

**Georgios D. Michalopoulos**

Institute of Study of Eleutherios Venizelos and his Era

## **The Judeo-Bolshevik conspiracy and the persecution of Jews in interwar Salonica<sup>6</sup>**

### **Abstract**

I argue that in interwar Greece there was a small yet influential of anti-Semitic anticommunists, whose centre and main area of interest was Salonica. I attempt to demonstrate that their ideas were not a particular Greek phenomenon- rather these intellectuals and activists distanced themselves from traditional forms of Greek anti-Semitism. On the contrary, their appearance was part of a pan-European phenomenon triggered by the October Revolution in Russia, and facilitated by the ensuing immigration of the defeated Whites. This ideology should be understood within the context of the Ottoman imperial collapse, the ensuing relocation of populations and the anxiety of Balkan nation-states to ensure their national frontiers.

**Key words:** Bolsheviks, Jews, Greece, anticommunism.

### **The state of the field of anti-Semitic studies**

This traumatic transition, which cut off the links of the city to the Mediterranean and the Balkans and turned it into a provincial city of Greece, overshadowed by Athens and the port of the Piraeus, was aggravated by the Great Fire of 1917, when one third of the city was destroyed. The Jews were disproportionately affected as most of the destroyed property belonged to them. According to a contemporary report, 52,000 Jews were left homeless, while 16 out of a total of 33 synagogues were burned. Some immigrated but most – especially the poorest families – relocated in slums created around the city. This further aggravated the economic vulnerability of the community and brought it in fierce competition for land and state resources with the newly arrived refugees. Nehama made no secret of his resentment of the effect of the refugees on the city's economy:

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<sup>6</sup> The title refers to an article by Nikos Fardis entitled “Regarding the Maccabi scandal”, *Macedonia*, June 24, 1931, p.1. The exact phrase was: “the Jews are those who being communist and collaborators of the komitadjis work for the death of Greece race”.

The city is cluttered with ruined, discouraged and bitter people, a petty bourgeoisie which shrinks and smothers it with its host of intermediaries, wide boys, low-income people, indulging in a thousand parasitic occupations. (Fardis June 24 1931:1)

Indeed, the relation between Jews and Greek Orthodox, especially the refugees, was not an easy one. There was already tension under the Ottoman Empire, since the Greek community, which was then dwarfed by the Muslim and Jewish ones, favoured incorporation into the Greek state, whereas the Jews preferred the continuation of the *status quo*. But it was in the 1920s that tension escalated, and the key factor was the siege mentality that prevailed in the northern provinces of Greece. Greece had only recently acquired these territories, they were inhabited by populations of dubious loyalty to the Greek state, and the neighbouring states (especially Bulgaria) were expected to challenge the territorial *status quo*. The recent disastrous and total defeat of Greece in the hands of its traditional enemy and the circulation of stab in the back theories about the alleged support of its Western allies for Turkey, further aggravated Greek insecurities. This was evidenced by the rise of anti-Semitism among Salonican Christians in the second half of the 1920s; Salonican Jews also felt insecure as a minority in a homogeneous nation-state, and this was shown by their rising support for anti-systemic political forces, especially Zionism and communism.

Open violence soon followed, in the summer of 1931. For days, fantastic rumours circulated about the city's Jews collaborating with Bulgarian irredentists (known in Greece as *komitadjis*) in a communist conspiracy to make Macedonia autonomous and take it away from Greece. The main rumour-monger was *Macedonia*, the city's largest newspaper, assisted by ultra-nationalist associations and students. The most serious incident took place in the Jewish Quarter of Campbell, a slum created in 1927 to house 216 Jewish families. The violence of the refugees and the destruction of Jewish homes that ensued suggested that they wanted to claim the city as their own at the exclusion of the Jewish 'other'. On the night of 29 June 1931, two thousand people, mostly from the nearby refugee settlements of Kalamaria and Toumba, encircled the Campbell Quarter and prepared for an attack. When two police cars arrived, they were shot at from the crowd, and the policemen abandoned the scene. Similarly, attempts by the mounted police and the gendarmes to restore order were repelled by the armed crowd. In the attack that followed there were two dead and five wounded, whereas most of the quarter was destroyed. According to a Greek historian similar incidents of violence happened throughout the city – in one case the anti-Semites cut off the ears of two victims (Pierron 2004: 209-34; Margaritis 2005: 23ff).

