much less inclusive, Turkish-Islamic entity – simply put, a nation-state²⁷. They thus undertook to coerce the Greeks, whom they saw as endangering the envisioned character of the empire, to introduce the teaching of Turkish in their schools²⁸. However, they did not view

27. See, e.g., M. Şükrü Hanioglu, *Preparation for a Revolution: The Young Turks, 1902–1908* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 301, 313–18; Erik J. Zürcher, *The Young Turk Legacy and Nation Building: From the Ottoman Empire to Atatürk's Turkey* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2010).

28. Vangelis Kechriotis, "The Modernization of the Empire and the Community

the Jews as a group that endangered their vision. The Jews were a tiny minority in their country, and quite a submissive one at that. Hebrew education hardly struck the Young Turks as a danger to the rule of the Ottoman Empire or the flavor they wished for it. To them, such education was an expression of religious sentiment, and the idea it taught of seeking to establish a Jewish nation-state in some part of the empire a fantasy of laughable proportions²⁹. Conversely, education of a European bent provided in foreign languages smacked to them of intervention by the European powers in the internal affairs of the Ottoman Empire and signaled the identification of educators and educated with foreign states whose interests differed from theirs. This circumstance is the political backdrop against which the education given to Salonikan children at the close of the Ottoman period must be understood.

Much of our knowledge of the institutions in which Jewish children were educated in those years is a product of Zionist sources – not an unimportant fact to bear in mind while considering them. The most comprehensive description of the educational institutions that provided schooling to Jewish children in Salonika at the end of the Ottoman era was written in 1910 under the name Ben-Ori (perhaps a choice inspired by the French *éclair*) by an unknown author who published a series of articles in Hebrew in the Zionist newspaper *Ha-Mevasser* (The herald). His ideological motivation does not detract from the importance of his account: no other such description exists, even in Zionist-oriented newspapers published in Ladino. Publications reflecting other political ideologies, such as the Ladino newspaper *La Epoka*³⁰ and the French

‘Privileges’: Greek Orthodox Responses to the Young Turk Policies”, in *The State and the Subaltern: Modernization, Society and the State in Turkey and Iran*, ed. Touraj Atabaki (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2007): 53–70.

29. Rozen, *Turkey and the Balkans*, 1:113–14, 117. There is no evidence that the Young Turks tried on any occasion to coerce Jewish schools to introduce the teaching of Turkish as argued by Naar, *Jewish Salonica*, 146.

30. *La Epoka: Revista politica komersiala y literaria* (The epoch: Political, commercial, and literary review) was published under the direction of Saadi Levy from 1875 to 1911.

*Journal de Salonique*³¹, contain mostly laudatory articles on the Alliance school³², or on one of the foreign or Jewish private schools that catered to the needs of moneyed families³³. Some articles actually were veiled advertisements for those establishments, while the purpose of others was to criticize the Great Talmud Torah³⁴.

As suggested above, the educational institutions that served the Jewish children of Salonika fell into several distinct categories:

A. Jewish Education

Jewish education for the masses in Salonika was provided either according to neighborhood or at the Great Talmud Torah. David Benveniste, who migrated to Palestine in 1914, included in his 1960s-era memoir a description of his educational experiences as a young child of Salonika during the Hamidian era: The first stage of Jewish education took place in a *heder*-like venue administered by a woman known as a *maestra* (Ladino for a female teacher), who would take into her sparse home five or six children of ages three or four from neighboring households. She would seat them on mats or long stools around a table, provide bread bearing some condiment, and adjure them to keep quiet so that she could see to her housework. Her occasional presence was felt when a nose needed to be blown or some greater issue arose. The sole purpose of this ostensibly educational establishment was to free the mothers of these children for a few hours to attend to their own

31. *Journal de Salonique: Publication bi-hebdomadaire, politique, commerciale et littéraire* also was published under Levy's directorship, from 1895 to 1910.

32. See, e.g., the following assorted articles from 1903–4: "The Alliance Israélite" [Ladino], *La Epoka*, 6 February 1903, 1; "The Alliance Israélite" [Ladino], *La Epoka*, 3 April 1903, 1; "The Jews of Salonika" [Ladino], *La Epoka*, 10 April 1903, 1; "The Alliance Israélite" [Ladino], *La Epoka*, 23 May 1903, 1–2; "The Alliance Israélite" [Ladino], *La Epoka*, 4 November 1904, 1.

33. "The Amar School" [Ladino], *La Epoka*, 30 October 1896, 7; "The Nemunei Gayret School under the Principalship of Mr. Moise S. Modiano" [Ladino], *La Epoka*, 26 May 1899, 9; "The Nemunei Gayret School under the Principalship of Mr. Moise S. Modiano" [Ladino], *La Epoka*, 22 June 1900, 7; "Scholarly Activity" [Ladino], *La Epoka*, 3 August 1900, 6; "The Instruction School" [Ladino], *La Epoka*, 27 March 1903, 2; "The Shelomo Shalem School" [Ladino], *La Epoka*, 17 June 1904, 1–2.

34. Naar, *Jewish Salonica*, 152.

housework. The maestra received payment from the parents in cash or foodstuffs³⁵.

At approximately age five, a child was sent to the *havra*, a term in Ottoman Jewish jargon with the meaning of *synagogue*, and indeed many such classes were conducted in the women's section of neighborhood synagogues. The *rubi*, or *havra* educator, would collect his students each morning, and then spend a lengthy day teaching them first the Hebrew alphabet, then prayers, liturgy, and reading. The *rubi* too received compensation from the parents in the form of money or food³⁶.

In 1910, Ben-Ori counted a total of thirty *havras*. The number of students who attended them is unknown, and can only be estimated as between six hundred and one thousand. Whereas Benveniste's impression was recalled through the softening lens of time that had elapsed since his childhood, Ben-Ori, writing in the period, spared no criticism:

Here you have a depiction of such an "educational institution": a narrow, dark room or a muddy, filthy cellar, of course lacking windows. ... On rotting, rickety benches or grimy planks sprawled over boxes of kerosene, before hobbled, broken desks covered with dust and filth –or even with no desks before them– sit huddled boys and girls. ... The "*hakham*" reads out to the children some letters, words, or broken words, and verses translated to Spanish. ... and these herds of young children shout, they wail, they roar, after him, and none understands the words of his fellow. ... Thus a nation educates its children! ... Boys and girls by the thousands remain mired in ignorance, and their parents, who are people of the masses, products of the education given by such *havras* as these, think that they have thus given their sons and daughters the privilege of some education³⁷.

Sa'adi Betzalel Halevi, who certainly was not a Zionist, carried with

35. David Benveniste, "Childhood Memories (The Stages of My Education)" [Hebrew], in *Salonika, a Jewish Metropolis* (Jerusalem and Tel Aviv: Institute for the Study of Salonikan Jewry, 5727 [1967]), 82–83.

36. Benveniste, "Childhood Memories", 84–85.

37. Ben-Ori, "The State of Education in Salonika" [Hebrew], *Ha-Mevasser* 1, no. 11 (4 Adar II 5670 [15 March 1910]): 171.

him very gloomy recollections of his havra days that are in keeping with this criticism³⁸.

Notably, Ben-Ori's mention of girls attending the havra in 1910 is a puzzle. Benveniste, reflecting on almost the same years, mentioned only boys, and no other source mentions mixed classes at the havra, or for that matter in any educational institution in Salonika. What is more, most Jewish girls in Salonika in this period did not receive any education at all³⁹. These circumstances suggest that Ben-Ori was not a local, but an outsider who received his information from local Zionists.

In 1908, Rabbi Ya'aqov Me'ir convinced the Hilfsverein der deutschen Juden leadership in Berlin to establish in Salonika a Hebrew-language kindergarten, which teachers Yonina Hazanovitz and Levi Kohen, previously of Jerusalem, later developed into a primary school that continued functioning until the Great Fire of 1917. Though they were regarded with disdain by communal leaders for both their Ashkenazic origins and their Zionist ideology, it was these institutions, which provided Hebrew-language instruction in Jewish studies and taught a range of subjects, on which the Zionists of Salonika hoped to model education for the youngest children⁴⁰.

The Jewish education provided to children by the community was imparted in the Great Talmud Torah, where 1,300 pupils were enrolled as of 1910, and the Lesser Talmud Torah, an institution paralleling the havra that was charged with the education of some two hundred children not yet of primary school age. Children began their studies at the Great Talmud Torah at approximately age seven, and classes there were

38. Aron Rodrigue and Sarah Abrevaya Stein, *A Jewish Voice from Ottoman Salonica: The Ladino Memoir of Sa'adi Besalel a-Levi* (Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012), 35–37.

39. Benveniste, "Childhood Memories", 82–85. Cf. Yehoshua Qantorovitz, "Our Daughters" [Hebrew], *Ha-Mevasser* 1, no. 35–36 (11 Elul 5670 [15 September 1910]): 337–40. Molho, "Female Education (see above p. 129, n. 3), paints an idealized picture of female education in the city.

40. Ben-Ori, "The State of Education in Salonika" [Hebrew], *Ha-Mevasser* 1, no. 10 (20 Adar I 5670 [1 March 1910]): 155; "We Want Schools" [Ladino], *La Tribuna Libre* [The free platform], 2 September 1911, 1; Joseph 'Uzzi'el, "Educational Institutions in the Salonika Community", in *Salonika, a Jewish Metropolis*, 75–76.

open to all, even those unable to pay tuition. The school, which consisted of three divisions in turn divided into eight classes each, employed four Jewish and five Turkish teachers. There was no need to coerce the Jewish leadership of Salonika to introduce Turkish to the school: aspiring to identify with the idea of Ottomanism, they did so willingly, although the results proved quite poor⁴¹. The institution lacked a standardized curriculum. Material taught included Hebrew, Ladino, Turkish, French, mathematics, geography, Jewish history, and general history. General studies were brief and scant. Hebrew was treated with derision. Physical education⁴², field trips, and games were deemed dispensable. The possibility of educating the children was further critically compromised by the placement of older and younger children within a given classroom, on account of limited space and educational personnel⁴³.

The considerable financial investment required to enhance instruction at the Great Talmud Torah naturally fell upon the shoulders of the wealthy members of the community, and the community Executive Committee⁴⁴, which they controlled, proved to be in no hurry to authorize such an outlay. At a meeting of the Community Assembly⁴⁵, supplementary funding for the Great Talmud Torah in the amount of 350 Turkish liras was authorized under pressure brought to bear by Ya‘aqov Me’ir⁴⁶. With these additional resources, he was able to bring Dr. Yitzhaq Epstein from Palestine to serve as the principal of the institution.

Epstein was renowned as the father of Hebrew education in the Land of Israel⁴⁷. While at the Great Talmud Torah, he instituted a series of far-

41. Naar, *Jewish Salonica*, 145.

42. See, e.g., “Healthy Soul in a Healthy Body” [Ladino], *El Avenir* [The future], 21 February 1911.

43. Ben-Ori, “State of Education”, 1 March 1910, 156.

44. Minna Rozen, “The Jewish Community of Salonika, 1912–1941: Organizational Patterns”, *Αρχείων Ανάλεκτα: Περιοδική έκδοση μελέτης και έρευνας αρχείων (δευτέρα περίοδος)* [Compiled from the archive: Periodical of studies and archival documents], n.s., 1 (June 2016): 310–11.

45. *Ibid.*, 311–12.

46. Ben-Ori, “The State of Education in Salonika” [Hebrew], *Ha-Mevasser* 1, no. 7 (6 Adar I 5670 [15 February 1910]): 93, 110.

47. Shlomo Haramati, *Three Early Teachers* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Yad Ben Zvi,

reaching reforms; introduced novel instructional techniques; assigned physical education, music, and drama a place in the curriculum; and transformed the institution into a school where classes were conducted in Hebrew and Zionist ideas disseminated⁴⁸. Along with their Zionism, Me'ir and Epstein brought with them the debate over instruction in the Hebrew language, a question that continued to be contested as long as the Salonika community endured⁴⁹.

B. General Education

The schools of the Alliance Israélite Universelle provided what was deemed “general education”, a European education delivered under Jewish auspices. In essence, the Alliance maintained a private school system of the French style that addressed the needs of two social groups: middle-class parents who could pay tuition, which was not low by any means, and indigent parents, whose children’s tuition was paid by the community⁵⁰. As of 1910, there were seven such educational establishments. One was the Moïse Allatini School, which boasted five hundred boys in three kindergarten classes, six primary school classes, and three secondary school classes. The institution produced human resources for the international economic pursuits of the Allatini family and simi-

1984), 144–48; Yuval Dror, “The ‘Rural School’ in the Colonies of the Upper Galilee at the Beginning of This Century” [Hebrew], in *Etzba‘ha-Galil 1900–1967* [The Galilee Panhandle, 1900–1967], ed. Mordecai Naor (Jerusalem: Yad Ben Zvi, 1991).

48. Joseph Klausner, “A World in Emergence: Notes on Travels in the Land of Israel” [Hebrew], *Ha-Shiloah* 27 (5672–73 [1911–13]): 255; Naar, *Jewish Salonica*, 154–55 ‘Uzzi’el, “Educational Institutions”, 74; Judith Dishon, “A Travel Account of Salonika at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century” [Hebrew], *Pe‘amim* 107 (2006): 39–65, esp. 57n66.

49. Yitzhaq Epstein, “The Revival of the Hebrew Language among the Jews of Turkey, Part 1” [Hebrew], *Ha-Mevasser* 1, no. 3 (1 Shevat 5670 [11 January 1910]): 33–34; idem, “The Revival of the Hebrew Language among the Jews of Turkey, Part 2” [Hebrew], *Ha-Mevasser* 1, no. 7 (6 Adar I 5670 [15 February 1910]): 97–100; Ben-Ori, “The State of Education in Salonika” [Hebrew], *Ha-Mevasser* 1, no. 6 (29 Shevat 5670 [8 February 1910]): 93; A. Hermoni, “The Beginning” [Hebrew], *Ha-Mevasser* 1, no. 5 (2 Shevat 5670 [12 January 1910]): 67–69.

50. “Expensive Education” [Ladino], *El Avenir*, 18 August 1911, 1.

lar ones in Salonika⁵¹. The mandatory languages of study, from most to least important, were French, Turkish, Hebrew, and Italian. Hebrew was not taught as a living tongue. Optional languages were German, English, and Greek. Pupils at the Allatini School enjoyed a rich and varied general studies curriculum as well. The school taught Jewish history in French, and only to the point of the destruction of the Second Temple. Also operated under the aegis of the Alliance was a primary school for girls that provided general education deemed adequate by Ben-Ori, though he judged the Jewish education meager. Hebrew was not among the subjects studied.

The Alliance maintained as well a French-language kindergarten, a vocational school for girls, and two primary schools for the girls of poor families, located in the popular neighborhoods of Vardar and Kalamaria, that taught basic life skills⁵². According to the accounting given by Ben-Ori⁵³, a total of approximately 2,200 students attended these institutions. As a whole, they operated at an annual deficit of seventeen thousand francs, six thousand of which the Alliance agreed to defray while the remainder was left to the community. Ben-Ori expresses rage at the Alliance's unhindered control of the school curriculum and its refusal to take into account the desires and needs of the Salonika community despite contributing only one-third of the funds needed to pay the deficit. Stressing the question of loyalty to the Ottoman regime and Jewish religious roots, he bristles, "Go, if you please, and ask this great, simple congregation: Which do you choose –to educate your children as Ottoman Hebrews, Hebrews with regard to Hebrew and Ottomans with regard to love of the homeland, or to rear them as those French who keep their distance from you?"⁵⁴.

51. See, e.g., complaints by Salonikan merchants who hired alumni of the school regarding the incompetence of the latter in commercial correspondence, "Alliance Israélite Universelle" [Ladino], *La Epoka*, 17 September 1897, 1.

52. "Statistics" [Ladino], *La Epoka*, 20 April 1876, 1; "Announcement" [Ladino], *La Epoka*, 14 February 1881, 4.

53. Ben-Ori, "State of Education", 15 March 1910, 170.

54. Ben-Ori, "State of Education", 8 February 1910, 93.

C. Jewish Private Schools

Apart from the Great Talmud Torah and the Alliance schools, there were in Salonika a great number of private educational institutions of various orientations. Some were Jewish institutions owned by private individuals. Ben-Ori opines that the parents whose children attended them could have exercised unlimited control of the curriculum, an opportunity that he excoriates them for squandering:

The parents relate coldly to the style of education and are undemanding in such matters. It is enough for them that the sons be plumped with a few languages that work in the commercial market and with the more necessary bits of general knowledge. ... And thus these sons are educated in the ostensibly Jewish schools, far from Judaism, far from the past and the future of their nation⁵⁵.

Ben-Ori here warns the parents against the total assimilation of their children. Yet the reality that he describes was not truly so simple. True, an expansive education, even one informed by a particular agenda, is at once a wonderfully potent and a dangerous tool. It grants recipients access to new worlds of inconceivable breadth that they previously could not have imagined. At the same time, the teacher never knows what a student will do with the knowledge acquired. A few examples are in order.

The Jews of Salonika in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century consumed some forty Ladino newspapers, almost all of whose editors were alumni of the Alliance schools. These periodicals included both Zionist and socialist newspapers. Each of these persuasions was utterly opposed to the orientation of the Alliance. Of particular note is Abraham Samuel Recanati⁵⁶, probably the most radical of the Zionist leaders of Salonika produced by the Alliance despite itself. Recanati understood that the Salonikan masses would not be inclined toward the secular nationalist Zionism of Central and Eastern Europe. In its stead, he advocated religious Zionism as preached by the Mizrahi movement, though

55. Ben-Ori, "State of Education", 8 February 1910, 171.

56. Recanati appears in the documents of the Salonikan Jewish community as "Abraham" or "Abram". In Hebrew, he was known as Avraham Shemu'el.

he personally identified with the most radical and activist branch of Zionism, Ze'ev Jabotinsky's Revisionist Movement, as well⁵⁷.

The Alchek School, a private educational institution founded in 1898 by Rabbi Jacob Isac Alchek, developed under the leadership of his sons Isac and Abraham into one that provided a broad-based education with a French orientation, though with the inclusion in its curriculum of Hebrew and of Jewish history due to the sons' ardent Zionism. This school gave rise to several of Salonika's key Revisionist Zionist activists, who migrated to Palestine prior to the outbreak of World War II⁵⁸.

The Gattegno School, established in 1890 by Leon Gattegno⁵⁹, was formally named by its founder the Franco-Alaman (French-German) School, because these were the chief languages within its walls. The institution included two kindergarten classes, two classes that served children between that age and primary school, four primary school classes, and four secondary school classes, and its work explicitly served the aim of preparing the children of the upper class to participate in interna-

57. Concerning Recanati, see David Benveniste, *From Salonika to Jerusalem: Chapters of Life* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Committee of Sephardim and Oriental Jews, Institute for the Study of Salonikan Jewry, and Center for Integrating the Heritage of Spanish and Eastern Jews, 1982), 189–91; Abraham S. Recanati, "The Maccabi: The Heroic Period of the Zionist Movement in Salonika" [Hebrew], in *Zikhron Saloniqi* [A Memoir of Salonika], ed. David A. Recanati, 2 vols. (Tel Aviv: Committee for Publication of the Salonika Community Book, 5732–46 [1972–86]), 1:275–304; Hayyim Aharon Tole-dano, "The Mizrahi Organization in Salonika: The Great Popular Movement for the Torah and Zion" [Hebrew], in Recanati, *Zikhron Saloniqi*, 1:424–54. The Mizrahi organization was behind the arrival of hundreds of families in the Land of Israel between 1932 and 1936, and its core leaders, among them Recanati, successfully made their way to Palestine (*ibid.*, 445–50). Disregard of the Hebrew sources led Naar (*Jewish Salonica*, 150–51) to the conclusion that Recanati's version of Zionism initially had nothing to do with Palestine. See also Minna Rozen, "A Very Narrow Bridge: The Jewish Community of Salonika, 1912–1943" (unpublished manuscript, August 2017), Microsoft Word file, section 2.3.1: Political Parties of the Community.

58. Naar, *Jewish Salonica*, 166; 'Uzzi'el, "Educational Institutions", 77.

59. Gattegno was born to a prominent family of merchants who traded in goods from colonies in the New World and elsewhere. He successfully ran for the Greek Parliament in the elections of 6 December 1915 and was in 1923 and again in 1936 elected chairman of the community's executive committee, and thus by extension chairman of the community. He held these offices until 1941.

tional commerce. Aside from linguistic education, the school provided general education and commercial training, while neither Hebrew nor Judaic subjects were emphasized. Notwithstanding, this institution too produced several of Salonika's leading Zionists, such as Leon Recanati⁶⁰.

D. Foreign Schools

Some of these private schools were administered by individuals and institutions from foreign countries, toward whose culture and language they were geared exclusively. The difference between these schools and those of the Alliance was that the former provided a good general education, but there of course was no Jewish education to be had.

Parents who send their children to such a school, notes Ben-Ori, do so at a prodigious cost that they never would be willing to pay for a proper education at a community school. With resources of this scale, he opines, it would be possible to provide a good schooling for all the children of the community⁶¹. Among these private schools were Italian institutions, an establishment run by Catholic missionaries, the Protestant mission school, and the Mission laïque française⁶². These schools taught subjects that were not studied at others aside from those of the Alliance, such as French and Italian literature, Turkish, geography, history, and natural sciences. Jews comprised 64 percent of the students of the Mission laïque française and 71 percent of those at the Italian schools, all totaling some 556 individuals⁶³.

E. How Many of Salonika's Jewish Children Were Actually Educated?

In 1909, the newspaper *Ha-'Olam* (The world) published a survey of the schools serving the children of the city. It named thirty-one educational institutions and tallied 4,370 boys and 2,877 girls among the pupils, for a total of 7,427⁶⁴. According to Ben-Ori's calculations in 1910,

60. 'Uzziel, "Educational Institutions", 77–78, 80.

61. Ben-Ori, "State of Education", 8 February 1910, 171.

62. 'Uzziel, "Educational Institutions", 78–79.

63. Bouroutis, "The European Schools in Salonika", 215, 229–30.

64. Yehoshua 'Qantorovitz, "Letters from Turkey: Salonika II" [Hebrew], *Ha-'Olam* [The world], 10 Adar 5669 [3 March 1909], 12.

approximately 7,500 boys and girls were enrolled in educational institutions in Salonika, including 3,500 in general education establishments, two thousand in schools that combined general and Jewish education, and another two thousand in various havras, alongside 3,500 children, by his reckoning, who went entirely unschooled⁶⁵.

Ben-Ori's is not the only report attesting to the fact that thousands of Jewish children in Salonika were unschooled on the eve of the Greek era. Newspapers controlled by the opposition to the communal leadership, such as the Zionist *El Avenir* (The future)⁶⁶ and *La Tribuna Libre* (The free platform)⁶⁷, protested this fact time and again, and the socialist *La Solidaridad Ovradera* described hundreds of Jewish children loitering unschooled in the Çayır (Turkish: meadow) neighborhood, where the poorest of the poor lived in crumbling shacks made of construction scrap⁶⁸. Pressing the community leadership to open more Jewish schools, *El Avenir* stressed that most of the pupils in the missionary schools were Jewish and urged the leaders to examine what was so wrong with education at the Great Talmud Torah that parents preferred a Christian school⁶⁹. An anonymous description in *El Avenir* of Jewish parents' attitude to the subject of education echoes Ben-Ori:

The people of this city fall into two groups: those who believe that the suburban schools are sufficient for the initial years of schooling, and later on will send their children to foreign schools, [and] those who live in the Kampanias [who] are lucky. They have foreign schools of the mission and of foreign countries. Jewish education? Religious education? History of the Jewish people? He-

65. Ben-Ori, "State of Education", 8 February 1910, 72.

66. "Education" [Ladino], *El Avenir*, 7 August 1911, 1; "Only 1,200 Children Can Read and Write" [Ladino], *El Avenir*, 7 August 1912, 3.

