

## THE SALONICA ISSUE AND THE BALKAN WARS

Dimitris MICHALOPOULOS\*

### ABSTRACT

Salonica was a Jewish and not a Greek city early in the twentieth century. At the outbreak of the First Balkan War, therefore, the Greek Army was to advance northward, namely to Bitola (Monastir). Still, the Greeks captured Salonica and not Bitola. In fact, the Ottomans made easy the Greeks' advance by retreating without fighting; for the Ottoman Commander-in-Chief wanted to prevent Salonica from being seized by the Bulgarians. As a result, the city was surrendered to the Greeks on October 27, 1912, albeit the Bulgarian Army's Macedonian irregulars had entered Salonica earlier.

After Salonica was annexed into Greece (thanks to the 1913 Bucharest Treaty), several steps were taken in order to persuade Salonica Jewry to abandon the city. Since, nonetheless, that the Jews were not eager to emigrate, a conflagration destroyed the very centre of Salonica, i.e. the part of the city where Jews had their homes and businesses, on August 5, 1917. It was arson; and the indirect responsibility of the Greek authorities is established long ago.

### SELANİK SORUNU VE BALKAN SAVAŞLARI

#### ÖZET

Selanik 20. yüzyılın başlarında bir Yunan şehri değil, Yahudi yerleşim yeri idi. Birinci Balkan Savaşı patlak verdiğinde, Yunan ordusu kuzeye, yani Manastır'a (Bitola) doğru ilerlemekteydi. Ne var ki, Yunanlılar Manastır'ı değil, Selanik'i ele geçirmişlerdir. Aslında, Osmanlı başkomutanının Selanik'in Bulgarlar tarafından işgalini önlemek istemesinden dolayı şehirden savaşmadan geri çekilmesi Yunan ilerleyişini kolaylaştırdı. Sonuç olarak, Bulgarların düzensiz Makedon birlikleri Selanik'e daha önce girdiyse de; sonuçta şehir 27 Ekim 1912'de Yunanlılara terk edildi.

Selanik Yunanistan'a katıldıktan sonra (1913 Bükreş Antlaşması sayesinde), Selanik'teki Yahudi cemaatin şehri terk etmelerine ikna etmek için pek çok adım atıldı. Yahudiler her şeye rağmen göç etmeye niyetli olmadığından, 5 Ağustos 1917'de Yahudi ev ve işyerlerinin olduğu şehrin merkezinde bir yangın çıkarıldı. Bu, Yunanlı yetkililerin dolaylı sorumluluğunda uzun zaman önce yapılan bir kundaklama eylemiydi.

#### INTRODUCTION

Early in 1912, the conclusion of an alliance of the Christian Kingdoms of the Balkans against the Porte was all but a Pulcinella secret.<sup>1</sup>The weight of organizing the war was initially carried by Bulgaria, pivot of the alliance against the Porte.<sup>2</sup> Autochthonous Macedonians were considered to be Bulgarians by that time and, if truth be told, most of them actually had a Bulgarian

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\* Board of Directors, Historical Institute for Studies on Eleutherios Venizelos and his Era, Athens, Greece. E-Mail: michalodimitris@gmail.com

<sup>1</sup> Sinan Kunalp and Gül Tokay (ed.), Ottoman Diplomatic Documents on the Origins of World War One. The Balkan Wars. First Part (Istanbul: The Isis Press, 2012 [hereafter: Balkan Wars, 1]), p. 33, doc. 9: Mavroyeni Bey, Ottoman Ambassador in Vienna, to Assim Bey, Foreign Minister of the Sublime Porte.

<sup>2</sup> Édouard Driault and Michel Lhéritier, Histoire diplomatique de la Grèce de 1821 à nos jours, vol. V (Paris : PUF, 1926), p. 71.

national conscience.<sup>3</sup> The Bulgarian political leadership, therefore, thought themselves called by duty to remove the remnants of Ottoman rule in Europe.