What had caused these incidents? How did the Sephardic Jews become persecuted in a city they considered their own? I argue here that the motivating force behind the anti-Semitic violence was the arrival and spread in Greece, and especially Salonica, of the Judeo-Bolshevik conspiracy theory. The ideology of the people who attacked the Jews was not the old religious and economic anti-Semitism, which accused the Jews of profiting at the expense of the Greeks and of having crucified Christ, and which had led to several massacres in the 1820s and a violent Blood Libel in Corfu in 1891. On the contrary, the organizers of the 1931 Pogrom believed in a very different, modern and international sort of anti-Semitism, according to which international Jewry worked together with Bulgarian irredentists in a communist plot to take Macedonia away from Greece. This was the Greek version of the Judeo-Bolshevik conspiracy, first formulated in the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* in 1895, and which spread throughout Europe in the aftermath of World War I. It gained great popularity among the Whites during the Russian Civil War, consequently leading –according to the highest estimates- to the death of 150,000 Jews in pogroms. As Michael Kellogg has demonstrated, the spread of the theory was a cross-cultural phenomenon, which involved in particular the networks of White Russia émigrés; and as Paul Hanebrink has argued, the Judeo-Bolshevik conspiracy was a pan-European panic, which emerged as a result of similar social and political anxieties throughout interwar Europe about revolution, national identity and economic crisis (Miliakova, Ziuzina 2008: 61; Kellogg 2005: 270- 280; Hanebrink 2008: 74-9).

If the above is correct, there are two major implications to be drawn. First, that the violence of 1931, although of course it was not entirely independent from the realities on the ground, was linked to an image of the Jew as an agent of subversion, conspiracy and power which had nothing to do with the actual victims of the attack and much more to do with the anxieties of the aggressors. As David Norman Smith has argued ‘the Jews [...] are the plastic unity of all the anti-Semite’s inner demons’. More specifically, the accusations against the Jews that they took part in an imaginary international communist plot had almost nothing to do with the fact that many of the Jews, especially the poorer ones, had indeed voted for the Greek Communist Party in past elections. Indeed, the electoral behaviour of the Jewish community was only rarely mentioned by the propagators of violence, who instead insisted that the Salonican Jews took part in a secret and terrible plot against Greece. The conclusion they drew was that Salonican Jews could not possibly be assimilated, as Athenian politicians, and especially the Liberals, tried to do using carrot-and-stick tactics, but rather had to be removed (through emigration or death) (Smith 1996: 203-240).

Second, this kind of anti-Semitism was a new phenomenon. Although Greek supporters of the Judeo-Bolshevik conspiracy used the vocabulary of traditional Greek anti-Semitism and ultra-nationalism to disseminate their beliefs, the actual content of their theory was radically different from anything that had appeared before. Greek Judeo-Bolshevik conspiracy theories belonged to an era of national minorities and political subversion, when the ‘other’ did not lie outside national frontiers as the army of an inimical nation but was to be found within them, as spy, traitor or revolutionary. This means that the supporters of the Judeo-Bolshevik conspiracy were a special category among Greek anti-communists and anti-Semites. Indeed, there were many Greeks in the interwar period who were both anti-communists and anti-Semites; but only a few subscribed to the Judeo-Bolshevik conspiracy theory, and it was precisely these radicals who were more eager to use violence against the Jews.

### **The Greek Judeo-Bolshevik conspiracy theory and the newspaper *Macedonia*: from assimilation to elimination**

Anti-communism first arrived to Greece through refugees who left Russia in panic. Though apparently mundane, the archival traces of their struggle for residence rights, work permits and state support provide a telling insight into the way in which the Greek state responded to these personal representatives of anti-communism. Most of the Russian émigrés were army officers who arrived after the mass evacuation of the White Army at the Black Sea. Once in Greece, migrating to other destinations without a passport and money was particularly difficult if not impossible, and many of them, willingly or not, settled permanently in the country (Philippos Dragoumis Archive A).

Of course many of these people felt a deep hatred for the Soviet Union. One of the most active anti-communists was a certain Piotr Vladislavsky Vereschinsky, a former officer of the Russian Army who had obtained Greek citizenship; in 1931 he vandalized the car of the Soviet ambassador and tore its flag. These isolated and futile acts of resistance seem today insignificant. Nevertheless, the image of destitute officers who wandered around Greek cities with worn out uniforms of the Czarist Army became figures of sympathy for the Greek public – all the more so, since they shared the same Orthodox religion. Their mere existence stood as a proof of the evils of communism. The Greeks showed understanding, and for instance Vereschinsky went unpunished (AYE A).

