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Synagogue Zirkusgasse, the so-called “Türkischer Tempel” in Vienna’s District Leopoldstadt, designed by Hugo von Wiedenfeld (1852–1925). This synagogue for Vienna’s Sephardic community was consecrated in 1887, and destroyed during Kristallnacht. It was also home to Salonica Jews who lived in Vienna. Undated photograph; photographer/artist unknown. Source: LBI F 3226 Synagogue Zirkusgasse in Vienna, Leo Baeck Institute New York, F 3226.

“Austrian,” “Jewish,” “Salonican”: The Multiple Aspects of Belonging of Salonican Jews in the Fin-de-Siècle Habsburg Empire

by *Lida-Maria Dodou*

Abstract

Even though Salonican Jews are not typically associated with the Habsburg Empire, some of them, nonetheless, lived there. This paper aims to examine the formation of these Salonican Jews' (self-)identification by studying their social interactions with the local Viennese population such as the Viennese Sephardi or the Greek-Orthodox communities. The change of the milieu within which they found themselves subsequently impacted their self-perception. Thus, the issue of the surrounding environment and their relations with other groups became central to their self-understanding, as will be demonstrated. By examining different aspects, like migration patterns, financial decisions and family ties, one can understand how their intersection influenced Salonica Jews' self-identification, which, at the same time, shaped and was shaped by the surrounding milieu. Within this framework, these people perceived themselves and were perceived as Salonican, Sephardi, Jewish, and as subjects of the Emperor.

1 Introduction

On September 24, 1897, the Judeo-Spanish newspaper of Salonica “*La Epoka*” published an article from its correspondent in Vienna, which described how well-received the newspaper was by the “*Salonikiotes de Vyena*” (“Salonican [Jews] of Vienna”).¹ Although not an official community of their own, it appears that the Salonican Sephardi Jews were quite numerous in fin-de-siècle Vienna. The reason for this was mostly the commercial links they entertained with enterprises located in the Austrian half of the Habsburg Empire. In fact,

¹ *La Epoka*, September 24, 1897, 3.

this period was the period of the greatest financial and political influence of the Habsburg Empire in Salonica and its surrounding region, and a part of Salonica's Jewish elite was instrumental in the consolidation of this influence.² A few Salonican Jews also had political links with the Habsburg Empire, since many of them had acquired the Austrian protection (within the framework of the Capitulations) and/or citizenship, sometimes even before 1867.³

The presence of Sephardi Jews in the Habsburg lands is a field of Jewish studies that has experienced a revival in the last decade. Works like that of Martin Stechauner offer an insight into the (self-)perception of Sephardi Jews in the Habsburg lands.⁴ Others, like Felicitas Heimann-Jelinek's work, bring to light the material aspect of Sephardi life while considering regional differences that existed.⁵ However, a study about Jews from Salonica in the Habsburg Empire – and particularly in Vienna – remains a desideratum. This becomes more evident if one considers the significance Salonica had for Sephardi Jewry, as indicated by designations such as “Mother of Israel.”⁶ The Ashkenazi and Romaniote Jews that inhabited Salonica had adapted to the Sephardi majority, as indicated, for example, by the use of the Judeo-Spanish language, while the overall Jewish population of Salonica constituted the city's majority until the 1920s.⁷

² Kostis Moskof, *Thessaloniki, Breakthrough of the Compradorial City* [Greek] (Athens: Stochastis, 1978), 79–93.

³ Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv, GKA Konsulatsarchiv Saloniki 138, Matrikel 1833, where there are Jews registered as “untertanen de iure”; the issue of the legal differentiation between the protégés and the citizens of a European state in the Ottoman Empire is the subject of an extensive bibliography. For some introductory comments, see Pablo Martín Asuero, *El consulado de España en Estambul y la protección de los Sefardíes entre 1804 y 1903* (Istanbul: The Isis Press, 2011), 14.

⁴ Martin Stechauner, *The Sephardic Jews of Vienna: A Jewish Minority Crossing Borders* (Vienna: Unpublished dissertation, 2019).

⁵ Felicitas Heimann-Jelinek (ed.), *Die Türken in Wien: Geschichte einer jüdischen Gemeinde* [Jüdisches Museum Wien, May 12–October 31, 2010] (Vienna: Jüdisches Museum Wien, 2010).