67. "Education for the People" [Ladino], *La Tribuna Libre*, 22 July 1910, 5; "Give Us Schools" [Ladino], *La Tribuna Libre*, 12 August 1910, 1; "A Letter from an Inhabitant of Rejie Vardar" [Ladino], *La Tribuna Libre*, 2 September 1910, 6.

68. "A Meeting in Alberto Ardit's Home" [Ladino], *La Solidaridad Ovradera*, 25 August 1911.

69. "Education", 1; "The Dangers of Indifference" [Ladino], *El Avenir*, 2 February 1912, 1–2; "Only 1,200 Children Can Read and Write", *El Avenir*, 8 July 1912, 3.

brew? Heads of families laugh when thus asked, saying, “My son is not going to be a rabbi (Ladino: no va salir hakham)”⁷⁰.

In point of fact, Ben-Ori’s attempt at putting a number on the children who received no kind of education was wide of the mark⁷¹. On 28 April 1913, not long after the Greeks arrived in Salonika, Konstantinos Raktivan, the first governor general of Macedonia, conducted an enlightening census in which he counted 61,439 Jews, 45,867 Turks, 39,956 Greeks, 6,263 Bulgarians, and 4,364 foreign nationals in Salonika⁷². Since the Greek state’s interest was to prove its claim to Salonika, one has to assume that the number of non-Greeks was absolutely no greater than required and that of Greeks was as great as judged possible. The Jews for their part estimated that they numbered ninety thousand at this juncture⁷³. Given a conservative estimate of 61,439 and assuming four people per family⁷⁴, i.e., approximately fifteen thousand families, and a minimalist estimate of one child aged four to eighteen per family, we arrive at a total of fifteen thousand children of school age. Based on the incomplete statistical data of 1917, there were at that time 15,981 community members who had not yet attained the age of twenty⁷⁵. Subtracting those aged zero to four and eighteen to twenty and adding the girls who went uncounted in the community registers, we conclude that there were some twelve thousand children of educable age. How many were in fact given some sort of an education? Assuming the veracity of the *Ha-‘Olam* report, which was published three years prior to

70. “Education”, 1.

71. See below, p. 151.

72. Alexandros A. Pallis, “Racial Migrations in the Balkans during the Years 1912–1924”, *The Geographical Journal* 66, no. 4 (October 1925): 315–31; Haralampos Papastathis, “The Incorporation of Macedonia into the Greek State”, in *Modern and Contemporary Macedonia* 2:24–39 (Thessaloniki: Papazisis, 1993), Macedonian Heritage: An On-line Review of Macedonian Affairs, History and Culture, http://www.macedonian-heritage.gr/ContemporaryMacedonia/Downloads/Macedonia_Vol_2_p_24-39_Papastathis.pdf, 29n25.

73. Naar, *Jewish Salonica*, 56–57; statistical report based on incomplete statistical data for 1917 [ca. 1940], old catalog no. SA/GR 67 (not correlated in concordance with folder no. in new catalog), CAHJP, 2; “Education for the People”, 5.

74. Statistical report, 1.

75. Statistical report, 1.

the census, and the estimates given by Ben-Ori in 1910, only about 60 percent of the Jewish children of Salonika received any education. The state of affairs appears yet less auspicious in light of an Alliance report of 1912, a year before the Greek census, that gives the number of pupils in each of the city's schools, including institutions unaffiliated with the Alliance, for a total of 6,074⁷⁶. To these we may add the 120 Jewish students of the French mission school⁷⁷, the 346 at the Mission laïque française⁷⁸, 210 who studied at the Italian schools⁷⁹, and 123 at German schools⁸⁰, totaling 799 students, as well as the handful who studied in schools administered by the Ottoman authorities, which brings us to less than seven thousand students. Thus according to a very conservative estimate, at the dawn of the Greek period, of a minimum of 12,200 school-age children, not more than 7,500 actually attended schools, and even many of these did so over the course of just a few years. No less distressing, the most expensive line item in the community budget of the time was education, which amounted to five thousand Turkish liras of a total of twelve thousand⁸¹, 3,500 being allocated to the Great Talmud Torah alone. Paradoxically, the salaries paid teachers at that institution were far lower than those given instructors employed by other schools⁸².

The dearth of educational institutions and resources for paying tuition were only two of the various reasons many children were not schooled. It is evident from a 7 July 1910 article in the nationalistic *La Tribuna Libre* –though never expressly stated– that its writer is complaining of fathers who take no interest in the education of their sons,

76. Molho, *Jewish Life*, 131.

77. Bouroutis, "European Schools", 178.

78. Ferdinand Buisson, "Mission laïque Française", in *Nouveau dictionnaire de pédagogie et d'instruction primaire*, 1911, Institut Français de l'éducation, <http://www.inrp.fr/edition-electronique/lodel/dictionnaire-ferdinand-buisson/document.php?id=3199>; Bouroutis, "European Schools", 392.

79. Bouroutis, "European Schools", 230.

80. *Ibid.*, 228.

81. "Community Expenses" [Ladino], *Avanti* [Forward], 14 April 1913, 1.

82. "The Administration of Our Community" [Ladino], *Avanti*, 16 April 1913, 1.

and mothers whose daughters' education is of no importance to them⁸³. The factors that by all appearances truly were associated with reluctance to embrace modern education were the need for additional workers to support the family and a desire to preserve the family authority structure, which modern education for the masses was sure to erode.

5. Greek Rule and Its Effects on Communal Attitudes toward Education (1912–1923)

During the Ottoman period, the Jewish community enjoyed unlimited freedom in educating its children. Even the push that came with the Tanzimat to modernize the school system and promote the teaching of Turkish was not accompanied by coercive measures. In a certain sense, this freedom desensitized the Jews of Salonika. They experienced no pressure to deviate from their accustomed religious practices and lifestyle, and their consciousness of the centrality of education to communal awareness, as well as investment in this enterprise, was limited⁸⁴.

The arrival of the Greeks in Salonika put an end to this situation. Greece was a nation-state, not a supranational empire, and like other nation-states, it conceived of education as a peerless tool for forging the “new Greek”. As early as 1834, Greek law mandated compulsory education for all children between the ages of five and twelve, manifesting the importance attributed to education by the modern Greek state⁸⁵.

In Macedonia, the task of forging the “new Greek” was of particular difficulty, due to its peculiar ethnic makeup. For this reason, Greece

83. “The School and the Family” [Ladino], *La Tribuna Libre*, 7 July 1910, 2–3. See also above, n. 37.

84. The idealized picture painted by Naar (*Jewish Salonica*, 151–56) of the Great Talmud Torah as a hallmark of newfound communal interest in education should be juxtaposed with Ben-Ori’s descriptions and the fact that at least 40 percent of Jewish children received no education whatsoever (see above, p. 149).

85. Theodore G. Zervas, “From Ottoman Colonial Rule to Nation Statehood: Schooling and National Identity in the Early Greek School”, *Espacio, Tiempo y Educación* 4, no. 1 (2017): 1–21, esp. 6; Dimitrios Zachos, “Citizenship, Ethnicity, and Education in Modern Greece”, *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 27, no. 1 (2009): 131–55.

viewed the hellenization of Macedonia writ large and of Salonika in particular as a mission of supreme importance, to be achieved above all through education. Such education, needless to say, was to be Greek education and taught in the Greek language⁸⁶, and the Jewish community was thus compelled to relate to the question of education with a seriousness that transformed it into a first-rate political question.

If this was not enough, the school system underwent a series of crises in the years 1912–23. The Balkan Wars (1912–13), World War I (1915–18), and then the Greco-Turkish War of 1919–22 flooded the city with homeless refugees. The schools, like the synagogues, were much in demand as places of shelter for the tens of thousands in need of sanctuary⁸⁷. In 1916, Salonika was home to at least ten public and three private Jewish educational institutions⁸⁸. Most, including the Great Talmud Torah and the schools of the Alliance, were destroyed by the Great Fire in 1917⁸⁹, and the burden pressing down upon those that remained grew only greater. These troubles were compounded during the war years by increasing reliance on school-age children to provide for their families. Come 1920, there were only 1,142 pupils enrolled in twenty-nine classes

86. Katerina Lagos, “Forced Assimilation or Emigration: Sephardic Jewry in Thessaloniki, 1917–1941”, *Journal of Modern Hellenism* 31 (2015): 73; Philip Carabott, “Aspects of the Hellenization of Greek Macedonia, ca. 1912–ca. 1959”, *Κάμπος* [Kampos]: *Cambridge Papers in Modern Greek* 13 (2005): 21–61, https://www.academia.edu/9096364/Aspects_of_the_Hellenization_of_Greek_Macedonia_ca._1912_-_ca._1959.

87. “In Salonika” [Ladino], *El Puevlo* [The people], 24 March 1918; “In Salonika” [Ladino], *El Puevlo*, 6 May 1918; “Τα Σχολεία θα επιταχθώσι” [Schools to be expropriated], *Το Φως* [The light], 8 November 1918, 1.

88. Spyros Loukatos, “Η Εβραϊκή Κοινότητα της Θεσσαλονίκης μέσα από ελληνικές εκθέσεις 1913–1923” [The Salonika Jewish community as reflected by the Greek archives, 1913–1923], *Χρονικά* [Annals], May–June 1996: 10.

89. Vilma Hastaoglou-Martinidis, “On the State of the Jewish Community of Salonika after the Fire of 1917: An Unpublished Memoir and Other Documents from the Papers of Henry Morgenthau”, in *The Jewish Communities of Southeastern Europe: From the Fifteenth Century to the End of World War II*, ed. Ioannis K. Hassiotis (Thessaloniki: Institute for Balkan Studies, 1997), 147–74, esp. 157; Yitzhaq Samuel Emmanuel, “A History of the Jews of Salonika” [Hebrew], in *Zikhron Saloniqi*, 1:207; Nehama, *Histoire*, 766.

at the Jewish schools, while a similar number studied in private or foreign schools⁹⁰.

In the same year, the Greek government promulgated Act 2456, which specifically permitted Jewish communities to establish their own schools for the children of their members⁹¹. The community was granted the right to establish a curriculum so long as it did not conflict with Greek law and assured that students would be sufficiently educated in the language of the land, and with the requirement that Jewish schools teach history, geography, and the sciences in Greek, as well. Instruction in all other subjects was permitted in any language chosen by the community. It was established that Greek-language educators would be appointed according to the same criteria and in the same manner as in Greek state schools, and that they would be subject to review by the state, whose superintendents of schools were to enjoy powers and rights as established by royal decree of the Greek state.

This decree transformed local Jewish education. Most of the Jews of Salonika had no knowledge of Greek. The fact that not only Greek, but also history, geography, and science, would be taught by Greek teachers was one of great import inasmuch as it removed Jewish teachers who were not proficient in that language from the job market. By requiring that instruction in history and geography be in Greek, the state had assured that these subjects would be taught in the light it deemed appropriate. This was the most critical tool for the hellenization of the Jews of Salonika and their training as loyal Greeks. The act also effectively clarified that any person who continued sending his child to a foreign or private school in which instruction was in a different language was thus attempting to insulate himself from Greek society or harbored intentions of immigrating or of having his child do so. Hellenizing future generations of the Jewish population was part and parcel of the overall policy of hellenizing Macedonia at large and integrating it within Greece. Similar laws were enacted concerning Macedonian Muslims

90. Zalman Kuhn, "Report of the Superintendent of Education on Community Schools" [1920; Hebrew], in *Register of Communities: Greece*, ed. Brakha Rivlin (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 5759 [1998]), 253.

91. Rozen, "Jewish Community", 319–23.

and Orthodox communities affiliated with the Bulgarian church that spoke the Slavic dialect of Makedonski⁹².

From this point, the Jewish community of Salonika was immersed in an unceasing debate regarding the question of education. Even if its leadership brought no alacrity to its treatment of the subject, it was forced to contend with the matter due to its political significance. Education thus became in many respects the litmus test for the vitality of the community.

Following the Great Fire of 1917 and the efforts of the Greek government to replace Saturday with Sunday as the compulsory day of rest, the Zionists and the Socialists⁹³ found themselves the only political groups still resisting government policy. Apart from these two movements, there was the Bloc Moderado, or Moderate Bloc, whose members were neither Zionists nor socialists but simply wanted to find a way to live properly in this unfamiliar reality. Though they defined themselves as “assimilationists” who advocated Greek education, the members of this moderate camp were such only in name. To wit, behind this label stood affluent individuals whose children attended foreign schools where classes were conducted in French or Italian. The Zionists, who certainly did not regard themselves as assimilationists, pushed for education to be conducted in French as well as in secondary languages such as Greek and Hebrew, taking a position largely in keeping with the Bloc Moderado. Both groups represented a population that sustained itself principally through trade with Europe, so that knowledge of European languages was critical to them.

92. Naar, *Jewish Salonica*, 50–51. See also Carabott, “Hellenization”, 21–61.

93. Regarding the socialist movement among the Jews of Salonika, see Andonis Liakos, *Η Σοσιαλιστική και Εργατική Ομοσπονδία Θεσσαλονίκης (Φεντερασιόν) και η Σοσιαλιστική Νεολαία* [The socialist and labor movement in Thessaloniki (Federation) and the beginning of socialism] (Athens: Paratiritis, 1985); Alexandros Dagkas, *Recherches sur l'histoire sociale de la Grèce du nord: Le mouvement des ouvriers du tabac 1918–1928* (Paris: Association Pierre Belon, 2003), 149, 156–63; H. Şükrü Ilicak, “Jewish Socialism in Ottoman Salonica”, *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 2, no. 3 (September 2002): 115–46; Iakovos J. Aktsoglou, “The Emergence/Development of Social and Working Class Movement [*sic*] in the City of Thessaloniki (Working Associations and Labor Unions)”, *Balkan Studies* 38, no. 2 (1997): 285–306.

The true assimilationists were the socialists, who passionately championed the use of Greek⁹⁴. As they saw it, Greek education meant schooling for everybody, not only the children of moneyed families. This was the socialists' motivation in their advocacy of integration in the Greek school system. They complained bitterly of an insufficiency of classrooms and of community schools for the poor masses, as well as of the caliber of the young women employed for a pittance to teach. The socialists made plain their disdain for the promises of community leaders to establish more Jewish schools, and explained that the Jewish private schools were meant for the children of the privileged. Much to their frustration, however, despite their attempts to prevail upon the Greek government to open state schools in Jewish neighborhoods, the government was occupied at the moment with the conduct of hostilities in Asia Minor, and had little interest in the matter of schools for working-class Jewish neighborhoods⁹⁵.

At the same time that the socialists were waging a campaign against the Zionists for ostensibly preferring French to Greek, the Zionists were in the midst of an offensive against the Alliance, which in the main taught in French. The Zionists alleged that the alliance was producing "Mendelssohnians" and thus preparing the ground for assimilation, a concern that went unallayed despite the best explanations offered by Alliance officers in both Salonika and Paris⁹⁶.

The demands of Act 2456 were implemented beginning in 1921, with study in the Greek language in community schools far exceeding that in

94. "For the Education of the Poor" [Ladino], *Avanti*, 6 August 1921, 1; "The Question of the Schools" [Ladino], *Avanti*, 349 (10 December 1921), 1.

95. "The Advertisement for the Private Schools" [Ladino], *Avanti*, 29 September 1921, 1; "The Question of the Schools", 1.

96. *La campagne contre les écoles de l'Alliance*, 15 February 1919, GRECE_IG_3_0164-66, Archives of the Alliance Israélite Universelle (AIUA); *L'Alliance Israélite a fait son temps: Débarrassons nous des ses écoles*, 2 January 1920, GRECE_IG_3_0075-6, AIUA; Joseph Nehama to the secretary of the Alliance Israélite Universelle in Paris, 19 May 1916, GRECE_IG_3_0092, AIUA, 4; Nehama to the secretary of the Alliance Israélite Universelle, 17 June 1918, GRECE_IG_3_006, AIUA; Nehama to the secretary of the Alliance Israélite Universelle, 8 January 1920, GRECE_IG_3_0067, AIUA.

Hebrew⁹⁷. In July 1922 the community published a new charter for the administration of its schools whose first clause required that principals be selected by the community's newly formed Supreme Education Committee⁹⁸ in consultation with the superintendent general of community schools. They were to be chosen on a strictly annual basis, meaning that they would be reinstated annually as required, or else as deemed appropriate in light of their performance. Only alumni of a teachers' college with several years' teaching experience in a public school, it was established, would be eligible to serve in this role, though those who already had served as principals at the time the charter was published were not subject to this limitation. The principals were charged with the administrative, physical, financial, and educational affairs of the schools, their students, and their teachers.

School attendance was conditioned by the charter's second clause on payment of tuition, which was to be collected from parents in the form of a tax. Orphans and gifted children of the poor were exempted from payment, but each school was required to limit this group to no more than 25 percent of its student body. At the start of each year, an education committee of each school was to establish the amount of the tax. The principal was authorized to raise the amount of the tax in accordance with the financial status of a family after obtaining the agreement of the superintendent and in consultation with the neighborhood education committee. Failure to pay the tax would result in expulsion from school, though a possibility was held out, again requiring consultation with the superintendent, of disregarding non-payment in special cases.

In practice, collection of tuition fell to teachers and principals, as detailed in clauses 2 and 3. The latter were required under clause 9 to submit trimesterly and yearly reports to the superintendent on all aspects of school affairs, and under clause 10 to ensure meticulous maintenance of sanitary conditions within the schools.

According to clause 14, candidates for teaching positions, as with the

97. Protocols of the Supreme Education Committee, 3 January 1921, 109, old catalog no. SA/GR 8, CAHJP, new catalogue no. SA/GR 031.

98. On the Supreme Education Committee, see below, pp. 182-84.

principals, were required to be alumni of a teachers' college or at least a gymnasium. Teachers were to be hired once annually following a yearly concourse conducted in the presence of a special committee headed by the superintendent. Clause 21 instructed principals and teachers to ensure that their pupils acquire knowledge that would further their particular aptitudes as well as their intellectual and ethical education by teaching the great literary classics, history, geography, the political and social cultures of various peoples, and works of a general and philosophical bent on biology and physics⁹⁹.

Though the entire document reflects quite progressive ideas of education and its administration, it is clear from the second clause, which capped non-paying attendees at 25 percent of the student population, that the community did not expect all of its children to receive an education. What is more, such exemptions as were available, like the option to levy increased tuition, were subject to the discretion of community officers and functionaries, a reality that not only reflected an undemocratic ethic but also made parents subject to a thicket of political pressures that might be applied by community and neighborhood functionaries affiliated with any of the various political factions within the community¹⁰⁰.

Even with all the imperfections of the new scheme, the number of Jewish students attending community schools, or for that matter any of the schools of Salonika, substantially increased by 1923, an achievement made only greater by the economic and political challenges brought by the resettlement in Salonika of 160,000 refugees from Anatolia in the wake of the population exchange between Greece and Turkey. Zalman Kuhn, the community superintendent of education, counted in that year ten community schools with a total of 2,400 students and seventy-nine instructors, and described a system-wide budget of 450,000 drachmas¹⁰¹.

His data are complemented by those reported in Greek sources,

99. Komunita israelita, *Regulations of the Community Schools* [Ladino] (Salonika: Novel Press, 1922).

100. Rozen, "Narrow Bridge", section 2.3.1: Political Parties of the Community.

101. Joseph Vidal Angel and A. Levy, eds., *Jewish Almanac 5683: A Collection of Literary, Historical, Economic, Jewish, and General Information* [Ladino] (Salonika: Renaissance, 1923), 12.

which account as well for Jewish students enrolled in institutions other than those of the community. According to figures provided by Achilles Lambros, then governor general of Macedonia, to the Greek Ministry of Interior in mid-1923, no fewer than 4,713 students were enrolled in private or community schools operated by Jews. In total, there were 6,661 Jewish students in the city, comprising 33.5 percent of the total. The Jewish community then constituted approximately 34 percent of the population of Salonika¹⁰².

According to Lambros's statistics, some 45 percent of school-age Jews and Greeks, taken together, were receiving an education – a decrease for the Jews of 15 percent since the Ottoman period. The low proportion of school-age Greeks enrolled in the schools notably was a function, if not entirely, of the resettlement of the Anatolian refugees, a group that the Greek school system had not yet succeeded in assimilating. The low percentage of school-age Jews receiving an education was due in part to the influx of indigent Jewish refugees from the Balkan war zone, in part to the occupation of schools by refugees and the subsequent destruction of those buildings by the Great Fire, and in the main to the disintegration of the old Jewish neighborhoods as a result of the same conflagration¹⁰³.

One of the more intriguing aspects of the education of Jewish children in Salonika after 1920 is the dramatic expansion of education for the youngest children. As of 1920–23, Salonika and its suburbs boasted forty-four kindergartens, of which thirty-three were Jewish. Together they serviced 1,986 children, while the Greek kindergartens provided for 778. I would suggest that until 1923 this disparity was linked to the number of Jewish working mothers, which far exceeded that among the Greeks. In Salonika and its environs in the same year there were twenty-seven Jewish primary schools, some private, as opposed to ninety Greek primary schools. The Jewish community's only secondary school in that year was that of the Alliance, which provided instruction for two classes that together numbered fifty-one boys, all of whom constituted not 1 percent of all Jewish students in the city. The number of Greek secondary school students, even allowing for the fact that they comprised 60

102. Loukatos, "Jewish Community", 12.

103. *Ibid.*

percent of the city's population in this year, was magnitudes greater than that of the Jews, with 1,782 Greek students, 686 of them girls, in fourteen Greek gymnasiums, altogether constituting 14 percent of the Greek students in the city. Education in Greek society, these figures imply, was more democratic and less a function of class than education among the Jews¹⁰⁴.

The state of Jewish education in 1923 thus was such that there was provision for just under 50 percent of school ages, so that for many of the children of Jewish Salonika, education ended after the fourth or fifth grade. Only a handful went on to what was known as progymnasium (i.e., middle school); most children entered the workforce at age ten or eleven. The children of the wealthy received a private education, whether in a Jewish establishment or a foreign institution, and their parents paid amply for the privilege.

6. The Greek State, the Jewish Community, and the Escalation of Conflicting Interests (1923–1926)

It may be said that the ability of a state to provide education is greater than that of a minority community. However, circumstances in Greece in these years were almost indescribably dire. At the same time, one is well advised to bear in mind that the Greek state, at least on paper, was highly interested in funding schools for Jewish children on its own terms, namely, that they receive a Greek-language education and education in the Greek language. That the community did not obtain resources for education from the state resulted largely from a decision of its own making; due to the persistence of this situation, Jewish community schooling came to be a source of irritation for the government, with Greek politicians viewing the phenomenon as fostering Salonikan Jewish differentness and hampering the hellenization of the city.

The clash between pressure exerted by the state in the field of education and what the community understood to be its interests found expression in two contradictory processes that began in 1923. In that year, following the reconstruction plan for the 1917 burnt zone, the Jewish

104. Ibid.

community and Greek community jointly purchased a parcel of land near Agia Sophia Church, near the center of Salonika, with the purpose of building an educational complex to serve both communities. The part owned by the Greek community was used to build a new Greek high school. The Jewish community too sought to build a new school on its part of the parcel, but claimed to lack the necessary funds to build and maintain such a structure. The government therefore stepped in, allocating the necessary funds for construction and undertaking operation of the school until such time as the community would become able to take over. The importance that the state attributed to the matter is attested by the fact that this was done even as Greece was grappling with the resettlement of refugees from Asia Minor, a ponderous burden that consumed much of the energy and resources at the government's disposal.