A popular Greek novelist supported this view of the noble yet persecuted White Russian, in a novel entitled *Colonel Liapkin*. The homonymous hero was based on a real person, Vassili Vassilievich Davidov, who had fought ferociously in the Civil War and later collaborated with the Nazis: ‘he could drink blood from a glass, as long as it was communist [blood]’. Liapkin/Davidov settled in a provincial Greek town and distinguished himself through his education, hard work and aristocratic manners – attributes which local Greek society appreciated. Yet despite his modest success in Greece, in the novel, Liapkin remained a Russian at heart, could not adapt to his new Mediterranean homeland, and nostalgia suffocated him. He sank into depression and alcoholism and, in the end, he committed suicide by throwing himself into a river (Bokotas 1987: 56).

Similarly, the conservative politician Philippos Dragoumis saw the White émigrés with sympathy: „The White Russians are almost all intellectual, law-abiding and honest gentlemen. They are hard-working and knowing their difficult position they become even more so in order to survive” (Philippos Dragoumis Archive B).

On another occasion he noted similarly, „Generally, it seems to me that we have great moral obligations to provide asylum to the ‘White’ Russian refugees; we owe so much to Russia. Maybe I am influenced by the fact that my ancestors and also those of my wife ... found many times asylum or protection in Russia. But really the situation of these people who are moved around without a recognized nationality like sheep is truly tragic (ibid.).

Another important constituency in the formation of Greek anticommunism were Greek Russians. Dozens of thousands Greeks in the Russian Empire before the Revolution. There was a Greek middle class, especially in Odessa, but also in St Petersburg and other cities of European Russia, as well as rural population: Greek peasants lived in Ukraine as well as in the Caucasus, where there was a significant Pontic Greek population. Their anticommunism had two sources. The first was that many of them, especially those of a bourgeois background, had suffered personally at the hands of the Bolsheviks. According to one of them „fleeing the chaotic present Russian regime” was virtually a necessity for Greek Russians. Their situation was getting worse every day they spent in the USSR. The second was that Greek peasants in Ukraine, for the most part, sided with the anarchist Black Army of Nestor Makhno, which was crushed by the Red Army in 1920 (AYE B; Kataiftsis 2010: 484-7).

The anticommunism of Greek Russians was also paradoxically motivated by the increasing reluctance with which the Greek authorities issued visas. Indeed the Greek authorities feared that Greek Russians would bring communism with them. Moreover, Greece

was already home to one and a half million of refugees from Turkey. This raised obvious concerns about land and employment (AYE C; AYE D; AYE E; AYE F).

To the Greek Russians it clearly seemed that only the fiercest proclamation of anticommunism and nationalism would secure them a visa. In their correspondence with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs they boasted about their past anticommunist activity and hoped that their threats against Soviet authorities would help them and their families find a place in Greece. As one of them claimed, „There are so many deserted villages near the frontiers, where thousands of families could live. You should send them [=the Greek Russians] there to make them stop the komitadjis [=the partisans of the IMRO, Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization]” (The citation is from AYE G. See also AYE H and AYE I).

Greek Russians thus presented themselves to the Greek authorities as a potential bulwark against the enmity of the linguistic and religious minorities in Macedonia. Indeed, many of them joined paramilitary groups in the northern provinces of Greece: this was facilitated by the constriction of political freedom in the northern provinces, the concentration of a great number of refugees and a strong military presence (Marketos 2006: 205).

The third group that distributed anticommunist ideas to Greece was military officers who fought in the Allied intervention in the Russian Civil War. The officers who participated in the Ukrainian Campaign were selected among the staunchest supporters of Venizelos. As Thanos Veremis has claimed, once they returned to Greece most of them felt deep hate for communism: later, during the German Occupation, several of them collaborate with the Nazis to suppress the growing influence of Greek communism. This initiated the strong relation of Venizelism with conservative anticommunism, which would become more apparent in the 1930s (Veremis 1977: 146).