## 1. THE WARS

The Bulgarian Army was outstandingly strong in mid-1912. It numbered 300,000 men with 800 guns, whilst the Serbian one had only 220,000 with 500 guns (and a Cavalry 3,000 strong).<sup>4</sup> As far as the Greek Army was concerned, it was nearly 90,000 strong men in Thessaly,<sup>5</sup> but swelled to 100,000 at the very eve of the war<sup>6</sup> and doubled in number after the hostilities began, because of Greek-Americans rushing as volunteers.<sup>7</sup> There were also units of 10,500 troops in Epirus.<sup>8</sup> The prestige, nevertheless, of the Greek Army was low after the defeat it had suffered in 1897; beside that, the rank and file was undisciplined<sup>9</sup> and its Logistics left much to be desired.<sup>10</sup>

On the other hand, 300,000 Ottomans were expected to serve under the colours in the case of war in the Balkans;<sup>11</sup> nearly 25,000 of them were to fight against the Greek Thessaly Army,<sup>12</sup> but at the outbreak of the war merely 15,000 troops were ranged alongside the Greek-Turkish frontier there (with very few guns).<sup>13</sup> Further, the Greek Army had organized a well-working espionage network in Macedonia<sup>14</sup> and most of the Christian privates of the Ottoman Army were expected to desert after war was declared.<sup>15</sup>

The point, however, is that as early as mid-May, 1912, a Bulgarian-Greek Treaty of Defensive Alliance was signed in Sofia.<sup>16</sup> The Treaty was completed by a Military Convention signed in the Bulgarian capital as well, on September 22 of that same year.<sup>17</sup> The Bulgarian-Serbian Alliance Treaty and Military Convention were signed a couple of months earlier.<sup>18</sup> No alliance between Serbia and Greece was conducted;<sup>19</sup> for the Bulgarians were the irrefutable protagonists of the Balkan League's genesis and crystallization. The Bulgarian military leadership, moreover,

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<sup>3</sup> Albert Londres, *Les comitadjis ou le terrorisme dans les Balkans*. Translated into Greek by Dēmētrēs Michalopoulos (Athens : Petsivas, 2008), p. 21ff.

<sup>4</sup> Geniko Epiteleio Stratou. *Dieuthynsē Historias Stratou* (= [Greek] General Staff. Department of Military History), *Ho Hellēnikos Stratos kata tous Valkanikous polemous tou 1912-1913* (= The Greek Army in the Balkan Wars, 1912-1913), vol. 1 (hereafter: *Ho Hellēnikos Stratos*, 1), Athens: Dieuthynsē Historias Stratou, 1988, p. 25.

<sup>5</sup> Hypourgeion Stratiōtikōn. *Genikon Epiteleion Stratou* (= [Greek] Ministry of War). [= Greek] General Staff)-*Polemiki Ekthesis* (= Report on the War), *Ho Hellinikos Stratos kata tous Valkanikous Polemous tou 1912-1913* (= The Greek Army in the Balkan Wars, 1912-1913), vol. 1. *Parartēma* (=Annex [hereafter: *Parartēma*]), Athens: Ethniko Typographeion, 1932, doc. 211a: Colonel Napoleon Sōtilēs to the Ministry of War, Larissa, October 6, 1912, p. 98.

<sup>6</sup> *Ho Hellēnikos Stratos*, 1, p. 25.

<sup>7</sup> X. Stratēgos, *Ho hellēnotourkikos polemou tou 1912* (= The 1912 Greek-Turkish War), Athens: "Hellēnikē", 1932, pp. 45, 48.

<sup>8</sup> *Ho Hellēnikos Stratos*, 1, p. 25.

<sup>9</sup> *Parartēma*, doc. 1413: Lampros Koromēlas, Foreign Minister of Greece, to Crown Prince Constantine, Athens, December 2, 1912, pp. 478-479; doc. 1431: Constantine to Koromēlas, Salonica, December 12, 1912, pp. 487-488.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, doc. 120: The Crown Prince Constantine, Commander-in-Chief of the Thessaly Army, to the Ministry of War, Larissa, September 30, 1912, p. 55.

<sup>11</sup> *Parartēma*, doc. 5: Dēmētrios Panas, Greek minister at Sofia, to the Foreign Ministry of Greece, Sofia, August 14, 1912, p. 5.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, doc. 203: Information Bulletin signed by Captain Athanasios Hexadakylos, p. 92.