In the following years, the Jewish community exerted some feeble efforts to make its mark on the operation of the school, but only to maintain its ownership of the land¹⁰⁵. The school became the mainstay of state education for the Jews of Salonika the moment it was operational, and retained this role to the end of Jewish existence in the city. It never was numbered among the schools of the Jewish community, but throughout remained a state school for Jews¹⁰⁶.

Notwithstanding the fact that the community declared itself lacking

105. Protocols of the Supreme Education Committee, MS 1709, vol. 5 (below, "BZI"), 105 (20 December 1932), 107–8 (3 January 1933), 109 (10 January 1933), Ben Zvi Institute.

106. "Η Παραχώρησις εις την Ισραηλιτική Κοινότητα των Διδακτηρίων της Αγίας Σοφίας. Η διακήρυξι της Γενικής Διοικήσεως" [The granting of the Agia Sofia School to the Jewish community: The declaration of the governate general], *Ταχυδρόμος της Βορείου Ελλάδος* [The post of northern Greece; *Taxydromos ths Voreiou Ellados*], 7 September 1934, 2; Protocols of the Supreme Education Committee (BZI), 101 (23 November 1932), 105 (20 December 1932), 108 (3 January 1933), 109 (10 January 1933), 148 (28 September 1933). "A letter from the government superintendent of schools, Mr. Lagoumitsakis, was read at the meeting of the Supreme Education Committee. The superintendent explains that the Agia Sofia School is in fact State School No. 47 for the Jews, and if there will be extra places, Christian students will be able to be admitted as well" (p. 148). Naar's contention (*Jewish Salonica*, 159–60) that the Agia Sofia School was a substitute or a continuation of the former Great Talmud Torah is incorrect, and the lengthy discussion revolving around this point is erroneous.

the resources to build the Agia Sophia School, it almost concurrently began to collect money to open the Talmud Torah School in the eastern part of the city (not to be confused with the Great Talmud Torah, which was lost to fire in 1917)¹⁰⁷. With the opening of the Talmud Torah School, the Jewish community added to its school system three classes of what it termed “higher courses” –seventh, eighth, and ninth grade–for “outstanding students”, with the aspiration of developing it into a Jewish gymnasium¹⁰⁸.

The nature and purpose of the Talmud Torah School are revealed by later documentation. Following a pledge by Yosef Nissim in 1928 to provide an endowment of three hundred thousand drachmas¹⁰⁹, a building at 46 Velissariou Street, near Agia Triada (on the eastern side of the city), was purchased in 1930 for the new school. As indicated in a note found among records of the community’s property, the purpose of acquiring the building was “to use it as a *talmud torah* school, i.e., a Greek elementary school, under the supervision of the Office of Public Education. At this school, the Hebrew tongue will be taught”¹¹⁰. The emphasis on the teaching of Hebrew was no accident: although supervised by the state, the Talmud Torah School was a communal institution where Hebrew and other Jewish subjects were taught with much care¹¹¹.

The apparent contradiction between the inability of the community to come up with resources for the Agia Sofia School and the fact that

107. “The Ceremony of the *Albasha*” [Ladino], *La Verdad* [The truth], 5 April 1926.

108. Zalman Kuhn, “The Kuhn Report on the Educational Project of the Salonika Jewish Community, Presented to the Supreme Education Committee” [Hebrew], in Recanati, *Zikhron Saloniki*, 2:178, 185.

109. *La Verdad*, 15 May 1928.

110. Sabetai Saltiel, handwritten cadastre of communal property, compiled 1939–40, Codex Saltielis, Prewar Communal Archive, 28–29, Jewish Museum of Thessaloniki. I am indebted for this information to Dr. Evangelos Hekimoglou of Thessaloniki.

111. Protocols of the Supreme Education Committee (BZI), 103 (6 December 1932): “Hayyim Aelion, the principal of the Talmud Torah School, demands the introduction of complementary courses in Hebrew for pupils who come from other schools and whose Hebrew is scant”. Concerning this school, see Moshe Ha‘elyon, “My Childhood and Adolescence in the Talmud Torah School” [Hebrew], Center for Educational Technology, accessed 21 February 2018, <http://lib.cet.ac.il/pages/item.asp?item=21638>.

another community school was almost simultaneously opened with money collected from its wealthy benefactors justifies engagement in some speculation. The Agia Sofia School was built to the south of Via Egnatia, in central Salonika. This area, which had until the 1917 fire been the dwelling place of the Jewish working class and the heart of the Salonikan Jewish community, now was an upscale middle- and upper-class neighborhood of modern, newly constructed apartment buildings in which Jews comprised only a small minority. These Jewish families may have had no interest in state-supervised schools for Jews, and were able to afford private education of a European flavor that better suited them, or else a Greek private schooling of a higher standard than Greek public education¹¹².

Central Salonika remained home to some poor Jewish families as well, 46 percent of which lived in free rental housing owned by the community, and 22 percent in illegal shacks¹¹³. Their children too needed to be educated, but their numbers may not have been such that the community felt it could justify the cost of building and maintaining a community school for them. Nor did the community mind that their education would mainly be a Greek one if left to the government. On the other hand, the number of Jews living in the eastern part of the city was by then much larger, and thus seen as justifying communal investment in a new school. Children of Jewish families in central Salonika that could not afford private schooling but wanted a relatively good Jewish education with an emphasis on Hebrew had to take the trolley to 46 Velissariou Street¹¹⁴.

7. Rising Anti-Semitism and the Heightened Struggle for the Soul of Education in the Community and in Relations with the Greek Government (1926–1933)

A number of processes with ramifications for education proceeded

112. See above, n. 10.

113. Evangelos Hekimoglou, "Jewish Pauperism in Salonika, 1940–1941", in Rozen, *Turkey and the Balkans*, 2:201, 205.

114. Moshe Ha'elyon, "My Childhood".

in tandem in the months before the parliamentary elections of November 1926. In July of that year, a few months after the commencement of fundraising for the Talmud Torah School, a Greek–Jewish commission was established with the encouragement of the Greek Foreign Ministry to assess the prospect of establishing a Jewish state secondary school to be funded by the state and operated according to government requirements¹¹⁵. The commission was headed by Nikolaus Louvaris, a professor at the University of Athens long viewed as a true friend of the Jewish community¹¹⁶. That August, Ioannis Minardos, the head of the Government Press Office in Salonika and a dedicated venizelist who shortly thereafter became a member of the anti-Semitic organization Tria Epsilon (the National Union of Greece) came to understand that three French-speaking commission members thought likely to favor integration with Greek culture had been systematically left uninvited to meetings of the commission. Minardos further understood from the Jewish press that the other Jewish members of the commission had put much effort into pushing it toward the creation of a public fund to finance the establishment of a high school with a Zionist orientation. Concurrently, Minardos alleged, the Zionist press had disseminated rumors to the effect that the Greek government was failing to satisfy its commitment to provide funding for state education, on the basis of which these news-

115. Ioannis Minardos to the Greek Foreign Ministry in Athens, 5 October 1928, protocol 4468 (no further information available: viewed as photocopy in collection of Manolis Kandilakis), Archive of the Foreign Ministry of Greece, Athens.

116. Nikolaus Louvaris, “Zionism and Judaism” [Ladino], *Aksion* [Action], 6 January 1930, 2; “The Four-Part B’nai B’rith Lecture Series” [Ladino], *El Mesajero* [The messenger], 2 February 1940, 1; “Albert Einstein/Nicolaus Louvaris/Hermann Hesse/Stefan Zweig: ‘Albert Schweitzer – Symbol der Humanität,’” *Universitas* 15 (1960): 79–82. Louvaris, who was persuaded by his close friend Archbishop Damaskinos Papandreou to join the collaborationist government of Ioannis Rallis in order to protect the interests of the Greek Orthodox Church under German occupation, was tried after the war and served a prison sentence from 1944 to 1949. See Panteleymon Anastasakis, *The Church of Greece under Axis Occupation* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), 56, 93, 129–31, 137–38, 308n100; Andrew Apostolou, “Greek Collaboration in the Holocaust and the Course of the War”, in *The Holocaust in Greece*, ed. A. Dirk Moses and Giorgos Antoniou (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 108.

papers asked why the community should agree to education that in any event was not in line with its own views¹¹⁷.

As elections drew closer, anti-Jewish agitation in Salonika swelled. Nationalist groups in the city, featuring especially migrants from Anatolia, heatedly charged that the Jews had no intention of integrating in the Greek state and quite to the contrary, were in fact enemies of the state. Rumor on the Greek street had it that the commission was nothing more than a front for a plot to secure government funding for schools to be controlled by the Zionists and their ideology¹¹⁸.

Radical Zionist leaders had indeed picked up the gauntlet cast down by the Louvaris commission and begun work to establish a Jewish community gymnasium in which their ideology would hold sway¹¹⁹. To accomplish their goal, they needed to collect the requisite money without the aid of the Greek government and in effect to come out strongly against the government and against the dominant actors in the community establishment. The attempt ultimately failed, and the funds that had been collected were put toward a purpose other than that intended by the Zionists¹²⁰.

In the meantime, the Communists¹²¹ in Macedonia in general and in

117. Ioannis Minardos, document 28 (letter to the governor general of Macedonia, 21 August 1926), in Constantopolou and Thanos Veremis, *Documents*, 113–14; Minardos, attachment A to document 28 (22 September 1926), in Constantopolou and Thanos Veremis, *Documents*, 114–15; Minardos, document 30 (letter to the Foreign Ministry in Athens, 23 December 1926), in Constantopolou and Thanos Veremis, *Documents*, 120–21.

118. Ioannis Minardos, document 28 (letter to the governor general of Macedonia, 21 August 1926), in Constantopolou and Thanos Veremis, *Documents*, 113–14; Minardos, attachment A to document 28 (22 September 1926), in Constantopolou and Thanos Veremis, *Documents*, 114–15; Minardos, document 30 (letter to the Foreign Ministry in Athens, 23 December 1926), in Constantopolou and Thanos Veremis, *Documents*, 120–21.

119. Minardos, document 28; Minardos, attachment A to document 28.

120. Zalman Kuhn, attachment B to document 28 (letter to *La Renecanssia Djudia* editor Elie Frances, 5 September 1926), in Constantopolou and Thanos Veremis, *Documents*, 116–17.

121. On 4 November 1918, the Socialist Federation was constituted within the newly founded Socialist Labor Party of Greece (Greek: Σοσιαλιστικό Εργατικό Κόμμα Ελλάδας, *Sosialistikó Ergatikó Kómma Elládas*; acronym: ΣΕΚΕ, SEKE). At the second congress of the SEKE, in April 1920, the party decided to affiliate with the Comintern,

Salonika particularly made quite a strong showing in the 7 September 1926 parliamentary elections, while the incumbent Koma Fileleftheron (Liberal Party), led by Eleftherios Venizelos, barely clung to power. More than 50 percent of Jewish voters voted for the Communist Party, although that party received only 10 percent of the vote in internal community elections¹²². On the heels of the parliamentary elections, Zionists in Salonika expressed concern that the Jews would be blamed for the considerable support for the Communists in Salonika as well as understood to harbor aspirations of laying waste to Greek society. Their worries were prescient. The tension that had built among Greek nationalists all autumn exploded with explicit allegations that the electoral achievement of the Communists was the work of Jewish enemies of Greece who sought to push the country into the arms of international Communism, a charge puzzlingly accompanied by the further grievance that the same Jews were sucking the life force out of the Greek worker. The Jewish establishment, Zionist and non-Zionist alike, took fright¹²³.

The Zionists now split into two camps. One, under the leadership of Abraham Recanati and the Mizrahi, cleaved to the radical line. This camp maintained that its mission was to impart the nationalist ethos to the Jewish youth of Salonika and to continue promoting the goals of a Jewish state and Jewish migration to the Land of Israel. Zéev Jabotinsky's visit to Salonika ten days after the elections delivered the allegiance of the bulk of Mizrahi members to the faction that he led, *Berit ha-Tzohar* (a Hebrew acronym for the League of Revisionist Zionists). They numbered approximately eight hundred to the four thousand other Zionists in the city. The salience of the Revisionists lay in activities so intensive

the international Communist organization founded in Moscow in 1919. The party accordingly changed its name to the Socialist Labor Party of Greece – Communist (SEKE-K). At the third extraordinary congress of the SEKE-K, in November 1924, the party was renamed the Communist Party of Greece and adopted the principles of Marxism-Leninism. See Dagkas, *Recherches*, 667–76.

122. See Rozen, “Narrow Bridge”, section 2.2.1: The Jews in Greek Politics and the Fight for Political Representation.

123. Rozen, *Turkey and the Balkans*, 1:267–74.

and audacious as to leave the impression that they were the Zionist establishment, though this was not in fact the case¹²⁴.

The main leader of the General Zionists at the time was Mentech Bessantci. He had been elected to Parliament in 1926 as an independent, though in practice he supported the party of Eleftherios Venizelos, and concurrently served on the Executive Committee as a representative of the Zionists, as well as on the Supreme Education Committee. His Zionism well may have been heartfelt, but above all, Bessantci was a politician. To describe him as an opponent of Greek education, as opposed to Zionist education, would be too simple. He comported himself as a champion of Hebrew education only from a late stage, upon his nomination to the Supreme Education Committee and then as chairman of that committee, when his work was limited to these functions¹²⁵.

In the summer of 1926, Bessantci embarked upon a propaganda campaign whose purpose was to integrate Salonikan Jewry in Greek culture through education, an endeavor in which the newspapers that he edited, the French-language *L'indépendant* and *El Puevlo* (The people) in Ladin, served him and his supporters as mouthpieces. He spoke openly and explicitly of the responsibility of the Executive Committee to establish a Greek Jewish state secondary school. Minardos, who felt that the Jewish community would spurn state funding to achieve its own goals, attempted to restrain Bessantci, seeking to hamper a project that he believed would be used to establish a Jewish secondary school of a Zionist orientation¹²⁶. However, Bessantci subsequently met with Louvaris, then the director general of the Greek Ministry of Religious Affairs and Education, and the latter promised to provide any resources required for the integration of Salonikan Jewish education within the Greek school system. Minardos still opined that the Jewish community would eschew use of this money in order to ensure that Jewish education would follow the Zionist agenda. He noted that Kuhn, the superintendent of Jew-

124. Rozen, "Narrow Bridge", section 2.3.1: Political Parties of the Community.

125. Naar, *Jewish Salonica*, 165–66, 170–71. See also below, pp. 189–91, 198–206.

126. Ioannis Minardos, document 31* (letter to the Foreign Ministry of Greece, 16 December 1926), in Constantopoulou and Thanos Veremis, *Documents*, 121–24.

ish schools, had not protested when the community had forbidden its teachers to accept salaries from the state and even threatened to dismiss any who might do so¹²⁷. In the meantime, Bessantci succeeded with significant effort in securing a promise from the Greek government of a general allocation for community schools within the community's general budget, thus denying the government any voice in where the money went¹²⁸.

In 1927, while presiding over a gathering of Alliance alumni in Salonika, Joseph Nehama made known his view that much of the curriculum of the Jewish schools ought to be diverted from the traditional subjects toward study of the Greek language, arguing that this was the only way to transform the children of the day into adults equally good Greek citizens and good Jews. The gathering adopted a decision to petition the Greek government to open as many public schools as possible, so that as many Jewish children as possible would be able to receive an education not dependent on tremendous financial sacrifice. The decision was echoed by similarly minded articles in the newspapers associated with the Bloc Moderado. Moderate Zionists such as Bessantci were thus jerked in conflicting directions by the desire to equip the children of the poor with a language that would serve them in Palestine, the desire to equip their own children with European languages that would serve them in their trade, and the desire to humor the Greek authorities who aspired to hellenize the Jews through the education of their young.

The Greek government was not yet particularly concerned by the teaching in Jewish schools of Hebrew, because this was considered the religious language of the Jews. (It would take at least six more years for the authorities to understand that Hebrew was a problem no less than Ladino or French)¹²⁹. Hebrew perhaps was the language of Zionism, they reasoned, but there was nothing for the Zionists to do with the language

127. Minardos, document 30.

128. Salonika Press Office, document 32 (letter to the Foreign Ministry of Greece, 4 February 1927), in Constantopoulou and Thanos Veremis, *Documents*; Salonika Press Office, appendices A and B to document 32, in Constantopoulou and Thanos Veremis, *Documents*, 124–26.

129. See below, p. 190.

unless they intended to migrate to Palestine. Elie Veisi, Bessantci's partner at *El Puevo*, wrote that "the years to come will be difficult, and it is not advisable that we should waste hour after hour learning a language such as Hebrew, which is of no use to anyone here". In later articles, he advocated integration of the Jews of Salonika in Greek society, identifying such integration as a Jewish interest¹³⁰.

Mizrahi-affiliated newspapers were taken aback by the advocacy of these ideas in a newspaper whose editor was a politician who identified as a Zionist, and responded with articles objecting to his activity and branding him a traitor. The Greek press, having learned of these developments from the Salonika Press Office, which kept abreast of the Jewish newspapers, began wondering what sort of education the Zionists truly sought and whether their pro-integration propaganda was sincere. Minardos wrote on 5 October 1928 to the press division of the Greek Foreign Ministry that Abraham Recanati's comments on the subject made four days earlier had been reported in the pages of *La Verdad* (The truth):

Jewish educational integration in the Greek state as proposed by the Zionists to the Jewish citizens of the city of Salonika would be disastrous. The Jewish soul cannot become Greek. It is simply astounding to see the intensity of the propaganda put out by the neighborhood Zionist organizations in favor of Greek evening schools. ... Suddenly all the Zionist newspapers are writing articles advocating the need to learn the Greek language and Greek history. The individual leading them is the Zionist leader Bessantci. Recently all the Jews have been speaking about their integration in the Greek state, and this must end. We must not send our children to Greek schools, lest they forget that above all they are Jews.

Having read this article, Minardos suggested that Bessantci was deceiving both his Jewish voters and his Greek political allies¹³¹. The Gov-

130. Dimitrios Kalapothakis, document 33 (letter from the director of the Salonika Press Office to the Foreign Ministry of Greece, 8 April 1927), in Constantopolou and Thanos Veremis, *Documents*, 126–31.

131. Minardos to the Greek Foreign Ministry, 5 October 1928.

ernment Press Office noted that unlike the Athens community, the Salonikan community had not published a notice thanking the Greek government for its decision to provide funding for the community school system¹³². A combination of mutual distrust and true hesitation by the community as to which path it ought to pursue resulted in a situation where there was verbal advocacy of integration but this had not yet borne fruit, mainly because no person had taken it upon himself to follow up on expressions of support with an effort at implementation. A 1928 reckoning counted 2,146 students in eighteen Jewish private schools¹³³, where education in Greek language and culture was not controlled by the state. To this number we should add the two thousand Jewish students in foreign schools¹³⁴ and 3,159 students in the community schools supervised by the state¹³⁵, all in all some 7,305 Jewish students—around 60 percent of all educable Jewish children—part of whom had only minimal Greek education. A total of 412 Jewish students attended Greek schools¹³⁶.

In January 1930, frustration at the state of education in the city was on display in the newspaper *Aksion* (Action): “It is necessary to establish a

132. Dimitrios Kalapothakis, document 52 (letter to the Foreign Ministry in Athens, 21 September 1929) and attachment, in Constantopoulou and Thanos Veremis, *Documents*, 167–69.

133. Tzioumakis, “Jewish Population”, 101. Tzioumakis’s numbers are based on statistics gleaned from reports presented in 1928 to the Supreme Education Committee, kept in the Archives of the Jewish Community in Salonika (box 7, envelope 139, item 24); the photograph of the original document (no. 24) is presented on p. 195 of his work. Naar (*Jewish Salonica*, 161) cites from the same archive, albeit without a detailed reference, a different number of students—2,733—for the same year.

134. Philippos Dragoumis, secret report to the Foreign Ministry Political Department, Balkan Affairs Division, Interior Bureau, no. 14408, 10 April 1933, Gennadius Library, file 23: Governate General of Macedonia: Education and Church (1931–1936), subfile 23.5: Foreign schools (1933), record number 148, Dragoumis Papers.

135. Kuhn, “Kuhn Report”, 177–88. According to the information compiled by Naar (*Jewish Salonica*, 160) from papers kept at the Jewish Museum of Salonika, there were 3,365 students in this category. Tzioumakis (“Jewish Population”, 97), who gleans his numbers from the Macedonia Historical Archives (the archives of the Governate General of Macedonia), gives yet another number: 3,405 students.

136. Tzioumakis, “Jewish Population”, 102.

Jewish Greek gymnasium, a vocational school, a girls' school..."¹³⁷. In the same year, Salvator Tcahon¹³⁸ was appointed chairman of the Supreme Education Committee, where he served alongside Bessantci, Moïse Benosiglio, Alberto Leon Gattegno, and Isac Beja. Of these, Bessantci, Benosiglio, and Tcahon identified as Zionists¹³⁹. The last was a scion of an old publishing family¹⁴⁰, as well as the advisor to the community on welfare affairs¹⁴¹. He worked as a teacher at the Gattegno School¹⁴² and was a relative of Gattegno¹⁴³, the founder and owner of that school and later also chairman of the Salonika community¹⁴⁴ as well as a member of the Greek Parliament¹⁴⁵. After the Great Fire, the school was rebuilt in the upscale neighborhood of Kampanias, and in autumn of 1933 it merged with the Alcheh School, where studies brought together French culture and Zionism¹⁴⁶.

Inasmuch as Bessantci drifted with the winds and Gattegno was the owner and principal of a francophone school that principally served the children of the wealthy, Zionist tendencies on the part of the commit-

137. "Constructive Politics" [Ladino], *Aksion*, 2 January 1930, 1.

138. "Jewish Education in the Community Schools" [Ladino], *Aksion*, 2 January 1930, 1. Tcahon also was a member of the Executive Committee in 1933 ("Election Platform: Ben Ya'aqov, Zionism Is a Popular Movement, but in Salonika ..." [Ladino], *Aksion*, 17 May 1933, 1.

139. List of delegates to the 1919 World Jewish Congress, dated 3 March 1919, Palestine Office, fond 1435, opis 1, file 1, Moscow Archive (digital archive no. 2049, Goldstein-Goren Center).

140. *Rosh ha-Shana prayer book* [Hebrew] (Salonika: Yizhaq Jahon, 5653 [1892/93]).

141. "Passover Alms for the Jewish Poor" [Ladino], *Aksion*, 9 April 1933; "We Can't Pay" [Ladino], *El Tiempo*, 29 September 1934, 1.

142. Salonika Press Office, report to the Foreign Ministry of Greece on the American School of Classical Studies at Athens, 7 September 1933, Gennadius Library, file 38: Governor General of Thessaloniki and Macedonia: Jews of Thessaloniki and Florina, subfile 38.2: Thessaloniki, record 213, protocol 2444, Philippos Dragoumis Papers.

143. Executive Committee meeting protocol, 26 February 1936, old catalog no. SA/GR 160, new catalog no. SA/GR 41, CAHJP, 1.

144. *Ibid.*

145. Dimosthenis Ch. Dodos, *Οι Εβραίοι της Θεσσαλονίκης στις εκλογές του ελληνικού κράτους 1915–1936* [The electoral periphery of Salonika: Parties and candidates, 1915–1936] (Salonika: Nomiki Scholi, 1989), 125.

146. 'Uzzi'el, "Educational Institutions", 77–78.

tee were by no means a foregone conclusion. In the meantime, government initiatives to secure a foothold in the schooling of Jewish children gained momentum following the electoral victory of the Liberal Party, headed by Venizelos, on 19 August 1929, which enabled him to introduce to the Greek school system a number of far-reaching reforms¹⁴⁷, among them an intensified focus on hellenization¹⁴⁸.