Indeed, the first state institution upon which anticommunist ideas had had an impact was the army. Army officers transformed the ideas of White Russians and Greek Russians from a marginalized ideology to state policy. In Greece in the 1920s the army was an overgrown, powerful and humiliated institution and its most ambitious members sought power. Anticommunism within the army contributed to the creation of at least two right-wing regimes in interwar Greece: the dictatorships of Pagkalos (1925-6) and Metaxas (1936-41).

The people and groups described above were anti-communist in the broad sense of the word, and it is probable that some of them, especially some of the Greek Russians, were anti-Semites too. But how did the Judeo-Bolshevik theory reach the Greek public? The first time that the Judeo-Bolshevik conspiracy theory reached a wide audience in Greece was in 1925: Aristeidis Andronikos published a series of thirty two articles, in the bestselling newspaper of

the country, *Eleftheros Typos*, under the title ‘What Bolshevism is’ – later to be published in book format too. Andronikos was a diaspora Greek and a true cosmopolitan. He was born in Plovdiv in 1862, a city with a significant Greek minority, which from the 1890s onward became repeatedly the target of Bulgarian pogroms. He studied medicine in Athens and Paris and settled in Russia in 1902, where he worked as doctor. He worked briefly as Greek consul-general in St Petersburg during the turbulent days of the Civil War and it was probably this capacity together with his foreign origin, and his upper class background that led to his arrest in 1919. He claimed to have stayed in prison for six months. For the next four years, he stayed under police surveillance in Russia: it was only in 1924 that he managed to return to Greece (Marketos 2006, 329 and 334; Andronikos February 7 1925: 1; Ploumidis 2010 173-4).

Andronikos’s thought was in line with the theories that other White Russian émigrés disseminated. He believed that Bolshevism was a Jewish plot to destroy Russian Christianity, which had resulted in apocalyptic chaos, disorder and the ritual murder of its Russian Orthodox enemies. In his texts, Andronikos described the alleged crimes of the Bolsheviks in gruesome detail: „The convicts are brought to the court of the fortress. They are made to form a group which is shot by machine guns. The mass of these people falls down. Most of them are not yet dead... Their executioners throw upon them lime and then cover them with cement. Every morning the same terrible sight appears. A small hill of cement at the surface of which can be seen hands and feet, tense due to the last agony of the half dead, who with their hands had managed to break the crest of cement that covered them” (Andronikos 1925: 41-2).

In a later passage, the parallelism with the Christian martyrs is explicit: „In the basements, [...] they forced the condemned to death to lie on the floor with their feet outstretched towards the wall. Then began an odious and bloody operation, that of nailing their feet on the wall and their hands on the floor. Afterwards, they put a sharp piece of metal on the chest and under the jaw [of the victim] so that in every movement of the chest or the head the martyr would feel great pain. With other people, they showered them with boiling water and while they still felt great pain, they coated them with naphtha and burned them alive” (Andronikos 1925: 41-2).

Although Andronikos’s descriptions seem overblown, as George Leggett has shown in the most thorough study of the USSR’s political police to day, the Cheka did frequently use torture and there were very few if any institutional or legal restrictions in their operations. The witnessing of true executions and tortures, as well as the experience of imprisonment

under what must have been terrifying circumstances, explain the panic, alarm and hatred that went through Andronikos's books (Leggett 1987: 68ff).

Moreover, according to Andronikos, the Jews would not stop until they had accomplished world domination and the complete destruction of the Christian religion, and therefore they posed an imminent and direct threat to European civilization. These beliefs were in line with arguments used by White Russians émigrés for a European crusade that would overthrow the Bolsheviks. He saw in communism above all a threat to Europe as a way of life, its religion, intellectual life, traditions and values: in short, he saw in the Jewish 'other' a rallying call for the unification of Europe (Andronikos 1925: 31-7 and 154-9).

Andronikos was not a typical right wing nationalist – at least not according to the Greek political context. He supported Venizelos's Liberal Party, rather than the monarchist and conservative Popular Party: this was the case with most supporters of the Judeo-Bolshevik conspiracy, contrary to more traditional anti-communists who typically supported the Conservatives. For example, in a characteristically odd and implausible argument, Andronikos argued that the communists helped the Conservatives defeat Venizelos in the 1920 elections and claimed that it was this electoral result that led to the Greek defeat in Asia Minor in 1922.