⁶ For a discussion about the origins and conceptualization of the phrase, see Devin E. Naar, “Fashioning the ‘Mother of Israel’: The Ottoman Jewish Historical Narrative and the Image of Jewish Salonica,” *Jewish History* 28:3 (2014): 354–357.

⁷ Devin E. Naar, “Sephardim since Birth: Reconfiguring Jewish Identity in America,” in *Sephardi and Mizrahi Jews in America: The Jewish Role in American Life*, ed. Saba Soomekh (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2015), 75–104, here 97. Naar offers an indicative example of Ashkenazi adaptation to the broader Sephardi milieu in Salonica through the case of Saadi Halevi, the editor of *La Epoka* (see fn. 1).

This essay aims to examine the relations between Salonican Jews and other groups in Vienna, and how their interaction in both the Habsburg lands and Salonica shaped their sense of belonging and their self-perception. Salonican Jews in the Habsburg Empire will here be examined as a community, not on a formal level, but rather as a group that shared multiple cultural affinities, linked to the experience of living across different borders.⁸ This experience turned them into mediators between the different milieux within which they found themselves, thus blurring the boundaries between these worlds.⁹ This experience across milieux led, as will be demonstrated, to the concretion of their self-identification as “Salonicans,” “Sephardim,” “Jews,” and “subjects of the Emperor.” By interacting with different groups and individuals, they shaped their self-understanding, transforming their identification in relation to their experience(s) and how they were perceived by others.¹⁰ In other words, their origin from Salonica, the fact that they were merchants, their immigration (whether temporary or permanent) to the Habsburg lands, and their acquisition of Austrian citizenship/protection (at least for some of them) all shaped their self-understanding, which would have been different had any of these elements not been a factor.

2 Salonican Jews in the Habsburg Empire

While Sephardi Jews in the Habsburg Empire were present already since the early 18th century, the presence of Salonican Jews dates to approximately one century later. This presence is documented by the passport indices of the Habsburg consulate in Salonica. According to these, a number of Jews in Salonica who had originally come from the Italian dominions of the Habsburg Empire were regularly issued passports to travel to the Habsburg lands. The persons in question had maintained business relations with fellow Jews in Italian cities such as Trieste, participating in broader Jewish maritime

⁸ Vaso Seirinidou, *Greeks in Vienna (18th–mid-19th Century)* [Greek] (Athens: Herodotus, 2011), 27.

⁹ Olga Katsiardi-Hering, “Christian and Jewish Ottoman Subjects: Family, Inheritance and Commercial Networks between East and West (17th–18th C.),” in *The Economic Role of the Family in the European Economy from the 13th to the 18th Centuries*, ed. S. Cavaciocchi (Florence: Florence University Press, 2008), 412–434, here 414.

¹⁰ Basil Gounaris, “Introductory Comments,” in *Identities in Macedonia* [Greek], eds. Basil Gounaris, Iakovos Michailidis, and Giorgos Angelopoulos (Athens: Papazisi Editions, 1997), 11–25, here 19.

networks.¹¹ However, they saw the opportunity which was provided by the increasing trade between the Habsburg mainland and the region of Macedonia and expanded their businesses beyond the well-established networks in the port cities of the Mediterranean, thus creating the first Jewish Salonican enclave in Vienna.

The presence of fellow Sephardim in Vienna, many of whom were members of the same extended families as those in Salonica, proved valuable for the eventual consolidation of businesses in Vienna and the decision of settlement taken by Salonican Jews. Joint partnerships were sometimes formed, particularly in the field of the so-called “colonial products” or “Turkish products,” but most importantly, information on where to settle or whom to trust for financial transactions was shared, thus minimizing the risks for the newcomers. For example, when Elie Asseo settled in Vienna in 1903, he opened his business close to the *Westbahnhof* train station, but soon transferred it to the city center, at *Postgasse 11*, where one could find other Sephardi businesses in very close proximity.¹² Moreover, it appears that the transfer of leases took place within the same circles. That is how in 1891 the firm “Calderon Josef und Soehne” (owned by the Sephardi Calderon family) was registered at *Untere Donaustrasse 27*,¹³ while in 1908 Calderon’s firm had moved and the firm of the Salonican Jew N. Nehama was registered at this address.¹⁴

