



Evdoxios Doxiadis

STATE,
NATIONALISM, AND
THE JEWISH
COMMUNITIES OF
MODERN GREECE

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To Jennifer

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Preface

This book began over a decade ago while I was still a graduate student at UC Berkeley as a project for a course. What struck me at the time, and continues to amaze me, was how the history of Jews in Greece has not been problematized with regard to the convoluted paths of Greek nationalism since the creation of the modern Greek State and the variation of the Jewish communities themselves. Even today, when several excellent books on Greek Jewish history have been published and when more and more historians are shedding light on this part of Greek history, the focus rarely shifts away from the three decades between incorporation of the Jewish community of Thessaloniki (Salonica) to the Greek state during the Balkan Wars and its destruction during the Holocaust, nor look beyond the Salonica community, admittedly at least twice as large than all the other Greek Jewish communities combined. There are of course good reasons for all of this; availability of archival material, confrontation of long-held ideas in Greek historiography regarding the Holocaust, the significance of Salonica in Greek Jewish memory or Greek Jewish diaspora, and the simple fact that this is still a relatively new field in Greek historiography. But I believe that without exploring the development of the relationship between the Greek state and its Jewish communities, which by the time of the incorporation of Thessaloniki had almost a century's worth of history, we fail to capture the nuances of Greek state attitudes, policies, and perceptions with regard to Jews and other minorities.

The purpose of this book is not to discuss the history of modern Greece for which there are many excellent books available including a recent volume by Thomas Gallant,¹ nor to examine the history of Greek Jews for which Katherine Fleming produced a good history some years ago.² The aim of this book is to consider the interactions of the modern Greek State with its minorities, and explain its shifting policies, by focusing on the relationship between the modern Greek state and the different Jewish communities within its borders and beyond. In so doing I hope to shed more light into the complicated history of Greek nationalism and address questions of identity, especially with regard to the elites of modern Greece who formulated its policies and developed its policy aims and as a counterpoint to popular ideas and beliefs. I have deliberately tried to avoid discussing such popular views of Jews or anti-Semitism except when such ideas resulted in acts that forced the state to act. Although a comprehensive historical study of Greek anti-Semitism still awaits its author, the widespread presence of some form of anti-Semitism among the Greek public throughout Greek history is indisputable. What concerns this volume, however, is the place Jews had, if any, in Greek constructs of the nation and citizenship and how such perceptions contrasted with those reserved for other minorities. In short, I ask the question if Jews, and which Jews at that, were perceived as loyal Greek citizens, how and why this became possible, and how did the Jewish experience compare to that of other minorities in Greece.

To begin the discussion, I set the stage in Chapter 1 with a brief examination of the two millennia of history between Greeks and Jews, with a focus on the Byzantine and Ottoman Empires. Chapter 2 examines the Greek War of Independence, when the first attempts were made to define a Greek identity in terms of law and nationality, but which also saw horrific violence inflicted by all sides on the communities of the perceived enemy. Chapters 3 and 4 form the main body of my argument and investigation. They cover the period from the beginnings of the modern Greek state to the disastrous war in Asia Minor that shattered Greek dreams of creating a nation-state spanning both sides of the Aegean Sea. This is the period when the institutions of the Greek state were created, when concepts regarding citizenship, nationality, and ethnicity were developed and transformed, and when the modest state that emerged in 1830 purposefully expanded to essentially its current size. This was also the period when significant Jewish communities were incorporated to the Greek state alongside other minorities necessitating a readjustment of Greek internal policies and institutions. Chapter 5 examines the interwar period when the question of minorities in Europe was endlessly debated and was often the cause of friction between states including Greece and its neighbors. Chapter 6 concludes the discussion with a brief examination of the Holocaust in Greece and its aftermath in view of the preceding discussion and a glance into the relationship between Jews and Greece to the present.

Although ideas of the nation and nationalism stand at the core of this book, I have tried to avoid complicating the already complex historical circumstances with theoretical approaches to the question of nationalism. Instead I have opted for a brief overview of the ideas that have formulated my own understanding of the question that I hope will be useful in raising certain questions in the mind of the reader that will prove pertinent in the remaining chapters. Unfortunately a brief discussion of such a complex idea necessitates gross simplification of the ideas of the scholars that I discuss. I simply want to present some of the arguments that have framed the discussion of nationalism and stress the difficulties in applying them to the Greek case.

Although nearly all theoretical approaches to nationalism stress its modern nature, it often appears that this is the only point scholars can agree upon. Theorists of nationalism have naturally focused on the development of nationalism in the various regions or periods they are particularly well versed in and thus have stressed different aspects of nationalism and its relation to modernity, which may be relevant in some cases but inapplicable to others. Despite the insights that these understandings of nationalism provide, in the Greek case one often finds that they fail to adequately explain the course of Greek nationalism. Ernest Gellner for instance makes a clear distinction between traditional and modern societies and offers the definition that “nationalism is primarily a political principle which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent.”³ In his view, premodern, traditional societies had no incentive to impose a homogeneity on their people since diversity frequently provided greater benefits to ruling elites but modern, industrial societies strive for exactly the opposite as a new high culture infuses the whole society.⁴ The role of the state is crucial for this development as it creates and maintains the necessary educational infrastructure.⁵ However, Gellner sees nationalism as the product of industrial social organization, where labor migration and bureaucratic employment are important determinants

for fostering the idea of the co-national. For him it is nationalism that generates nations, not the reverse.⁶ Despite the appeal of Gellner's thoughts, it is hard to apply his model in Greece as others have noted⁷ because it lacked industrial development and industrial employment until the end of the nineteenth, if not the early twentieth, century but with its highly influential, centralized bureaucracy and pioneering efforts toward mass education.