Furthermore, Andronikos did refer to the support of the Salonican Jews to the Communist Party, but not in the sense that the Jews voted for the communists. Rather he accused the Jews of fomenting demonstrations and violence, of spreading propaganda for the autonomy of Macedonia, and of collaborating with the Bulgarians. (pp. 159-60). Andronikos 'revealed' that Mustafa Kemal was a Salonican Jew who had converted to Islam (incidentally Kemal was indeed born in Salonica but both his parents were Muslim). He regarded the defeat of the Greek army in Asia Minor not as the defeat by a rival nationalism, but rather as the clash between two civilizations and two religions, and thus it was not only Greece that was defeated at war but also humanity, civilization and Christianity. Like their Hungarian counterparts, Greek supporters of the Judeo-Bolshevik conspiracy saw in the collapse of the Tsarist regime a morality tale about the dangers of losing touch with tradition. They presented their country as a bulwark that separated Europe from the barbarians, and asked for the support of Europe against their country's traditional foes (Andronikos 1925, Chapter III "The hatred of Bolshevism towards the Greek race", 100-8).

Thus, Andronikos concluded his book: „The Asia Minor Catastrophe [of 1922] and the uprooting of the Christian and Greek civilization from the East are *mainly* the work of the



Jewish dictators of Moscow and of Kemal, who [refers to the former] used Kemal as their instrument (Ibid, 166).

Apart from Andronikos, it seems that there was a milieu in interwar Greece which discussed and circulated such theories. It is telling that *The Protocols of the Elders of Sion* were published twice (in 1928 and in 1932), whereas Andronikos published two more books: *The idea of world peace* (1933), where he argued that the concept of the nation was sanctified by the Christian religion, and therefore internationalism was suspect of being an anti-Christian project; and *Judas through the centuries* (1928), which was probably influenced by the first major work of Alfred Rosenberg, *Die Spur des Juden im Wandel der Zeiten* [The trail of the Jew through the centuries] (Kellogg 2005: 74-5).

The publication of his views in a major Greek newspaper certainly offered Andronikos a wide audience – moreover, his views were soon enough republished as a book, which Andronikos claimed sold ten thousand copies; if true, this number would suggest a great success for a small market like the Greek one. At least one other author subscribed to Andronikos's Judeo-Bolshevik theories, Margarita Raftopoulou-Epitropaki, who saw in the Russian Revolution a conspiracy against the Christian religion. „[...] the Jews dominate the Soviet government of the country, therefore the people is right in attributing to them the wild and bloody extermination of the Christians and the humiliation of the Christian religion, while they do not harm at all the other religions, Jewish, Buddhist or Brahmanical. Not a single synagogue, not a single mosque was harmed; on the contrary the Jewish religion is protected in a biased and ostentatious way, therefore the whole policy of the Russian Bolsheviks is a genuine Jewish product” (Raftopoulou-Epitropaki 1929: 35).

Still, it is important to remember that most Greek anti-communists were not of the Andronikos kind. Thus, in his 1927 book, the otherwise fierce anti-communist Gerasimos Polyzoidis explicitly attacked the Judeo-Bolshevik conspiracy: „They had told us many times that the revolution of the Bolsheviks in Russia was nothing but a Jewish revolution, realized for the benefit of the interests of the sons of Israel. And they support this view until today so as to make us believe it, advancing as their strongest argument the view that out of 490 members of the Central Executive Committee almost 295 are Jews. [...] [But] Bolshevism is not a Jewish but a Russian product which the Jews of course attempted to take advantage of” (Polyzoidis 1927: 42-4).

Most of the conservative anti-communist authors worried about communist infiltration in state institutions, threats to Greece's territorial sovereignty and the momentum the labour movement gained as Greece was quickly industrializing. All in all, Greek anti-

communists, even those who openly flirted with fascism, stayed away from the apocalyptic visions of the Judeo-Bolshevik conspiracy and remained within the grounds of right wing nationalism, authoritarianism and traditional Greek values, often evolving the conservative triptych ‘Fatherland, Religion, Family’. Greek anticommunism was primarily a home-product, its authors often had little experience abroad, and their rhetoric evolved around traditional themes of Greek conservatism. Quite characteristically, some had the tendency to attribute the spread of communism in Russia to the alleged backwardness and corruption of the Russian nation. Essentially we have here what Markku Ruotsila calls ‘conservative anticommunism’, which was essentially a transmutation of traditional conservative discourse (Dalla 2007: *passim*; Mazower 2009: 34-7. Gazi: 2011: *passim*).