The Greek government, adamant to bring Greek education to the community, dispatched the special superintendent of foreign schools, Mr. Tzamouleas, to discuss the topic with community leaders. Practically, the purpose of the visit was to assess the possibility of closing the “foreign schools” – a term used at this juncture as a synonym for those of the Alliance – and transferring their students to the community schools, which were under the supervision of the state and thus an easier target for curricular modification. Among other topics, the plan to open a state public school in each of the teeming, poor neighborhoods that were home to Jews was revisited by the Greek authorities¹⁴⁹.

Unspecified community leaders informed Tzamouleas that the foreign schools provided schooling for some two thousand students, including five hundred children of families able to afford tuition fees. The community was willing to accept responsibility for the 1,500 other students on condition that the government increase the yearly allocation for education by two million drachmas, permitting the construction of five new schools, and make a payment of three hundred thousand drachmas to each school to help defray the costs of equipment and instruction¹⁵⁰.

Concurrently, Kuhn, the superintendent of community schools, trav-

147. Alexis Dimaras, “Modernisation and Reaction in Greek Education during the Venizelos Era”, in *Eleftherios Venizelos: The Trials of Statesmanship*, ed. Paschalis M. Kitromilides (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), 335–38.

148. Katerina Lagos, “The Metaxas Dictatorship and Greek Jewry, 1936–1941”, doctoral dissertation, St. Anthony’s College, Oxford University, 2005, 251; Lagos, “Forced Assimilation”, 73–74.

149. “Τα Ξένα Σχολεία και οι Ισραηλιτόπαιδες” [The foreign schools and Jewish children], *Μακεδονικά Νέα* [News of Macedonia], 11 September 1930, 6.

150. “Η Εκπαίδευσις των Ισραηλιτόπαιδων” [Jewish children’s education], *Μακεδονικά Νέα*, 12 September 1930, 4.

eled to Athens to meet with Georgios Papandreou, then the minister of religious affairs and education, who acceded to the establishment of five public schools. These new institutions would provide for 1,600 additional students, and their curriculum would be prepared by the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Education. A decree dated 1930 was issued mandating that the requisite structures be speedily rented and duly equipped so that operations might begin the same year¹⁵¹.

The cooperation of the community in this project hardly was a product of mere submissiveness on the part of Kuhn or the community leadership, or for that matter a product of ideological conviction¹⁵². As much is clear from the fact that the salaries owed Jewish teachers by the community were delayed on numerous occasions and the community had difficulty funding education for the masses¹⁵³. As far as the community was concerned, there were two potential solutions for educating the children of the masses: to make every effort to compel the Greek government to sponsor such education, which would entail agreeing to teach Greek and in Greek, and giving up much of Jewish education and the teaching of French, as in the Agia Sofia School, or to ensure that those children who had no future in the city would acquire the linguistic knowledge most needed in what was virtually their only option for immigration: the Land of Israel. Neither Kuhn nor Bessantci can be accurately portrayed as supporting either type of education: each did what he found to be necessary at the time.

As events unfolded, the Greek press continued its blow-by-blow reporting on the saga of the hellenization of the Jewish schools, indicating that this process was not merely a governmental desideratum. In the latter part of October 1930, it transpired that of all the Jewish children the government judged had to be given a Greek education, there were spaces in schools for only five hundred, three hundred of whom registered with Greek public and private schools and two hundred with

151. “Ιδρύονται εν Θεσσαλονίκη Πέντε Δημοτικά Σχολεία χάριν των Ισραηλιτών” [Five public schools established in Salonika for the benefit of the Jews], *Ταχυδρόμος* [The post], 18 September 1930, 4.

152. Cf. Naar, *Jewish Salonica*, 167.

153. “The Teachers Can’t Wait” [Ladino], *Aksion*, 25 March 1930.

those of the Jewish community. According to an article published in *Makedonika Nea* (News of Macedonia), thousands of Jewish students were without a classroom, and thousands more who were supposed to be taught in the Jewish public schools were left without so much as a structure because the school buildings of the community had been seized by families whose homes in the Teneke Mahalle quarter had been destroyed by urban renewal. Kuhn attempted to correct the situation by leasing other buildings for use as schools¹⁵⁴. This reporting is consistent with the aforementioned assumption that thousands of school-age children simply did not go to school for lack of a school to attend.

In the meantime, Kuhn sent two teachers, one Jewish and the other Christian, to each of the five schools that were to be established, and students began registering¹⁵⁵. Papandreou kept up with developments and checked that the structures required for the creation of the new schools had in fact been rented¹⁵⁶.

However, the speed with which the Greek government took action to educate the children of the community subsequently lessened due to a series of challenges. On 28 June 1931, a duly incited mob of Greek rioters descended on the Campbell neighborhood, an area on the outskirts of the city that was home to survivors of the Great Fire, and set fire to it¹⁵⁷. The families whose homes had been destroyed then took over the large school buildings. Only in January 1932 were the structures cleared, and in the meantime, no classes were held in these venues.

The Campbell incident was closely connected to the question of education in another sense as well. The arson was the climax of a violent week in Jewish–Greek relations in Salonika whose epicenter was at the Maccabee Club. Several days prior to the Campbell incident, vandals broke into and destroyed that club. The next day, the Greek national student organization published a notice explaining why Greeks were so agitated. Among the

154. “Το Ζήτημα Της Στεγάσεως των Ισραηλιτοπαιδων Μαθητών” [The problem of providing housing for the children of the Jews], *Μακεδονικά Νέα*, 18 October 1930, 6.

155. “Τα Νεοϊδρυθέντα 5 Ισραηλικά Σχολεία” [Five Jewish schools newly established], *Ταχυδρόμος*, 31 October 1930, 6.

156. “Δια την Λειτουργίαν των Ισραηλιτικών Σχολείων” [For the operation of the Hebrew schools], *Μακεδονικά Νέα*, 20 December 1930, 3.

157. Rozen, *Turkey and the Balkans*, 1:285–89.

reasons given were the following: “The Jews decline Greek education in their schools. They decline to speak Greek and prefer Ladino”¹⁵⁸.

In a Greek–Jewish dialogue held in the hall of the Salonika Chamber of Commerce, a Greek participant registered his view that “neither the government nor the Greeks are responsible for the unfortunate event”, then suggested that the Jews request that the government take responsibility for the education of Jewish children, to which Senator Ascher Malah responded that the community’s schools had been Greek schools for some time¹⁵⁹. The barely hidden implication of both that anonymous proposal at the meeting and the notice published by the national student organization was that by failing to integrate as Greeks –which is to say, take on Greek education– the Jews themselves had given rise to the explosive atmosphere and the attacks that they had suffered.

In 1932, as at the end of every other academic year, Kuhn prepared a lengthy report on the state of community education in Salonika¹⁶⁰. He was not satisfied with the achievements of the school system in that year, feeling that its performance in the years 1928–31 had been far superior. The factors that had led to this situation, in Kuhn’s view, were several. First was the suspension of classes in the several schools that had until January 1932 housed people made homeless by the Campbell incident. A further cause that he listed was the profound changes made to the curriculum by the government supervisor of the public schools, Mr. Lagoumitzakis. Until 1931, students in these schools learned Greek eighteen hours each week. Then, two months after the commencement of the academic year in 1931, Lagoumitzakis announced a radical change under which kindergarteners and first-grade students would learn Greek twenty-two hours per week; students in the second and third grades, twenty-five; the fourth grade, twenty-eight; and the fifth and sixth grades, thirty hours per week. The announcement was accompa-

158. “Περί των επεισοδίων του Συλλόγου “Μακαμπή”-Ανακοινωθέν της Ε.Π.Ε” [On the disturbances in the Maccabee organization: A notice from the National Student Organization], *Νέα Αλήθεια* [New truth], 25 June 1931.

159. “Η Χθεσινή Έλληνο-Ισραηλιτική Συγκέντρωση εις το Εμπ. Επιμελητήριο” [The Greek–Hebrew encounter yesterday at the professional association], *Μακεδονικά Νέα*, 3 July 1931, 4.

160. Kuhn, “Kuhn Report”, 177–88.

nied by Lagoumitzakis's reduction of the number of Greek teachers at the schools. Irrespective of the incongruousness of these two changes, he refused to retract either. Thus many students were left without teachers and the system was compelled to merge classes and to spend more time on Hebrew and French education so that children would not be left idle. Kuhn complained as well of rampant malingering by the Greek teachers, aided by a superintendent of school sanitation whose dispensation of sick days knew few bounds, and of Lagoumitzakis's failure to provide substitute teachers. The Greek language thus went unstudied for a period of several weeks in the winter months.

In sum, the good or bad intentions, depending on the view of the observer, that lay behind the changed face of Jewish education in Salonika correlated with action only partially, as so often is the case with intentions and outcomes.

During the 1931–32 academic years, Salonikan Jewish children in the public school system were grouped into sixty-six classes in a total of nine community schools averaging 50 children per class. The number of students enrolled in school declined as the pupils' age increased. Thus the sixth grades of the Reji and Baron Hirsch Schools were consolidated. According to Kuhn, the Cazes School was falling apart and in need of fundamental repairs. Kuhn notes his awareness that the average class size is far greater than is conducive to effective instruction. All told, 3,159 students, including 1,766 boys and 1,393 girls, were enrolled in community schools. Though the number of girls is unequal to that of boys, the hellenization of education clearly brought far more girls to school than in previous times.

In his report, Kuhn gave special consideration to the state of Hebrew education in these schools. He gives the average number of hours devoted per week to Hebrew education in the early childhood division, i.e., kindergarten, first grade, and second grade, as fifteen, whereas in the fifty elementary classes, an average total of 9.3 hours of instruction in Hebrew per week was provided. At the same time, Kuhn, who seemingly supported the idea of integrating the communal school system within the Greek system¹⁶¹, urged the community leadership to cooper-

161. Naar, *Jewish Salonica*, 162–67.

ate with the Greek government to establish a Greek Jewish gymnasium, for which he proposed two curricula: one to be presented to the authorities, and another for implementation. The curriculum for presentation to the Greek government featured twenty-nine weekly class hours: ten of Greek, two of physics, two of geography, two of history, four of mathematics, four of French, two of physical education, one of calligraphy, one of art, and one of vocational education. The actual plan called for only twenty-seven class hours, including three fewer of Greek and two more of French. (According to conventional arithmetic, the resulting total is twenty-eight, rather than twenty-seven, hours). In addition to the above, there were to be six to seven hours of Hebrew instruction. Because physics, geography, history, calligraphy, and mathematics were taught in Greek, it must be recalled, the intended curriculum actually called for fourteen hours of instruction in Greek every week. In explanation of the number of additional hours to be spent studying French, Kuhn notes that students who have reached this point in school all are potential emigrants and argues that the additional hours are required to see to their particular needs. Notwithstanding the statement by the editor of *Zikhron Saloniki*¹⁶², in which Kuhn's report was published, that the latter was concerned with the study of Greek but not of Hebrew, this does not appear to have been the case, as demonstrated by his plan for the community high school: it is highly doubtful that even the fictional curriculum assembled by Kuhn could have survived the scrutiny of the Greek government.

In early 1932, Philippos Dragoumis, a Greek diplomat and politician from a distinguished Macedonian family, was appointed governor general of Macedonia. The backdrop to the appointment was the defeat of Venizelos's party in parliamentary elections by Konstantinos Tsaldaris's Laiko Komma (People's Party), of which Dragoumis was a leading member. Among the other members of the party were a number of Jews, such as Isac Sciaki and Isac Molho, who had high hopes for the new administration¹⁶³.

162. Kuhn, "Kuhn Report", 188n2.

163. Rozen, "Narrow Bridge", section 2.2.1: The Jews in Greek Politics and the Fight for Political Representation.

The new governor general, who was intermittently to serve in this position until the end of 1934, left behind in his personal archive highly detailed documents concerning the foreign schools of Salonika, in which he took great interest. In his eyes, a foreign school was a non-Greek school. Such institutions submitted to him annual reports whose contents make clear that the object of his scrutiny was the degree of hellenization undergone by education within them. The transition wrought in Greek politics by the defeat of the Liberals and the rise of conservative forces thus clearly was of no consequence for the hellenization policies brought to bear on the education of Salonika's children. These reports, which make clear that during these years there remained in Salonika quite a few schools where the primary language of instruction was not Greek, are a valuable source of information regarding the Jewish students of these institutions, their curriculum, and class sizes. Thus, for instance, a report dated 10 January 1933 by the principal of Collège Saint-Jean-Baptiste de La Salle, a secondary school, indicates a total of 162 students in the institution, including eighty-eight Christians, ten Muslims, and sixty-seven Jews, who received ten hours of instruction per week in the Greek language¹⁶⁴.

The Mission laïque française, which claimed to be a Greek secondary school comparable to all other private Greek secondary schools, contained six secondary school classes, a beginners' and an advanced preparatory French class for students who had completed junior high school, and three banking and commerce classes. Together these numbered 286 students, for an average of twenty-six per class. The school's curriculum included preparatory study for the French matriculation examinations, physics, and mathematics, as well as lessons in Greek, history, and geography given in Greek, as in Greek schools. The number of weekly instructional hours devoted at this school to the Greek language varied from thirteen in the lowest grade to six for the eldest students. Twenty-nine teachers taught at the school, and eleven of these were

164. Principal of Collège Saint-Jean-Baptiste de La Salle, report on the school, 10 January 1933, Gennadius Library, file 23: Governate General of Macedonia: Education and Church (1931–1936), subfile 23.5: Foreign schools (1933), record 149, Philippos Dragoumis Papers.

Greek. Of the 286 students, 169 were Jews. The second largest was that of the ninety-two Greek Orthodox students, while other demographics were not substantially represented. The school indeed was one of quality, and its popularity among the wealthy families of Salonika therefore is no surprise.

The same organization operated a girls' school, which spanned the years from kindergarten to the conclusion of junior high school. This school had a class for advanced study of the French language and another for preparatory studies for pupils who were to begin middle school. In total, there were eight classes and 143 students: approximately eighteen girls per class. Of the fifteen instructors who taught in the school, four taught Greek. Primary school students received six instructional hours of Greek every week, while in the junior high school, freshmen received twelve, sophomores eleven, juniors nine, and seniors six. Of the 143 students, eighty-eight were Jewish¹⁶⁵.

Another French school, *Les frères du Dieu*, was in fact a French–Greek middle school six of whose classes received instruction in French and three in Greek. Each class studied the Greek language seventeen to eighteen instructional hours per week. There were 181 students in total, averaging approximately twenty per class, and forty-four were Jewish¹⁶⁶.

There were a number of Italian schools as well in Salonika, including two consisting of kindergarten and primary school. One, the Santa Rosa School, had five kindergarten classes and a Montessori primary school. The other, namely, the Manzoni School, consisted of three kindergarten classes and a primary school. The teaching staff of the two schools included eight teachers of Italian, one who provided religious instruction, two teachers of the French language, and a sewing instructor. Although this tally makes no mention of instructors who taught Greek, the cur-

165. Principal of the *Mission laïque française*, report on the school, 12 January 1933, Gennadius Library, file 23: Governate General of Macedonia: Education and Church (1931–1936), subfile 23.5: Foreign schools (1933), record 151, Philippos Dragoumis Papers.

166. Principal of *Les frères du Dieu*, report on the school, 14 January 1933, Gennadius Library, file 23: Governate General of Macedonia: Education and Church (1931–1936), subfile 23.5: Foreign schools (1933), record 154, Philippos Dragoumis Papers.

riculum includes instruction in that language. At the Santa Rosa School, the number of weekly instructional hours dedicated to Greek varied from three hours in the first grade to six in the fifth. At the Manzoni School, the range was from three in the first grade to five in the third. There were 246 students in all, including 108 Jewish children¹⁶⁷.

In addition to the above, Salonika had an Italian gymnasium, named after King Umberto I of Italy, that included a middle school of four classes and a high school of three. Instruction was provided by fifteen teachers, of whom three taught Greek. Students in the middle school were taught Greek five hours per week. Pupils in their first year of high school received four instructional hours of Greek per week, while the two higher classes received three. There were 210 students in the institution, including 161 Jews¹⁶⁸.

Also active in Salonika were three institutions described as American, in fact run by Protestant missionaries, which only a few dozen Jewish students attended¹⁶⁹. In all, there were 2,114 students enrolled in the foreign schools, a stark decrease from the 4,300 registered in 1923–25. Dragoumis viewed the discrepancy as a great achievement delivered by the requirements imposed on foreign schools by Act No. 4868. He did not include with the above data the parallel figures for the various Ro-

167. Reports of the Santa Rosa and Manzoni schools, 11 January 1933, Gennadius Library, file 23: Governate General of Macedonia: Education and Church (1931–1936), subfile 23.5: Foreign schools (1933), record 153, Philippos Dragoumis Papers.

168. Principal of Umberto I Gymnasium, report on the school, 12 January 1933, Gennadius Library, file 23: Governate General of Macedonia: Education and Church (1931–1936), subfile 23.5: Foreign schools (1933), record 154, Philippos Dragoumis Papers.

169. Report of the American Agricultural Middle School, 20 January 1933, Gennadius Library, file 23: Governate General of Macedonia: Education and Church (1931–1936), subfile 23.5: Foreign schools (1933), record 155, Philippos Dragoumis Papers; principal of the Anatolia School, report on the school, 25 January 1933, Gennadius Library, file 23: Governate General of Macedonia: Education and Church (1931–1936), subfile 23.5: Foreign schools (1933), record 155, Philippos Dragoumis Papers; governorate general of Macedonia, report on the American boarding high school for girls, supplemental to the Anatolia report, 25 January 1933, Gennadius Library, file 23: Governate General of Macedonia: Education and Church (1931–1936), subfile 23.5: Foreign schools (1933), record 155, Philippos Dragoumis Papers.

manian, Armenian, and Jewish schools, which are instead given separately¹⁷⁰.

The statistical data in Dragoumis's archive afford us a number of intriguing insights. In early 1933 there were approximately twelve thousand Jewish families and a minimum of twelve thousand children of educable age¹⁷¹, of whom Dragoumis's report has 7,333 studying in one educational institution or another, indicating the return of education among Jewish children –in a quantitative sense– to where it had been at the end of the Ottoman period. Still, the ratio of Jewish students to total Jewish population, estimated at 10.5 percent, compares unfavorably to that of Christian students to total Christian population, estimated at 14.4 percent. A further curiosity reflected by this material is the great number of Jews enrolled in many of the foreign schools, particularly French and Italian, as opposed to the small minority of Jews in the German and American schools. (There is no reason to believe that the missionary character of the Protestant schools was the reason for their lack of popularity among Jewish parents, since the same parents did not hesitate to send their children to the French Catholic mission school.) It is clear from the data that the educational orientation of the Jews of Salonika was a very European Mediterranean one, as it had been for centuries. Also of note is that the Dragoumis report, like the reports filed by the schools themselves, indicates that the Greek government demanded that the Jewish community dedicate far more instructional hours to the Greek language and other subjects taught in Greek than foreign schools were providing.

In summary, the tension between hellenization and the foreign trends represented by French, Italian, and Hebrew did not lapse between 1912 and 1933. In spite of the energetic hellenization policy of the Greek government, the level of hellenization was quantitatively quite low. As the community embarked on its final decade of existence, 30 percent of Jewish children who received any education attended foreign, non-Greek schools. Of those who received public education, some 20 percent at-

170. Dragoumis, secret report.

171. See below, p. 219, note 314.

tended Greek state schools for Jews or general-population schools¹⁷². The remainder of the students attended community schools that still struggled to preserve their Jewish identity. Thus if the Greek policy of hellenization is judged by quantitative as well as qualitative accomplishments, the results are far from impressive. The reaction of officials in the Jewish community responsible for formulating and executing community policies toward these official efforts cannot be understood in ideological terms: all tried their best to provide education to the greatest number of students possible, at the least possible expense, out of a desire to achieve what they saw as the best possible results for the future of the community's children.

8. The Supreme Education Committee

The routine business of the communal education system was the province of the Supreme Education Committee, at least six of whose nine members were present at each weekly meeting. Two members were *hakhamim*, members of the Religious Council¹⁷³, and there always were others who were members of the Executive Committee as well¹⁷⁴. Leon Gattegno, who served as chairman of the Supreme Education Committee in the 1930s, concurrently served on the Executive Committee, as did Mentech Bessantci¹⁷⁵. The overlapping membership of the bodies is intriguing in light of the fact that there often were conflicts of interest between the two¹⁷⁶.

The Supreme Education Committee had several standing subcommittees. One of these, the Pedagogy Subcommittee, was responsible for purely educational matters, such as planning the content and schedule of the curriculum. The same subcommittee issued decisions regarding

172. The percentage given is based on the total of 2,271 students in these schools cited by Naar (*Jewish Salonica*, 170).

173. Regarding the Religious Council, the communal body responsible for religious affairs, see Rozen, "Organizational Patterns", 310.

174. *Ibid.*, 310–11, 321–30.

175. Protocols of the Supreme Education Committee (BZI). Cf., e.g., Rozen, "Organizational Patterns", 337, 352–53.

176. See above, p. 168 and below, pp. 183, 193.

the distribution of students among the various schools, opening new classes, and closing underpopulated classes, and made recommendations to hire or fire teachers¹⁷⁷.

The Rentals Subcommittee handled the rental of real property dedicated in trust to the school system of the community¹⁷⁸. It transpires from the protocols of the Supreme Education Committee that the school system received revenues from the rental of at least eight properties¹⁷⁹. Income from four of these provided annual income of forty-two thousand to forty-five thousand drachmas¹⁸⁰, while the most lucrative asset, the Cedid Han, earned at least four hundred thousand drachmas every year¹⁸¹. The income could not be diverted by the community to other purposes, but it was not sufficient to resolve the perpetual deficit run by the communal school system. In some cases, in lieu of some part of the rent, tenants contracted with the Rentals Subcommittee to maintain the properties under its management¹⁸².

The protocols of the Supreme Education Committee suggest that all decisions of the two above subcommittees were brought to it for further discussion, followed by either ratification or rejection, and ad hoc subcommittees were established from time to time¹⁸³. Although it might seem that the subcommittees and the Supreme Education Committee as a whole were largely boxed in by the more powerful Executive Committee, their overlapping membership may have minimized the extent of disagreements.

177. Protocols of the Supreme Education Committee (BZI), 136 (3 August 1933, 17 August 1933).

178. *Ibid.*, 102 (23 November 1932).

179. These include properties rented by the Modiano brothers (*ibid.*, 102; 23 November 1932), Lambropoulos (*ibid.*), Viziropoulos (*ibid.*), Ya‘aqov and Yosef Kohen (103; 6 December 1932), Shelomo Shalem (*ibid.*), and the Max Nordau Association (106; 20 December 1932). Other assets owned and rented out by the committee included Cedid Han, whose name means “the new caravanserai” notwithstanding the fact that it actually was a covered bazaar (110; 25 January 1933), and Dimitrios (114; 8 February 1933).

180. *Ibid.*, 106 (20 December 1932).

181. *Ibid.*, 110 (25 January 1933).

182. See, e.g., *ibid.*, 112 (2 February 1933), 114 (8 February 1933).

183. See below, p. 188-89.

Whereas the subcommittees named above were charged with general responsibility for teachers, the curriculum, assets, and other elements of the school system, there was an additional subcommittee created by the Supreme Education Committee for each community school. The task of these latter subcommittees, each of which consisted of three or four members, was to deal with students and their families in general and specifically to determine, together with the principal and neighborhood supervisor, the tuition fees to be paid by parents¹⁸⁴.