Most modernist theorists like John Breuilly link nationalism to the state and state power.⁸ Breuilly too tied nationalism to modernization again identified primarily in economic terms that changed the economic order of society in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.⁹ Breuilly stressed the idea of citizenship, the idea of the nation as a body of citizens, and although the conception of nationality in terms of the political rights of citizens dominated the eighteenth century,¹⁰ many groups subsequently rejected this liberal understanding of the nation seeking a cultural understanding to nationality, the two often merging in a "sleight-of-hand ideology."¹¹ Those that pursued his thoughts further like Paul Bass saw literacy, media and mass communication, standardization of language, and schooling as the necessary factors to promote the necessary interclass communication.¹² Again, although there is much that seems to be useful in Breuilly and Bass' understanding of nationalism, Greece had neither the economic structures, literacy, or even standardization of language that their theory requires, Breuilly himself admitting that Greece was an anomaly to his theory.¹³

Eric Hobsbawm has been a great influence to Greek historiography so his understanding of nationalism is particularly pertinent. Hobsbawm believed that nations and nationalism are the result of a social engineering process where invented traditions play a crucial role in forging a necessary continuity with the past.¹⁴ The nation is the most pervasive of these invented traditions with the period from 1870 to 1914 being the height of invented traditions, a period that also witnessed the emergence of mass politics.¹⁵ Invented traditions were the primary means through which the ruling elites tried to counter the threat of mass democracy with a focus on primary education, public ceremonies, and public monuments,¹⁶ Hobsbawm almost echoing Gellner in that "nations did not make states and nationalisms but the other way around."¹⁷ Hobsbawm identified two basic stages of nationalism in European history, the first characterized by the democratic nationalism of the "great nations" infused with ideals of the French Revolution from 1830 to 1870, followed by the reactionary nationalism of the 1870s onwards of the so-called small nations mostly against the Ottoman, Habsburg, and Russian Empires.¹⁸ Once again Greece ill fits Hobsbawm's description this time in a temporal sense since despite the obvious similarities of Greece with the "small nations," Greece emerged fully independent in 1830, and developed quickly a powerful nationalist agenda, yet she also does not seem to fit comfortably in his democratic nationalism of the "great nations."

One cannot discuss nationalism without mentioning Benedict Anderson whose understanding of nations as imagined communities has become ubiquitous in modern historiography. For Anderson, nationalism and nationality are cultural artifacts with nationalism emerging at the end of eighteenth century because of historical forces.¹⁹ In a sense Anderson sees the nation in the same framework as religion or kinship and defines it as "an imagined political community—and imagined as both inherently

limited and sovereign.” The nation is imagined because members do not know the overwhelming majority of their fellow members yet “in their minds lives the image of their communion.”²⁰ The factors that allowed these communities to emerge include according to Anderson the decline of the older religiously imagined communities, the exploration of the world by Europeans, the decline of Latin, the sacred language, and especially commercial book publishing or print-capitalism.²¹ Print-capitalism created fields of communication in spoken vernaculars, fixed stable vernacular languages allowed the development of an image of antiquity crucial to the idea of the nation, and created different languages of power and authority, all leading to the creation of national consciousness.²² Anderson’s convincing formulation is nevertheless problematic in the case of Greece, not only because of the very different sacral language involved, but also due to the complex linguistic issues in Greece that were not resolved until 1974. Furthermore, the interaction of Greeks with the non-European world was quite different than the one Anderson describes while religion, as will be discussed in subsequent chapters, played a crucial role in the formulation of national consciousness in the region as others have criticized him with regard to the cases of Ireland, Poland, Armenia, or Israel.²³

Miroslav Hroch has been more attuned to the peculiarities of nationalism in eastern Europe which is of great benefit to those who work in the region. Hroch tied nation-forming to the process of social transformation associated with capitalism but instead of focusing on the economic aspect he emphasized the social effects, especially the transformations with regard to mobility, communication, literacy and so on, all looked upon from an empirical lens.²⁴ For Hroch, the classical national movements had three demands: the development of a national culture based on the local language, to be used in education, administration, and economic transactions; the creation of their own social structure with their educated elites and economic classes; and the gaining of equal civil rights with some degree of political autonomy.²⁵ In a very structural way, Hroch then broke down the phases of a national movement and identified four separate types of national movements in Europe, the third, a mass movement already established in the old regime before the achievement of a constitutional order being confined to the Ottoman Balkans including Greece.²⁶ Unlike other theorists, Hroch considers the particularities of Easter Europe and the Balkans in his formulations and thus sees industrialization as one possible but not a necessary factor in successful nation building,²⁷ but his rather rigid structural approach often ignores political determinants.²⁸ He is also close to a primordialist understanding of the nation as exemplified by his rhetorical question of why nobody in the early nineteenth century thought to launch a campaign to convince the Irish that they were Germans and so on.²⁹ As we shall see, it did occur to some to try to convince Albanians, Slavs, and Vlachs that they were Greeks, often with remarkable success.

Anthony D. Smith comes from a different tradition representing ethnosymbolism which challenges the modernist approaches to nationalism examined above. He stressed the need for an analysis of identity over the span of centuries with an emphasis on the importance of continuity and the significance of preexisting ethnic communities (*ethnies*) in the formation of national identities.³⁰ Smith believed that to understand modern nations one needs to consider the preexisting ethnic components

without which the process of nation building is highly problematic.³¹ For Smith a nation is “a named human population sharing an historic territory, common myths and historical memories, a mass, public culture, a common economy and common legal rights and duties for all members.”³² Smith specifically addressed the Greek case in the early nineteenth century using the failure of the church hierarchy to respond to the emerging aspirations of the middle classes who then used secular ideological discourses to achieve their aims.³³ Smith identified two kinds of nationalism, a “territorial” and an “ethnic” version (roughly Western vs. Eastern), the latter seeming to fit Greek developments rather well.³⁴ Ethnosymbolists have been criticized for using such broad definitions of their terms as to make them useless, and that they fail to explore the differences between modern nations and earlier ethnic groups, essentially conflating the two terms. Malesevic accused Smith of “evolutionary historicism” based on determinism, fatalism, and finalism, with a view of history as having well-defined stages of development, and with historical evolution as a mission, that *ethnies* must become nations.³⁵