Thus, retired colonel Ioannis Petridis saw communism as threatening to the conservative establishment and suggested as a remedy the return to tradition, the avoidance of radicalism, and – using a rhetoric reminiscent of Italian fascism – demanded the end of class warfare in the name of national interests, and proclaimed that „we intend the establishment of social peace, with which until now all the social classes have progressed. And on this basis, which accords with Greek tradition, we demand a natural and smooth evolution...” (Petridis 1925: ch.15).

Moreover, the conservative ecclesiastical review *Anaplasis* argued that the downfall of Russia was the outcome of its deviation from good Orthodox practice, rather than of a Jewish plot. In the case of most Greek anti-communists, greatest threat to Greek society were not the Jews but two other groups. First, Greek anticommunists were afraid of the Asia Minor refugees. As George Th. Mavrogordatos has demonstrated the refugees were the only compact voting bloc of nation-wide significance: their vote for the Liberal and Communist Parties was disproportionately high. It was thanks to the refugee vote that the Conservative Party stayed away from power for a decade (1922-33) and also thanks to them that the Communist Party became a significant political force. Second, there was a fear that communists had infiltrated the Greek University, and especially the Faculty of Languages, and that they would use their influence there to turn the young Greek students into communists: this paranoid myth had a seed of truth, since Dimitris Glinos, who had designed a series of educational reforms for the Liberal Party in the 1920s, openly joined the Communist Party in the 1930s. As the Liberals lost their reformist zeal in the 1920s and the 1928-32 Venizelos Government served a conservative rather than modernizing domestic agenda, intellectuals started doubting the merits of liberal ideologies, especially as the world economic crisis was making its impact on Greece too. Many among them came to see the

Communist Party as the only hope for substantial social change (Mavrogordatos 1983: 182-6).

Anti-communists wanted a conservative school curriculum, focusing on the classics, and instruction in archaic rather than colloquial Greek. The Liberal MP N. Kraniotakis warned in 1927: „communism has paid as much attention as possible to attracting civil servants. When the club of the civil servants decided to set up a library one of its members offered to donate many and useful books. Indeed he did [...] and it was a replete communist library”. Later in his speech, he warned that „communism has understood that those who will in the future instruct the Greek generations should be ingrained with communist ideas and this is why they turned to the Faculty of Languages” (Kraniotakis 1927: 4-5).

Therefore, it is almost certain that Judeo-Bolshevik conspiracy believers represented only a small minority within the larger group of anti-communist Greek intellectuals. But they were very fortunate in that they managed to capture one of the leading newspapers of the time: *Macedonia* was Salonica’s most popular Greek language newspaper and also the main propagator of the accusation which led to the 1931 Pogrom. What made the Judeo-Bolshevik conspiracy appealing to the newspaper and its readership? One can only speculate here, but a good guess is the appeal of the Judeo-Bolshevik conspiracy to unify disparate elements. In the case of Salonica the disparate elements were not the Germans and the White Russians whose cooperation Kellogg has described in detail but rather the Greek refugees from Asia Minor. These people were anything but a homogeneous community: they came from different places, spoke different languages and had different traditions. Offering them a common enemy, a simple explanation for their trouble and also an apocalyptic vision of destruction and doom (similar to the traumatic experience they went through leaving Turkey) must have appealed to the refugees, who by then were the single largest group of the city (100,000). As Ted Goertzel has demonstrated, belief in conspiracies is higher among people who have high levels of pessimism for the future of society and alienation from the authorities („anomie”), low levels of interpersonal trust and belong to a minority. The refugees, being poor, marginalized and with a different culture from „native” Greeks, arguably had all three of these characteristics (Goertzel 1994: 736-8).

The key attractions of the Judeo-Bolshevik conspiracy were that it offer a simple and soothing explanation for one’s adversities, it unified otherwise heterogeneous groups by offering them a common enemy and a scapegoat and above all that it was adaptable to many different courses of action and varying circumstances. White Russians used it to rally support against the Soviets in the hope of organizing a European military campaign that would allow