9. Personnel Changes, Political Upheaval, and the End of Jewish Education (1933–1941)

The year 1933 saw the appointment of two community functionaries with significant consequences for the school system. First was that of Tzevi Simha Koretz as the rabbi of the community¹⁸⁵. Koretz, a Zionist in thought and deed, belonged to the mainstream of the leading European Zionist movement, or General Zionists. He may have been reasonably expected to adhere to the Zionist path as delineated by the hard core of the Zionist movement, whose members sought to make their way to Palestine. Surely enough, on Koretz's arrival in Salonika, he made just such an impression in sermons and discussions. The 19 February 1933 edition of *El Puevo* carried a sermon that he had delivered the previous Saturday in Bet Sha'ul, the largest of the city's synagogues, on "Education and Religion". In this sermon, he stressed the importance of religious education, the transmission of the history of the Jewish people to future generations, rebuilding the Land of Israel, and finally sustaining the ability of the Jews to live among the other nations.

Two days after the publication of the sermon, Koretz met with the members of the Religious Council. The local rabbis complained to him

184. Protocols of the Supreme Education Committee (BZI), 200 (incorrectly numbered 198, 23 August 1934). See also above, p. 158 and below, p. 191.

185. Naar, *Jewish Salonica*, 123–32; Minna Rozen, "Jews and Greeks Remember Their Past: The Political Career of Rabbi Tzevi Koretz, 1933–1943", *Jewish Social Studies* 2, no. 1 (2005): 111–65.

of the estrangement of the youth from religion, asserting that many young Jews were studying at foreign schools and emerging as *libres pensadores* – freethinkers. Raphael Menaché, the secretary of the chief rabbinate, argued to Koretz that the solution for these ills was the reinstatement of the traditional system of congregations (under which they had been differentiated according to the places of origin of those who had arrived in Salonika after their expulsion from the Iberian Peninsula and southern Italy in 1492). To this, Koretz diplomatically replied that he lacked knowledge of local customs and would seek guidance from the other rabbis. All left the meeting quite content¹⁸⁶.

In a sermon most of which was published in *Aksion* on the eve of Rosh ha-Shana 5694 (1933), the rabbi declaimed, “Knowledge of the Hebrew language and of our four-thousand-year history shows the youth the great treasures of our civilization and presents to them the important figures who are the bedrock of our existence. When the youth study their lives and deeds, they come to view them as role models and wish to follow in their footsteps”¹⁸⁷.

Due to a change in the laws of the mandatory government, immigration to Palestine of persons who lacked property had become easier at this juncture even as other destinations were rapidly closing¹⁸⁸. Preparing the Salonikan masses for the voyage was more and more pressing. In the eyes of Zionist circles radical as well as moderate, the appointment at such a critical juncture for Jewish education of a chief rabbi with the views espoused by Koretz was a most auspicious turn of events, promising a dramatic turnabout in Zionist and religious education. However, natural though this course may seem, it is not the direction in which events proceeded in practice.

The second major change of personnel in 1933 came with the passing of Zalman Kuhn, the longtime superintendent of community schools¹⁸⁹.

186. “Dr. Koretz and Our Justices” [Ladino], *El Pueblo*, 26 February 1933, 4.

187. “The Religious Education of Our Youth” [Ladino], *Aksion*, 29 September 1933, 2.

188. Albert Montefiore Hyamson, *Palestine: A Policy* (London: Methuen, 1942), 147–52.

189. Protocols of the Supreme Education Committee (BZI), 113 (6 February 1933).

He was succeeded for a short time by David Florentin, a journalist and vice president of the Salonika Zionist Federation, but Florentin decamped to the Land of Israel, leaving the post to wait for an appropriate person to fill it. A lengthy debate over who ought to be chosen as the next superintendent went unresolved as agitation grew on the street and among Jewish teachers, with the latter resenting the fact that a new superintendent, if only a temporary one, was to be selected without their advice¹⁹⁰. Unpaid teachers whose salaries were cut off went on strike¹⁹¹, and one scandal followed another in the Jewish schools, where uncontrolled students erupted in shouts of “We don’t want Greek! We want French and Ladino!” at Greek instructional staff. Students at the Reji Vardar School went so far as to fling an admixture of curses and rocks at their teachers. A delegation of teachers appeared before the municipal education committee and declared that their attendance thenceforth would be conditioned on the provision of a police escort. The Greek press attributed the violence to an anti-Greek ferment “characteristic of the Jews of our city”¹⁹².

Additional problems were not lacking. The considerable extent of funding invested by the government in the Jewish schools led to protests by Greek parents that their children had been left to fend for themselves on the street even as newly constructed schools were given to the Jewish community¹⁹³. In the meantime, the Jewish education system functioned without a superintendent. Even once the Supreme Education Committee had found a suitable candidate to replace Florentin, actually bringing that candidate to Salonika took until November 1933. The newcomer was Ze’ev Wolodarsky, accompanied by his wife, who was a

190. Ibid., 115 (10 February 1933), 121 (30 March 1933), 122 (19 April 1933), 124 (26 April 1933), 125 (2 May 1933), 126 (10 May 1933), 131 (13 July 1933), 134 (25 July 1933), 136 (3 August 1933), 139 (24 August 1933), 140 (20 August 1933).

191. Ibid., 151–53 (incorrectly numbered 149–51, 20 November 1933). (Page numbering in the original is incorrect from p. 141.)

192. “Σχολεία –μαθηταί λιθοβολούντες τους διδασκάλους και υβρίζοντες την Ελληνικήν γλώσσα” [Schools: Students threw rocks at Greek teachers and cursed the Greek language], *Μακεδονία* [Macedonia], 31 October 1933, 4.

193. “Εβραϊοποιούνται τα δημοτικά σχολεία” [The Hebraization of the Greek primary schools], *Μακεδονία*, 17 October 1933, 4.

certified kindergarten teacher, and another young female teacher¹⁹⁴. As Wolodarsky saw it, the heart of his job was the dissemination among the children of the Hebrew language. His perfect knowledge of Hebrew as pronounced in Sephardic milieus, as opposed to another Ashkenazic candidate, was one of the qualities that had won him a warm recommendation from David Florentin and Eliyyahu Strumsa¹⁹⁵. Both Florentin and Strumsa felt that Wolodarsky was just the right man for the job and anticipated that he would successfully train students in the upper classes of the Talmud Torah School¹⁹⁶ to become teachers themselves and carry on his work¹⁹⁷. This mission was critical to their goal of preparing the young generation for emigration to the Land of Israel. This was by now the only solution envisaged by the Zionist leadership for the “masses”, and yet an unattainable one due to an insufficiency of teachers of Modern Hebrew, a key defect of the Jewish school system in Salonika.

The first echoes of the plan for such “classes of higher education” were heard mere months after the arrival of Rabbi Koretz in the city, and even before he was sworn in at the office of the governor general. It seems logical enough that he was behind the idea; at the same time, there is no clear evidence that this was the case. The only reference to him at this stage concerns the need for his authorization to open a class¹⁹⁸, while the

194. Protocols of the Supreme Education Committee (BZI), 148 (incorrectly numbered 150, 7 November 1933). See also below, p. 194.

195. Eliyyahu Strumsa was a teacher of the higher grades of the Jewish education system and a ritual slaughterer. He appears in a list dated 16 September 1936 of the community’s employees that was compiled for Rabbi Koretz: fond 1428, opis 1, file 110, Moscow Archive (digital archive no. 20214, cassette 119, time 1:12:55). He is also mentioned as a Hebrew teacher in the Protocols of the Supreme Education Committee (BZI), 136 (17 August 1933).

196. Presumably the upper classes of the Talmud Torah School at 46 Velisariou Street.

197. Protocols of the Supreme Education Committee (BZI), 140 (30 August 1933).

198. The Supreme Education Committee decided on 5 December 1933 to start a “class for teachers and rabbis”, with new examinations to be held to identify suitable candidates pending the agreement of the chief rabbi; Protocols of the Supreme Education Committee (BZI), 155 (incorrectly numbered 157). Cf. Naar, *Jewish Salonica*, 174, who attributes the project to the two Ashkenazic newcomers, Koretz and Wolodarsky.

first mention of the plan coincides with the communal search for a new superintendent of Jewish education¹⁹⁹.

Only after Wolodarsky arrived did the process start to gain momentum. Hebrew teacher Daniel Saias, a graduate of David Yellin's seminar in Jerusalem²⁰⁰, began designing the course²⁰¹; Wolodarsky prepared a plan for the project and suggested that the teachers include the chief rabbi, Refa'el Haviv²⁰², Strumsa, Saias and Hanan'el Hassid²⁰³. Wolodarsky anticipated that the students would not receive a stipend, but only a better set of clothes (in the parlance of the community: albasha extra), and teachers too were to receive no additional remuneration. The community, he decided, would request permission from the government superintendent of schools to use one of the classrooms of the Agia Sofia School to house the venture²⁰⁴.

At the beginning of 1934, the Supreme Education Committee placed the project under the supervision of a special sub-committee comprised

199. Koretz arrived in Salonika in February 1933 and was sworn in on 11 August of that year (“Ωρκίσθη σήμερον ο Αρχιεραβίβος Κουρέτζ” [Rabbi Koretz was sworn in today], *Εφημερίς των Βαλκανίων* [Balkan events], 11 August 1933, 4). Koretz is not mentioned in the earliest document that discusses the idea (Protocols of the Supreme Education Committee (BZI), 132 (23 July 1933)).

200. Saias was one of a group of Great Talmud Torah graduates sent by Dr. Yitzhaq Epstein to Palestine to prepare to teach Hebrew in Salonika. See Hayyim A. Toledano, “The Hebrew Teachers in the Schools of Salonika” [Hebrew], in Recanati, *Zikhron Saloniqi*, 2:192; “Nathan Shalem” [Hebrew], *Salonika, a Jewish Metropolis*, 270; David Benveniste, *From Salonika to Jerusalem*, 1:114–15. On David Yellin's Hebrew-language seminar for teachers, founded in 1914, see “The Teachers' College in Jerusalem” [Hebrew], *Ha-Tzefira*, 16 June 1914, <http://jpress.org.il/>; Ruth Burstein, “The War of Languages and the Hebrew Teachers College” [Hebrew], *Hed ha-Ulpan he-Hadash* 100 (2013): 27–30, accessed 21 October 2018, <http://cms.education.gov.il/NR/rdonlyres/D05C76A1-AD7C-49D7-AA30-1B768EE86BCB/163846/4.pdf>.

201. Protocols of the Supreme Education Committee (BZI), 155 (incorrectly numbered 153, 27 November 1933).

202. In addition to teaching Hebrew, Haviv served as the rabbi and spiritual leader of the Mizrahi Youth Committee (Avraham Shemuel Recanati, “Va'ad Tze'irei ha-Mizrahi” [The Mizrahi Youth Committee], in Recanati, *Zikhron Saloniqi*, 2:485).

203. ‘Uzzi’el, *Salonika, a Jewish Metropolis*, 326.

204. Protocols of the Supreme Education Committee (BZI), 158 (incorrectly numbered 156, 14 December 1933).

of Shelomo Ezrati²⁰⁵, Leon Gattigno, and Mentech Bessantci²⁰⁶. The Supreme Education Committee managed to start the class for future rabbis and teachers at minimal expense, and the new superintendent persuaded the committee to buy the books that the teachers and rabbis required for the preparatory class, although the number of times he had to approach the committee in order to get this money is telling²⁰⁷. Wolodarsky also persuaded the committee to initiate remedial Hebrew courses for the candidates for the special class whose Hebrew was too poor for them to attend. These courses were to be funded by the parents²⁰⁸.

Another of Wolodarsky's priorities was to overhaul instruction in the primary schools. Within a week of his arrival, he had visited all the community schools and presented the Supreme Education Committee with a report exposing excessive class size, poor teacher training, and a dearth of proper textbooks, as well as noting the deplorable state of the building that housed the school in the neighborhood of Agia Paraskevi. His key recommendations, aside from Hebrew education classes, were to import professional literature for the teachers and to enrich the schools' libraries. In conclusion, he expressed his wish to visit the Hebrew classes conducted at the public schools for Jews, a delicate proposi-

205. Ezrati was practically in charge of the Spanish legation in the city, holding the title vice-consul; see "A Survey of Jewish Newspapers in the City, 1–10 November 1932", Gennadius Library, file 39, document 1, Philippos Dragoumis Papers; Daniel Carpi, introduction to *Italian Diplomatic Documents on the History of the Holocaust in Greece (1941-1943)* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 1999), 33–37. He was a member of the Supreme Education Committee at least as early as 1932; Protocols of the Supreme Education Committee (BZI), 101 (23 November 1932).

206. Ibid., 164 (incorrectly numbered 162, 9 January 1934).

207. Ibid., 158 (incorrectly numbered 156, 14 December 1933), 160 (incorrectly numbered 158, 18 December 1933), 164 (incorrectly numbered 162, 9 January 1934), 167 (incorrectly numbered 165, 22 January 1934), 169 (incorrectly numbered 167, 8 February 1934), 176 (incorrectly numbered 174, 15 March 1934). Only in mid-March was the expense actually approved, although it had been agreed upon in mid-December.

208. Protocols of the Supreme Education Committee (BZI), 164 (incorrectly numbered 162, 9 January 1934). Regarding the Hebrew education classes, see also below, p. 193 and Naar, *Jewish Salonica*, 174–75.

tion that required special written permission from the Greek superintendent of schools²⁰⁹.

In the following weeks, Wolodarsky took to cajoling the Supreme Education Committee to implement the recommendations of his initial report. However, doing so would cost money that was nowhere to be found in the coffers of the community, so much that teachers' salaries came to perpetually hang in the balance as a result²¹⁰.

In the meantime, the ongoing deficit of Greek teachers remained unresolved²¹¹, and alongside the other ills of the community schools, there emerged a new problem. Though state schools for Jews had instructions from the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Education to cater to the needs of their students with ten weekly hours of Hebrew instruction, this directive was not implemented on the ground and well might have gone unremarked if not for Wolodarsky. As a result of his persistent reminders, Mentech Bessantci went to see the new Greek superintendent, one Mr. Bilakas, who disclosed his intention to entirely do away with the teaching of Hebrew and leave only two hours per week of religious education²¹². From this point, Hebrew education was a bone of contention between the Jewish community and the Greek authorities represented by their local officials in Salonika. Notwithstanding the provisions of the law, their intention in practice was to erase, to the extent possible, the interethnic differences that thwarted their vision of a country of uniform, hellenized Greek citizens. That Wolodarsky was questioning the actual extent of Hebrew education most likely was known to the bureaucrats responsible for it, and probably was their reason for suddenly objecting

209. *Ibid.*, 148 (incorrectly numbered 150, 13 November 1933).

210. See above, nn.153,191; Protocols of the Supreme Education Committee (BZI), 155 (incorrectly numbered 153, 27 November 1933), 156–57 (incorrectly numbered 154–55, 5 December 1933).

211. *Ibid.*, 155 (incorrectly numbered 153, 27 November 1933), 159 (incorrectly numbered 157, 14 December 1933), 167 (incorrectly numbered 165, 16 January 1934), 170 (incorrectly numbered 168, 8 February 1934); 189 (incorrectly numbered 187, 29 May 1934).

212. *Ibid.*, 159 (incorrectly numbered 157, 14 December 1933), 161 (incorrectly numbered 159, 27 December 1933), 162–63 (incorrectly numbered 160–61, 4 January 1934), 164 (incorrectly numbered 162, 9 January 1934).

to the fact of his foreign citizenship, a point that had been resolved even before he was hired²¹³.

In August 1934, a new Supreme Education Committee comprised of Leon Gattegno, Mentech Bessantci, Isac Angel²¹⁴, Isac L. Molho²¹⁵, Robert Raphael²¹⁶, Salomon Ezrati, Albert Nahmias²¹⁷, and two representatives of the Religious Council was appointed, in accordance with the community charter. Upon election, they were reminded of the areas where they were to exercise authority: responsibility for the community schools, the curriculum, securing money for the construction and expansion of schools, selection of teachers, and establishment of subcommittees for the respective schools, the last function of which was dependent upon the approval of the Executive Committee²¹⁸. Yet despite the admonition, the performance of the committee members left much to be desired, especially because their most crucial decisions were subject to approval by the Executive Committee and the two bodies did not necessarily pursue the same agenda, in spite of their overlapping membership.

At the end of 1934, the seventh- and eighth-grade classes of the Tal-

213. *Ibid.*, 189 (incorrectly numbered 187, 29 May 1934), 191 (incorrectly numbered 189, 12 June 1934). Cf. above, p. 186, and below p. 202.

214. Angel was elected to the Executive Committee in January 1937 (document dated 8 November 1939, old file no. 204b, new catalog no. GR/SA 45, CAHJP).

215. Molho was a member of the municipal council for many years and a member of Parliament for the People's Party from 1933 to 1935. See Leon A. Nar, *Οι ισραηλίτες βουλευτές στο ελληνικό κοινοβούλιο (1915–1936)* [Jewish members of the Greek Parliament, 1915–1936] (Athens: Hellenic Parliament Foundation, 2011), 128; Rozen, "Narrow Bridge", section 2.2.1: The Jews in Greek Politics and the Fight for Political Representation. Molho was a member of the committee from at least 1934; Protocols of the Supreme Education Committee (BZI), 198 (incorrectly numbered 196, 23 August 1934).

216. Raphael concurrently served as a member of the Executive Committee (Executive Committee and Advisory Committee meeting protocol, 15 August 1934, old catalog no. SA/GR 247, new catalog no. SA/GR 39, CAHJP). He assumed this post no later than 1932; Protocols of the Supreme Education Committee (BZI), 103 (6 December 1932).

217. Nahmias was a member of the committee starting no later than 1932; Protocols of the Supreme Education Committee (BZI), 103 (6 December 1932).

218. Executive Committee and Advisory Committee meeting protocol, 15 August 1934, old catalog no. SA/GR 247, new catalog no. SA/GR 39, CAHJP.

mud Torah School were closed without notice. Parents, who were unable to register their children at other schools, fruitlessly pled that the classes be reopened, their pledges to pay the tuition unheeded²¹⁹. They were left with the sole option of registering the children at a Greek public progymnasium. Yet even so, in a testament to the low level of education among the Jewish children of Salonika, in 1936 only two hundred Jewish students attended any Greek or foreign progymnasium, comprising some 1.6% of all Jewish children of educable age, or 0.3% of the entire Jewish population of Salonika, as opposed to 3.7% of Christians in major Greek cities who attended gymnasium or progymnasium²²⁰. The meaning of these numbers is that among the Jews of Salonika, only the children of the rich were schooled beyond sixth grade, and the urban Greek population educated its children beyond this grade at almost nine times the rate of Salonikan Jewry.

Growing pressure on the finances of the community had repercussions for the community leadership, which gingerly began at this point to signal a retreat from its support of the Zionist agenda. In a three-part lecture series on the education of the children of Salonika that Rabbi Koretz organized in late 1934 and early 1935, he discussed the Jewish home's failure to transmit Judaic values and the preeminent role of the teacher in this task. He referred to the neighborhood children "who spend most of their days in the streets", as well as to the need to relate with due seriousness to the transmission of "Jewish and Greek values, so that they will be good Greek patriots and good Jews" –in that order²²¹. The contrast between these sermons and the one he gave upon entering office, where Judaism came first and good citizenship second, underscores the change in his understanding of the reality of Salonika²²².

In that year, the community provided education for 3,497 students in a total of eight schools, whose eighty-one teachers received their sala-

219. "The Question of the Upper Classes of the Talmud Torah" [Ladino], *Aksion*, 11 November 1934, 1.

220. "The Demise of the Elite: The Authoritative Opinion of Mr. Joseph Nehama" [Ladino], *Aksion Prensa*, 16 February 1936, 1.

221. "Lecture by Dr. Koretz: Educating the Child at Home and in School" [Ladino], *Aksion*, 7 January 1935, 4.

222. See above, p. 184.

ries from the community coffers. Most of the pupils were from families barely able to pay tuition fees or were taught at the expense of the community. The annual cost of the system to the community was 2,125,000 drachmas. According to community sources, the Greek government provided almost one million drachmas to this end. However, because government funds were provided to the community rather than directly to the school system, how much money from governmental sources was used for education is impossible to verify, as is whether complaints regarding the scarcity of governmental support were justified²²³.

The Executive Committee elected in 1934 took the view that “education is of utmost importance, and a community cannot evade its duty to maintain Jewish schools and even to sacrifice for the purpose”, a veiled reference to looming increases in taxes levied on the rich. For this tactic to be implemented, according to the Executive Committee, it was necessary that the education budget be returned to the general budget, as government funds given to the community for education had not gone directly to that purpose. The desired change would permit a larger part of taxes and government funds to be used for educational ends.

The plan was a difficult one to implement. The committee took pride in its intention to ensure the education of poor children and youth by hiring at great cost three additional certified Hebrew teachers brought from Palestine and reopening the seventh grade (though not the eighth) of the Talmud Torah School. Classes to train future teachers and rabbis were opened, and the Executive Committee decided to subsidize enrichment courses for teachers during the summer, as well as the purchase of Hebrew textbooks²²⁴.

Two related observations in the Executive Committee’s report as described in *Aksion* merit attention. First, according to it, the mission of the community school system was to provide education for what community leaders called *las masas* (the masses), a Ladino euphemism for the working class. Second, the report argues that this population must

223. Tzioumakis, “Jewish Population”, 113, 164, 178–88. See also Protocols of the Supreme Education Committee (BZI), 128 (8 June 1933).

224. “The Work of Education” [Ladino], *Aksion Prensa* [Action press], 6 September 1935, 2.

be enabled to study Hebrew. The reason was straightforward: the Land of Israel was the last remaining destination to which the poor of Jewish Salonika could emigrate, and knowledge of Hebrew would be indispensable in this enterprise. Little did they know that this window of opportunity would close in short order.

By the time *Aksion* had published the report, it was obvious that the three teachers named in it had cost far more than the community was able to afford. The annual salary of the new superintendent was 174,000 drachmas, which alone amounted to 17 percent of the community education budget. Blumenthal, a novice teacher who had completed her studies just before traveling to Salonika, received four thousand drachmas per month – double the salary of a local teacher with thirty years' seniority. Their arrival came precisely at a point when community employees had gone three months without payment. The community had debts amounting to three hundred thousand drachmas, and teachers who requested increases in salary were told that such a thing was impossible due to budgetary constraints²²⁵. The public agenda of the community began tilting toward integration in Greek society, acceptance of the demands of the Greek school system, and training locals to provide the education needed by the many who community leaders felt would be best served by migration to Palestine. This trend is apparent in articles published in *Aksion* as early as 1932²²⁶ and gathered steam following that publication's unification with *La Prensa Libre* (The free press)²²⁷.

The excess of importing teachers from Palestine was especially prominent in contrast to the circumstances of a school system meant “for the masses”, as described by an *Aksion Prensa* (Action press) writer who visited the Reji neighborhood:

“The residents themselves live in poverty ... people who go to sleep without supper. Barefoot children run about in the streets; as much can be attested by the principal of the school, who every day sends home

225. “The Classification of the Teachers and Mr. Wolodarsky” [Ladino], *Aksion*, 15 July 1935, 1; “The Community Schools” [Ladino], *Aksion Prensa Reunidos* [United action press], 24 November 1935, 6.

226. “The Difficulties of the Jewish Students” [Ladino], *Aksion*, 4 March 1932, 1.

227. “The Community Schools”, 6.

children who arrive in school barefoot²²⁸. In the suburbs of Salonika there were sixty to seventy-five children in each class, and as of 1936, the Reji School refused to accept new students for lack of space²²⁹.

Those opposed to bringing teachers from Palestine found a prominent prolocutor in the editor of *Aksion Prensa*, Elie Frances, whose newspaper increasingly preached the need to find a place in Greek society for the Jews of Salonika. He opposed the import of teachers from the Land of Israel on the grounds that it would be of no use. Migration to Palestine and elsewhere, he argued, had left Jewish Salonika a shell of a community populated by people unable either to help themselves or to emigrate. The luxury of learning Hebrew, as he viewed it, would not help them. Frances wrote that Wolodarsky had done nothing of service to the Salonika community. Sanitary conditions in the schools remained poor, thousands of children continued aimlessly to roam the streets, and class size was unforgivable. The half-million drachmas paid to the three teachers who had failed to be of benefit to the Salonika community could have gone to sheltering the homeless, repairing dilapidated classrooms, building new schools, and so forth²³⁰. He penned the article pseudonymously, signing only *Imparesial* (Favoring None).

