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Salonica Jews and the Habsburg Empire, 1867-1918: a forgotten story

If one was to summarize the influence the Great Powers had on Salonica's Jewry at the end of the 19th century, the story would roughly go as follows: huge French impact- significant Italian impact but generally speaking declining and minor compared to the French and a bit of British influence, mostly in economic terms, with its ups and downs¹. And if one was to ask about the Habsburg's role on the city's Jews, the answer they would most often get would be about the Habsburg Empire's role in the internationalization plans of Salonica, before the city's definite incorporation into the Greek state². But how did we get there? How could a power, otherwise seemingly absent from the theater of the city's life, be in such a position to devise or support plans for its benefit?

The truth is that such a narrative broadly described misses a lot of instances in which the Habsburgs not only participated but had the leading role in events and processes that took place in the city. In other words, before the plans for internationalization, there were other moments in which the Austro-Hungarian influence was very important. The most notable of them were the construction of the Oriental Railways³, which connected the city with Central Europe, the foundation of the Deutsche Schule which, unlike what the name might suggest, was created by the Austrians and was financed equally by both the Austrians and the Germans, the introduction of the Austrian Lloyd routes which was the most significant means of maritime transport at the time et al. Most importantly, at the fin-de-siècle Salonica, the Austro-Hungarian capital represented one-third of the overall port's movement, with particular predominance in sectors like the textiles and cereal trade, i.e. sectors which had vital importance for the city's commerce⁴. This fact is even more striking if one takes into

¹Eyal Ginio, "Jews and European Subjects in Eighteenth-Century Salonica: The Ottoman Perspective", in *Jewish History*, vol. 28 (2014), p. 290, 293

² e.g. Joseph Nehama, *Histoire des Israélites de Salonique*, (Thessaloniki, University Studio Press, 2000 (1935)), Rena Molho, *Οι Εβραίοι της Θεσσαλονίκης 1856-1919: Μια ιδιαίτερη κοινότητα* [The Jews of Thessaloniki, 1856-1919- A Unique Community], (Athens, Pataki editions, 2001)

³ Daout Levy, *Rapporto sobre la Comunita Djudia de Thessaloniki*. (Thessaloniki: Jewish Museum of Thessaloniki. N.d.), p. 80

⁴ OeStA/HHStA GKA KsA Saloniki 454

account that a century earlier according to the official statistics, not a single Austrian ship docked in the city's port⁵.

The timeframe under examination, i.e. 1867 to 1918, corresponds to two seminal events in Habsburg history: The December Constitution of 1867, when Jews in the Habsburg Empire were granted equal civic rights, and the collapse of the empire at the end of 1918. What is interesting is the fact that the protection of Salonica Jews, under the terms of bilateral agreements between the Ottoman and the Habsburg governments dating back to the 18th century, started earlier than 1867 and enabled Salonica Jews to move freely within the Habsburg Empire- a paradox since, at the same time, the local, Habsburg Jewry was not allowed to do so⁶. In other words, Salonica-based Jews, as Habsburg subjects born outside the territory of Austria, enjoyed more rights and freedom than Habsburg subjects born within the Habsburg territory. The Jews constituted an important element for the implementation of the Habsburg policies in the region since they were very well connected with the local market and this was the element the Habsburgs needed in order to increase their influence during the course of the 19th century. The archives of the Habsburg consulate in Salonica are quite indicative of the evolution of the financial strategy of Austria-Hungary in the 19th century and the role Jews played in it.

The list of subjects the consulate comprised in several instances is telling of the progress of the economic penetration of the Habsburg Empire in the region. The first Austrian delegation was founded in the 1760s⁷ and the first list of subjects still preserved dates back to 1833. Even though not the central focus of this essay, it is worth noting that according to this list, there were 7 de jure subjects in 1833- all of them Jews: four merchants, one doctor, one dragoman of the consulate and one whose profession isn't specified⁸. At the same time, in an index titled "de facto subjects 1833", we encounter another 9 persons: a dragoman (the one preceding the above-mentioned in the de jure subjects) and a variety of other professions, from a rabbi to a salesman of lemons and from a post-office employee to a commander of the Austrian

⁵ Kostis Moskof, *Θεσσαλονίκη, τομή της μεταπρατικής πόλης* [Thessaloniki, breakthrough of the compradorial city]. (Athens: Stochastis, 1978), p. 79- 93.

