

# Salonika's Jewish Laborers from the Balkan Wars to the Metaxas Dictatorship (1912/3–1936): A Reevaluation of the Tobacco Crisis

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## **Abstract**

An updated, contextual picture of the Salonikan Jewish working world from the Balkan Wars (1912/3) until the onset of the dictatorship of Ioannis Metaxas (1936) is proposed in this paper. Based on the Ladino and Greek press, the list of applicants for certificates to immigrate to Mandatory Palestine between 1930 and 1935, and statistics compiled by Member of Parliament Mentesh Ibn Shanji in 1936 concerning Jewish professionals in the city, it is argued that the decline of Salonikan Jewry and its chronology must be understood against the backdrop of the ebb of the city at large and changes in Greek tobacco politics during the interbellum period, rather than solely interethnic tension and efforts to hellenize the city. This portrait of the interwar working world in Salonika also refutes the commonly accepted view of the success of Zionism in that city.

## Keywords

Communism, Great Depression, Jewish community, labor unions, Salonika, tobacco, Zionism.

## Introduction

Socioeconomic studies of Greece between the Balkan Wars (1912/13) and the Second World War (1940) have amply addressed questions of overall socioeconomic policy<sup>1</sup> and the history of the Greek labor movement<sup>2</sup>. However, owing to prevailing ethnocentric perspective in Greek historiography, the role of Jewish bread winners in Salonika has been

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1. Κωνσταντίνος Β. Βεργόπουλος, «Η ελληνική οικονομία από το 1926 έως το 1935» [Konstantinos Vergopoulos, “The Greek Economy from 1926 to 1935”], in *Ιστορία του Ελληνικού Έθνους, Νεώτερος Ελληνισμός από το 1913 έως το 1941*, τ. ΙΕ' (Αθήνα: Εκδοτική Αθηνών, 1977) [History of the Greek Nation, vol. 15 Modern Hellenism from 1913 to 1941 (Athens: Ekdotiki Athinon, 1977)], 327–42; Θεόδωρος Σακελλαρόπουλος, «Κράτος και οικονομία στην Ελλάδα μια ιστορική τυπολογία» [Theodoros Sakellariopoulos, “State and Economy in Greece: A Historical Typology”], in Θεόδωρος Σακελλαρόπουλος, εκδότης, *Νεοελληνική Κοινωνία Ιστορικές και Κριτικές Προσεγγίσεις* (Αθήνα: Έτος έκδοσης εντύπου, 1993) [Theodoros Sakellariopoulos, ed., Modern Greek Society, Historic and Critical Approaches (Athens: Έτος έκδοσης εντύπου, 1993)], 189–246; Mark Mazower, *Greece and the Inter-war Economic Crisis* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991); Christos Bakalis, “The Impact of Tobacco in Greece (Cultivation, Processing, Manufacturing, and Trade)”, in *Tabakund Gesellschaft: Vom braunen Gold zum sozialen Stigma*, ed. Frank Jacob and Gerrit Dworok (Baden-Baden, 2015), accessed June 16, 2019, <https://www.nomos-elibrary.de/10.5771/9783845256696-1/titelei-inhaltsverzeichnis>, 237–64.

2. Αντώνης Λιάκος, *Εργασία και πολιτική στην Ελλάδα του Μεσοπολέμου* (Αθήνα: Νεφέλη, 1993) [Antonis Liakos, Labor and Politics in Interwar Greece (Athens: Nephéli, 1993)]; Efi Avdela, “Class, Ethnicity, and Gender in Post-Ottoman Thessaloniki: The Great Tobacco Strike of 1914”, in *Borderlines: Genders and Identities in War and Peace, 1870–1930*, ed. Billie Melman (New York: Routledge, 1998), 421–38; Alexandros Dagkas, *Recherches sur l'histoire sociale de la Grèce du nord: Le mouvement des ouvriers du tabac 1918–1928* (Paris: Association Pierre Belon, 2003); Κώστας Φουντανόπουλος, *Εργασία και Εργατικό Κίνημα στη Θεσσαλονίκη. Ηθική, Οικονομία και συλλογική δράση στο Μεσοπόλεμο 1908–1936* (Αθήνα: Νεφέλη, 2005) [Kostas Fountanopoulos, Labor and the Labor Movement in Thessaloniki: Moral Economy and Collective Action during the Interwar Period, 1908–36 (Athens: Nephéli, 2005)]; Alexandros Dagkas, *Le*

lost in that overall picture<sup>3</sup>. Where it has been considered in depth, the economic activity of the Jews of Salonika generally has been studied in relation to banking and industrial enterprises<sup>4</sup>, and far less often with an eye to the simple Jews of Salonika—day laborers, small craftsmen, and particularly tobacco workers—who lived hand to mouth, and the depiction of their world within the city's increasingly Greek Christian society during the first twenty-four years of Greek control. The inspiration for this paper came from the studies of Gila Hadar and Shai Srougo, each of whom focused on a different group of Jewish laborers<sup>5</sup>. Their scholarship led me to consider the position of tobacco workers, the largest and most politically active segment of Salonikan Jewish laborers, and to