In 1935, the community's teachers presented the Executive Committee with a new charter of their making that included treatment of both financial and clearly pedagogical issues, arguing that it was imperative for them to have a voice in matters of education. The Executive Committee rejected the charter. In March 1936, the teachers complained to the committee that their salaries had been reduced by 15 percent since 1933. They requested that this be remedied, as well as demanded higher pay grades, a request that till then had been rejected with the argument that government funding had not yet been received. Now that the funds had arrived, the teachers went on to demand that their salaries reflect the new pay grades that they deserved. The Executive Committee turned

228. "A Resident Who Cares, Toward Putting an End to the Propaganda Campaign: The True State of the Residents of Reji" [Ladino], *Aksion Prensa*, 3 May 1936, 1.

229. Elie Frances [Imparesial, pseud.], "The Lesson to Learn from the Employment of Wolodarsky" [Ladino], *Aksion Prensa*, 11 March 1936, 2.

230. "Lesson", 2.

down their requests²³¹. Nine of the community's teachers subsequently threatened to strike in the event that their meager salary were not augmented, then later gave notice that they would in fact quit.

Two senior educators, Michael Molho and Joseph Nehama, tried to warn the community leadership that the disintegration of the school system would threaten the community's future existence. Both had given up on the education of the poor out of concern for the education of the middle and upper classes, which they feared would be unable to produce a future generation of community leadership –and with no leadership, there would be no community. Molho complained that the Supreme Education Committee was run by shopkeepers rather than intellectuals with some understanding of the meaning of education. The two teachers' comments make clear that in their eyes, the population of Jewish students consisted at this point in time of three classes: the children of the rich, who received their education in foreign schools and, so they believed, would contribute nothing to the community or its leadership; the children of the middle class, who studied at the schools of an Alliance that had declined since its glory days; and the children of the poor, who were lost forever. None would prove capable of producing a new generation of leaders²³².

The resentment among teachers did not inspire them to be of any help to Nehama and Molho's aspirations, whose dream of creating the future Jewish elite through a quality education as they understood it never materialized. However, the resentment felt by them all proved helpful to those who favored integration in the Greek school system. The newspaper *El Mesajero* (The messenger) argued that the Greek superintendent of schools, one Mr. Ekonomides, was taking advantage of Greek law to compromise communal autonomy in matters of education and turn the schools of the community into Greek schools like all

231. Executive Committee meeting protocol, 8 March 1936, old catalog no. SA/GR 160, new catalog no. SA/GR 41, CAHJP.

232. Michael Molho, "The Death of the Elite" [Ladino], *Aksion Prensa*, 11 February 1936, 2; Joseph Nehama, "The Death of the Elite" [Ladino] *Aksion Prensa*, 18 February 1936, 1.

others with regard to all things but religion²³³. This doubtless was true, an extension of the trend against which Wolodarsky had warned since his arrival. Also true, however, is that in the Jewish community there were by now many who perhaps were not enamored of Ekonomides's maneuvers but for financial or political reasons offered no resistance. With new restrictions on Jewish immigration enacted by the mandatory government after the Arab revolt of 1936, the Land of Israel grew more and more distant²³⁴. In one article published in *El Mesajero*, the writer opines that the complaints of the teachers regarding Wolodarsky resulted from the scope of his salary rather than his performance, and that in the midst of their protests, they had lost track of what they should have been trying to protect: the rights of a Jewish community trying to stave off government oversight²³⁵.

In the meantime, in spite of the community's strenuous efforts to keep Wolodarsky in his position, a law enacted on 21 March 1936 forbade foreign citizens to step foot in school during school hours, so that he was prevented from entering the classrooms. Concurrently, and not without connection to the new law, an open conflict broke out between the Jewish community and the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Education concerning whether instruction in the Hebrew language ought to be considered language education or religious education. The community argued that such instruction imparted a national language to students, while the state classified it as religious instruction. The Greek government thus took the view that it was possible and sufficient to make do with the Hebrew Bible for teaching Hebrew, while Wolodarsky wanted to introduce modern teaching methods.

After the law was passed, the Executive Committee resolved to dispatch a delegation including Deputy Chairman She'alti'el Cohen, Education Committee Chairman Bessantci, and community attorney Yom-Tov Yacuel to Athens, where Members of Parliament Alberto Tcenio,

233. "A Grave New Blow to Communal Autonomy" [Ladino], *El Mesajero*, 31 March 1936, 1.

234. Rozen, *Turkey and the Balkans*, 1:296–310.

235. "Why Certain Teachers Are Attacking Mr. Wolodarsky" [Ladino], *El Mesajero*, 3 April 1936.

Isak Sciaki, and Haimaki Cohen awaited them, to take action²³⁶. In parallel, Koretz, Bessantci, and Eli‘ezer Mitrani met with Acting Governor General Stathakopoulos (Konstantinos Pallis²³⁷, the governor general, was in Athens at the moment) and drew his attention to the problems caused by the law and to its inconsonance with Act 2456²³⁸. Stathakopoulos then called Pallis, and the latter instructed him to delay implementation of the law pending his return to Salonika. That night, Sciaki, who then was in Athens, met with Professor Louvaris, by now the minister of religious affairs and education, in the home of the latter, who agreed that it was unimaginable to teach Hebrew using the Bible as a textbook. He also made clear, however, that Wolodarsky had no business in classes where Greek was taught²³⁹. The next day, the Executive Committee sent a telegram to the government demanding the annulment of the new law and stressing that Ekonomides was going to great lengths to cripple the autonomy of the community schools. As an example, they referred to an incident the previous day in which the Greek inspector of education had disqualified the Passover Haggada as an authorized study text, claiming that only the Bible qualified²⁴⁰.

On one level, it would seem that the Greek authorities were divided on the issue of the community schools, with Pallis and Louvaris taking a position at odds with that of Ekonomides. Yet the difference between them emanated from the fact that Pallis and Louvaris were at the time political officials. They too wanted to achieve the goal of hellenizing Jewish education, but being political figures, they needed to maintain good relations with the Jewish community. Ekonomides, meanwhile, was a civil servant, and thus free to reflect the true spirit of the central government in Athens. As much was surmised in an editorial in *El Mesajero* opining that Ekonomides’s circular regarding Jewish education reflected the true intention of the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Education: to

236. “The Question of Education” [Ladino], *El Mesajero*, 2 April 1936, 1.

237. Pallis (1871–1941) was a royalist military officer and served as governor general of Macedonia from 7 December 1935 to 2 June 1936.

238. See above, pp. 154–56.

239. “Communal Autonomy Must Be Reestablished” [Ladino], *El Mesajero*, 1 April 1936; Isak Sciaki, letter to the editor, *El Mesajero*, 3 April 1936, 1.

240. “The Question of Education” [Ladino], *El Mesajero*, 2 April 1936, 1, 4.

take the education of Jewish children out of the hands of the community and place it in the hands of the Greek state²⁴¹.

The editorial in *El Mesajero* took the position that the efforts of Koretz, Bessantci, and Sciaki to defeat the new decree were insufficient, and complained that the moves of the Greek government had been greeted with apathy by the Jewish community because only Hebrew instruction was at risk, but in truth the problem was far broader, extending to the autonomy of the community, no less²⁴². Yet the pages of the same newspaper bear evidence that the community leadership had left no stone unturned in striving to thwart the decree. Just a week later, unnamed community members recruited Markos Theodoridis, a former government minister and the leader of the local branch of the ruling People's Party, to support their case²⁴³. Subsequently, he wrote a letter to Prime Minister Panagis Tsaldaris explaining the problem. The prime minister's response was published in *El Mesajero* in Ladino translation:

Dear Marko,

I met with the minister of education with respect to the question of interest to the Jews. He established that he is handling the misunderstanding of the inspector [of education] with regard to the interpretation of the law. The Jews should not be concerned in any way. The question is being addressed, and there is no need to send a delegation for this purpose²⁴⁴.

Inasmuch as the People's Party relied on the support of the Jewish community in Salonika²⁴⁵, such reassurances were effective in soothing the worries of its leadership.

During the first week of April, the Executive Committee and Advisory

241. "Communal Autonomy Must Be Reestablished".

242. "Communal Autonomy Must Be Reestablished".

243. Theodoridis (1872–1952) served as minister of agriculture from 1935 to 1935, interim foreign minister in the government of Panagis Tsaldaris, and a member of Parliament for the People's Party; Demosthenes Koukouna, *Οι Έλληνες πολιτικοί 1926–1949* [Greek politicians, 1926–1949] (Athens: Metron, 1999), 74.

244. "No Need for a Communal Delegation" [Ladino], *El Mesajero*, 10 April 1936, 1.

245. Rozen, "Narrow Bridge", section 2.2.1: The Jews in Greek Politics and the Fight for Political Representation.

Committee met to consider the ineluctable problem of Wolodarsky. *El Mesajero* now openly editorialized, “We know that among us there are those who are interested in outside intervention”. Some teachers may have hoped finally to enjoy predictable payment of their salaries. The nameless other culprits were the wealthy members of the community, apparently joined by part of the leadership, whose interest was to free themselves of the burden of educating the poor²⁴⁶. *Aksion Prensa* took the opposite position to that of *El Mesajero*, arguing that bringing Hebrew teachers from Palestine brought no benefit to the community but implicitly proved that another part of the leadership wanted the poor to learn Hebrew so that they would leave Salonika and make their way to Palestine²⁴⁷. In either event, the central goal was to escape the burden of the poor, and as usually is the case, the truth lay someplace in between. There was a tension between the inclination to give the poor tools for leaving Salonika, and the disinclination to pay for these tools.

Despite Tsaldaris’s letter and the agreement between Pallis and community leaders that the status quo would be preserved, conflicts with the Greek superintendent of schools continued to arise. Wolodarsky was prevented from entering the Cazes School²⁴⁸ and then from entering Talmud Torah Nissim, while it was reported that the Greek instructor at the Kalamaria School had scrutinized the students’ bags for Hebrew language textbooks²⁴⁹. Just a few days later, one of the Greek superintendents of education, Mr. Vaionitis, presented himself at the Agia Sofia School and demanded that all Hebrew inscriptions be removed from the walls.

Community leaders saw this development as a new assault on educational autonomy, and Rabbi Koretz, accompanied by Member of

246. Sciaki, letter to the editor, 1; “One Who Puts on a Straw Face Is Eaten by Ducks” [Ladino], *El Mesajero*, 5 April 1936, 1, 4. Cf. A General Zionist [pseud.], “Speaking of the Community Inspector” [Ladino], *El Mesajero*, 20 April 1936, 2.

247. See above, pp. 185, 194. “Zionism and Assimilation” [Ladino], *Aksion*, 30 March 1934, 1. Cf. “To Save the Community from Ruin” [Ladino], *El Mesajero*, 19 April 1936, 1.

248. “Another Incident in the Schools” [Ladino], *El Mesajero*, 20 April 1936, 4.

249. “Further Incidents in the Community Schools” [Ladino], *El Mesajero*, 22 April 1936, 2.

Parliament Haimaki Cohen, Mentech Bessantci, and Mitrani, went to Pallis to again discuss the whole question of the schools. In the presence of the other Greek superintendent of education, Ekonomides, the delegation presented its position on all matters concerning Jewish education with attention to the requirements of Greek law.

According to an editorial in *El Mesajero*, the discussion was quite cordial and resulted in a number of understandings. First, the Jewish community was to retain ownership of its schools, and the natural representatives of the community –members of the Executive Committee and the Supreme Education Committee– would be permitted to visit them. Second, the question of Wolodarsky’s status was entirely separate from the question of the ownership and control of community schools. Ekonomides had discovered that Greek law forbade foreigners to serve as teachers or inspectors of education, and the delegation agreed that Wolodarsky’s situation would be reconsidered by the competent ministry and his status clarified once and for all. Finally, as far as books used for teaching Hebrew and the number of hours dedicated to this purpose were concerned, the governor general agreed to extend the status quo till the end of the year, and it was agreed that the community would work with the Pedagogic Committee of the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Education in Athens so that approved Hebrew books could be used and the Hebrew language taught in accordance with the educational program defined by the ministry²⁵⁰.

A week after the meeting, Cohen and Bessantci met with Ekonomides to explain that the Hebrew inscriptions in Jewish schools could not be removed, and he accepted their position²⁵¹. The Greek government, for its part, trotted out an assortment of carrots and sticks, with the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Education allocating one million drachmas for Jewish community schools divided into a protracted

250. “A New Attack on Our Educational Autonomy” [Ladino], *Aksion*, 28 April 1936, 1; “Wolodarsky Expelled from the Schools” [Ladino], *El Mesajero*, 28 April 1936, 1, 4.

251. “Hebrew Inscriptions in the Community Schools” [Ladino], *El Mesajero*, 5 May 1936, 4.

series of smaller payments, the better to ensure compliance with the ministry's demands²⁵².

The Executive Committee subsequently located in its archives the papers given to Wolodarsky by the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Education upon his arrival in the city, which authorized him to serve as the "rightful inspector". These were given to Ekonomides, and the community considered the matter settled. Counting on support from Pallis, and perhaps Louvaris as well, the Executive Committee decided to send a delegation to Athens for a comprehensive discussion of Jewish education with the newly appointed prime minister, Ioannis Metaxas²⁵³.

Before the delegation had even departed, however, Louvaris arrived in Salonika. According to "one of the editors of *El Mesajero*" who accompanied the minister during his visit, Louvaris said that the Jews of Salonika were entitled to give their children a Jewish and French education in equal measure to their Greek education and that the Greek superintendent's limitation of Hebrew instruction to the Bible was based on an incorrect understanding of the Education Act²⁵⁴. Altogether, he declared that the study of Hebrew needed to be independent of the general education provided by the Jewish schools, i.e., under the oversight of the community. The Jews of Salonika, Louvaris said, were law-abiding citizens and not an ethnic minority, and were not to be prevented from studying the language of their creed. Louvaris gave expression to his view that a Jewish Greek gymnasium ought to be established in Salonika so that Jewish youth would be able to obtain a higher level of education. If possible, he said, the gymnasium would employ an entirely Jewish

252. "Speaking about the Inspector General" [Ladino], *El Mesajero*, 20 April 1936, 2.

253. "The Question of the Communal Schools" [Ladino], *El Mesajero*, 29 April 1936, 1.

254. There is no indication of what Education Act is intended, but it most likely is Law 5872/1933, according to article 8 of which "the Jewish communal and private schools are allowed to deviate from the state school programs, after a decision of the Ministry of Education" (issued on 21 October 1933).

teaching staff and educational matters would be managed by a Jewish committee²⁵⁵.

The day following the interview, a delegation headed by Rabbi Koretz came to meet with Louvaris. The latter reiterated to them the entirety of the remarks he had made to the newspaper editor and proposed that future problems be avoided by the government's appointment of a Jewish superintendent of Jewish schools, who would be responsible for providing the principals with guidance for following the relevant laws. Louvaris said as well that textbooks used for teaching Hebrew clearly were not damaging to any religion even if they were not approved by the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Education²⁵⁶. With these remarks, he essentially repeated the comments he had made in early April when Sciaki had come to his home in Athens to protest the policies being enacted in Salonika²⁵⁷.

Louvaris's visit to Salonika stimulated a wave of activity around communal education. As it turned out, Louvaris was accompanied by two inspectors from his ministry, who came especially to study the problems attending Jewish education. A day after the meeting held by Louvaris and Koretz, there was another including Ekonomides and Vainitis, the two local inspectors; the two inspectors accompanying Louvaris, Mr. Zervos and Mr. Lippas; and Louvaris himself, and on the side of the Jewish community, community president Gattegno, Member of Parliament Tcenio, Supreme Education Committee Chairman Bessantci, and brothers Isak and Alberto Alcheg, who owned the Alcheg private school²⁵⁸.

The officials visiting from Athens, according to *El Mesajero*, recognized the community's right to supervise and inspect its schools, as well as to choose their personnel. They also recognized that all of the above were among the competencies of the Supreme Education Committee, whose members were required to be Greek citizens. Jewish principals, however, were not competent to restrict Greek personnel at the schools.

255. "The Visit of the Minister of Education to Salonika" [Ladino], *El Mesajero*, 29 May 1936, 3.

256. *Ibid.*

257. "Communal Autonomy Must Be Reestablished".

258. See above, p. 142.

Ensuring that the power structure would be perfectly clear, it was agreed that any letters or circulars sent by the government would be delivered first of all to the Greek principal, and he then would provide them to the Jewish principal. The community would be permitted to nominate a superintendent of Hebrew classes on condition that he have Greek citizenship. Teaching of the Hebrew language in the community schools would continue in the same format as ever, and the four Greek officials agreed that the Bible could not reasonably serve as the only textbook for this purpose, though notwithstanding the freedom of the community with regard to teaching Hebrew, textbooks would require the approval of the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Education. In order to expedite this process, a special book approval committee including Jews and Greeks and chaired by the chief rabbi would be created in Salonika²⁵⁹.

Of particular interest are the reported deliberations on the curriculum of community schools. After prolonged deliberations, participants at the meeting decided that a committee including the government superintendents of education and members of the Supreme Education Committee would arrive at a curriculum that would serve the schools in the next year and the foreseeable future²⁶⁰.

The Alliance schools posed a separate problem. The governmental inspectors insisted that these could not be considered community schools because even Wolodarsky was not permitted inside; hence they should be considered private schools. The Jewish participants in the meeting, though, noted that the majority of the students in these schools were from indigent families that could not afford private schools, and could not attend community schools because there were none in their neighborhoods, the implication being that the community bore the burden of their tuition at the Alliance schools. This matter appears to have gone unresolved²⁶¹.

259. "The Question of the Schools Is Progressing Well" [Ladino], *El Mesajero*, 1 June 1936, 1; "The State's Grant to the Community" [Ladino], *El Mesajero*, 4.

260. "The Question of the Schools Is Progressing Well" [Ladino], *El Mesajero*, 1 June 1936, 1; "The State's Grant to the Community" [Ladino], *El Mesajero*, 4.

261. "The Question of the Schools Is Progressing Well" [Ladino], *El Mesajero*, 1 June 1936, 1; "The State's Grant to the Community" [Ladino], *El Mesajero*, 4.

Finally, the Jewish representatives asked Louvaris to arrange for the government grant of one million drachmas to be given to the community as a lump sum, rather than in installments as originally envisioned, due to the severe deficit in the community budget. In return for all this and the government's other concessions, Louvaris asked the Jewish representatives to give up "50 meters" of the Jewish cemetery to facilitate the expansion of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki²⁶².

The next day, the two inspectors from Athens, accompanied by Bessantci and Tcenio, set out to visit four schools that the community administration described as representing the main flavors of Jewish education in the city: the Yosef Nissim School (i.e., the Talmud Torah School at 46 Velisariou Street), the "mixed" school²⁶³ (School No. 48, a state school for Jews), the Alchegh School, and the Alliance school (perhaps the Allatini School). Zervos reportedly was quite satisfied with the progress made by the students of the Talmud Torah in learning the Greek language and in their Greek civic education. At School No. 48, he promised to obtain government funds for renovations. At the Alchegh School, he was impressed by the high level of teaching, the conduct of the students, and the excellent physical condition of the school. Neither visited classes at the Alliance school, but Lippas had a long conversation with the principal, Joseph Nehama, who gave an extensive explanation of the communal character of the school²⁶⁴.

Judging by subsequent events, it seems that the burst of activity on the part of the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Education inspired community figures interested in the Hebrew language to continue taking action themselves. On 2 June 1936, Bessantci, Koretz, and Rabbi Eliyyahu Hasson visited the community school in the Baron Hirsch

262. "The Question of the Schools Is Progressing Well" [Ladino], *El Mesajero*, 1 June 1936, 1; "The State's Grant to the Community" [Ladino], *El Mesajero*, 4.

263. Mixed schools were state institutions for Jews where the community supervised Hebrew and religious studies but any spaces left unfilled by Jewish students were available to Christians.

264. "Yesterday's Inspection of the Jewish Schools" [Ladino], *El Mesajero*, 2 June 1936, 1.

neighborhood with the aim of assessing Hebrew-language test results and emerged quite pleased with the outcomes²⁶⁵.

In the meantime, the government kept up its concern with the Jewish schools. A scant three weeks after returning to Athens, Louvaris reappeared in Salonika. Kind as usual, he promised the president of the community, the chief rabbi, and Bessantci in a meeting that a new law would be legislated concerning the Jewish schools and a delegation from the community would definitely come to Athens to be involved in its formulation. He also promised to see to the community's wish to receive the government grant as a lump sum upon returning to Athens. Louvaris took the opportunity to express his wish to create a Greek Jewish state gymnasium in the city, and a committee was created upon Bessantci's suggestion to achieve that goal²⁶⁶.

The meetings with Louvaris reignited a financial crisis that had been simmering by now for several months in the community, and now threatened to ruin it. In April 1936, the six members of the Executive Committee stepped down on account of the crisis, only to rescind their resignations when no one was willing to replace them²⁶⁷. The leaders of all parties represented in the General Assembly²⁶⁸ suggested any manner of proposals to resolve the impasse, but according to *El Mesajero*, none was credible because every member of the assembly was tainted by corruption involving community real estate holdings, cronyism, or nepotism²⁶⁹. No member of the General Assembly would agree to serve on the Executive Committee, and the assembly refused to disband. In the end, the Executive Committee was populated with provisional

265. "School Oversight" [Ladino], *El Mesajero*, 4 June 1936, 1.

266. "A Communal Delegation to the Minister of Public Education" [Ladino], *El Mesajero*, 23 June 1936, 1.

267. "The Executive Committee of the Community Is Remaining in Place" [Ladino], *El Mesajero*, 21 April 1936, 1.

268. The General Assembly was elected by members of the community who paid the taxes that it imposed; see Rozen, "Organizational Patterns", 312.

269. "Elections! The Only Solution, the Only Way Out" [Ladino], *El Mesajero*, 26 April 1936, 1; "Disbandment of the Community's General Assembly" [Ladino], *El Mesajero*, 3 May 1936, 2.

members, the assembly was dissolved, and elections were announced for September 1936²⁷⁰.

The provisional Executive Committee was formed a day or two before the meeting with Louvaris, with a membership consisting of Gattegno as president, Haimaki Cohen as vice president, Dr. Albert Menasche²⁷¹ and Avraham Levi as secretaries, Aron Florentin as treasurer, and Isac Nahmias as comptroller, with Pepo Benosiglio, Isac Cabeli²⁷², and Hayyim Benroubi promising to assist. Of these, Gattegno declared himself “independent”; Menasche, Benosiglio, and Benroubi represented the Bloc Moderado; Cabeli, Florentin, and Nahmias represented the General Zionists; Cohen represented the Mizrahi; and Levi represented the Union Foburgista (Union of residents of the neighborhoods of the masses), a party identified with the Communists²⁷³. The continued functioning of the community, if perhaps temporary, seemed assured. However, just a month after the crisis reached this resolution, Zionist members of the Executive Committee protested understandings with Louvaris that they took to include the community’s consent to reduce the amount of Hebrew instruction, as demanded by the government. If their program of fourteen hours spent on Hebrew instruction at the community schools every week did not materialize, they threatened, they would withdraw from the Executive Committee and the community, without officers to take in money, once again would face bankruptcy²⁷⁴.

Initially, the Zionists’ agenda seemed to prevail. Louvaris expressed

270. “The Community Crisis Has Not Been Resolved” [Ladino], *El Mesajero*, 7 May 1936, 4; “Executive Committee of the Community: Elections in September” [Ladino], *El Mesajero*, 26 May 1936, 1.