⁶ Hannelore Burger, *Heimatrecht und Staatsbürgerschaft österreichischer Juden. Vom Ende des 18. Jahrhunderts bis in die Gegenwart*, (Wien, Böhlau Verlag Wien Köln Weimar, 2014), p. 18.

⁷ Rudolf Agstner, *Handbuch des k.(u.) k. Konsulardienstes. Die Konsulate der Donaumonarchie vom 18. Jh. bis 1918*, (Vienna, New Academic Press, 2018), p. 121

⁸ OeStA/HHStA GKA KsA Saloniki 138

fleet. If we notice the mere numerical data as well as the professions recorded, we can come to the following conclusions: the de jure subjects were financially well-off, while in the de facto subjects there was a broad spectrum of financial status. These observations make more sense if we take into account the next list regarding this matter that can be found in the Habsburg consulate's archive. It's an index comprised in 1856, containing all the de jure and de facto subjects together, which unfortunately makes it impossible for the time being to differentiate the status of each person written there⁹. This list gives a total of 17 persons, so roughly the same number as the two previous lists combined. What is interesting about this list is not so much the number, but the names comprised. Whereas in the two previous lists we encounter 16 different surnames among the 16 people registered, in this list we encounter only 8 surnames corresponding to 18 people, out of which 4 existed in the previous lists and all were merchants. Hence, we can deduct that even though the number of subjects remained the same, the group they constituted was mostly comprised of members of the same family and it included the elements the most useful for the Habsburg economic interests in the city. In other words, along with the augmentation of the Habsburg economic interests in the city, there was a "selection" of who could become Austrian, based on whether (it was thought that) he could serve these interests. That's why in those lists we find prominent members of the Jewish community in Salonica, such as Moise and Elie Fernandez, David and Daniel Sullam as well as Lazzar and Moise Allatini, who was actually a "knight of Franz-Josef's order"¹⁰.

Post-1867

The situation regarding Salonica Jews that were Habsburg subjects in the period following 1867 derives from the previous period, despite some alterations. For one thing, the Jews were Austrian subjects among other, non-Jews, found in the lists; all the sections of the Salonica population were represented in the consulate's indexes and there was a greater diversification

⁹ OeStA/HHStA GKA KsA Saloniki 146

¹⁰ OeStA/HHStA GKA KsA Saloniki 455

regarding the occupations. The Jews were still the majority of the Austrian protégés and/or de facto subjects¹¹, however, one finds also a few Greek names and some Turkish as well.

There are two other lists found in the archives, which are not dated, entitled “subjects 1880” and “de facto subjects ca. 1908-1909”. The names contained there are chronologically noted. The data from this index has been adjusted based on other consular records, such as testaments and death certificates, that were found in the archive and which refer to people who, for example, died while in Vienna, and therefore were not registered as de facto subjects *in Salonica* by the consulate, yet they were. This has allowed for more precise documentation of people and their status, since the descriptions contained in the files are rather vague and sometimes mistaken¹². Here we encounter 60 names (plus 7 from testaments and the minutes of the consular court) that correspond to approximately 2/3 of the entries of the subjects in general for a period which actually corresponds from 1880 until 1912. The most important detail here is the existence of women who are registered as protégés of their own accord, as heads of households, usually- but not exclusively- after the death of their husband. The surnames encountered demonstrate the same tendency that was observed in the previous list, i.e. the familial ties of the subjects and their relatively wealthy status. We also notice that few of the people found in this list existed also in the previous one of 1856, therefore allowing us to trace entire families throughout the 19th century. As stated earlier, these lists of “de facto subjects” end in 1912, presumably when the Greek army entered the city and the capitulations and other agreements that allowed the consular protection seized to exist.

Post-1912

For some of the persons encountered in the previous “de facto subjects” lists, there are no further records. However, for others among them, 1912 constitutes a turning point, when they transcend from “protégés” to full-scale citizens. In December 1913 a list was submitted

¹¹ One finds the use of “de facto subjects” and “protégés” used interchangeably in the archives, in lists that include the same persons. Based on descriptive sources from the archives and the use of these terms by several actors with diverse connotations in different times, we can deduct that, at that time, the categories and terms that defined one’s relationship with a state weren’t as rigid as one might expect today; the relationship was characterized by diversity, which points to a wider understanding of belonging to a state- a sort of spectrum where an individual can occupy different places.