them to retake control of their homeland. The German NSDAP used the Judeo-Bolshevik conspiracy to cleanse and purify German culture from alien influences, to strive for the creation of a Great Germany and also to justify the invasion of the Soviet Union: during Operation Barbarossa, the elite murderers of the *Einsatzgruppen* targeted specifically Communist Party Commissars and Jews. As Admiral Karl Dönitz eulogized Hitler on April 30, 1945 „his action in fighting against the Bolshevist spring tide was waged [...] for Europe and the entire civilized world”. Hungarian Catholics (as Hanebrink has shown) used the Judeo-Bolshevik conspiracy to re-invent their country’s past as a Christian bulwark against the enemies of European civilization, and to consequently ask for material support from Western European countries in the possibility of a foreign invasion. Believers in the Judeo-Bolshevik theory thought that they dealt with a great threat that no single nation could face on its own. Thus, they followed closely anti-communist and anti-Semitic developments in other countries, and tried to develop links with similar ideologists abroad. Indeed, both the *Nasjonal Samling* of Vidkun Quisling and the Greek EEE [National Union of Greece, *Εθνική Ένωσις Ελλάδος*] came under the patronage of the NSDAP in the 1930s.

In Norway, Quisling – who had spent much time in the USSR in the 1920s in a humanitarian relief mission – argued in the 1930s that ‘Jewish power and Jewish morality aspire towards a decisive influence both on the development of the world and on the future of our country’: he thus asked for the creation of an anti-Semitic alliance among the Nordic people, an idea intended to make a good impression on the NSDAP, but which alienated the Christian wing of his party. Salonican Christians, on the other hand, used the Judeo-Bolshevik conspiracy to oppose the assimilationist policies of the Liberal Party towards the Jews, demand the exclusive support of the Greek state and demonstrate their nationalism: indeed many Greeks in the 1920s viewed the refugees—the ‘Turkish seeds’ as they often called them inimically, and wanted them to leave Greece; the future dictator Ioannis Metaxas had famously argued for their resettlement in Turkey. It is ironic and perhaps insightful too, that the refugees applied to Jews the same argument that anti-Venizelist conservatives used against them: they cannot be assimilated, therefore they have to go (Dönitz quoted in Waddington 2007: 1; Dahl 1999: 118-21).

The article that initiated the attacks of the newspaper against the Jews was published on 20 June, 1931 entitled „The Maccabi of Salonica really participated in the last year congress of the Komitadjis and openly supported the autonomy of Macedonia”. The author was the editor of the newspaper, Nikos Fardis. ‘Komitadjis’ was a pejorative reference to the IMRO, that any contemporary Greek reader would have recognized: a revolutionary

organization in Macedonia before 1913, with socialist influences in its ideology and strong ties to Bulgaria and which often conflicted with Greek nationalists who consequently still regarded it as an arch-enemy of Greece. Similarly to the Jews, the newspaper used the word 'komitadji' as a free-floating signifier, a plastic term adaptable to many different contexts and circumstances. Indeed IMRO was socialist in its origins and supported Macedonian autonomy – contrary to the official Bulgarian government which supported instead the incorporation of what was then Ottoman Macedonia to Bulgaria. All this changed after 1913: the disastrous defeat of Bulgaria in the Second Balkan War, and the violent suppression of the Bulgarian minority by Greek and Serbian nationalism had a three-fold effect on IMRO: it abandoned socialism for Bulgarian nationalism, it abandoned autonomy and with it any notions of a separate Macedonian ethnicity, and it became a powerful paramilitary ultranationalist organization. It often organized terrorist acts both in Greece and Serbia with irredentist aims. Under its leader Ivan Mihailov, its ideology became fascistic and IMRO developed links with the Croatian Ustase and fascist Italy. It is unclear whether *Macedonia* was aware of these developments and did not comment on them or whether the ideological transmutation of IMRO was simply missed on the Greek side. In any case, *Macedonia* referred to IMRO as socialist, communist, or Bulgarian nationalist depending on the context and never making specific references to people, places or events. The second element of the accusations regarded Macedonian autonomy. These plans went back to the aftermath of the Turkish-Russian War of 1877-78. Initially, Russian diplomacy forced the Ottoman Empire to accept a 'Great Bulgaria' which would comprise of the territories of modern day Macedonia together with most of Ottoman Macedonia. The other Great Powers, however, and especially Britain, were scandalized and changed the plans. The size of Bulgaria was reduced and instead, in a new peace treaty signed a few months later, Bulgaria was offered vague promises of Macedonian autonomy. This continued to be the matter of contestation between the Christian nations, Turkey and the Great Powers. What was new in the 1930s, however, was that the plans for Macedonian autonomy were abandoned by all except the communist party. In a fateful decision the Greek Communist Party decided to support the notion of an autonomous Macedonia, which made all its members suspects of national treason.