271. Dr. Menasche was a physician at the Hirsch Hospital and a gifted musician. From 1945 to 1960, upon his return from Auschwitz, he served as president of the community. See his book *Birkenau: Auschwitz II (Memoirs of an Eyewitness): How 72,000 Greek Jews Perished* (New York: Isaac Saltiel, 1947).

272. Cabeli was elected to the Executive Committee in 1937 (Rozen, “Organizational Patterns”, 353).

273. “The New Executive Committee Was Formed Yesterday” [Ladino], *El Mesajero*, 22 May 1936, 1.

274. “Danger of a New Communal Crisis” [Ladino], *El Mesajero*, 24 June 1936, 1.

his approval for having teachers from Palestine teach Hebrew classes²⁷⁵, and the memorandum prepared by the community for the government regarding Jewish education was modified according to the Zionists' demands²⁷⁶. This modification proved only temporary, though. The community's leadership was apprehensive that the proposed program would be rejected, and the government grant remained very much needed, so the final draft presented to the government included only six to eleven hours per week of Hebrew instruction, and the Zionists kept their places on the Executive Committee²⁷⁷.

By now, Wolodarsky and the teachers accompanying him, having been prevented by the government from doing their work, had returned to Palestine. In late June, it was proposed that Bessantci temporarily take Wolodarsky's place as superintendent of education in the Hebrew language²⁷⁸. The proposal was presumably approved by the government, perhaps with the aid of connections newly formed by Bessantci within the People's Party, which he had joined when the fall of Venizelos had come to appear inevitable. A communal delegation was immediately thereafter to depart for Athens to meet with Prime Minister Themistoklis Sophoulis and bring legal finality to the status of Jewish education in Salonika²⁷⁹.

The news of the mission to Athens was followed just over two weeks later by the August 4th Revolution. Ioannis Metaxas seized power, declared a military dictatorship, dissolved all political parties and organizations, banned political activity, and began heavy-handedly deploy-

275. "Minister Louvaris Authorized the Engagement of the Hebrew Language Teachers from Palestine" [Ladino], *El Mesajero*, 28 June 1936, 1.

276. "The Question of Education, the Community Memorandum Has Been Modified" [Ladino], *El Mesajero*, 30 June 1936, 1.

277. "A Project of the Jewish Schools Program" [Ladino], *El Mesajero*, 10 July 1936, 1.

278. "The Meetings of the Executive Committee" [Ladino], *El Mesajero*, 3 July 1936, 1. Cf. Naar, *Jewish Salonica*, 332n166. The document designated *ibid.* as CAHJP S/A 200 recently was added to the new catalogue as part of GR/SA 302 (Correspondence and Documents Concerning the Inspector of the Commission of Instruction, Mentesh Bensanchi).

279. "Communal Delegation in Athens" [Ladino], *El Mesajero*, 16 July 1936, 1.

ing highly centralized government policies that countenanced neither counterviews nor negotiations²⁸⁰.

Metaxas viewed childhood and youth education as a central concern of the ideal Greek state that he intended to form. For him, revival of Greek language and religion, which in his eyes were the two pillars of Greek nationalism, was critical to the emergence of a “third Greek civilization” (the first two being those of the classic and Byzantine eras), and he thus saw fit to keep the education portfolio in his own hands²⁸¹. In addition to traditional education, Metaxas created the *Ethniki Organosi Neoleas* (EON; National youth organization), whose purpose was to ensure the effective inculcation of his ideology in Greek youth²⁸².

Foreign education, Jewish education included, clearly no longer had a place in the Greek school system. Although the Jewish children of Athens and other small communities who spoke Greek could join the EON (notwithstanding the formal requirement that members be Greek Orthodox), the children of Jewish Salonika were confronted with a problem posed by their insufficient knowledge of the Greek language. Metaxas aspired to minimize as much as possible the differences between minority cultures in Greece and the ideal Greek culture that he saw in his mind’s eye²⁸³.

In the weeks that followed Metaxas’s seizure of power, the news regarding his educational laws was followed on the pages of *El Mesajero* with great concern. By the end of September 1936, it was clear that Hebrew would be taught only in the two top grades of the primary school. In a bid to soften the blow to Hebrew education, Rabbi Koretz traveled

280. Robin Higham and Thanos Veremis, ed., *The Metaxas Dictatorship: Aspects of Greece, 1936–1941* (Athens: ELIAMEP, 1993).

281. Stanley G. Payne, *A History of Fascism, 1914–1945* (Oxford: Taylor and Francis, 1996), 319; Constantine Sarandis, “The Ideology and Character of the Metaxas Regime”, in *The Metaxas Dictatorship*, 159–61.

282. Marina Petrakis, *The Metaxas Myth: Dictatorship and Propaganda in Greece* (London and New York: Tauris, 2006), 18–25, 29–30, 51–52, 78–97, 142–49, 159, 184, 198.

283. Lagos, “Metaxas Dictatorship”, 127–63.

to Athens to meet with officials there²⁸⁴. On his return, he related that he had promised at the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Education that the Jews wanted to raise their children in the spirit of Greek patriotism and as good Jews (in that order). His request for an audience with Metaxas had not been granted, although he had been told that a meeting could be arranged at a later date²⁸⁵.

On 29 October, Athenian attorney Daniel Alhanati, who saw to the legal affairs of the Salonikan Jewish community in the capital, sent his clients a tersely worded account of the decision by the new government concerning Jewish education in Salonika:

A superintendent shall be appointed by the minister of education and religions to oversee the foreign schools and the schools of minorities. The superintendent shall receive his salary from the ministry. He shall be required to be an individual who has worked in the Greek Ministry of Education at least ten years.

The notion of the community's oversight of its own educational institutions thus came to an end. A further bone of contention was cleared by the next section:

The foreign schools shall be permitted to use books known and approved by the Pedagogical Council of the Ministry of Education. In the event that the foreign schools use books not approved by the Pedagogical Council, they shall be penalized by the ministry. In the matter of books to aid in the study of foreign languages, the schools shall be required to obtain the approval of the Pedagogical Council.

The third section of the decree forwarded by Alhanati established that students in the Jewish schools shall receive lessons on the Greek language precisely as in Greek schools. With regard to Hebrew language studies, the schools shall be required to obtain the consent of the Pedagogical Council. The Jewish schools shall be permitted to teach the Hebrew language, Jewish history, and the Jew-

284. "The Education Laws" [Ladino], *El Mesajero*, 22 September 1936, 1; "Education in the Jewish Schools" [Ladino], *El Mesajero*, 30 September 1936, 1.

285. "Chief Rabbi Dr. Koretz Returned Yesterday" [Ladino], *El Mesajero*, 7 October 1936, 1.

ish religion for fourteen hours per week in the first four grades of primary school, and eleven hours per week in grades five to seven. Furthermore, it shall be permissible under the law to teach an additional foreign language in the sixth and seventh grades for one hour per day, but not in excess of six hours per week²⁸⁶.

It is clear from the text of the new law that all Jewish studies were to be considered a single subject and instruction in this field would be limited to the number of class hours previously dedicated to the study of Hebrew alone.

The community refused to see the new law as the final word on the subject, and Bessantci continued serving in his roles as chairman of the Education Committee and superintendent of schools²⁸⁷. Over the course of 1937, the community persevered in its attempts to soften the limitations on the study of Hebrew, due to the problems associated with learning that language from the Bible. These efforts, however, were fruitless²⁸⁸.

Metaxas saw the Jews as people of a different religion who could not claim a different national identity by dint of language or history, and so the Hebrew language was to him only a religious tool. For Metaxas, religion was a pillar of good citizenship; for this reason, he insisted that Christian Greek teachers be God-fearing persons who would educate their students to be God-fearing as well²⁸⁹. Soon enough, his view of the relationship between religion and nationality penetrated the Jewish community. Rabbi Koretz, perhaps acting on knowledge of what to expect from the authorities in Athens, instructed the Executive Committee to require that Jewish school teachers attend services at the synagogues along with their students on the Sabbath, just as the Christian teachers

286. Alhanati to the Executive Committee, 19 October 1936, fond 1428, opis 1, file 115, document 464, Moscow Archive (cassette 122, Documentation Project of Turkish and Balkan Jewry).

287. Executive Committee and Advisory Committee meeting protocol, 19 July 1937, old catalog no. SA/GR 181b (inaccurately correlated in concordance with new catalog no. 230; content may reside in new catalog no. SA/GR 47), CAHJP.

288. Executive Committee meeting protocol, 12 September 1937, old catalog no. SA/GR 181b (inaccurately correlated in concordance with new catalog no. SA/GR 230; content may reside in new catalog no. SA/GR 47), CAHJP.

289. "Mr. Metaxas and the Schools" [Ladino], *El Mesajero*, 29 October 1936, 1.

attended church with their students on Sunday. The teachers refused to do so until the summer of 1938²⁹⁰; several weeks later, the regulation that Rabbi Koretz had attempted to obtain from the Executive Committee arrived in the form of an order from the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Education, through the government superintendent of educational matters, requiring synagogue attendance on the Jewish holidays²⁹¹.

Synagogue attendance in Salonika under the Metaxas regime was a matter of complex social, cultural, and religious significance. As previously noted, Metaxas wanted God-fearing citizens, irrespective of whether they were Christians or Jews. Meanwhile, the initial refusal of Jewish teachers to attend with their students can be interpreted as a result of their desire not to attend at all, but also as stemming from a preference to attend synagogue with their own sons or other male family members. Finally, it is evident that most fathers, and thus most sons, did not attend synagogue even on the Sabbath, because there otherwise would have been no reason to make the teachers bring the children. This last possibility is corroborated by a secret 1940 report prepared by Dr. Tzevi Zohar for Keren Hayesod in which he discloses that

whoever visits the Salonika community and brings with him the common assumption regarding the religiosity of this community immediately will comprehend his mistake. It is sufficient to obtain numbers from people who know something and are interested in emphasizing this quality (such as the Mizrahi people) to understand the true state of affairs. According to these numbers, the number of worshipers –or to be exact, the number of sermon listeners– on the Sabbath day comes to two thousand people attending fifty synagogues. ... A little boy could count those who cease working on the Sabbath day or close their shops in this great community²⁹².

290. Executive Committee meeting protocol, 30 August 1938, fond 1428 (incorrectly numbered 1458), opis 1, file 145, Moscow Archive (cassette 129, document 721, Documentation Project of Turkish and Balkan Jewry).

291. Executive Committee meeting protocol, 8 October 1938, fond 1428 (incorrectly numbered 1458), opis 1, file 144, Moscow Archive (cassette 128, document 706, Documentation Project of Turkish and Balkan Jewry). The government regarded the Sabbath as among the Jewish holidays.

292. Zohar, secret report prepared for the main office of Keren Hayesod (KH4/

Inasmuch as Metaxas wanted Jewish children to study Hebrew only to the extent necessary for their religious needs, new books in Greek had to be prepared for them to learn Jewish history and Judaism, as well as Greek history. During June 1939, Executive Committee meetings featured discussions regarding the preparation of textbooks²⁹³, whose purpose was to educate the children in a Hellenic patriotic spirit and “harmonize Judaism and Hellenism”²⁹⁴. While it seems that this was a venture of interest to both sides²⁹⁵, implementation was of course the sole province of the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Education.

It took only three months for the ministry to produce its Judaism textbook. When the work was complete, the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Education sought to have it evaluated not by Rabbi Koretz or some other knowledgeable person from Salonika, but by Rabbi Eliyyahu Barzillai, the chief rabbi of Athens. His verdict was negative: the books were not good. The members of the Executive Committee in Salonika, offended by the ministry’s disregard for their community’s seniority in years, size, and history of education, then argued that insufficient time remained to prepare other books, and asked for permission to continue using the old ones²⁹⁶.

Nevertheless, the community could not ignore the government’s demand for new teaching texts, and the Executive Committee therefore decided to allocate money for this purpose. However, rather than leave the job for the government or entrust it to any specific individual, the

B/2044, CZA) and sent by the Organization Department of the Jewish Agency to Mosheh Shertok (Sharett) who was at that time the head of the Jewish Agency Political Department on 2 December 1940 (S25/5282, CZA).

293. Naar, *Jewish Salonica*, 182–83. Cf. Executive Committee meeting protocol, 26 June 1939, fond 1428, opis 1, file 144, Moscow Archive (cassette 128, documents 617–18, Documentation Project of Turkish and Balkan Jewry); Executive Committee meeting 30 July 1939, fond 1428, opis 1, file 144, Moscow Archive (cassette 128, document 633, Documentation Project of Turkish and Balkan Jewry).

294. Naar, *Jewish Salonica*, 183.

295. Cf. *ibid.*, 182–83.

296. Executive Committee meeting protocol, 3 September 1939, fond 1428 (incorrectly numbered 1458), opis 1, file 145, Moscow Archive (cassette 129, documents 724–29, Documentation Project of Turkish and Balkan Jewry).

committee announced a contest to be won by the author of the best Jewish history textbook, totaling not more than three hundred pages, for primary and secondary schools. The award for a book written in Greek would be six thousand drachmas; in a “foreign language”, five thousand drachmas (probably due to the need for translation), and the author would be entitled to a share of profits from sales of the volume²⁹⁷.

The case of the new textbooks certainly demonstrates the intention of the government to complete the process of hellenizing Jewish education. It does not attest to enthusiastic cooperation by the Salonikan community. The Executive Committee and other leaders were not hurrying anywhere: within the idea of a contest was concealed the possibility that nothing would come of it. When the books finally were published in January 1940, there indeed were those in the community who shared the joy of the *Aksion* editorial staff, which had for years advocated the integration of the Jewish schools in the Greek school system²⁹⁸. Yet this was not the general feeling of the community.

The interest of the Metaxas government in reshaping Jewish education extended not only to curricula and books, but even to the main figures who administered the community’s educational agenda. One of these, Bessantci, was disqualified for his position by a new law passed on 29 October 1936. There is no evidence that he was at any time officially recognized by the Metaxas government as occupying this post, but nothing appears to have been done until 31 March 1938, when the Greek superintendent of the Jewish schools in Salonika gave notice that the governor general of Macedonia, now Georgios Kyrimis²⁹⁹, had decided that only the chief rabbi or the president of the community, or else a proxy, would be permitted to enter the Jewish schools to assess the performance of teachers of Hebrew³⁰⁰.

Thus notified, the Executive Committee of the community began to

297. Executive Committee meeting protocol, 17 October 1939, fond 1428 (incorrectly numbered 1458), opis 1, file 144, Moscow Archive (cassette 128, document 695, Documentation Project of Turkish and Balkan Jewry).

298. Naar, *Jewish Salonica*, 185.

299. Kyrimis served as governor general of Macedonia from 27 March 1937 to 8 April 1941.

300. Executive Committee meeting protocol, 12 September 1937, old catalog no.

fear reprisals from the government, though the reason for its concerns seems to have been not Bessantci's ineligibility for the post of superintendent of Jewish education, but the fact that he was serving as both chairman of the Supreme Education Committee and superintendent. Responding to this unease, Yacuel, the community's legal advisor, suggested that Bessantci's appointment was in fact legal because he was an employee of the Jewish community, on the community payroll and having contracted to serve for a defined period, and there was no connection between his two roles³⁰¹.

Ultimately, Bessantci continued to serve in both capacities. When his term as superintendent came to an end, the Executive Committee wrote a letter to the inspector general of foreign and minority schools to inform him that the community had decided to nominate Bessantci as superintendent for the next three years. The fact that he had been in office until that point merited no mention, suggesting that his status remained unfinalized, as far as the Greek government was concerned, until the end of his contract, in the autumn of 1939. In detailing Bessantci's qualifications in its letter, the Executive Committee noted that he had studied at the Great Talmud Torah and later at the Allatini School, and served as a teacher at the Great Talmud Torah and the Alcheh School –none of which, needless to say, sufficed for accreditation as superintendent under Greek law³⁰².

It took not even three weeks for the governor general to have his say. In a meeting with Gatteno, the president of the community; Tcenio, the now-former member of Parliament; and Raphael Halevi, the government's representative on the Executive Committee, the governor general stated his opposition to having a given individual in communal office for such a long period and demanded a list of twenty other persons

SA/GR 181b (inaccurately correlated in concordance with new catalog no. SA/GR 230; content may reside in new catalog no. SA/GR 47), CAHJP.

301. Yom-Tov Yacuel to the Executive Committee, 21 November 1938, old catalog no. SA/GR 351, protocol 6982, new catalog no. 178 a–b, CAHJP.

302. Executive Committee meeting protocol, 26 September 1939, fond 1428 (incorrectly numbered 1458), opis 1, file 145, Moscow Archive (cassette 129, documents 714–16, Documentation Project of Turkish and Balkan Jewry). See also above, p. 210.

from among whom he would choose the members of an entirely new Supreme Education Committee³⁰³.

The intervention of the governor general was unprecedented in the history of the Salonika community's relations with the Greek authorities; indeed, it was unprecedented in the history of the community since the arrival of Sephardic Jews in the then-Ottoman city following the 1492 expulsion from Spain. Until now, the community had chosen its own functionaries. There sometimes had been a need for the consent of the relevant authorities, but such outright interference was novel in the extreme. The community leadership must have tried to challenge the decision of the governor general, but he allowed only that he had no objection to Bessantci's continuing to work for the community so long as this work were unrelated to education³⁰⁴. Yacuel then stepped in and successfully persuaded Kyrimis to let Bessantci stay on as secretary of the Supreme Education Committee rather than the superintendent of Jewish education or a member of the committee³⁰⁵, a compromise that permitted the community to continue benefiting from Bessantci's long experience in education.

Clearly enough, the Metaxas government had been dissatisfied with Bessantci's success in keeping the teaching of the Hebrew language alive in recent years. Now, with no one keeping an eye on these studies, Rabbi Koretz demanded action from the Executive Committee, which informed the Greek superintendent of education that Gattegno would be responsible for the inspection of Hebrew studies in the community schools³⁰⁶. Eli'ezer Mitrani appears at a later point as the superintendent

303. Executive Committee meeting protocol, 17 October 1939, fond 1428 (incorrectly numbered 1458), opis 1, file 144, Moscow Archive (cassette 128, document 695, Documentation Project of Turkish and Balkan Jewry).

304. Executive Committee meeting protocol, 29 October 1939, fond 1428 (incorrectly numbered 1458), opis 1, file 144, Moscow Archive (cassette 128, document 671, Documentation Project of Turkish and Balkan Jewry).

305. Executive Committee meeting protocol, 31 October 1939, fond 1428 (incorrectly numbered 1458), opis 1, file 144, Moscow Archive (cassette 128, document 666, Documentation Project of Turkish and Balkan Jewry).

306. Executive Committee meeting protocol, 8 November 1939, fond 1428 (incor-

of Jewish education³⁰⁷, but Tzevi Zohar, whose visit to Salonika came at this juncture, insinuated in his report that the community had lost its right to appoint a superintendent to supervise instruction in the Hebrew language due to internal strife that gave the authorities an opportunity to eliminate this position³⁰⁸. However, whether it truly was internal discord that caused this could not be verified by reference to other sources.

Community education continued to encounter pressure from other angles as well. All Alliance schools had been consolidated with the community schools by early April 1937, with the Kalamaria School following in early 1938³⁰⁹. Hiring a new teacher now required not only a decision by the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Education, but also approval from the governor general³¹⁰.

On 21 May 1940, Athanasios Papaeugiou, the superintendent of foreign and minority schools, reported to the Greek Foreign Ministry that despite the passage of three years since the promulgation of the law requiring teachers in those schools to demonstrate competence in Greek, only thirty-three of the fifty teachers of the Jewish schools in Salonika had passed the test, while nine others had demonstrated some competence and eight had failed. Four of these last did not know a single word of Greek. Papaeugiou attributed this phenomenon to blind fanaticism and opposition to all things Greek³¹¹.

rectly numbered 1458), opus 1, file 144, Moscow Archive (cassette 128, document 649, Documentation Project of Turkish and Balkan Jewry).

307. Executive Committee meeting protocol, 8 September 1940, fond 1428 (incorrectly numbered 1458), opus 1, file 145, Moscow Archive (cassette 129, document 42, Documentation Project of Turkish and Balkan Jewry).

308. Zohar, secret report.

309. "Soothing Acts", *Paix et Droit, Organ de l'Alliance Israélite Universelle* 4 (April 1937): 12.

310. Executive Committee meeting protocol, 17 October 1939, fond 1428 (incorrectly numbered 1458), opus 1, file 144, Moscow Archive (cassette 128, document 695, Documentation Project of Turkish and Balkan Jewry); Executive Committee meeting protocol, 18 February 1940, fond 1428 (incorrectly numbered 1458), opus 1, file 145, Moscow Archive (cassette 129, document 794, Documentation Project of Turkish and Balkan Jewry).

311. Lagos, "Metaxas Dictatorship", 256–59.

Ultimately, the Jewish community came to terms with the new state of affairs and apparently decided to make what it might of the circumstances. In 1940 the community called on the Governate General of Macedonia to take its place in paying the rent incurred by a primary school³¹². The implication was clear: this is your education, and you will have to pay for it.

10. Jewish Salonika, Viewing 1940: A Look from Without and a Look from Afar

Aside from the protocols of the Supreme Education Committee and those of the Executive Committee, anyone who would give an accounting of the education received by Jewish children in Salonika in early 1940 must give consideration to Dr. Tzevi Zohar's report and Michael Molho's *In Memoriam*. According to Zohar's report, communal education still had a budget of three million drachmas per year, of which one-third was provided by the Greek government. These funds financed ten schools serving four thousand students. Three of these institutions were state schools for Jewish children (such as the Agia Sofia School); of the four thousand students, 1,500 studied in these. Five hundred children studied in Jewish private schools that catered to the needs of affluent families, several hundred (no precise number is given) studied in regular Greek primary schools, and another five hundred were enrolled in schools operated by foreign governments. All in all, Zohar counts approximately five to six thousand students in a community of sixty thousand individuals.

The numbers in Zohar's report are not entirely in keeping with those provided by Michael Molho, according to whom there were on the eve of the war five community schools, which catered to the needs of 3,805 students; four state schools for Jewish children, which served 934 students; and two Jewish private schools, with 245 students, in addition to 1,584 Jewish students at Greek primary schools, 839 Jewish students at

312. President of the Salonika Jewish community to Daniel Alhanati in Athens, 18 June 1940, old catalog no. 376, protocol 3364, new catalog no. GR/SA 183, CAHJP.

Greek gymnasiums, and 2,831 Jewish students at foreign gymnasiums. All in all, Molho counted 7,690 Jewish students³¹³.

The number of Salonikan Jews given by Zohar (more than 60,000) also differs from other sources, a more plausible number being 53,094³¹⁴. Even according to the numbers given by Molho, assuming an average of five members per family, including only one of educable age, only 71 percent of Jewish children in Salonika received any kind of education in 1940³¹⁵. Zohar states that the community school system was considered by the community leaders to be meant for the poor masses, but this was common knowledge³¹⁶.

Sent by Keren Hayesod to assess the Zionist potential of the Salonika community, Zohar was especially interested in the teaching of the Hebrew language and Jewish studies in general. According to his report, the community was entitled to receive from the state reports of the ethnic composition of every school in the city, and if a school had more than twenty Jewish students, the community could demand that teachers on its payroll be permitted to teach Jewish studies there. In the

313. Michael Molho, *In Memoriam*, 2nd ed. (Thessaloniki: Communauté Israélite de Thessalonique, 1973), 23.

314. Tzioumakis, "Jewish Population", 146; Molho (*In Memoriam*, 17) counts forty-nine thousand registered community members and 5,011 foreign nationals, totaling 52,300.