¹² There are also other lists which contain and enumerate names of subjects, such as censuses. However, these lists have been compiled to a different end, hence they contain data which can impact our understanding, since in the subjects registries only heads of households are included, whereas in the censuses, where the scope is different, even two-months old babies of protégés were included, despite not being registered in the consulate’s registries yet. Therefore, this essay has only employed lists referring to heads of households.

by the consulate to the embassy in Istanbul¹³; this list contained 87 names of people who were “newly naturalized Levantine merchants from Salonica”¹⁴- however, archival research has demonstrated that they were actually 99 fully naturalized Jews from Salonica. This discrepancy is probably due to the fact that for some the process started before the Balkan Wars, after the Italo-Turkish war of 1911. Since the procedure wasn’t standardized yet, it took more time and correspondence between the different authorities involved in order for the naturalizations to be finalized, while for others it was a fast-track process in 1914, right before the window of opportunity for these naturalizations closed, hence resulting in a multiplicity of lists and registries containing the names of the newly-naturalized, which explains the discrepancy in numbers.

What we notice from this list and the relevant documents is that there were some of the previously protégés who became fully-fledged subjects- yet the majority of the “newly-naturalized merchants” were not protégés before. The documents found in those people’s files are indicative of the Habsburg policies for the region as well. For each naturalization the consul had to issue a “certificate of good character” which stated information like the income, in order to testify to the applicant’s ability to sustain him/herself and his/her household, since that was a major concern for the political communities where these persons were to be naturalized, because, in case of poverty, the community had to provide some allowance¹⁵. It is worth noting that the Habsburg Empire had very rigid, financial barriers regarding naturalizations, unlike other countries. The Habsburg state wasn’t interested in simply having many citizens on the spot; it would rather have fewer but directly influencing the economy. As

¹³ Interestingly, the Habsburg bureaucracy maintained the same structure of its consular representation even after the changes the Balkan Wars caused in the region’s borders. It was only in 1914 that the embassy in Athens would start to appear in the consulate’s correspondence.

¹⁴ OeStA/HHStA GKA KsA Saloniki 450- “Neueingebürgerte Levantinische Kaufleute“. It is worth noting that, a couple of years later, during WWI, the French administration used a similar term in order to describe those Jewish merchants from the former Ottoman Empire: “un étranger de nationalité Israélite du Levant“. See Sarah Abrevaya- Stein, *Extraterritorial Dreams: European Citizenship, Sephardi Jews, and the Ottoman Twentieth Century*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), p. 79.

¹⁵ Andrea Komlosy, “Der Stadt schiebt ab. Zur nationalstaatlichen Konsolidierung von Heimat und Fremde im 18. Und 19. Jahrhundert“, in Sylvia Hahn, Andrea Komlosy, Ilse Reiter (ed.): *Ausweisung- Abschiebung- Vertreibung in Europa 16.-20. Jahrhundert* (Innsbruck: Wien: Bozen: Studien-Verlag, 2006), p. 91. Generally speaking, the registration to a political community was the most crucial step to be considered a citizen, even for those who were assigned the citizenship by birth. The registration provided the “heimatrecht“, i.e. the right of domicile, which was what defined one’s rights and obligations vis-à-vis the state (social benefits, suffrage rights etc.). It is also important to note that there was no “Austro-Hungarian” citizenship; one could either be an Austrian or a Hungarian citizen. All the people found in the consular archives that were not Habsburg subjects by birth and were later naturalized opted for the Austrian citizenship.

the representative of the Viennese Chamber of Commerce and Trade in Salonica wrote in a letter addressed to the ministries of Internal and Foreign Affairs, “in addition to all this, a strong, efficient and respected Austrian colony in Salonica provides an excellent basis for possible economic actions of greater style, e.g., the establishment of an Austrian bank branch there, and moreover gives the monarchy the means to exert an appropriate legitimate influence on the port administration and railroad traffic”¹⁶. As becomes evident from this passage, the financial strategy of the Habsburgs was very clear-sighted, both to its goals and the means to achieve them. This is the reason that we can often read in the consul’s certificates that “The above-mentioned works mainly with Austrian firms and is in such close contact with them, that his naturalization as an Austrian can be perceived to be in the interest of the export trade”¹⁷.