The other ingredient of the conspiracy theory was the Maccabi sports club. This club was part of a network of similar sports clubs. The Salonican one was founded shortly after the Young Turk Revolution in 1908. The accusation of *Macedonia* here was an extreme case of guilt by association: the Salonican branch of Maccabi had links with the Sofia branch of the Maccabi, which was intrinsically suspicious. The exact accusation was that under the

pretext of attending sports events organized by the Sofia Maccabi organization, representatives of the Salonica Maccabi visited Bulgaria where they attended a conference of IMRO, and publicly subscribed to plans about an autonomous Macedonia. Accusations then followed that the Jews were spies of communism, Bulgarian nationalism, etc. Sionist and anti-communist.

So, to some extent the accusations made reference to the turbulent past of the region. They were also an expression of the siege mentality of Greek nationalism, and its insecurities about its northern provinces. Yet, what is truly remarkable is the lack of any serious data: it is not simply that the account offered by the newspaper was factually inaccurate. It was that the account was *a priori* incredible and self-contradictory: there is no way that IMRO would have collaborated with communists or that a middle-class and socially conservative association like the Maccabi would have supported publicly a communist party, let alone in an official ceremony abroad. The implausibility of these accusations placed the text within the Judeo-Bolshevik conspiracy anti-communist *genre* and is a good example of the plasticity of the Jew. The Jew of the anti-Semite who believes in the Judeo-Bolshevik conspiracy adapts to the circumstances: as Sartre famously said, ‘if the Jew did not exist, the anti-Semite would have to invent him’ (Sartre 1948 [1946]: 10).

Moreover, these accusations could not be discredited by any amount or kind of evidence. It is impossible to prove that something did not happen, no matter how implausible its occurrence. On the contrary, when Jews entered the debate to attack such theories, their enemies used it as evidence of their guilt. Indeed, when on June 23 the Maccabi claimed that it did go to Bulgaria to attend an event organized by the Sofia Maccabi, which had no political significance whatsoever, *Macedonia* claimed triumphantly that at last Maccabi admitted it had attended a conference where a conspiracy against Greece was unfolding.

Two more things stand out regarding the role of the newspaper in the summer of 1931. First that it acted as a billboard for the various anti-Semitic groups. It published daily their announcements, information and accusations against the Jews and in this way, the anti-Semites could co-ordinate their action and get to know each other.

Second, it turned the assimilationist discourse of the Liberal Party – which the newspaper officially supported – into an eliminationist one. This was made in a very subtle way since *Macedonia* retained an assimilationist vocabulary but used it to support eliminationist conclusions.

## Epilogue

In the Greek context, the study of the supporters of Judeo-Bolshevik conspiracy theory is important for two reasons. First it allows us to trace the origins of the Greeks who collaborated with the Germans during the Nazi Occupation of Greece (1941-4). Many of the anti-Semitic groups that persecuted the Jews in interwar Salonica sided with the Germans for ideological reasons, most notably EEE. Andronikos himself collaborated openly with the Germans: in 1942, he became the chairman of the pro-Nazi Greek Socialist Patriotic Organization and in the September of 1944 he left Greece under German protection, and took part in a puppet government set up by the Nazis in Vienna as Minister of Propaganda. Second, the alienation of the Salonican Jews both from the refugees and from the authorities of the city (they received very little assistance from the police) had its consequences when the Nazis turned against the Jews in 1942, as the Salonican Jews – contrary to what happened in Athens – received very little support from the local population.

Greek supporters of Judeo-Bolshevik theories were few in numbers but had a lasting impact on Greek society. They blocked the assimilationist policies of the Liberal Party, and strengthened the links of the Salonican Jews with the Conservatives, making them welcome the Metaxas dictatorship with relief; they collaborated with the Germans and contributed to the almost complete annihilation of the Salonican Jews; and they helped forge a new identity for the Greek Orthodox refugees, based on religion rather than language or culture, which identity, facilitated their assimilation in the Greek society. Given the recent resurgence of Greek Nazism, with the Golden Dawn party, which now claims figures such as Andronikos as martyrs of Greek nationalism, it is more urgent than ever to research seriously the spread and content of the Judeo-Bolshevik conspiracy in interwar Greece.

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