<sup>13</sup> Stylianos Gonatas, *Apomnēmoneumata, 1897-1957* (=Memoirs, 1897-1957), Athens, 1958, p. 39.

<sup>14</sup> Already in 1910, thanks to Greek consuls in the border provinces of the Ottoman Empire. (Historiko kai Diplōmatiko Archeio tou Hypourgeiou Exōterikōn [Archives of the Foreign Ministry of Greece; hereafter: AYE], 1911, 49, Eleutherios Venizelos (in his capacity as Minister of War) to the Foreign Ministry of Greece, No. 22626. B/48, Athens, December 4, 1910.

<sup>15</sup> *Parartēma*, doc. 195a: General Order (signed by the Crown Prince Constantine), pp. 88-89.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, doc. 2, pp. 3-4.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, doc. 16, pp. 11-12.

<sup>18</sup> É. Driault and M. Lhéritier, *Histoire diplomatique*, V, pp. 69-70.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71.

expected the war to be victorious<sup>20</sup> albeit a long one.<sup>21</sup> Still, the key person proved to be an Ottoman general, namely Hasan Tahsin Paşa. He was of Albanian stock<sup>22</sup> and fluent in Greek (and married with a Greek lady). His professional rise was unexpected. For at the beginning of his career, he was merely a rural guard; afterwards he became a non-commissioned officer in the Ottoman Army and, finally, obtained a commission.<sup>23</sup> His promotion to the rank of General was due to his many acquaintances,<sup>24</sup> though he proved at last to be a good officer.<sup>25</sup>

The crux point is that, when hostilities began, Ali Riza Paşa (and not Hasan Tahsin Paşa) was the Commander-in-Chief of the Ottoman troops in Macedonia;<sup>26</sup> Ali Riza Paşa was renowned for bellicosity and ability in warfare.<sup>27</sup> The question was, therefore, how Hasan Tahsin was substituted for Ali Riza. The whole story is like a conjuring trick. As a matter of fact, Hasan Tahsin Paşa was the Commander of the VIII Army Corps, with headquarters in Damascus, Syria.<sup>28</sup> But this very Army Corps came under the authority of Salonica (a heavily fortified city by then);<sup>29</sup> and so Hasan Tahsin Paşa was appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Ottoman troops at the Bistriça (Haliacmon) river.<sup>30</sup> At the end, an “extraordinary” VIII Army Corps was created, with headquarters in Kozanē, south-western Macedonia; and Hasan Tahsin Paşa gained the command.<sup>31</sup> This was the way that he replaced Ali Riza Paşa as Commander-in-Chief of the Ottoman troops against the Greek ones.

As aforementioned, he was an experienced Army officer. Yet after the first engagements with the Greek troops, he seemed to have lost every hope of gaining the war and made haste to retreat to Salonica.<sup>32</sup> In fact, the Ottoman troops abandoned their positions in Sarantaporon during the first hours of the 10<sup>th</sup> of October, 1912;<sup>33</sup> left intact a bridge over the Bistriça river;<sup>34</sup> did not defend Kozanē albeit well fortified;<sup>35</sup> did not fight on the Vardar river.<sup>36</sup> In other words, after the battles at Sarantaporon and Yenice-i Vardar, Hasan Tahsin Paşa did not want to resist any more<sup>37</sup>. Further, on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of October, the field officers deserted the Ottoman troops covering Salonica.<sup>38</sup> A couple of days further, i.e. on October 24, Lampros Koromēlas, Foreign Minister of Greece, sent off the following cable to Constantine, Crown Prince and Commander-in-Chief of the Greek troops operating in Macedonia: “According to information from Berlin... the Ambassador [of a Great Power]... implores you [i.e. Constantine] to enter Salonica the sooner the better; if so, it is most

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<sup>20</sup>Parartēma, doc. 5: D. Panas to the Foreign Ministry of Greece, Sofia, August 14, 1912, p. 5.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., doc. 3: D. Panas to the Foreign Ministry of Greece, Sofia, August 14, 1912, p. 4.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., doc. 1932: telephonic discussion of Major Skoufos with Kōnstantinos Nider, Chief of Personnel of the Greek Ministry of War, p. 467.