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*mouvement social dans le Sud-Est Européen pendant le XXe siècle: Questions de classe, questions de culture* (Thessaloniki: Editions épicentre, 2008).

3. Evangelos Chekimoglou, "Thessaloniki, Economic Developments 1912–1940", in *Queen of the Worthy: Thessaloniki, History and Culture*, ed. Konstantinos I. Hassiotis (Thessaloniki: Paratiritis, 1997), 142–54.

4. Nikolaos Thomopoulos, "The Wealthy Jews of Thessaloniki and Their Impact on This Port-City: Myth or Reality?", *Επιθεώρηση Οικονομικών Επιστημών*, Τεύχος [Economic Sciences Review] 10 (2006): 107–32; Orly C. Meron, *Jewish Entrepreneurship in Salonica, 1912–1940: An Ethnic Economy in Transition* (Brighton UK: Sussex Academic Press, 2011); Πάρις Παπαμίχος Χρονάκης, «Οι έλληνες, εβραίοι, μουσουλμάνοι και ντονμέ έμποροι της Θεσσαλονίκης, 1882–1919, Ταξικοί και εθνοτικοί μετασχηματισμοί σε τροχιά εξελληνισμού» (Διδακτορική Διατριβή, Πανεπιστήμιο Κρήτης, Ρέθυμνο, 2011) [Paris Papamichos Chronakis, [Greeks, Jews, Muslims, and Dönme Traders of Salonica, 1882–1919: Struggles and Ethnic Transformations in the Greek Era] (doctoral diss., University of Crete, Rethymno, 2011)]; Mark Levene, "Port Jewry of Salonika: Between Neo-colonialism and Nation-State", *Jewish Culture and History* 4, no. 2 (2001): 125–54.

5. Gila Hadar, "Karmen be-Saloniki—Migdar, Mishpahah u-Ma'avak be-Kerev Po'alot Tabbak Yehudiyot" [Carmen in Salonika—Gender, Family and Tension among Jewish Women Tobacco Workers], *Pe'amim* 107 (2006): 5–37; Hadar, "Jewish Tobacco Workers in Salonika: Gender and Family in the Context of Social and Ethnic Strife", in *Women in the Ottoman Balkans: Gender, Culture and History*, Library of Ottoman Studies 15, ed. Amila Buturović and Irvin Cemil Schick (London and New York: Tauris, 2007), 127–52; Shai Srougo, *Ha-Po'alim ha-Yehudim bi-Nemal Saloniki: Bein ha-'Olam ha-'Othmani le-'Olamah shel Medinat ha-Leom ha-Yevanit* [Jewish Laborers in the Port of Thessaloniki: Between the Ottoman World and the Greek Nation-State (1869–1936)] (Jerusalem: Ben Zvi Institute, 2014).

reconsider in general the socioeconomic history of disadvantaged Jews in Salonika during the period.

In the pages that follow, the experience of Jewish workers in the wider context of Salonika during these twenty-four years is reconsidered on the basis of the Ladino and Greekpress of the period, lists of individuals who applied between 1930 and 1935 to the Palestine Office in Salonika for certificates to immigrate to Mandatory Palestine, preserved in the remains of the community's archive in Moscow, and statistics compiled by the Jewish Member of Parliament Mentsh Ibn Shanji<sup>6</sup> in 1936 about Jewish professionals in the city.

## I. Rereading the Early Years, 1912–1922

### 1. *The Balkan Wars and Their Immediate Repercussions*

In the historical memory preserved among Salonikan Jews, the arrival of Greek forces in October 1912 led to a series of crises in the community's life that broke its economic vitality<sup>7</sup>. The obvious desire of the Greek government to hellenize Greek-ruled Macedonia and Thrace, newly acquired in the Balkan Wars, contributed to a similar picture in

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6. Transliterated from the Hebrew fonts, pronounced by Salonikan Jews: Mentech Bessantci.

