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The field of modern Greek Jewish studies has added to our knowledge of previously ignored communities. There have been notable achievements. Bernard Pierron’s account of Jewish-Christian relations set a high standard for future scholarship (*Juifs et chrétiens de la Grèce moderne: Histoire des relations intercommunautaires de 1821 à 1945* [Jews and Christians of modern Greece: A history of intercommunal relations from 1821 to 1945] [1996]). Rena Molho’s award-winning work explores the modernization of Salonika’s Jewish community (*The Jews of Thessaloniki, 1856–1919: A Unique Community* [2000]). Similarly, Rika Benveniste’s microhistory of Luna Gattegno rescues from obscurity the life of a woman who survived Auschwitz and is a book of history, conscience, and love (Λούνα: Δοκίμιο ιστορικής βιογραφίας [Luna: An essay in historical biography] [2017]).

Evdoxios Doxiadis’s *State, Nationalism, and the Jewish Communities of Modern Greece* seeks to build on this existing literature. Doxiadis examines the relationship between the Greek state and the Jews and changing state attitudes within shifting historical contexts. He places this analysis within the broader context of the Greek state’s treatment of other minorities from the Greek War of Independence (1821-29) to the conclusion of World War II. However, his conclusions often reinforce Greek official apologia about the state’s treatment of Jews, while ignoring the Jewish perspective.

Chapter 1, “Greeks and Jews from Antiquity to the Ottoman Empire,” provides extensive historical background going back 2,300 years. Doxiadis defines three themes that run through the book. First, the “Greeks” and “Jews” were separate and often in conflict from the start, an argument that resembles Robert D. Kaplan’s discredited ancient hatreds thesis in his *Balkan Ghosts: A Journey through History* (1993) (p. 1). Second, the state, whether represented by the Eastern Roman Empire (Byzantium) or an independent Greece after 1821, was often more tolerant than the Greek Orthodox Church and the general Greek population. Third, Sephardi Jews shared a certain closeness to the Ottomans, as well as a rivalry with the Greek Orthodox elites, which Christians used to justify their antisemitism.

Chapter 2, “My Enemy’s Friend Is My Enemy: Jews and the Greek War of Independence (1789-1830),” explains the formation of identity in the Greek state after its founding in 1821. Here, Doxiadis contrasts the apparently liberal state with the narrow-minded church and population. At the elite level, Doxiadis discusses the Greek nationalism of such men as Rigas Phereos Velestinlis and Adamantios Korais, who were influenced by the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. Ko-
rais, although anticlerical, decried rabbinic Judaism as “superstitious” and particularly hostile to Christianity, which provides evidence of the church’s hold on Greek identity (p. 41). Doxiadis argues that the Greek War of Independence “was in many respects a genocidal conflict,” involving the “genocidal destruction of the Jewish communities of Greece”—claims made without adequate reference to the scholarly literature on genocide (pp. 31, 36). Doxiadis, however, does not discuss the casual antisemitism of the Greek revolutionaries, such as Georgios Karaiskakis.[1]

Chapter 3, “What a Great Idea! National Identity and the Early Greek Kingdom (1830-1862),” examines identity consolidation in the new Greek state. This account of independent Greece’s early years lays the foundations of how we can understand the state’s treatment of Jews and other minorities. Doxiadis argues that Greece accommodated minorities to a limited degree and that policy changed partially in anticipation of territorial expansion that would include many who were not Greek Orthodox. Although Doxiadis stresses state liberalism, he presents little archival material about the Jews that adequately represents a Jewish viewpoint. What comes across is the resilience of Greek Orthodoxy as a cultural and political factor. In Greece, the state could oppose the church as an institution while accepting church membership as the foundation of Greekness.

Chapter 4, “Competing Nationalisms: New Territories, Nationalist Aspirations, and Jews (1862-1923),” analyzes the context of Greece and other Balkan states fighting over populations and regions. Doxiadis explains that while other states thwarted some of Greece’s territorial ambitions, the country still peacefully obtained the Ionian islands (including Corfu) from Britain in 1863, Thessaly, and parts of southern Epirus from the Ottoman Empire (1881). In 1912, Greece captured Ioannina and Salonika (Greece’s second largest city, Thessaloniki in Greek, Saloniki in Judeo-Spanish). Both cities had notable Jewish communities, and as Doxiadis shows, it was during this era that Jews became able to participate in Greek civic life, join the army, and attend university. Doxiadis then discusses the 1891 Corfu blood libel—during which the Greek Orthodox population attacked Jews in Corfu and Zakynthos after the murder of a Jewish girl who was falsely rumored to have been a Christian, and the Athens government intervened to lift the siege of Corfu’s Jewish quarter, following which some two thousand Jews fled the island—in largely political terms.