<sup>23</sup>Vasileios Nikoltisios and Vasilēs K. Gounarēs, Apo to Sarantaporo stē Thessalonikē. Hē hellēnotourkikē anametrēsē tou 1912 mesa apo tis anamnēseis tou stratēgou Hasan Tahsin Pasa (= From Sarantaporon to Salonica. The 1912 Greek-Turkish conflict through the memoirs of Hasa Tahsin Paşa), Salonica, 2002, p. 10.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid.

<sup>25</sup>X. Stratēgos, Ho hellēnotourkikos polemos tou 1912, p. 13.

<sup>26</sup>Parartēma, doc. 210, p. 97.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., doc. 209: Information Bulletin, October 4, 1912, p. 95.

<sup>28</sup>N. Th. Kladas, “Prōtos Valkanikos Polemos” (=The First Balkan War), Megalē Hellēnikē Enkyklopaideia (= The Great Greek Encyclopaedia), vol. VI (Athens: Pyrsos, 1928), p. 549.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

<sup>30</sup>Parartēma, doc. 197: Nikolaos Mauroudēs, Greek consul at Bitola, to the Foreign Ministry of Greece, p. 89; doc. 210: Information bulletin issued by A. Hexadakytylos on October 4, 1912, p. 97.

<sup>31</sup>Ho Hellēnikos Stratos, 1, p. 28.

<sup>32</sup>X. Stratēgos, Ho hellēnotourkikos polemos tou 1912, p. 13.

<sup>33</sup>Ho Hellēnikos Stratos, 1, pp. 56-57.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 59.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 62.

<sup>36</sup>Parartēma, doc. 681a: General Moschopoulos to the General Staff of the Army, October 23, 1912, p. 245; S. Gonatas, Apomnēmoneumata, p.41; X. Stratēgos, Ho hellēnotourkikos polemos tou 1912, p. 60.

<sup>37</sup>Parartēma, doc. 681: Hasan Tahsin Paşa’s cable captured by the Greeks, October 21, 1912, p. 244.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., doc. 702: L. Koromēlas to Crown Prince Constantine, Athens, October 23, 1912, p. 250.

likely that the Great Powers will agree to Salonica being annexed into Greece”.<sup>39</sup> The Ambassador in Berlin who was so keyed up over Salonica was the French one, namely Jules Cambon.<sup>40</sup> In other words, the city was ready to be taken by the Greek Army.

In reality, Hasan Tahsin Paşa was a landowner in the area around Salonica.<sup>41</sup> He dreaded, therefore, that Salonica might be captured by the Bulgarians.<sup>42</sup> For Macedonians, under Jane Sandansky’s leadership, were fighting the Ottomans as irregulars of the Bulgarian Army;<sup>43</sup> and Hasan Tahsin Paşa was terrified by the anti-plutocratic slogans put forward by the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (IMRO). As a matter of fact, bomb attacks, carried out by the “Boatmen”, an anarchist IMRO group, took place in Salonica as early as 1903.<sup>44</sup> These attacks were intended to provoke the intervention of the Great Powers in Macedonia in favour of the autochthonous Slavic populations; this aim was achieved thanks to the Mürzsteg agreement, concluded in that very year, 1903, between Franz Joseph, Emperor of Austria and Apostolic King of Hungary, and Nicholas II, Emperor of all the Russians. Yet the “Boatmen” were considered to be Bulgarians and their attacks panicked Salonica Jewry. That is why in 1912 the Jews of Salonica wished their city to be captured by the Greeks and not the Bulgarians.