315. Cf. testimonies in Shmuel Refael, ed., *Routes of Hell: Greek Jewry in the Holocaust – Testimonies* [Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Institute for the Study of Salonikan Jewry and Association of Survivors of Concentration Camps of Greek Origin Living in Israel, 1988): Dario Akunis left school at age ten (p. 34), Shelomo Arukha at the same age (p. 46), Sha'ul Ben Ma'or never attended school and started working at age eight (p. 80), Barukh Elimelekh left school at age nine (p. 88), 'Immanuel Hanukka at age ten (p. 192), and Yitzhaq Levi also at that age (p. 284). The testimonies were taken in the mid-1980s and comprise 13.6% of the forty-four testimonies by Salonikan survivors in Israel that Refael recorded.

316. See above, pp. 56, 173, 185, 187, 194-94; cf. Ya'aqov 'Asa'el's testimony (O.3/2491, Yad Vashem Archives, Jerusalem): "The poor were illiterate. There were community schools where they could acquire only primary education. As for people of better means, it was beneath them to send their children to the community schools. They were sent to French schools or Jewish private schools where the primary language was French."

community schools and state schools for Jewish children, ten weekly hours of Hebrew and Jewish studies were scheduled. All other classes were conducted in Greek by Greek teachers, and by now, all principals were Christian Greeks –not on account of any government diktat, but because there simply were no Jewish teachers who knew enough Greek to teach general studies or administer schools.

Zohar was very pessimistic even with regard to those fields not taught by Greek Christians, as he perceived there to be no effective mechanism for preparing future teachers of Jewish subjects. The prohibition against importing teachers from abroad kept the level of teaching low, the books used were poor, and once children finished sixth grade, they never again saw a Hebrew text, be it a traditional book or a current newspaper. Viewing these circumstances alongside the lack of any Jewish high school, Zohar concluded that the young generation of Jewish Salonika was growing up with neither Jewish education nor “Hebrew culture”³¹⁷.

It is edifying to compare Zohar’s evaluation of education in Jewish Salonika on the eve of its extermination to the description written by Michael Molho immediately after the war on the same subject and years. The discrepancies between them are not limited to numbers. Molho, like Zohar, relates that all general studies in the communal schools were taught in Greek, but states that out of thirty-four weekly hours of studies, twelve –not only ten– were dedicated to Hebrew and Judaism. The study of Hebrew, according to Molho, started in kindergarten and was conducted according to the modern “Hebrew in Hebrew” method. Other Jewish studies started only in third grade and were conducted in Hebrew using modern methods. Unlike Zohar, who belittled the level of teaching in these subjects, Molho recalled that Hebrew and Jewish studies were taught by the graduates of what he called the “École Normale de Jerusalem”, referring to David Yellin’s seminar³¹⁸. Contrary to Zohar’s concern that there was no cohort of future teachers, Molho described a communal initiative to train as teachers the twenty best students of the higher classes in the communal schools, who studied for four years in

317. Zohar, secret report.

318. See above, n.200.

addition to their six years of elementary schooling to prepare for their mission of teaching the future generation.

Molho sums up his account by noting that the Jewish student was confronted by difficulties caused by his need to cope with two foreign languages, namely, Hebrew and Greek, besides his mother tongue, Ladino³¹⁹. In spite of this obstacle, he argues, the Jewish student assimilated the Greek language perfectly and distinguished himself in both the Greek gymnasium and the Greek university. He competed with great success in all the examinations for public office and employment at the great banks, all in spite of his “ethnic handicap”³²⁰.

At the same time, writes Molho, the Jewish child learned enough Hebrew to understand the prayers and the Bible, and not to feel himself disoriented in Palestine when he decided to go there to continue his studies or to settle down. A young graduate of the community schools, so he writes, had a real knowledge of his Judaism, and many found their way to Zionist activities without damage to their profound and sincere attachment to their Hellenic fatherland³²¹.

The descriptions left by both Zohar and Molho must be read critically. Zohar’s description invites credence because it is devoid of sentimentality, but the reader cannot but discern in it a sense of superiority toward the subject of his report: Diaspora Jews in need of rectification. Molho’s description meanwhile suffers from the opposite problem. Himself a survivor of that extinguished community, he cannot be objective toward his subjects – *De mortuis nil nisi bonum dicendum est* (speak only good of the dead)! His bias is especially conspicuous in view of his 1936 article “The Death of the Elite”³²². Both of his texts agree on a total lack of interest in the children of the “masses”, and he openly admits in the 1936 article that he simply gave up on them. The difference between the two texts is glaring: while in 1936 he was doubtful as to the ability of the school system to create a Jewish elite, in his eulogy he praises the intellectual achievements of the Jewish youth and the efforts invested by

319. Though Molho names the mother tongue as Spanish, Ladino is intended.

320. Molho, *In Memoriam*, 23–24.

321. *Ibid.*

322. See above, n. 232.

the community in preserving their Jewishness with no impingement on the nurture of their budding Hellenic patriotism.

The bulk of the different sources utilized here oblige us to keep in mind that the situation of the community under Metaxas bore no resemblance to that in previous years. The gates of Palestine were closed, and no others opened in their stead. Metaxas was a dictator –some would say a fascist along the lines of Mussolini, Franco, and Salazar. Yet this dictator memorably dissolved all of the anti-Semitic organizations in Greece and forbade *Makedonia* to continue publishing anti-Semitic articles³²³. Though he did not permit Zionist activities, Metaxas declared himself a supporter of the cause. He was given the honor of being inscribed by the Salonika community in the Golden Book of the Jewish National Fund³²⁴ and spoke frequently of his esteem for the Jewish people and Judaism³²⁵. Did he thus contradict himself? Not really. Metaxas wanted every resident of Greece to be loyal to the country and part of its culture³²⁶. In 1938, when immigration had become impossible and poverty oppressive, three hundred primary school-age children without benefit of school or teacher still ran about the streets of Reji³²⁷. In February 1941, community functionaries calculated that of more than forty-six thousand community members, there were 31,036 poor individuals eligible for nourishment from the soup kitchens. However, only eleven thousand of these in fact received food from the various such institu-

323. Lagos, “Metaxas Dictatorship”, 180–81.

324. “Mr. Metaxas’s Inscription in the Golden Book of the KKL” [Ladino], *Aksion*, 11 November 1937, 1.

325. K. E. Fleming, *Greece: A Jewish History* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2008), 102; “His Honor the Chief Rabbi Received the Head of State” [Ladino], *El Mesajero*, 6 October 1937, 1; “Mr. Metaxas Passed through Salonika: His Conversation with the Chief Rabbi” [Ladino], *El Mesajero*, 7 May 1936, 1; “Mr. Metaxas and the Jews” [Ladino], *El Mesajero*, 8 September 1936, 1; Rozen, *Turkey and the Balkans*, 1:292n171.

326. Cf. Zohar, secret report.

327. President of the Salonika Jewish community to the Reji Vardar neighborhood council, 18 March 1938, old catalog no. SA/GR 181b, protocol 3484 (inaccurately correlated in concordance with new catalog no. SA/GR 230; content may reside in new catalog no. SA/GR 47), CAHJP.

tions³²⁸. Amid such conditions, no person could afford to be particularly picky. What previously had been covertly contemplated now was declared without shame: who needs a Jewish school³²⁹?

Metaxas had succeeded in imparting to most of the community a sincere desire to make themselves a part of Greek Salonika as Greeks–Greek Jews. The Metaxas regime had no intention of converting the Jews of Salonika, but sought only –and single-mindedly– to turn them into Greeks of the Mosaic faith. It may be said that the Jews of Salonika eagerly capitulated to Metaxas³³⁰. They fought for him against the Italians until his unexpected death on 29 January 1941³³¹.

On 9 April, the Germans entered Salonika. The ensuing governments that collaborated with the Nazis averted their eyes from what then was done to the Jews living in Greece, now reduced to stateless Jews.

11. How Successful Was Greek Education in Hellenizing the Jewish Children of Salonika?

What kind of a cultural product emerged from the schooling that the Jewish children of Salonika were receiving come the end of the 1930s? This question is all the more deserving of attention in view of the fact that many of the available sources ignore the reality that at least 30 percent of Jewish children did not undergo any formal education, and many others did so only for a few years of low-level instruction. Also crucial is that the hellenization of the community school system was at full steam only for a short period before the great flood that was to sweep everything away.

328. Executive Committee meeting protocol, 15 September 1940, fond 1428 (incorrectly numbered 1458), opis 1, file 145, document 464, Moscow Archive (cassette 129, document 849, at 0:16:55, Documentation Project of Turkish and Balkan Jewry); table of poverty rates [1940/41?], old catalog no. SA/GR 227, new catalog no. SA/GR 375, CAHJP; Evangelhos Hekimoglou, “Jewish Pauperism in Salonika, 1940–1941”, in Rozen, *Turkey and the Balkans*, 2:203.

329. “Is There a Need for a Jewish School?” [Ladino], *Aksion*, 26 August 1937, 2.

330. Rozen, *Turkey and the Balkans*, 1:338–40.

331. Zohar, secret report; Hagen Fleischer, *Greek Jewry and Nazi Germany: The Holocaust and Its Antecedents* (Athens: Gavrielides, 1995), 9, 19n50; Fleming, *Jewish History*, 106, 237–38n71; Rozen, *Turkey and the Balkans*, 1:199–205.

The main barriers between the Jewish and the Greek Christian population of Salonika were religion and language, and since religion was not in the 1930s considered particularly subject to change, language was left in the view of the Greek state as the most important value that might be used in molding the Jewish child into an acceptable Greek citizen. Yet the issue of language was not tied only to the existence of the Jewish community in Salonika. The Slavs and Muslims of Macedonia as well required linguistic hellenization, and to this was added in 1923 the need to eradicate a whole assortment of dialects brought by the Anatolian refugees³³². Thus it is that the sort of cultural product received by Salonikan Jewish children in the short period from 1912 to 1941 is one of great importance.

One way of understanding the product is through the surviving evidence on the use and knowledge of the Greek language. In 1928, none of the 62,999 Jewish inhabitants of Salonika reported himself to be a speaker of Greek. In 1940, a total of 21,094 out of 53,094 declared that they spoke Greek quite often, though none reported Greek as a mother tongue³³³.

Unlike adults, children of school age who attended school lived much of their lives, though not all, in Greek. How did they experience their linguistic world? Most left no trace of anything, linguistic habits included, as they disappeared in the smoke of the crematorium chimneys. However, some did survive to tell their story, and it deserves attention. We have at our disposal two collections of testimonies by Jewish survivors from Salonika, one consisting of ten testimonies taken between 1960 and 1967 and archived by Yad Vashem, and the other a collection

332. Anastasia Karakasidou, "Cultural Illegitimacy in Greece: The Slavo-Macedonian 'Non-Minority,'" in *Minorities in Greece: Aspects of Plural Society*, ed. Richard Clogg (London: Hurst, 2002), 138–43; Philip Carabott, "Aspects of the Hellenization of Greek Macedonia, ca. 1912–ca. 1959," *Cambridge Papers in Modern Greek* 13 (2005): 21–61; Peter Mackridge, *Language and National Identity in Greece, 1766–1976* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 302–6; George Kritikos, "Primary Education in a Non-standard Language," in *Standard Languages and Language Standards –Greek Past and Present*, ed. Alexandra Georgakopoulou and Michael Silk (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 49–63.

333. Tzioumakis, "Jewish Population", 196 (doc. 25).

of forty-four testimonies assembled by Professor Shmuel Refael in the mid-1980s and published in his edited volume *Routes of Hell*³³⁴. Of the total of fifty-four testimonies, thirty-three contained some reference to the use or study of language³³⁵, while some other survivors, especially those interviewed by Refael only in the 1980s, presumably neglected to mention the study of languages because of the long time that had passed since their childhood.

Of these thirty-three informants, eight gave Ladino as the everyday language of their families and of Salonikan Jews in general³³⁶. In twenty testimonies, Ladino as everyday language is implicit³³⁷. Only two informants described French as the everyday language of their families³³⁸, while not one said that Greek had been his everyday language. Twenty-three informants stated that they studied Greek at school³³⁹, two stated that Jews generally did not know Greek³⁴⁰, and one of these two went on to say that even those who knew Greek never thought in Greek and spoke it with a strange accent³⁴¹. Sixteen informants said that they had studied Hebrew³⁴², and eighteen French³⁴³. Two testimonies were written in French³⁴⁴, two informants said that they had studied Italian³⁴⁵, three stated that they had studied German³⁴⁶, and one that she had studied

334. Refael, *Routes of Hell*. Professor Refael informed me that he had abridged and edited the testimonies in his volume, while the Yad Vashem testimonies usually (but not always) were unedited.

335. See table 1.

336. See table 1, entries 2, 9, 17, 18, 23, 25, 28, 31.

337. See table 1, entries 4, 5, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 19, 20, 21, 22, 24, 26, 27, 29, 30, 31.

338. See table 1, entries 14, 28.

339. See table 1, entries 1, 2, 5, 9, 10, 13, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 32, 33.

340. See table 1, entries 1, 2.

341. See table 1, entry 2.

342. See table 1, entries 4, 9, 10, 11, 15, 16, 19, 20, 21, 23, 25, 26, 28, 29, 32, 33.

343. See table 1, entries 2, 4, 5, 9, 11, 12, 13, 16, 18, 19, 20, 24, 26, 27, 28, 30, 31, 32.

344. See table 1, entries 3, 6.

345. See table 1, entries 19, 24.

346. See table 1, entries 24, 30, 32.

English³⁴⁷. All of the latter languages were studied in addition to Greek, Hebrew, and French.

Taken together, allowing for the limitations emanating from the passage of time and with an eye to the surviving communal documentation, the ephemera, Zohar's report, and Molho's account, the testimonies suggest that even with Greek education proceeding apace on the eve of the German occupation, there still was no way to ascertain just how long it would take to assimilate the Jewish children of Salonika into Greek culture and language.

Conclusion

An overall consideration of the history of education in Jewish Salonika from 1908 to 1941 discloses that although the community leadership understood the ramifications for its school system of the transition from the rule of the Ottoman Empire to that of the Greek nation-state, it spent the bulk of the period, at least until 1936, torn between a number of considerations. First, it retained its traditional inclination to use education as a tool for preserving group boundaries. Second, its leadership aspired to provide its own children with an education that would enable them to succeed in the traditional pursuits of the community, which revolved around international commerce. Finally, the leadership was further influenced by the immense price of offering a private parochial education to all the children of the community. It could bring itself to pay such an expense neither under the Ottoman government nor under that of the Greek regime, when the problem took on great political importance.

When geopolitics thus forced the leadership to search for solutions to this entanglement, there were two main possibilities. One was to come to terms with the government's designs of transforming the Jews of Salonika into "good Greeks": to let the Greek government shoulder the duty, and with it the cost, of educating the poor masses. Another way was to offer a Hebrew education that would enable emigration from Salonika to Palestine.

By 1936 the debate between the two solutions still was dominated by

347. See table 1, entry 32.

those whose central goal was to provide a Hebrew education that would help the children of the poor migrate to the Land of Israel, while those favoring integration in the Greek school system, although supported by the efforts of the Greek government, were at the disadvantage. In 1936, however, with the termination of migration to Palestine and the rise to power of Ioannis Metaxas, whose education policy tolerated no exceptions, the community fully transitioned to Greek education. No doubt the efforts of the community to preserve the duality of the education it provided, with its mix of European languages and Hebrew, and the refusal to adopt Greek education were damaging to its image and standing in the Greek state. For most of the period, there was a relatively limited group of children who were privileged to receive an outstanding private education, generally of a Western European flavor, even as a significant proportion of the community's children went with no education at all and most of those enrolled in the community school system received quite a paltry Jewish education. After 1936, all of the above were institutionally integrated in the Greek school system, which was entirely foreign to many of them.

The Greek education given to these Jewish children did not help them by causing them to be considered an integral part of Greek society when the German invader decided to send them to their death. The interpretation of their songs of yearning for Salonika, sung in Auschwitz in the Greek language, as a sign of their integration in prewar Greek culture³⁴⁸ must be questioned in view of the gross mistakes that peppered their verse³⁴⁹. The sad reality, as concluded by Katherine Fleming, was quite the opposite. When they entered the cattle cars, these Sephardic Jews, Romaniots, Salonikans, Jews from Old Greece, and others from the islands did not consider themselves Greek. They did so only once they had found themselves on foreign soil. The Greekness of these unfortunate souls was a new identity born of alienation in the new and deadly environment of Eastern Europe³⁵⁰.

348. Naar, *Jewish Salonica*, 80–81.

349. Shmuel Refael, "Spain, Greece or Jerusalem? The Yearning for the Motherland in the Poetry of Greek Jews", in *Homelands and Diasporas: Greeks Jews and Their Migrations*, ed. Minna Rozen, 211–23 (London and New York: Tauris, 2008), 220–21.

350. Fleming, *Greece: A Jewish History*, 142–43, 153–55.

Table 1
Use and knowledge of languages among the Jews of Salonika on the eve of World War II as described in survivors' testimonies

	Survivor name	Testimony source	Everyday language, explicit	Everyday language, implicit	Greek studied at school	Hebrew studied at school	French studied at school	Comments
1.	Avraham Arditi	O.3/2487, Yad Vashem Archives			Knew Greek very well			Jews did not speak Greek
2.	Ya'aqov 'Asa'el	O.3/2491, Yad Vashem Archives	Ladino		Greek		French	Jews did not speak Greek
3.	Leon Cohen	Sonder Commando no. 182492 ³⁵¹						Testimony in French
4.	Hayyim Hanokh	O.3/3215, Yad Vashem Archives		Ladino		Hebrew	French	

351. Along with the testimonies from Yad Vashem, my late teacher Professor Daniel Carpi, of blessed memory, gave me a photocopy of Leon Cohen's testimony, beginning with p. 49 and wrapped in a piece of paper on which Carpi had written in Hebrew "The Zionist Archives". However, I have been told by the Zionist Archives that this document does not exist there. Cohen's testimony was published, again without the first forty-eight pages, as *From Greece to Birkenau: The Crematoria Workers' Uprising*, trans. Jose-Maurice Gormezano (Salonika Jewry Research Center, 1996). The initial pages seem to have been lost, and as of 1 November 2018, the Wikipedia article on Cohen states –without citing a source– that even the whereabouts of the original document whose photocopy I possess are unknown.

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5.	Etti Hasid	O.3/1704, Yad Vashem Archives		Ladino	Greek		French	From a family of Spanish nationals; studied at University of Thessaloniki
6.	Hayyim Aladjem	O.3/1702, Yad Vashem Archives						Testimony in French
7.	Shelomo Cohen	O.3/2878, Yad Vashem Archives		Ladino				Did not learn Hebrew in Salonika
8.	Hayyim Karaso	O.3/3142, Yad Vashem Archives		Ladino				
9.	Elyaqim Bakhar Ioakeim	Refael, <i>Routes of Hell</i> , 20	Ladino		Greek	Hebrew	French	
10.	Shelomo Arukh	Refael, <i>Routes of Hell</i> , 46		Ladino	Greek	Hebrew		
11.	Shelomo Bibas	Refael, <i>Routes of Hell</i> , 54		Ladino		Hebrew	French	
12.	Renée Bibas	Refael, <i>Routes of Hell</i> , 64–67		Ladino			French	
13.	‘Aliza Barukh	Refael, <i>Routes of Hell</i> , 106		Ladino	Greek		French	
14.	Yosef Barzillai	Refael, <i>Routes of Hell</i> , 116	French					

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15.	Jerasi Yosef	Refael, <i>Routes of Hell</i> , 146		Ladino	Greek	Hebrew		
16.	Moshe Ha'elyon	Refael, <i>Routes of Hell</i> , 166		Ladino	Greek	Hebrew	French	
17.	Ya'aqov Handali	Refael, <i>Routes of Hell</i> , 182	Ladino		Greek			
18.	Shabbetai Hanukka	Refael, <i>Routes of Hell</i> , 198–99	Ladino		Greek		French	
19.	Eliyyahu Teva'	Refael, <i>Routes of Hell</i> , 205		Ladino	Greek	Hebrew	French	Also Italian
20.	Yehi'el Daniyyel	Refael, <i>Routes of Hell</i> , 226		Ladino	Greek	Hebrew	French	
21.	Yitzhaq Cohen	Refael, <i>Routes of Hell</i> , 242–44		Ladino	Greek	Hebrew		
22.	'Ovadya Cohen	Refael, <i>Routes of Hell</i> , 254		Ladino	Greek			
23.	Yitzhaq Levi	Refael, <i>Routes of Hell</i> , 284	Ladino		Greek	Hebrew		
24.	Esther Maestro	Refael, <i>Routes of Hell</i> , 290		Ladino	Greek		French	Knew Italian and German as well; father was a professional translator who knew sixteen languages

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25.	Avraham Mano	Refael, <i>Routes of Hell</i> , 314–15	Ladino			Hebrew		
26.	Ya'aqov Mano	Refael, <i>Routes of Hell</i> , 324–25		Ladino	Greek	Hebrew	French	
27.	Moshe Yitzhaq	Refael, <i>Routes of Hell</i> , 353–54		Ladino	Greek		French	Was a journalist for the Communist newspaper <i>Rizospastis</i>
28.	Jennie Nahmias	Refael, <i>Routes of Hell</i> , 364–65	Ladino and French		Greek	Hebrew	French	
29.	Mary Nahman	Refael, <i>Routes of Hell</i> , 370		Ladino	Greek	Hebrew		
30.	Jaque Stroumsa	Refael, <i>Routes of Hell</i> , 378–79		Ladino	Greek		French	Studied and knew German as well
31.	Alberto Tzarefati	Refael, <i>Routes of Hell</i> , 424	Ladino				French	
32.	Frida Kobo	Refael, <i>Routes of Hell</i> , 432–33		Ladino	Greek	Hebrew	French	Studied and knew English and German as well
33.	Ya'aqov Razon	Refael, <i>Routes of Hell</i> , 455		Ladino	Greek	Hebrew		

ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

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Η παρούσα εργασία εξετάζει την εκπαίδευση των Εβραίων παιδιών και νέων στη Θεσσαλονίκη από την εκδήλωση του Κινήματος των Νεοτούρκων (1908) μέχρι τη γερμανική εισβολή στην Ελλάδα (1941), μια περίοδο που χαρακτηρίζεται από τη μετάβαση από την πολυεθνική οθωμανική αυτοκρατορία στο ελληνικό έθνος-κράτος.

Η εργασία –βασισμένη σε μια ποικιλία πρωτογενών πηγών, σε αρχαιακό υλικό που δεν έχει μέχρι σήμερα χρησιμοποιηθεί, στα εβραϊκά, στα ισπανοεβραϊκά, στα ελληνικά και στα γαλλικά που συγκεντρώθηκε στην Ελλάδα, τη Ρωσία, το Ισραήλ, τις ΗΠΑ και τη Γαλλία, καθώς και σε περιοδικά και σε απομνημονεύματα– αξιοποιεί την εμπειρία των εβραίων της Θεσσαλονίκης για να εξετάσει μια ευρύτερη θεματική: τις συνέπειες μιας τέτοιας μετάβασης από την πολυεθνική αυτοκρατορία στο έθνος-κράτος για την εκπαιδευτική πολιτική των μειονοτήτων: Σε ποιο βαθμό μια μειονότητα θα είναι διατεθειμένη να επενδύσει για να εδραιώσει την ταυτότητά της μέσω της εκπαίδευσης; Τι κινητοποιεί την ηγεσία της να επενδύσει σε μια τέτοια εκπαίδευση; Σε ποιο βαθμό η εκπαίδευση αυτή εξυπηρετεί την πολιτική θέση της μειονότητας; Τέλος, η εργασία εξετάζει το καθολικό ερώτημα σχετικά με το πόσο μια κοινωνία είναι έτοιμη να επενδύσει στην ισότιμη εκπαίδευση.