Chapter 5, “Disloyal Jews and Good Jews: Interwar Politics and the Jewish Communities of Greece (1923-1940),” focuses on interwar Greek policy changes following the influx of 1.5 million Greek Orthodox refugees and the acquisition of territories with large non-Orthodox and non-Greek-speaking populations. During this period, the Greek government used refugees to alter the demography of northern Greece, turning the “slavophone” ethnic Macedonians in the countryside and the Sephardim in Salonika into minorities in areas they had previously dominated (p. 108). The Greek government regarded minorities with suspicion, although Doxiadis argues generously that the state had “rather confused expectations” of religious minorities (p. 113). Discrimination forced the Salonika Jews and the Turks of western Thrace to vote in a separate electoral college to limit the impact of their parliamentary representation, for instance, and in Salonika, the state ousted the Jews from their dominant economic position, pulled them away from the Jewish communal education, and imposed compulsory Sunday closing—when by tradition Salonika had closed on Shabbat and the Jewish holidays.

Chapter 6, “The Holocaust and the Destruction of Greek Jewry,” discusses the impact of the Axis occupation of Greece on the Jews and its aftermath. Doxiadis shifts the focus away from Salonika, where some 70 percent of Greek Jews lived before the war: “The near total destruction
of the Thessaloniki [Salonica] community has skewed the statistics of the Greek Holocaust which when broken down indicate that the experience of Jews and their chances of survival in Greece varied dramatically from place to place” (p. 133). Doxiadis balances evidence of collaboration with instances of solidarity, showing that Bulgaria sought to build bridges to the Jews during its occupation of northeastern Greece in 1941. In Salonika, according to Doxiadis, antisemitism was connected to Jews’ lack of fluency in Greek, which led to suspect loyalties. Doxiadis passes favorable judgment on the church but not on some Jewish leaders, implying that Chief Rabbi Hirsch Zvi Koretz failed to destroy Salonika’s Jewish communal records, which ended up in German hands, and thereby insinuating the Jews were involved in their own destruction.

Few books have sought to cover as much ground as Doxiadis’s study. Unfortunately, the author approaches Greece’s Jews from a one-dimensional perspective that focuses largely on the state’s major concern being whether Jews were “loyal” or “disloyal.” Doxiadis rules out any discussion of the nature or origin of Greek antisemitism, remaining largely concerned with “when such ideas resulted in acts that forced the state to act” (p. ix). That self-imposed obstacle leaves the reader asking for more detail, particularly about the role of Greek Orthodox Christianity and the state in promoting antisemitism. When Doxiadis writes about antisemitism he prefers political to theoretical explanations.

In particular, Doxiadis does not examine religiously inspired bigotry, whether antisemitism or hostility to other minorities. The result is that he cites instances of religiously motivated hate that he does not fully explain, such as the Greek Orthodox bishop of Naxos calling for the “extermination” of that island’s Catholics (p. 40). Instead, by approaching the Jews from the standpoint of the Greek state, Doxiadis provides an account that often echoes Greek officials. For example, discussing the Don Pacifico affair (1847-50), he favorably cites Greek politicians who diminished the antisemitism of the mob’s attack on a Jew. Similarly, Doxiadis recycles official apologia for the 1891 Corfu blood libel by stressing Corfu’s foreign connections, implying that the island was somehow not as Greek as the rest of Greece.

Doxiadis’s concentration on how the state understood its Jewish citizens has the effect of portraying the Jews as objects that are acted upon rather than historical agents with their own will and desires. Such an approach overlooks the Salonika Jewish community’s intensive cultural and political activity in the interwar era.[2] Indeed, the absence of the Jewish side of the story, as well as analysis of broader contemporaneous European Jewish contexts, is striking.

Perhaps more notable is the author’s magnanimous judgment of the state’s actions, which stands in contrast to his view of some Jewish leaders. For example, during the interwar years, Jews left Greece at above the rate of other Greeks due to the country’s economic distress and growing antisemitism. Some twenty thousand Jews moved to Paris after 1927, while between ten and fifteen thousand moved to the Mandate of Palestine from 1932 to 1934 (p. 126). The Greek state was able to strip these Jewish emigrants of their Greek nationality if they left the newly acquired areas of Greece, such as Salonika. The conclusion, which Doxiadis does not draw, is that while the Greek state did not have a formal policy of encouraging Jewish emigration, it ensured that their departure was permanent.

By contrast, Jewish leaders (like Rabbi Koretz) get short shrift. Doxiadis’s claims about the Holocaust, although unsupported by the evidence, dovetail with the official version: that the Greek state is largely blameless for the Holocaust, while the Jews bear some responsibility. Such an approach reflects the difficulty that mainstream Greek historiography, including Doxiadis’s book, has integrating the Jewish experience. Like the
Greek state, Doxiadis silences the Jews, then implies they were to blame for their own suffering.

Notes


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