Even though many of the Salonican Jews who found themselves in the Habsburg Empire participated in the same social circles as the Viennese Sephardim, they notably did not participate in the official institution of the Viennese Sephardi community (*türkisch-israelitische Gemeinde*) – a fact that contrasts strikingly with their active participation in the Salonican Jewish community. Additionally, when in the last quarter of the 19th century the Sephardi community of Vienna attempted to maintain its independence from

¹¹ Mark Levene, “Port Jewry of Salonika: Between Neo-colonialism and Nation-state,” in *Port Jews: Jewish Communities in Cosmopolitan Maritime Trading Centres, 1550–1950*, ed. David Cesarani (London/New York: Routledge, 2013), 125–154, here 130.

¹² Adolph Lehmann, *Adolph Lehmann’s allgemeiner Wohnungs-Anzeiger: nebst Handels- u. Gewerbe-Adressbuch für d. k.k. Reichshaupt- u. Residenzstadt Wien u. Umgebung* (Vienna: Österreichische Anzeigen-Gesellschaft, 1908), 23.

¹³ Adolph Lehmann, *Adolph Lehmann’s allgemeiner Wohnungs-Anzeiger: nebst Handels- u. Gewerbe-Adressbuch für d. k.k. Reichshaupt- u. Residenzstadt Wien u. Umgebung* (Vienna: Österreichische Anzeigen-Gesellschaft, 1891), 610.

¹⁴ Lehmann, *Wohnungs-Anzeiger* 1908, 383.

the *Israelitische Kultusgemeinde*, the official Jewish community organization, which predominantly consisted of Ashkenazi Jews, the Salonican Jews in Vienna did not participate in their struggle, not even through public advocacy. We can, therefore, deduce that they did not associate with the official Jewish institutions, or even the discussions conducted within their framework, with their sense of belonging in a Sephardi milieu.

Salonican Jews also had interactions with Ashkenazi Jews, albeit more limited. These mostly entailed sharing information regarding business prospects in regions of the Habsburg Empire where there was no consolidated Sephardi presence, like Moravia.¹⁵ It appears, moreover, that the local committee of the *Alliance Israélite Universelle* (AIU) in Prague was regularly informed about the situation in the broader region of Macedonia. The activities of the AIU in Macedonia often appeared in the organization’s bulletins, providing information to all its members across its network. Yet, in the case of Prague, one can find in the local committee’s archives a draft letter written by Rabbi Armand Kaminka (1866–1950) on the reverse side of a telegram that was originally sent from Serres (the part where the recipient’s name was written is torn and missing).¹⁶ Thus, we can deduce that either direct communication between Serres and Prague was established or some Salonican Jew, to whom the telegram was originally addressed, had visited Rabbi Kaminka – either way, this is an indication of links between Salonican Sephardi Jews and Ashkenazi Jews in the Habsburg lands.¹⁷

Furthermore, there were even cases of intermarriage. The most well-known example concerned the marriage of Robert Allatini, a banker and member of one of the most renowned families of Salonica, with Bronia Rappaport,

¹⁵ Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv, GKA Konsulatsarchiv Saloniki 454, letters of firms from various places, like Prague, but also smaller ones, like Reichenberg/Liberec, asking for information about Jewish Salonican firms.

¹⁶ Serres is a town close to Salonica. The city and its Jewish community were in decline in the second half of the 19th century. However, by the end of that century it regained some of its importance thanks to, among other things, the settlement of Jews from Salonica, who sought to take advantage of the financial opportunities offered by the production of export goods and the eventual creation of a railway line that passed by the city. Vasilis Ritzaleos, “Jewish Neighborhoods in Serres from Tanzimat until the Financial Crisis of the Interwar, 1839–1929,” in *Proceedings of the International Conference on the Town of Serres and its Periphery from the Ottoman Conquest to Contemporary Times* (Serres: Municipality of Serres, 2013), 379–400, here 383–384.

¹⁷ Alliance Israélite Universelle, Petits Pays, Tchécoslovaquie B, 1.4.

daughter of Arnold Rappaport, director of the *Länderbank* and a prominent member of Galician and later Viennese Jewry.¹⁸ It is worth noting that the marriage did not take place at the Sephardi synagogue, a fact which attests to the previous conclusion about the Salonican Jews' disassociation from the institutionalized framework of Sephardi social life, as well as the minimal importance (if any) that the issue of denominational differences held for them – at least for those about whom we have data.