As aforementioned, J. Sandansky was leader of the Macedonians fighting against the Ottoman troops as irregulars of the Bulgarian Army.<sup>45</sup> His komitadjis were the first to enter Salonica – before the Greeks and Bulgarians did.<sup>46</sup> Hasan Tahsin Paşa managed to have the city surrendered to the Greeks, who, unlike the Bulgarians and their irregulars,<sup>47</sup> had a great reputation for being lenient by then towards Moslems and Jews.<sup>48</sup>

Salonica was actually surrendered to the Greeks on the 27<sup>th</sup> of October, 1912.<sup>49</sup> Yet the surrender protocol was dated October 26,<sup>50</sup> in order to exclude Bulgarian/Macedonian claims to be lodged against Salonica’s occupation by the Greeks. It is in this very “fact” that the main cause of the Second Balkan War is to be found. For Sandansky’s Macedonians tried to legalize their capture of Salonica by placing the Bulgarian flag atop the minaret of Saint-Sophia mosque and intending to sing a Te Deum therein on November 1<sup>st</sup>. Saint-Sophia was an important Byzantine church,<sup>51</sup> the cathedral of the city from the 8<sup>th</sup> century on, that became a mosque in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Its very name exerted spiritual magnetism on the Christian Orthodox populations of the Balkans (thanks, of course, to its automatic association with the Istanbul *Ayasofia*). The Greek military authorities,

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<sup>39</sup> Parartēma, doc. 728, p. 257.

<sup>40</sup> Pericles A. Argyropoulos, *Apomnēmoneumata* (= Memoirs), Athens, 1970, pp. 101.

<sup>41</sup> V. Nikoltsios and V. Gounarēs, *Apo to Sarantaporo stē Thessalonikē...*, p. 10.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 68.

<sup>43</sup> Hermenegild Wagner, *With the victorious Bulgarians* (London: Constable and Co., 1913), pp. 251, 254-255.

<sup>44</sup> See mainly Giannēs Megas, *Hoi “Varkarēdes” tēs Thessalonikēs. Hē anarchikē voulgarikē homada kai hoi vomvistikes energies tou 1903* (= The Salonica ‘Boatmen’. The anarchist Bulgarian group and the 1903 bomb attacks), Athens: Trochalia, 1994.

<sup>45</sup> H. Wagner, *With the victorious Bulgarians*, p. 250.

<sup>46</sup> P. A. Argyropoulos, *Apomnēmoneumata*, pp. 103-104. P. A. Argyropoulos was the first Governor General (Prefect) of Salonica, after the Greeks captured the city.

<sup>47</sup> AYE, 1912, 2. 1, Nikolaos Gkikas, Greek vice consul at Kavalla, to the Foreign Ministry of Greece, dispatch No. 6, Kavalla, November 22, 1912; The Foreign Ministry’s Press Office at Salonica to the Foreign Ministry headquarters at Athens, dispatch No. 76, Salonica, November 27, 1912.

<sup>48</sup> Pierre Loti, *Turquie agonisante* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1913), p. 70.

<sup>49</sup> Victor Dousmanēs, *Apomnēmoneumata* (= Memoirs), Athens: P. Dēmētrakos, n. d., p. 57; Sinan Kunalalp and Gül Tokay (ed.), *Ottoman Diplomatic Documents on the Origins of World War One. The Balkan Wars. Second Part* (Istanbul: The Isis Press, 2012), p. 165, doc. 1272: Said Halim Paşa, Grand Vizier and Foreign Minister, to Osman Nizami Paşa, Ambassador in Berlin and member of the delegation at the London Peace Conference, Constantinople, June 3, 1913.

<sup>50</sup> AYE, 1912, 2. 1, the Major General Panagiōtēs Danklēs, Chief of the General Staff of the Greek Army, to the Minister of War (n.d.)

<sup>51</sup> Herbert Adam Gibbons, *Venizelos* (Boston and New York: Newton Mifflin, 1920), p. 125.

nonetheless, banned the *komitadjis'* Te Deum to be sung;<sup>52</sup> and the Bulgarian military leadership raised no objection. For it had already recognized the capture of Salonica by the Greek Army.<sup>53</sup>

The hypothesis that Hasan Tahsin Paşa was bribed by the Greeks is not to be excluded.<sup>54</sup> The Serbs, after they realized, during the spring of 1913, that the “sovereign and hereditary Albanian principality” to-be-created<sup>55</sup> would deprive them of an outlet to the sea, began disputing with the Bulgarians the most important part of Macedonian territory. And the Bulgarians, after being exasperated by the loss of the major part of Macedonia, began to quarrel with the Greeks about what was to be done with Salonica. In short, the Second Balkan war was unavoidable; for the Bulgarians believed that in the Salonica affair they would be backed by the Russians.<sup>56</sup> In fact, the war broke out in June, 1913; yet the Bulgarians, decimated by cholera<sup>57</sup> and abandoned by the Russians, were defeated.