7. Yitzhaq Shemuel Emmanuel, "Toledot Yehudei Saloniki" [The History of the Jews of Salonika], in *Zikhron Saloniki: Gedulatah ve-Hurbanah shel Yerushalayim de-Balkan* [A Memoir of Salonika: The Greatness and the Fall of Jerusalem of the Balkans], ed. David A. Recanati, 2 vols. (Tel Aviv: Ha-Va'ad le-Hotza'at Sefer Kehilat Saloniqi, 1972–86), 2:203–13, 225–27; Recanati, "Hakdamah" [introduction] to "Hit'orerut Le'umit, ha-Tenu'ah ha-Tsionit" [National Revival, the Zionist Movement] in Recanati, *Zikhron Saloniki*, 1: 277–78; Asher R. Moisis, "Ha-Makkabbi u-Fera'ot Kempbel" [Maccabi and the Campbell Riots], in Recanati, *Zikhron Saloniki*, 1:361; David (Daut) Levi, "Pe'ilut ha-Yehudim be-Hayyei ha-Mishar (o Sippuran shel Shtei Mishpahot)" [The Activities of the Jews in Commercial Life; or, Two Families' Story], in Recanati, *Zikhron Saloniki*, 2:201; Mentesh Ibn Shanji, "Ba'alei ha-Miktso'ot bi-Kehillat Saloniki" [The Professionals of the Salonika Community], in Recanati, *Zikhron Saloniki*, 2:208–9; Yitzhaq Alvo, "Aharei ha-Delekah" [After the Fire], in *Saloniki 'Ir va-Em be-Yisrael* [Salonika: A Jewish Metropolis] (Jerusalem: The Center for Research of Salonikan Jewry, 1967), 226–27; "Ha-Kalkalah la-'Anafeha (Sekirah)" [Sectors of the Economy (A Survey)], in *Saloniki 'Ir va-Em*, 234–35, 237–38.

subsequent scholarly literature, even where the overall state of the ailing city was described in sufficient detail to be contemplated as a significant reason for the deterioration of the Jewish community<sup>8</sup>. Attention to studies of Salonikan economic history contributes to a more precise and less clichéd picture and helps us to contextualize the economic decline of the Jewish community amid the city's overall social and economic experience. Such studies, along with primary sources, shine a light on economic processes among the city's Jews that prove to be not only part of a deliberate effort by the Greek government to restrict the influence of the city's Jewish community, but also, perhaps even more, one aspect of a wider economic downturn in Salonika following the incorporation of Macedonia within the Greek state.

Under the Ottomans, much of Salonika's wealth was obtained from trade with the traditional, rural hinterland of Macedonia and Thrace, whose agricultural products were shipped via Salonika to the ports of the Mediterranean and beyond. The city's severance from the hinterland upon which it previously had relied brought about the abrogation of many debts by virtue of new borders separating borrowers from lenders<sup>9</sup>, a development that resulted in the bankruptcy of many businesses. The same severance engendered a second negative outcome as well: the Greek government enacted a highly deliberate regime of taxes and customs on goods imported to Salonika from neighboring rural areas still within the Ottoman Empire or governed by new nation-states that had emerged with the disintegration of that empire. Foreign goods passing through the port of Salonika en route to the hinterland now were taxed more highly than under Ottoman rule, and thus by 1914, imports wending their way through the port of Salonika had dropped by 40 percent relative to the years preceding 1912, and exports, largely goods in transit

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8. See esp. Mark Mazower, *Salonica, City of Ghosts: Christians, Muslims and Jews, 1430–1950* (Vintage Books: New York, 2005), 306, 347–58, and more generally, but without placement in the context of the rest of northern Greece, Katherine E. Fleming, *Greece: A Jewish History* (Princeton NJ.: Princeton University Press, 2008), 84–88. Devin E. Naar, *Jewish Salonica* (Stanford CA.: Stanford University Press, 2016), 293, discusses at length the hellenization efforts, but only on the cultural level, and states the cultural deterioration of the community as a fact without providing any explanation.

9. Chekimoglou, "Economic Developments", 151.

from other parts of the erstwhile empire, decreased by 47 percent<sup>10</sup>. In April 1914, the Belgian consul in Salonika reported to his government that prior to the coming of the Greeks, nine hundred large firms had operated there, yet in the spring of 1914, only six hundred remained<sup>11</sup>. The results were of course apparent not only in the financial state of the firms' owners, some of whom departed the city, but also that of their erstwhile employees. Many other businesses had upon the outbreak of hostilities immediately lost the ability to carry on operations, and their employees too were deprived of their source of income<sup>12</sup>.