Some recent approaches to nationalism have also made useful contributions. Michael Billig’s banal nationalism made the excellent point that nationalism continues after the establishment of the political entity it demanded and becomes part of the environment of the homeland.³⁶ National identity is constantly reinforced and replicated in nation-states with politicians and newspapers playing a significant role in the reproduction of nationalism.³⁷ Partha Chatterjee made a crucial contribution to the field by focusing on the non-European world in a postcolonial approach showing the limits of the universalist claims of other theorists, challenging their understanding of nation and of the modern state.³⁸ Rogers Brubaker suggested that ethnic conflict should not be understood as conflict between ethnic groups nor should we uncritically use categories of ethnopolitical practice as our categories of social analysis. He stressed that the rhetoric of “ethnopolitical entrepreneurs” have a performative character seeking to call a group into being through invoking it.³⁹ Although I cannot say that I accept any of these formulations in their entirety, most have influenced my own understanding of nationalism and thus the discussion in the ensuing pages.

The question of nation building has been at the forefront of historical discussion of state structures and policies for the nineteenth and twentieth centuries at least since the groundbreaking volume by Eugen Weber on nation building in France forty years ago.⁴⁰ Weber’s convincing argument for a much-delayed success at nation building in the most iconic nation-state in Europe, France, caused a reevaluation of previously accepted ideas about the effectiveness of nation building projects in the first half of the nineteenth century as well as with regard to the relationship of people to the nation-state. Inevitably that discussion led to the reexamination of the interactions between the state and those that did not identify with the dominant nation and the conflicts that often ensued but also the compromises achieved.

Unfortunately, such a discussion has not been sufficiently examined with regard to modern Greek history. Although Greece emerges as a nation-state remarkably early in 1829 and quickly builds all the institutions and trapping of a modern state, Greek historiography until very recently paid scant attention to the relationship of the state with the various ethnic, linguistic, and religious groups that populated it until the

late nineteenth and twentieth century when Greek territorial expansion transformed it. In part this is because of an implicit assumption that the early Greek state was a homogenous entity that lacked minorities and thus did not have to confront such questions until the Balkan Wars of 1912–13.

It is nearly impossible, however, to discuss nationalism without at some level talking about the “other,” those who do not belong to the nation or, even worse, are perceived as threats or enemies to the national goals. The idea that minorities, or nationalities as they were called in the nineteenth century, could be a threat to the state was not new as proven by the Wars of Religion in Early Modern Europe, and the persecution of threatening minorities such as the Moors of Spain, the Catholics in post-Reformation England, the Huguenots in France, and so on. However, the nineteenth and twentieth centuries heightened this fear as more and more “nationalities” demanded the right to maintain their difference, if not outright autonomy, challenging the assimilationist efforts of the new nation-states. If the “other” loomed large in the minds of nationalists, Jews had a prominent position as the ultimate national “other” in Europe.

Few authors that discuss nationalism and nation building in Europe fail to address the question of Jewish emancipation, persecution, exclusion, or inclusion to the national fold. The same, however, is not the case in Greece until the twentieth century when the Jewish question enters Greek historiography with the annexation of Thessaloniki and then disappears again following the Holocaust. Even in this context of the three decades from 1913 to 1943 the discussion is narrowly framed solely for the city of Thessaloniki, not only by nationalist historians but those who work on Greek Jewish history as well. In fact, most of Greek Jewish historiography has been focused on Thessaloniki/Salonica both in terms of its Ottoman past and in the transition to the modern Greek state.

Jewish Salonican historiography has a long pedigree but as Rika Benveniste noted it followed a parallel yet distinct path than the rest of Greek historiography. She identified three themes with regard to early-twentieth-century historiography: portraying the city as a haven for Jews under the Ottoman sultans, glorifying Sephardic supremacy in an implied juxtaposition to the Greek-speaking Romaniote Jews and to the Ashkenazi refugees from eastern Europe, and the idealization of migrant Jews as a unified group.⁴¹ The focus was narrow, local, and almost unrelated to the rest of Greek history. Even later Greek Jewish historiography exhibited the same ethnocentrism and homogenization that one finds in Greek historiography in general.⁴² The latter still fails to incorporate the Greek Jewish presence in the Greek historical narrative as Avdela and Benveniste noted, treating the “Jewish community of Salonica” as a trope that was challenged only recently for creating false dichotomies.⁴³ Although since the 1990s there has been some interest in Jewish history in Greece and increasingly more reflective works are being produced in both Greek and English,⁴⁴ the field has not broken free from the stranglehold that Salonica has exercised from the start, a rare exception being Fleming’s general history of Greek Jews.⁴⁵ My objective here is to take a step toward integrating Jewish history into the history of the Greek state as an integral component of the evolution of the state, ideas about the nation, and national (or nationalist) policies from the nineteenth century through the twentieth.

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Note on Terms and Transliteration

One of the most difficult aspects of writing this book has been the appropriate use of terminology, even with regard to the most basic terms. The very word “Greek” is itself highly problematic in the context of this book. Modern Greeks do not call themselves that to begin with but use the word “Hellene,” which is of course the word used in antiquity to describe those who belonged to the Hellenic culture. The word however was specifically chosen to associate modern Greeks with the ancients and it had at times taken other meanings. For most Christian subjects of the Eastern Roman Empire, what we often call Byzantium, up to the fifteenth century and beyond, the word “Hellene” was associated both with the ancients and with paganism, making it highly inappropriate to use except for some, often condemned, intellectuals like Georgios Plethon Gemistos. His own contemporaries like Gennadios Scholarios rejected the term in favor of the generic Christian.⁴⁶ A more appropriate term for the period from the late antiquity through the Ottoman period would have been “Roman,” or *Romios*, which was also how the Ottomans identified Orthodox Christians in their empire (*Rum*). Some modern scholars have used the term “Romaic” to point to a strong identification with Orthodoxy especially in the context of the Ottoman Empire and the patriarchate of Constantinople but that identity is also unsatisfactory for my purposes since for much of the period under consideration it did not include only what today we consider as Greeks but also Bulgarians, Serbs, Albanians, Macedonians, Romanians, and even some Arabs. Medieval Europeans used the term “Greek” to refer to Greek-speaking Orthodox Christians, and a few Greeks did indeed appropriate it to refer specifically to what we call today Greeks (*Graikoi*) but it never achieved wide circulation. For these reasons I have tried to avoid the simple term “Greek” prior to the establishment of the modern Greek state and have used primarily composite words (“Greek-speaking” or *grecophone*, “Christian Greek,” and so on).