## 2. THE AFTERMATH

Whatever the facts of the matter, Salonica was a Jewish city in early 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>58</sup> In 1912, prior to its capture by the Greeks, its population numbered 160,000 out of whom 90,000 were Jews.<sup>59</sup> The others were Turks (ca. 44,000) and Greeks (19,000). There were also Bulgarians, Armenians and “Franks/Levantine” (7,000 souls on the whole).<sup>60</sup> It is unnecessary to say that the Salonica Jews were Sephardim, i.e. people or descendants of people who lived prior to their settlement in the Balkans in the Iberian Peninsula.<sup>61</sup> They came to Salonica following their 1492 expulsion from Spain, and set up in Macedonia thanks mainly to Moses Kapsalis, chief rabbi (*hahambaşı*) of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>62</sup> It was Kapsalis, in fact, who persuaded the *Padişah* Bayezid II to open the Empire to Jews fleeing Spain.<sup>63</sup> The newcomers spoke *dzudezmo* (not to be confounded with Ladino<sup>64</sup>), i.e. Castilian Spanish adapted to Jews' every day life in an Ottoman megalopolis;<sup>65</sup> and speedily evolved into a major economic and financial factor in the Balkans.<sup>66</sup> For shortly after Jews from Spain poured into Salonica, new waves of immigrants, their co-religionists, followed them from Portugal.<sup>67</sup> Needless to say that, under the sovereignty of the Sublime Porte, the Sephardim enjoyed a privileged situation.<sup>68</sup> That is why Salonica was regarded as the virtual “Mother of Israel”.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> General P. G. Danklēs, *Anamnēseis – Engrapha – Allēlographia. To archeion tou* (= Memoirs – Documents – Correspondence. His Archives). Edited by X. Leukoparidēs, vol. II, (Athens: Vagionakēs, 1965), p. 16.

<sup>53</sup> P. A. Argyropoulos, *Apomnēmoneumata*, p. 104.

<sup>54</sup> Herbert Adam Gibbons, *Venizelos* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1920), p. 124; V. Nikoltsios and V. Gounarēs, *Apo to Sarantaporo stē Thessalonikē...*, p. 10.

<sup>55</sup> Georges Castellan, *L'Albanie* (Paris: PUF, 1980), pp. 21, 23.

<sup>56</sup> AYE, 1912, 2. 5, Geōrgios Streit, Greek minister at Vienna, to the Foreign Ministry of Greece, coded message No. 34439, Vienna, November 10, 1912.

<sup>57</sup> Their Army was short of a well organized sanitary service. (Balkan Wars, 1, p. 282, doc. 507: Rifaat Paşa, Ottoman Ambassador in Paris, to Gabriel Effendi, Foreign Minister of the Sublime Porte, Paris, December 2, 1912.)

<sup>58</sup> AYE, 1912, 2. 2, Iōannēs Alexandropoulos, Greek minister at Belgrade, to the Foreign Ministry of Greece, coded message No. 36977, Belgrade, December 15/28, 1912.

<sup>59</sup> P. A. Argyropoulos, *Apomnēmoneumata*, p. 107.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.* Franks (Levantine)= people of Western European descent, ‘acclimatized’ in the Near East.

<sup>61</sup> Sepharad= Spain (in Hebrew).

<sup>62</sup> The office of *hahambaşı* was abolished in 1517. (Nicholas P. Stavroulakis and Timothy J. DeVinney, *Jewish Sites and Synagogues of Greece* [Athens: Talos Press, 1992], p. 9.)

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 8, 163.

<sup>64</sup> The somewhat “sacred language” of the Spanish Jewries. (Martine Berthelot, *Cien años de presencia judía en la España contemporánea* [Barcelona: KFM, n.d.], p. 31.)