## **2. *The Tobacco Workers and Their World***

One of the most important sectors in the Macedonian economy, and that of Greece as a whole, was the tobacco industry. Greek tobacco was considered the best anywhere, and provided employment and sustenance to hundreds of thousands of growers, farm laborers, brokers who intermediated between those growers and the large tobacco firms, small merchants, factory owners, and laborers who earned their daily bread in the warehouses where the crop was processed. The sorting and packing of tobacco leaves was a source of income for a large number of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim laborers<sup>13</sup>.

The Macedonian tobacco industry was dominated by Muslims and Christians<sup>14</sup>, but the bulk of tobacco workers in Salonika itself were Jews. In 1912, they numbered three thousand, including men, women, and girls<sup>15</sup>. The Regie Company alone provided work for four hundred

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10. Orly C. Meron, "Jewish Entrepreneurship in Salonica (1912–1921): An Overview" (discussion paper presented at the Economic History Seminar of the Department of Economics, University of Athens, Apr. 30, 2007), accessed Jun. 4, 2019, [https://hdoisto.gr/download.php?fen=seminars/meeting\\_0023\\_2096.pdf](https://hdoisto.gr/download.php?fen=seminars/meeting_0023_2096.pdf), 6, no. 13.

11. "El porto de Salonik" [The Port of Salonika], *Nuevo El Avenir* 17, no. 93 (Apr. 21, 1914).

12. "Por la seguridad y el orden publiko" [For Security and Public Order], *El Avenir* 15, no. 37 (Nov. 15, 1912).

13. Bakalis, "Impact of Tobacco", 237, 240–44.

14. Dagkas, *Recherches sur l'histoire sociale*, 61–66, 87, 143–44.

15. Supplement 1, *La Solidaridad Ovradera*, *Journal Sosialista Semanal* [Workers' Solidarity: A Weekly Socialist Journal], Mar. 31, 1911; "El konflikto del tutun" [The

Jewish women and ninety male workers<sup>16</sup>. In 1916, there were among the Jewish tobacco workers of Salonika eight thousand men, women, and girls, comprising nearly half of the Jewish workers in the city<sup>17</sup>. Girls aged 10 to 14 formed the bulk of this group, while young women of 14 to 20 formed a much smaller part and male workers comprised not more than 10 to 14 percent of all tobacco workers<sup>18</sup>.

The increase in the number of Jewish tobacco workers between 1912 and 1916 may be explained not only by different criteria according to which a tobacco worker was defined by different sources, but should also be connected with the increase in the consumption of tobacco and especially of cigarettes during the First World War. Smoking was prized by governments, civilians and soldiers alike for its morale-boosting qualities<sup>19</sup>.

Tobacco processing was a seasonal task that required many workers during a relatively brief period. This reality gave the tobacco workers a kind of power that no other category of day laborers had, and thus in 1908 they were the first in the city to form a syndicate<sup>20</sup>, which came to

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Tobacco Conflict], *Avanti* 3, no. 202 (May 19, 1913): 1; supplement, *El Avenir* 14, no. 45 (May 2, 1911).

16. Supplement, *El Avenir* 14, no. 45 (May 2, 1911). La Société de la régie co-intéressée des tabacs de l'empire Ottoman, its full name, was a parastatal company formed during the late Ottoman Empire by the Ottoman Public Debt Administration with backing from a consortium of European banks, and its revenues were supposed to go toward paying the Ottoman debt to foreign countries. The company had a monopoly over tobacco production.

17. Henry Morgenthau, "The Jews in the Balkan States and Salonika", 1916, Henry Morgenthau Papers, box 34, reel 28, p. 32, Manuscripts Division, Library of Congress. Fountanopoulos (Labor and the Labor Movement, 134) reports a total of 3,207 registered laborers in Salonika, but this excludes unregistered laborers, women, and children.

18. Hadar, "Jewish Tobacco Workers", 127, n. 6. Compare her numbers, based on Ladino sources, with those of Dagkas, *Recherches sur l'histoire sociale*, 476, who calculated the percentage of Salonikan female tobacco workers under twenty as 79.37 percent of all female workers.

19. Michael Reeve, "Smoking and Cigarette Consumption", accessed Jul. 27, 2020. [https://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/smoking\\_and\\_cigarette\\_consumption#:~:text=During%20the%20First%20World%20War,cigarette%20across%20the%20belligerent%20nations.](https://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/smoking_and_cigarette_consumption#:~:text=During%20the%20First%20World%20War,cigarette%20across%20the%20belligerent%20nations.)