The same problem exists for most ethnic groups of the region including the Ottomans who were often called Turks but that also had the meaning of Muslim almost up to the establishment of the Turkish Republic. Similarly, there are still heated debates about the use of the terms “Bulgarian” and “Macedonian,” “Vlach,” “Pomak,” and so on. Greek sources frequently used terms that bestowed a nuanced identity such as *voulgarophonoi*, *alvanophonoi*, or *turkophonoi* (Bulgarian speakers, Albanian speakers, or Turkish speakers), *voulgarophronoi* or *tourkophronoi* (Bulgarian or Turkish-nationally minded), *roumanizontes* (Romanian nationally minded), and combinations of the above. But the meaning of the terms shifted overtime and per political calculations so that a *voulgarophone* (Bulgarian-speaker) could become a *slavophone* (Slavic-speaker) depending on the political circumstances.

For my purposes, the designation “Jew” is equally problematic, not only due to the ethnic and religious dichotomy, but also because of the existence of multiple Jewish

communities in the area whose distinctive characteristics are crucial to this book. Once again I have tried to be specific when the distinction was important referring to the specific Jewish communities in question (“Romaniotes” “Sephardim”) even though such terms were rarely used at the time or in the documents, especially the term “Romaniote.” I have also tended to focus on the two main communities, the Greek-speaking Romaniotes and the Ladino-speaking Sephardim, but the reader should keep in mind that there were even more distinctive Jewish groups with smaller numbers including Italian Jews, Ashkenazi Jews, Karaites, and even some like the Dönme whose very Jewishness is a matter of debate. I would have rather used the terms used at the time (*hellenophone*—Greek-speaker, *ispanophone*—Spanish-speaker) but that would have diverged from the established terms now found in modern historiography.

As if that confusion was not enough, the way the “nation” was understood or even the word used to refer to it saw significant change over time, which is part of my story. There are several terms that can be used to refer to the Greek “nation” from the modern *ethnos*, to the older *genos*, and the more problematic *phyle* and the last two can also be used to mean race among other things. There were subtleties when authors chose to use *ethnos* over *genos* and vice versa, expanding or collapsing the breadth of the concept and thus the people included to their understanding of nation, which can be lost in translation. Some terms like *genos* can also have many interpretations (race, species, gender, breed, family, ilk, kin, etc.), and it and its derivatives *omogenos* (same-*genos*) and *allogenos* (other-*genos*) were frequently used from nationalist treatises to legal promulgations with significant impact on minorities.

A final difficulty regarding terminology involves concepts of what we call today ethnic violence, ethnic cleansing, and genocide. Modern understandings of genocide stem from the UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide dating from 1948 which defined it as “any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group”⁴⁷ which listed the killing of the members of the group, causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group, imposing conditions of life calculated to result in the physical destruction of the group in whole or in part, imposing members intended to prevent births in the group, and forcibly transferring children of the group to another. Using that definition would be problematic when the concept of genocide had not yet been defined but the period I will examine includes most of these practices applied repeatedly to various groups. Some historians have raised objections to the use of the term “genocide” to describe such acts, even accusing those who do of violating historical principles and imposing modern concepts on the past. That is partly true especially with regard to what we would call today cultural genocide, which was widely practised by most states throughout Europe at the time. In many cases, however, the atrocities committed evoked responses from contemporaries that clearly show that such acts were deemed reprehensible. For example, although some Greek historians like Kremmydas have questioned the professionalism of those who have used the term “genocide” for the atrocities committed by Greek forces during the Greek War of Independence,⁴⁸ it is clear from the accounts of contemporaries that those acts were not within the norm of warfare. The contemporary, and philhellene, George Finlay described the atrocities committed by Christians and Muslims on each other as a war

of “extermination,” while even Greek commanders like Dimitrios Ypsilantis tried to avert the wholesale slaughter of prisoners or civilians.⁴⁹ Ottoman atrocities were in fact a crucial component in spurring some European states to intervene in the conflict in what some have called a humanitarian intervention. In my estimation, the use of such terms is quite appropriate and necessary to indicate the extent of violence inflicted upon communities based on their religious or ethnic composition.

Similar difficulties exist with names, place names, and even the transliteration of words into English. Transliteration from a different alphabet always involves choices and in the case of Greek the problem is greater because the standard transliteration method was developed for use with ancient Greek and to conform to Greek spelling rather than pronunciation. As a result, I have chosen to use the Library of Congress transliteration method for the most part with the exception of personal names which I have transliterated phonetically as they are most commonly used today.

The renaming of cities, villages, and regions is an old and effective policy of hegemonic cultural imposition seen throughout history and in the context of the nationalist conflicts. In the Balkans during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, places repeatedly changed names which may confuse the reader. There is hardly a city that retained its name from Byzantine to Ottoman times and then to whatever Balkan nation-state that city ended up in and several may have had (and still have) different names based on the ethnicity of the speaker. Istanbul is still universally Konstantinoupolis (Constantinople) in Greece, Izmir is Smyrni, Edirne is Adrianoupolis (Adrianople), and so on. The choice of the word often implies a political stance and to avoid this I have chosen to use whatever name was officially or commonly used at the time. Thus, I use Salonica till 1913 and Thessaloniki from that point onwards, Philippoupolis till 1878 and Plovdiv afterward, and so on. Unfortunately, even that is not always effective since various authors and documents continue to refer to cities and areas in different ways. When I feared confusion, I often added in parenthesis the second (or third in some cases) name to be sure to avoid confusion.