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.* (Dzudezmo<judaeismus (Latin): a hypothetical etymology.)

<sup>66</sup> Cf. N. P. Stavroulakis and T. J. DeVinney, *Jewish Sites and Synagogues of Greece*, pp. 8-9.

<sup>67</sup> Nicholas Stavroulakis, *Jewish Costumes of Greece and the Ottoman Empire* (Athens: Association of the Friends of the Jewish Museum of Greece, 1986), Introductory Note.

<sup>68</sup> N. P. Stavroulakis and T. J. DeVinney, *Jewish Sites and Synagogues of Greece*, p. 8.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 166.

This situation was changing dramatically during the First World War, i.e. after Salonica was annexed into Greece. In March 1917, following the 1916 Greek military coup which divided Greece into two parts, one (with Salonica as capital) in favour of the Entente Cordiale and another neutralist/pro-German (the so-called “Athens” or “Old” Greece), Salonica Jewry recorded already a 10,000 loss of people.<sup>70</sup> The Sephardim Jews, nevertheless, still were strong enough to strive towards Salonica’s internationalization.<sup>71</sup> But it was then that a terrible blow struck them. On August 5, 1917 (Old Style) a fire broke out that burnt Salonica’s very economical and commercial centre. Up to now, explanation about the conflagration was never furnished. The Salonica Jews, nonetheless, accused the Greek government of setting the fire in order to destroy their wealth; to have dismissed for ever any prospect of the Macedonian megalopolis’ internationalization; and further annihilate the activity of Salonica’s port (up to then the most important in the Aegean Sea<sup>72</sup>) in favour of Piraeus.<sup>73</sup>

Salonica Jewry, in fact, was the main victim of the 1917 blaze;<sup>74</sup> for Jews were 80% of the fire-stricken people.<sup>75</sup> Venizelos, Prime Minister of Greece (unified again in spring 1917), declared *urbi et orbi* that a fair solution would be given to the problems with which the Jews had to cope because of the “great catastrophe”.<sup>76</sup> He declared, nonetheless, that Salonica had to be totally “reconstructed”; it was “hitherto” a “Turkish city” that lacked many of the attractions and conveniences which a modern city ought to possess”.<sup>77</sup>

This argument cannot be considered as true; for during the last decades of Ottoman rule, Salonica was provided with almost everything that a “modern metropolis” required.<sup>78</sup> Still, Venizelos dropped a hint, during the meeting he had in London, several months after the conflagration, with a deputation of the Anglo-Jewish Association, that there was actually a “deep laid plant for the elimination of the Jews from Salonica”. As a matter of fact, the Greeks wanted to “supplant” them.<sup>79</sup> And with surprising cynicism declared the following: “Unfortunately, in commercial transactions, this instinct of supplanting other people often manifested itself, and he [Venizelos] had heard that there were even poor Jews who desired to supplant their richer brethren...”. Yet the Greek Government itself had no such intention, Venizelos stated.<sup>80</sup>

The formal assurance of Venizelos notwithstanding, the situation of Salonica Jewry was deteriorated at the end of the Great War.<sup>81</sup> As a result, the Joint Foreign Committee of the Jewish Board of Deputies and the Anglo-Jewish Association concluded that Venizelos’ “good intentions”

<sup>70</sup> “L’internazionalizzazione di Salonicco”, newspaper Israel (Rome), March 17, 1917.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> AYE, *Historia Hellēnōn Hevraïōn* (= History of the Greek Jews), 1919, 1. 9. 2, I. N. Mallah, member of the Greek Parliament, to the newspaper Israel (Rome), Saint Moritz, Switzerland, March 16, 1919.

<sup>74</sup> AYE, *Historia Hellēnōn Hevraïōn*, 1918, 1. 8, P. A. Argyropoulos, Governor General of Salonica, to the Foreign Ministry of Greece, coded message No. 129, Salonica, June 1, 1918.

<sup>75</sup> AYE, *Historia Hellēnōn Hevraïōn*, 1918, 1. 8, Record of the meeting of Kl. Hadjilazaros, chairman of the Salonica Chamber of Commerce, with D. Lubin, U.S. representative to the Rome Agricultural Congress. (Included in the dispatch of September 14/27, 1918, of Ch. Simopoulos, Greek minister at Rome, to the Foreign Ministry of Greece.)