Salonican Jews in Vienna were also in contact with another part of the Viennese population: the Greek-Orthodox community. The great majority of Salonican businesses were located in the “Greek quarter” in Vienna’s first district, often side-by-side or even in the same building as those of Greek-Orthodox merchants.¹⁹ There are moreover records of the two groups visiting the same recreational locations outside Vienna, like Bad Ischl, particularly in the summer, a fact that not only verifies their links with one another but also indicates the adoption of the same standards and behaviors as the locals and their belonging to the Viennese upper class.²⁰

Another element that demonstrates their contacts with the Greek-speaking population in Vienna is the very name they used for themselves when addressing the audience of the most popular Judeo-Spanish newspaper in Salonica, in the example given at the beginning. The term used, that is “Salonikiotes,” is a version of the Ladino word for a person originating from Salonica which contains a Greek suffix and therefore differs from the word “Selaniklis” which was otherwise typically used.²¹ The choice demonstrates a linguistic influence from the Greek language, which in turn demonstrates frequent social interaction.²² Moreover, this evinces their strong identification with their

¹⁸ *Die Neuzeit*, December 7, 1888: 4.

¹⁹ Anna Ransmayr, *Untertanen des Sultans oder des Kaisers: Struktur und Organisationsformen der beiden Wiener griechischen Gemeinden von den Anfängen im 18. Jahrhundert bis 1918* (Göttingen: V&R Unipress, 2018), 63.

²⁰ *Ischler Cur-Liste*, July 24, 1895: 2.

²¹ Even today, after more than a century of being part of the Greek state, the term used to describe a person originating from Salonica is influenced by the French, and not the Greek language. I would like to thank Jacky Benmayor for bringing this to my attention.

²² On the choice of the word influenced by the Greek language, instead of the more standardized version influenced by the Turkish, see also Naar, “Sephardim since Birth”, where the author examines issues of identification of Sephardi migrants from the Ottoman Empire in the United States.

place of origin – a trait that is also to be found among other Salonican Jews who migrated elsewhere.²³

3 Austrian Jews in Salonica

The fact that some of the Salonican Jews under examination had Austrian protection or citizenship, as mentioned in the introduction, affected not only their relations with the local authorities when they were in Salonica, but also how they were perceived by their fellow citizens. They were characterized “membres de la colonie austro-hongrois de notre ville”²⁴ by the *Journal de Salonique*, the most widespread Jewish local newspaper (in French). They displayed their allegiance to the Habsburg Empire in various ways such as providing funds for the Austro-Hungarian army.²⁵ Their association with Austria-Hungary became more evident after the First Balkan War (1912), when prominent members of the Jewish community of Salonica proposed the internationalization of the city, instead of its annexation by any of the belligerent states, a plan which served the Habsburg Empire’s interests as well. As noted in the Habsburg consul’s reports, the existence of Salonican Jews in the Habsburg lands facilitated the positive disposition of Salonica’s Jewry towards the plan and, consequently, towards the increased influence of the Habsburg Empire in the region.²⁶ Many of those who held Austrian citizenship continued to declare publicly their allegiance to the Habsburg Empire,

²³ Edgar Morin’s description of his father’s emigration to France is indicative of the strong regional identification which Salonican Jews had. Morin mentions that, upon his arrival in France in the early 20th century, his father was asked by the border authorities about his nationality, and he responded “Salonican.” See Morin Edgar, Christine Garabedian, and Colette Piault, “Vidal and his people,” *Journal of Mediterranean Studies*, 4:2 (1994): 330–343, here 332. The strong identification of Jews of Salonican origin in Vienna with their city persisted until many decades later. In 1938, Rachel Levy still answered “Salonica” when she was asked about her citizenship. Archive of the *Israëlitische Kultusgemeinde* (on loan at the Vienna Wiesenthal Institute), Auswanderungsfragenbogen – A/W 2589,83 (Nr.32801-33200)/33160/Levy Rachel.