Greeks and Jews from Antiquity to the Ottoman Empire

The interaction of Jews and Greeks dates back to antiquity with the conquests of Alexander the Great and the subsequent domination of the eastern Mediterranean by the Hellenistic kingdoms. This relationship was sometimes peaceful and productive but it was also frequently adversarial. The Jewish homeland was frequently rocked by revolts against Hellenistic, especially Seleucid, rule most notably in the Maccabean revolt of 167–160 BCE which is still celebrated today as Hanukkah. Conflicts also erupted periodically in areas where both Greeks and Jews had settled as in Alexandria. However, there was also close interaction between Greeks and Turks that led to the adoption of Hellenistic culture by many Jews, the first translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek (the Septuagint), and the emergence of several Jewish scholars influenced by Greek philosophy like Philo.

The Roman conquest of the Mediterranean created a unified space where different peoples could interact, travel, and settle with relative ease. This was also the case for Jews, whose large communities continued to flourish in Egypt and elsewhere. The Jewish revolts and resulting Jewish-Roman Wars (66–73 CE, 115–117 CE, 132–136 CE) led to the devastation of Judea and many Jewish communities that had participated, such as those in Cyrenaica and Egypt. The ensuing diaspora of Jews saw the creation of numerous Jewish communities throughout the Mediterranean.¹

The near simultaneous emergence of Christianity was a further blow to Judaism since most of the early converts to the Christian doctrine were Jews. Although the eventual success of Christianity did not impact Jews as much as pagans or heterodox Christian sects (Arians, Nestorians, Manichaeans, Donatists, Montanists, Gnostics, and many more) who were deemed heretical and were proscribed and persecuted, the standing of Jews in the now Christian empire was significantly diminished. Jewish refusal to convert to the dominant religion baffled and angered Christians who often vented their frustration with prosecutions and massacres such as their expulsion from Alexandria in 415ce following their dispute with Patriarch Cyril, famous for instigating the murder of the pagan mathematician and philosopher Hypatia by a Christian mob.²

As Orthodox Christianity came to dominate the empire, greater scrutiny was turned upon Jews and the perception that they harbored ill will toward Christians and the Roman state. Legislation restricting Jewish practices begun to find itself in Roman legal codes as in the *Codex Theodosianus* and the construction of new

synagogues was often banned.³ Jews were thought of as a disruptive element in society especially in the eastern provinces of the empire as evidenced in the historiographic and hagiographic texts of the time.⁴ Some accounts portrayed Jews as perpetrators of atrocities against Christians most famously in the brutal murder and desecration of the body of the Patriarch of Antioch Anastasius II in 608/9 during an uprising,⁵ while church fathers like John Chrysostom preached against Jews and deplored Christian-Jewish socialization.⁶

Jewish sources from late antiquity indicate an increasing Jewish anti-Roman attitude and the proliferation of polemics against Christianity.⁷ Roman-Jewish tensions can, of course, be detected earlier from at least 303ce⁸ but the Christianization of the Empire, especially of the still predominantly non-Christian “Holy Land” from Emperor Constantine onwards, intensified friction between Jews and Christian Romans.⁹ The loyalty of Jews to the empire was questioned which could erupt into violence. For example, during the siege of the Roman town of Tella by the Sassanid Persians, the entire Jewish population was massacred after an accusation was made that they were constructing a tunnel from the synagogue to the walls to let the besiegers into the town.¹⁰

In the East, Jews had a potential ally against Roman persecution, the Sassanid empire that was the main rival to the Romans/Byzantines from 224ce to 651ce. Jews welcomed the Persian conquest of Palestine and Jerusalem in 614ce, which was supposedly followed by a massive slaughter of Christians and attacks on Christians in other cities like Ptolemais (Acre) and Tyre.¹¹ Support for the Sassanids backfired when Emperor Heraclius recovered Jerusalem in 629ce and proceeded to massacre the Jewish population.¹² Roman and Persian rivalry was also conducted by Christian and Hebrew proxies throughout the Arabian peninsula where the Hebrew kingdom of Himyar in today’s Yemen was a Persian satellite opposed by the Roman satellite kingdom of Aksum in today’s Ethiopia.¹³

Unsurprisingly this hostility between Christians and Jews facilitated the early Islamic conquests of the region. Although Muslim rule reduced both groups to second-class citizens, it also guaranteed basic rights of worship and property, famously under the so-called Pact of Umar. Though inferior to Muslims, Christians and Jews under Muslim rule were equal to each other and were more or less free to pursue their trades, religious practices, and customs as long as they paid an extra tax, the *jizya* (*cizya* in Turkish). In many ways the Christian Church and the three Patriarchates that came under Muslim rule (Alexandria, Jerusalem, Antioch) continued to function effectively while Jewish culture flourished from Spain to Persia.

The early crusades (1096–1291ce) disrupted that equilibrium. Crusaders and accompanying pilgrims targeted Jews even before they ever left Europe. Roused by Pope Urban II’s appeals of 1095 that demonized Muslims, the crowds that gathered in 1096 fell upon the Jews of Cologne, the Rhineland, Moers, Regensburg, Trier, Mainz, Worms, Metz, Kerpen, and elsewhere massacring them indiscriminately or forcibly converting them as in Regensburg. On occasion the sources refer to the Jewish communities panic that led to mass suicides rather than face the brutality of the crusaders.¹⁴ This violence continued and intensified when the crusaders reached the areas under Muslim control. Not only did the crusading armies slaughter Muslims

and Jews indiscriminately when they captured cities, especially during the First crusade, but they also imposed their version of Roman Catholic Christianity on the local Eastern Orthodox Christians. The two churches had split over procedural, administrative, and theological issues in 1054, and the suspicions and hostility of each church toward the other turned into outright warfare with the Fourth Crusade of 1204, which instead of recovering Jerusalem or helping the struggling remnants of the crusader states sacked the Byzantine capital of Constantinople, ushering a sixty-year interregnum that fatally undermined the capacity of the Byzantines to resist the later onslaught of the Ottoman Turks.