<sup>76</sup> AYE, *Historia Hellēnōn Hevraïōn*, 1918, 1. 8, Minutes of the meeting of El. Venizelos with a deputation from the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Anglo-Jewish Association (London [no date given, but surely in 1918]).

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Dēmētrēs Michalopoulos, “Thessalonikē. Tourkokratia kai Neōterē Periodos” (= Ottoman Rule and Modern Times”, *Encyclopaedia Papyros-Larousse-Britannica*, vol. 28<sup>th</sup> (Athens: Papyros, 1984), p. 119.

<sup>79</sup> AYE, *Historia Hellēnōn Hevraïōn*, 1918, 1. 8, Minutes of the meeting of El. Venizelos with a deputation from the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Anglo-Jewish Association (London, 1918).

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Newspaper Dacia (Bucharest), November 14<sup>th</sup>, 1919.

were either “defected” or “misunderstood”.<sup>82</sup> Such ‘suspicions’ proved to be right; for as early as 1918, the idea of emigrating to Palestine was forwarded semi-officially by Greek leaders as the “ideal solution” of Salonica Jewry’s problem.<sup>83</sup>

It is unnecessary to give here a detailed account of what followed. The emigration of Salonica’s Sephardim to Palestine and even Spain late in the 1920s proved to be anemic.<sup>84</sup> Salonica Jewry was not disposed to abandon the “Mother of Israel”. That is why, during the last term of Venizelos’ premiership, a blaze destroyed anew, in June, 1931, the Jewish area of Salonica; namely the Campbell shanty town built in order to shelter the victims of the 1917 catastrophe. Doubtless was now the involvement of Venizelist factors, and likely that of the Greek authorities.<sup>85</sup> Yet the fresh catastrophe did not persuade the Sephardim Jews to abandon Salonica. That is why they were ‘consumed’ during the peripeteia of the Second World War.

## CONCLUSION

The string of coincidences thanks to which Hasan Tahsin Paşa was found from Damascus in Salonica was by no means a fortuitous one. In other words, he was the right person at the right moment, and in the right place to do what his protectors expected to be done. His well-known sympathy with the Greeks made things decisively easier for the Greek Army in south-western Macedonia; whilst his antipathy for the Bulgarians gave Salonica to the Greeks.

Were not Hasan Tahsin Paşa moved from Syria to Macedonia, the outcome of the hostilities between the Greek Army and the Ottoman troops in the European portion of the Ottoman Empire would be doubtful. For the prestige of the Ottoman Army was (with just reason) still high at the outbreak of the First Balkan War.<sup>86</sup>

Still, the Salonica Jews were ill-fated. In the long run the Greek Government proved to be desirous of getting rid of them. That is why Salonica’s center was set on fire in August, 1917...

...And why Salonica Jewry was abandoned to their fate during the Second World War.

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<sup>82</sup> AYE, *Historia Hellēnōn Hevraiōn*, 1918, 1. 8, Letter of Lucien Wolf to Joannes Gennadius, Greek minister at London, London, April 19, 1918.

<sup>83</sup> AYE, *Historia Hellēnōn Hevraiōn*, 1918, 1. 8, Minutes of the meeting of Kl. Hadjilazaros with D. Lubin; Nikolaos Politēs, Foreign Minister of Greece, to the Greek Diplomatic Agency in Alexandria, Egypt, coded message No. 7259, Athens, August 16, 1918.

<sup>84</sup> AYE, *Historia Hellēnōn Hevraiōn*, 1933, 3. 3. 2, The Greek Consul General at Barcelona to the Greek minister at Paris, dispatch No. 50, Barcelona, March 7, 1930; newspaper *Action* (Salonica), January 5, 1931.

<sup>85</sup> <http://www.istorikathemata.com/2010/10/29-1931.html>. (Retrieved on July 29, 2012.)

<sup>86</sup> Herbert Adam Gibbons, *Venizelos*, p. 118.

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