Characteristics of the Habsburg Jews from Salonica

As can be seen from the consulate’s archive, there were differences regarding the relationship the Salonica Jews had with the Habsburg Empire. In the first years after the emancipation of 1867, which would have allowed for the naturalization of Jews, should they want it, there was no such trend. Instead, those Salonica Jews that were de jure subjects were the descendants of persons who had acquired the citizenship in the pre-constitutional era. Regarding the de facto subjects, they probably had no particular need to become officially de jure Austrian citizens since their settlement in the Habsburg lands was mostly temporary and periodical. In other words, they would come and go in order to conduct business in the Habsburg lands, but they didn’t live permanently there. This pattern of mobility lasted approximately until 1903, when there was a diminution of contacts with the Habsburg Empire, presumably because of the Macedonian Struggle and the highly tense situation in the Macedonian hinterland. It was also characterized by the concentration of the actors in question in Vienna and their interaction with life there, as can be observed by their correspondences to the local press in Salonica and their subscription to several institutions/ organizations in Vienna.

In the years after the Young Turks’ revolution and until the Italo-Turkish War one can notice a resumption of previous activities. However, 1911 constitutes a turning point that would become even more apparent in the year 1913, as previously stated. Due to the expulsion of

¹⁶ OeStA/HHStA GKA KsA Saloniki 450

¹⁷ e.g. OeStA/HHStA GKA KsA Saloniki 417

Italian citizens from the Ottoman territory, in 1911 there were the first applications for naturalization as Austrians. The first to apply was Samuel Modiano, the president of the Jewish community of Salonica, along with his children Daniel and Moise and his nephew Vitalis¹⁸. Despite the very strong support received from the consul and the eagerness of the central Habsburg bureaucracy to finalize the procedure, it actually took almost a year for the completion of the naturalization, since there was no previous expertise regarding these processes. Others that applied in 1912, like Edgard Fernandez, were also relatively delayed. By 1913 however, when the massive wave of applications took place, the Habsburg Bureaucracy had acquired the necessary know-how so that a bulk of 15 applications were processed within two weeks.

None of the applicants was registered in Vienna; the great majority (ca 80%) was registered in Moravia, in the communities of Lundenburg/Breclav, Bruenn/Brno, Olmuetz/ Olomouc and Powel/ Povel(now part of the city of Olomouc), some in Altenberg, in the region of Lower Austria and others, one by one, in other places like Steinschoenau/ Kamenický Šenov, Spalato/ Split and Jungbunzlau/ Mladá Boleslav. While, of course, the Habsburg bureaucracy had its reasons to divide them among different cities and dictate where they would be registered, it is stated in the correspondence between the attorney in charge of their applications and the consul in Salonica, that the applicants themselves sought not to be registered in the Jewish political communities that existed in the region of Moravia, a fact indicative of their self-perception and the choices they made in order to adjust to the new setting¹⁹. It is also worth noting that the families that settled in Moravia and Lower Austria were part of larger familial and/ or entrepreneurial networks. However, even in their choice to become Austrians, there was sometimes an extended degree of diversification, in terms of communal registration. Hence, members of the same family were registered in three different communities.

(Post)WWI

From that moment onwards different trajectories were followed. Few remained in the communities where they were registered- or kept them as the basis of their financial activities. Others migrated within the Habsburg territory and in particular to Vienna, even after the dissolution of the Empire, while others migrated further to the USA. Last but not

¹⁸ OeStA/HHStA GKA KsA Saloniki 458

¹⁹ OeStA/HHStA GKA KsA Saloniki 450

least, a significant part of them returned to Greece- or rather kept Greece as the center of their enterprises²⁰. Even among those who returned, many continued having business ties with Austrian and Czechoslovak firms, thus proving that their links with the (post-)Habsburg space were quite strong and lasting.

All in all, the impact of the Habsburg Empire on Salonica was quite significant, as indicated by several parameters. This situation continued even after the annexation of the city by the Greek state, as demonstrated by the fact that the replenishment of drachmae in the banks' branches took place exclusively with the Austrian Lloyd, thus indicating the power the Habsburgs could exercise over the country's cash flow. The city's Jewry in particular had a crucial role in the implementation of the Habsburg financial policies. They were members of the economic and political elite, whose acts influenced many people beyond themselves, and yet their life trajectories have been incorporated into other narratives or they have been left aside completely by scholarly research, since these stories weren't particularly convenient to tell, given the events of WWII and the Shoah.

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²⁰ Orly Meron, *Jewish entrepreneurship in Salonica: 1912 - 1940: an ethnic economy in transition*. (Brighton: Sussex Acad. Press. 2013), appendix 4