²⁴ *Journal de Salonique*, July 21, 1902: 1. The Jews in Salonica were to a large extent French-speaking, much like the Jews of other Ottoman cities, due to the influence of the educational programs of the AIU. On the impact of the AIU and its education of Jews in the Ottoman Empire, see Aron Rodrigue, *French Jews, Turkish Jews: The Alliance Israélite Universelle and the Politics of Jewish Schooling in Turkey 1860–1925* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990).

²⁵ *Wiener Zeitung*, June 17, 1864, 1.

²⁶ Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv, Politisches Archiv XII, 404, Report of the Habsburg consul in Salonica to the minister of Foreign Affairs, April 8, 1913.

even at a time when Salonica had become the center of the Entente forces operating at the Macedonian front. This led some of them to eventually be apprehended by the Entente forces and deported from Salonica (their place of birth) since they had become enemy aliens.²⁷

4 Concluding Remarks

Following Matthias Lehmann's observation on the concept of diaspora, which should be understood "as something that happens rather than something that is,"²⁸ this article demonstrates that even in cases of settlements such as the one described here, identifications are formed according to what happens – in other words, according to the people's experiences, individually and collectively. Thus, the sense of belonging of Salonican Jews in Vienna was concretized by their experiences relating to their affinities with fellow Salonicans, fellow Sephardi, fellow Jews, and fellow Austrian citizens. Each aspect contributed separately and all together as a sum of experiences to the formation and diversification of the persons' self-perception and was related to aspects like information distribution, social circles, and financial relations. The intersection and transformation of these persons' sense of belonging is not separate from their migration experience and constitute a common thread that connects migrational phenomena across time and space.²⁹ Similarly, their class affected the construction of their self-identification and informed their practices when in contact with other groups, since "the migrant is created according to his social class."³⁰

The surrounding milieu thus affected the prevalence of each aspect of their identification. Acting as brokers between many groups and environments, the Salonican Jews in Vienna nonetheless embodied the real and imagined space where different identifications intersected and (in)formed their social

²⁷ Archives du *Ministère des Affaires étrangères*, AMAE/604PO/B/56, Letter from the Salonica directorate of the Lighthouses Company to the consul of France in Salonica, January 11, 1916; E.I.a. (Greek Literary and Historical Archive), Anastasiadou/656/1, Liste de sujets autrichiens résidant à Salonique. September 19, 1916.

²⁸ Matthias B. Lehmann, "Rethinking Sephardi Identity: Jews and Other Jews in Ottoman Palestine," *Jewish Social Studies* 15:1 (2008): 81–109, here 83.

²⁹ Dirk Hoerder, Andrew Gordon, Alexander Keyssar, and Daniel James, *Cultures in Contact: World Migrations in the Second Millennium* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 15, 17.

³⁰ Nancy Green, "La migration des élites. Nouveau concept, anciennes pratiques?," *Les Cahiers du Centre de Recherches Historiques* 42 (2008), 107–116, here 113.

surroundings.³¹ At the same time, their ability to maneuver between various distinct aspects affected them not only on a social but on a material level as well.³² This was what at the end allowed them to remain “Salonikiotes de Vyena” and at the same time “membres de la colonie austro-hongrois de notre ville.”³³

³¹ Simone Lässig and Miriam Rürup, “Introduction: What Made a Space ‘Jewish’? Reconsidering a Category of Modern German History,” in *Space and Spatiality in Modern German-Jewish History*, eds. Simone Lässig and Miriam Rürup (New York/Oxford: Berghahn 2017), 1–20, here 5.

³² This, of course, was not a unique trait of Salonican Jews. As Constanze Kolbe demonstrates, a similar case can be found with the Jews of Corfu, who were active in the citrus trade. They, too, “forged cross-ethnic and cross-religious networks between Jews, Orthodox Christians, Muslims, and Catholics but also between Jewish Sephardim and Ashkenazim from different empires and nation-states”. However, as the author states, “Corfu [was placed] on a very different trajectory than Salonica.” The establishment of connections between Salonican Jews and the Habsburg mainland and their migration is a case in point: Constanze Kolbe, *Crossing Regions, Nations, Empires: The Jews of Corfu and the Making of a Jewish Adriatic, 1850–1914* (unpublished dissertation, Indiana University, 2017), 2, 5, 116–119.

³³ See fn. 1 and fn. 24.