“Byzantium” will be frequently encountered in this text, though the term is a scholarly construct to distinguish the later Eastern Roman Empire from its earlier manifestation. For the rulers and subjects of the empire they were always Romans carrying on from the founding of the empire until 1453 when the Ottoman sultan Mehmet II the Conqueror sacked Constantinople and turned it into the capital of the Ottoman Empire.¹⁵ There were, however, some elements of the empire that justify a distinguishing characterization from the earlier Roman polity which allowed later Greek historians and nationalists to claim it as a Greek medieval state.¹⁶ In the first case, increasingly the language of administration, church, and high culture was Greek, and as the borders of the empire shrunk under the pressure from Arabs, Slavs, Lombards, Normans, or Seljuks, the territories of the empire became concentrated in Greek-speaking regions. European contemporaries frequently referred to the Byzantines as Greeks, though for the Seljuk and Ottoman Turks the territory of the empire continued to be Rome (Rum).

The history of Jews in the Byzantine Empire has received some attention but there is still a lot to uncover. Jews certainly faced restrictions in Byzantium in terms of professions and interactions with non-Jews, but they generally did not face the persecutions and violence Jews faced in medieval Europe where they were regularly persecuted and murdered particularly at times of heightened religious fervor like the crusades. Western Jews were subjected to all sorts of legal restrictions that barred them from owning agricultural land, being employed in professions, and even engaging in certain mercantile functions. Jews were also frequently accused of all sorts of crimes and unholy practices. The ritual murder accusation, which we will encounter again in later chapters, was a common trope of the period starting from the first such accusation in Norwich in 1144 that linked Jewish rituals with the use of blood from sacrificed Christian children. Medieval monarchs habitually expelled Jews from their domains, often to seize their properties, as in England in 1290, France in 1306, Sicily and Lithuania in 1483, Spain in 1492, Brandenburg in 1510, the Papal States in 1569, and Bavaria in 1593. Jews were also victims of changing political circumstances as in the case of England and France following the French victory at Bouvines in 1214. In both states, Jews were expelled, while France and England developed new structures of taxation and governance, though in England Jews were expelled at the request of parliament over negotiations regarding taxation while in France the initiative rested with King Philip IV.¹⁷ Even the generally tolerant Venice, which was willing to accept Muslims and later Protestants in its city, was only willing to accept Jews on the condition they remained segregated in their “ghetto.”¹⁸

The Byzantine Empire had its own share of anti-Jewish monarchs, and there were occasions of violence especially in times of war as we saw with Heraclius, who in 630/1 may have launched a forced conversion policy. Forced conversions were rare but not unheard of throughout the Mediterranean from the early fifth-century onwards, and several Byzantine emperors entertained the idea of forced conversion or the expulsion of Jews.¹⁹ As in the West, such policies frequently coincided with political or religious turmoil. Leo II, for example, pursued such a policy in the middle of the *iconomachy*, the dispute over the use of holy icons, while two notoriously anti-Jewish emperors, Basil I and Romanos I Lekapenos, were usurpers trying to establish their own dynasties. Recently scholars have challenged even the historicity of such forced conversions claiming that firm evidence exists only for the forced conversion of the Jews of Carthage under Heraclius.²⁰

In general, however, the bureaucratic nature of the Byzantine state and its reliance on Roman law helped ameliorate potential outbursts by the authorities. In Byzantium Jews were probably threatened more by the mob in the not too infrequent urban riots of the empire or by the actions of churchmen as in the case of the expulsion of Jews from the city of Sparta, than from organized state oppression.²¹ Furthermore, the relative control that the state had over the church ensured that the latter was not often the instigator of violence against Jews as was the case in the West. Though some emperors enacted discriminatory policies in specific regions and towns as in the case of Constantine X Doukas, who banished the Jews of Constantinople to the adjacent settlement of Pera, there was never an attempt to expel or forcibly convert the entire Jewish population of the empire, as was the case in many parts of Europe where as late as the end of the fifteenth century thousands of Spanish and Portuguese Jews were forced to convert after the Reconquista.²² Byzantine emperors, even fanatically devout ones like Theodosius I, frequently protected Jews and punished those who attacked them, despite the political backlash of such actions. In Theodosius' case that backlash came from the bishop of Milan Ambrose, famous for excommunicating Theodosius over the massacre of the people of Thessaloniki and for forcing him to publicly repent. In the case of Jews, however, Ambrose forced Theodosius to retract the punishment of those who had looted a synagogue in Callinicum insisting that Jews were not protected by the law.²³ Byzantium had no uniform policy toward Jews and as Benjamin of Tudela, a twelfth-century Jewish traveler from Spain, reported Jews could be oppressed in some cities like Constantinople but enjoy freedoms and prosperity in others like Thebes.²⁴

Despite this varied attitude toward Jews the Byzantine Empire inherited Rome's legislation which included restrictive policies toward Jews such as bans on circumcision and on Jewish settlement in Jerusalem and restrictions of certain religious practices and holidays.²⁵ Furthermore, Jews had been required to pay a special poll tax from 70ce onwards, while further legal impediments were enacted by late Roman emperors such as Theodosius I who banned polygamy, and Honorius, Valentinian III, Theodosius II, Justin, and Justinian who restricted Jewish employment in the bureaucracy and the army.²⁶ Jews were also forbidden from proselytizing while conversion of Jews to Christianity was legally encouraged with converts receiving various privileges and protection from disinheritance from their still Jewish parents.²⁷

