

## Discussions on Founding the Jewish Secondary School in Greek Salonica (1926-1927)

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On September 22, 1926, Jewish newspaper *Renacencia Giudia* published an article that caused a great stir. "Let's Found the Jewish Secondary School" it suggested, bringing up perhaps one of the most interesting debates concerning Salonican Jews. From Greek State, Zionists to auxiliary members of the Jewish community; the issue was debated on and on for more than a year and touched upon crucial questions regarding Salonican Jewry at the time.

It's no news for historians that Salonica had been a predominantly Jewish city during the Ottoman rule and that it took its share from nationalism in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Like many other Balkan and Anatolian cities, Salonica both welcomed and bid farewell to different ethnic populations during and after the Balkan Wars. With the arrival of Orthodox refugees from Anatolia, Greek refugees from Bulgaria and non-Greek populations leaving; the city became a predominantly Greek Orthodox (and thus, Grecophone) one on the eve of the 20th century.

Jews of Salonica had a unique situation. At a time when the nation states were built on the premise of population exchanges (such as the case between Greece and Turkey or Greece and Bulgaria) Jews have not been subjugated to any such obligation because they did not have a sovereign nation state. Though a crowded one, Jews eventually became a minority in Salonica. As Greece took steps to become a homogenous nation state day by day, Jewish community was deeply affected by this and had to adapt to the changing situation. One of the most prominent questions they had to deal with was the language and education of the community. Majority of the Jews in the city spoke a unique language which is called *Ladino* or *Judeo-Spanish*. Some members who were graduates of the *Alliance* schools spoke French. Language used at the religious matters was Hebrew. This caused problems, as Salonica was rapidly turning into a Grecophone state due to the aforementioned population exchanges and other nationalist policies of the Greek State. As a result, everyone's attention focused on the institutions of education of the Jewish community, because that was where the language education took place.

In the next lecture of the History Department Graduate Workshop Lecture Series in Memory of Yavuz Selim Karakışla, we will be looking at the discussions on the founding the Jewish secondary school in Greek Salonica which took place between 1926 and 1927, based on the press reports and oral testimonies. By following the discussions; we may deduce what some of the existing tensions between Jews and the Greek State were, what varying definitions of "Greekness", "Jewry" and "Greek Jewry" were, and what the fate of the Jewish Secondary School of Salonica turned out to be in the end.