In addition to anti-Jewish legislation, Byzantine Jews were also the targets of lay and ecclesiastical literature that associated them with evil deeds. From the fourth century onwards prestigious theologians like Ephraem and John Chrysostom linked Jews with baseness and loose morals, and advanced the depiction of Jews as murderers, Christ killers, adulterers, and generally lawbreakers.²⁸ Although early Christianity made clear distinction between Jews and Christian heretics, over the centuries the line became blurred with pagans, Jews, and heretics being often seen in similar ways and thus subjected on occasion to similar repression. The characterization of the term “Jew and Judaizing,” referring to Christian conversion to Judaism, was increasingly used as a label for heresy applied to a variety of sects such as the Bogomils, Paulicians, Athinganoi, and others, causing confusion.²⁹ Although the church itself was loth to accept the validity of forced conversions of Jews, unlike that of heretics, it certainly aimed at the ultimate conversion of Jews and through the banning of certain interactions between Jews and Christians instituted in Canon Law indirectly discriminated against Jews and their standing in a predominantly Christian society.³⁰ Conversion certainly carried great social and material benefits and was the only manner in which Jews could achieve positions of authority in the empire. A handful of such examples may indicate preferential treatment of such converts as in the case of Makarios who became an ecclesiastic and served both as confessor and as ambassador to Emperor Manuel II, while Philotheos Kokkinos, who was of Jewish origin, became patriarch.³¹

Finally, we should not ignore the significance of widespread popular anti-Semitism which took various form from the dumping of unclean water from the tanneries on the doorways of Jewish houses to “defile” them as Benjamin of Tudela reports³² to violent outbursts as that in Callinicum discussed above. The existing hostility may have intensified with the arrival of the Western crusaders and the settlement of Catholic Christians in the empire in later centuries who were more strongly anti-Jewish in their attitude and who also saw the local Christian population as heretical.³³ On occasion Jews participated in the rather frequent urban riots of the empire as in 1042, and on rare occasions they even rose in revolt as they had done in earlier centuries but such acts could backfire. In Byzantine Bari, for example, Jews rose in revolt in 1051, which provoked the Christian population to retaliate by destroying the Jewish quarter of the city.³⁴

Despite this, Jews were very involved in the economic life of the Byzantine Empire. Jews were employed in many professions including the vitally important silk manufacturing from as early as the seventh century in Constantinople, and the silk trade with Italy in the tenth century.³⁵ In urban settlements Jews worked in the tannery trade, the retail trade, cloth dyeing and manufacture, literary work and teaching, moneylending, and commerce.³⁶ Although most Jews lived in the cities of the empire there is also evidence of Jewish rural settlements. Benjamin of Tudela mentions 200 Jews engaged in agriculture on land they owned on Mt. Parnassus, and there is other evidence of Jews as farmers, manual laborers, and even peasants tied to monasteries.³⁷ As mentioned, Jews were legally barred from positions of authority including all military or bureaucratic posts,³⁸ but toward the end of the empire many Jews managed to circumvent many of the restrictions of Roman legislation by assuming privileged foreign status, usually Venetian or Genoese, which protected them from imperial

taxation and imperial law.³⁹ That further fragmented the already diverse Byzantine Jewish communities and their legal status between local and foreign Jews who competed against each other.

Jewish diversity in the Byzantine Empire existed long before the decline of Byzantine power. Jews were divided in several sects with Rabbanite and Karaite Jews having communities throughout the empire including Constantinople, where prior to the fall of the city to the Fourth Crusade there were some 2,000 Rabbanite and 500 Karaite individuals or households.⁴⁰ The sectarian division was coupled with linguistic fragmentation. Even in Hellenistic and Roman times some Jewish communities had abandoned Hebrew and Aramaic and had become monolingual speakers of Greek as was the case in Alexandria.⁴¹ Those living in Judea had maintained their languages but soon also adopted Arabic. Byzantine Jews on the other hand maintained the use of Greek in their daily lives but retained a knowledge of Hebrew as a scholarly language.⁴² Karaites too were primarily Greek speakers and many Jews had even adopted Greek names.⁴³ Jewish communities in Greece were reported as early as the first century CE in Thessaly, Boeotia, Macedonia, Aetolia, Attica, Argos, Corinth, Peloponnese, Euboea, Cyprus and Crete, and in Byzantine times more Jewish communities were reported in Mantinea, Hermioni, Mani, Methoni, Koroni, and Aegina.⁴⁴ These Rabbanite Greek-speaking Jews will form the Romaniote community that I will be referring to in subsequent chapters. Relations between different Jewish communities were not amicable and were often in competition with each other. For example, when the Karaites fled the depredations of crusaders after the 1099 destruction of Jerusalem which was the center of their movement, they sought refuge in Byzantium. Their different culture and origins from formerly Islamic territory, however, was used against them by the Rabbanite Jews of the empire to arouse the suspicions of Byzantine authorities regarding their possible allegiances.⁴⁵ Similarly Byzantine Jews were often in conflict with the Italian Jews of later centuries and their claims to the privileges enjoyed by Venetian or Genoese merchants.⁴⁶

It is also a curious circumstance that the final, and longest-lived, dynasty of Byzantium, the Paleologos dynasty, was perhaps the most philo-Semitic of all Byzantine dynasties. Although the Laskarids of Nicea cannot be considered philo-Semitic and Emperor John III Doukas Vatatzis supposedly ordered the forced conversion of all Jews, Michael VIII Paleologos, who sidelined, blinded, and imprisoned the last Laskarid emperor John IV, reversed that policy and gave Jews some privileges hoping to restore the empire to financial health.⁴⁷ Other emperors like Andronikos II issued decrees guaranteeing Jewish rights, a practice that was emulated by other Balkan rulers.⁴⁸ The weakness of the empire led later emperors to seek to subvert even their ecclesiastical autonomy to the pope in return for military aid, and spurred the emperors to a more liberal attitude toward non-Romans including Jews and Muslims. By the time the fiction of Roman independence ended with the fall of Constantinople in 1453, Byzantine Jews enjoyed the most extensive rights of all European Jews.

The relatively benevolent attitude of the Paleologue dynasty should not mask the fact that Jews were still second-class citizens and faced legal and social disadvantages and a hostile Christian population. Jews were seen at times as an existential threat or one tied to very real political challenges to the empire. Such attitudes varied over time

as the early links between the political threat of Islam and the theological perils of Judaism subsided when Byzantium recovered and could hold its own against the Arab onslaught but were resumed from the fourteenth century onwards, when a new wave of anti-Jewish texts appeared tied to the new threat of the Ottoman Turks.⁴⁹ Even during the rather benevolent Paleologos period, and perhaps in reaction to imperial policies, the anti-Jewish rhetoric of the church intensified and several anti-Jewish diatribes were written including one by the deposed ex-emperor and usurper John VI Kantakouzenos from his retirement at the monastery of Mangana.⁵⁰ Patriarch Athanasios scolded Emperor Andronikos for his attitude toward Jews, Muslims, and Armenians, while when Byzantine officials supported Jewish claims they faced accusations of Judaizing as in the case of Chionios in Thessaloniki and Kokalas in Constantinople.⁵¹

At a time when the church felt threatened by the efforts of the emperors to seek military support against the Ottomans from the West in return for the subjugation of the Orthodox Church to the pope, attacks against Jews and Judaizing heresies helped to heighten the religious sensibilities of the Roman public and ultimately scuttle the proposed union with Rome. Although the two churches were supposedly unified in the Council of Florence (1438–45) under pressure from a desperate emperor John VIII who gave Rome control over the churches in the East, the eastern Orthodox people and clergy in their vast majority refused to accept the union. Instead of unifying Catholicism with Orthodoxy the 1439 Decree of Union divided the Byzantine public and church into unionists and anti-unionists and led to violent riots and political infighting that outweighed the meager aid that Byzantium received from the West. For many in Byzantium, Catholicism was a greater threat than Islam and the seemingly unstoppable Ottoman Turks and many had professed a preference for submission to a Muslim conqueror rather than a Catholic one.⁵²

On May 29, 1453, the inevitable took place and the city of Constantinople, the Second Rome, fell after a brief siege to Mehmed II Sultan of the Ottomans. The last emperor, Constantine XI, died fighting and the much-diminished city was given to plunder. Mehmed II immediately moved his capital to the city and over the next few years subdued whatever Byzantine outposts remained in the Morea (Peloponnese) and Trebizond (Trabzon). Within a century the Ottomans would have built one of the largest empires of their time conquering the territories of the Mamluk empire in the Middle East, and of the Kingdom of Hungary in central Europe. Though often portrayed as a disaster in European and especially Greek historiography, ironically the Ottoman conquest also sheltered the Orthodox Church and gave it renewed authority in the East. While many Byzantines, and at least one Cretan Jew, lamented the fall in near apocalyptic language even some contemporaries who fought the Ottomans saw the conquest as the lesser of two evils, the worse outcome being Catholic domination.⁵³

Greeks and Jews in the Ottoman Empire

The Ottoman conquests of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries changed and retained the status of Jews in the region. On the one hand, Jews remained second-class citizens compared to Muslims and had to pay the tax assessed to all non-Muslims, called the

cizye. On the other hand, they were now the equals of Christians who were still the majority of the population of the early Ottoman state particularly in the Balkans. Up to the reign of Mehmed II, Christians or converts from Balkan Christians continued to hold significant posts in the Ottoman administration, but in the sixteenth century Jews increasingly filled several positions in the Ottoman court and the diplomatic corps, until the seventeenth century.⁵⁴ As the Ottomans pushed further into Europe and were engaged in near constant warfare with European states like Hungary, Austria and Spain under the Habsburgs, Venice, and Poland, Jews served a useful role as intermediaries with Europe and other hostile states like Safavid Persia. Wealthy Jews dominated the money distribution networks of Constantinople and Adrianople in the sixteenth century, and later competed strongly with Greeks for government tax farms.⁵⁵

The Ottomans already had long experience of ruling over a religiously and ethnically diverse population prior to 1453. Christians and Muslims had long interacted in Anatolia, especially during the Seljuk period when the ruling classes of the Byzantines and Seljuks, who were still going through the process of full conversion to Orthodox Islam, had crossed sides, converted, and apostatized, building familiarity with each other.⁵⁶ The image of early fourteenth-century Anatolia found in the account of the North African traveler Muhammad Ibn Battuta showed a region dominated by a multitude of small Turkish emirates, among which the Ottomans were hardly distinguishable, but in constant interaction between Christians, Armenians, Jews, Genoese, and Venetians.⁵⁷ Of all the emirates, the Ottomans had the greatest exposure to non-Muslims having rapidly expanded in the Balkans using Christians in their government, armies, and administration until the conquest of Constantinople by Mehmet II. Mehmet favored non-Turks in positions of authority including many members of the Paleologoi, the former Byzantine Imperial family, who converted to Islam like Has Murad Pasha, Mesih Pasha, and Huseyn Bey.⁵⁸

The capture of Constantinople transformed the Ottomans and allowed the Ottoman sultans to legitimately claim the title of Roman Emperor. The Ottoman state became a stable, bureaucratic state, still rapidly expanding in all directions but with increasing need to standardize its administration and find effective ways to rule over a massive territory with diverse populations. For most of the sultans and the Ottoman elite, linguistic, religious, and cultural differences among the *reya* were not problems that needed to be addressed.⁵⁹ Drawing upon both Roman and Islamic traditions the Ottomans made religion a fundamental aspect of their system but they also formalized and institutionalized it to a previously unheard-of degree. This is the famous *millet* system which, although scholarship has challenged and problematized considerably since it was first suggested, is still a useful tool to summarize and simplify Ottoman administrative policies with regard to religious minorities.

The origin of the *millet* system was generally attributed to Mehmed II, who, immediately following the capture of Constantinople, sought out the renowned ecclesiastic Genadios Scholarius, who had been captured and enslaved, and named him the new patriarch of Constantinople.⁶⁰ The choice was politically astute since Genadios had been a prominent opponent of the union of the Eastern churches with the Catholic Church and the rapprochement attempted by the Paleologoi emperors with the West.⁶¹ Under Genadios the Orthodox Church was guaranteed to repudiate the union and