20. See *Raporto anual dela union de los laboradores del tutun de Saloniko* (Annual Report of the Tobacco Workers Union in Salonika 1909) (22 September 1907–19 July



be the backbone of the Socialist Workers' Federation of Salonika<sup>21</sup>. The connection between the Socialist Federation and the Tobacco Syndicate is clear from the involvement in the latter of Federation leader Abraham Ben Aroya, and the membership in the syndicate's committee of Shemuel Yonah and Shelomoh Na'ar, two enthusiastic federation members<sup>22</sup>. The syndicate was well organized. As of 1914, its supreme institution was the committee, which was responsible for the Audition Committee, the Arbitration Committee, the Licensing Committee, and the Committee for the Recovery of Old Debts, in addition to a tax collector for each of the five major warehouses, a separate commission charged with verifying the use of the laborer cards given to syndicate members, and a propaganda commission<sup>23</sup>. Though the majority of tobacco workers were women and they were members of the syndicate, they formed their own part

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1909) (Salonika, 1909); list of workers who contributed to the striking tobacco workers at Kaza Erzog, *Journal del Lavorador*, 30 Elul 5669 (an erroneous date: there are only twenty-nine days in Elul, the last of which corresponded to September 15, 1909). The Budapest-based Herzog firm, which operated branches worldwide, had tobacco as well as banking operations. Konstantinos Lalenis, "Tobacco Era in Kavala, Greece: Shaping up Urban Identities", in Jacob and Dworok, *Tabak und Gesellschaft*, 102–103.

21. On the federation, see Αντώνης Λιάκος, *Η Σοσιαλιστική και Εργατική Ομοσπονδία Θεσσαλονίκης (Φεντερασιόν) και η Σοσιαλιστική Νεολαία (Αθήνα: Παρατηρητής, 1985)* [Antonis Liakos, *The Socialist and Workers' Movement of Thessaloniki (Federation) and the Beginning of Socialism*] (Athens: Paratiritis, 1985); Dagkas, *Recherches sur l'histoire sociale*, 147, 155–162; H. Şükrü Ilıcak, "Jewish Socialism in Ottoman Salonica", *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 2, no. 3 (Sep. 2002): 115–46; Iakovos J. Aktsoglou, "The Emergence/Development of Social and Working Class Movement in the City of Thessaloniki (Working Associations and Labor Unions)", *Balkan Studies* 38, no. 2 (1997): 285–306. Concerning the tobacco workers' syndicate, see its first yearly report, covering the period Sep. 22, 1907–July 19, 1909 (Salonika, 1909). On the role of tobacco workers in the federation, see supplement, *El Avenir* 14, no. 45 (May 2, 1911); Ilıcak, "Jewish Socialism", 115–46.

22. "Parte Sindikale, Sindikato de Tutun" [The Syndicalist Part, the Tobacco Syndicate], *Avanti* (Jan. 22, 1914): 2; Abraham Ben Aroya, "Reshit ha-Tenu'ah ha-Sotsyalistit bein Yehudei Saloniki" [The Early Socialist Movement among the Jews of Salonika], *Zikhron Saloniki*, 1:318.

23. "Parte Sindikale", 2.



of it, did not participate in meetings unless invited, and had no say in negotiations with employers<sup>24</sup>.

A few words about the lexicon of tobacco processing are in order, the better to understand changes that took place in the industry and their effect on workers' lives, and in fact on all of Jewish lower-class existence. Preparatory work for tobacco processing was performed by specialists called *achtarmatzides*<sup>25</sup>, called *bijakjis* in Ladino sources<sup>26</sup>. This is the only term for specialized tobacco workers that I have found in the Ladino sources, which also eschew other terms for differentiating between workers according to specialization, instead referring to all male workers as *tutunjis* and all females as *tutunjias*<sup>27</sup>. This preference may be due to a desire in the socialist sources to do away with hierarchies among the workers.

The main task of the *bijakjis* was to separate the tobacco leaves, which had been packed in the fields, when the product arrived at the warehouses<sup>28</sup>. Once the leaves had been divided up according to quality, color, and size, they were transferred to other specialists, who sorted them according to a finer classification, a requirement for the production of fine tobacco products.

Further work was assigned according to tobacco quality. The best tobacco (*basmas* or *basma* in Turkish, from *basmak*, to press), was processed by *exatratzides*<sup>29</sup>, who were expected to demonstrate great skill in

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24. "Konferensia" [Conference], *Avanti* (Jan. 22, 1914): 2. See also below, p. 13; n. 42; p. 15, n.50.

25. Αχταρματζήδες, from Turkish *aktarmacı*, an individual who moves something from one place to another.

26. From the Turkish *biçakçı* (singular), indicating not a cutler, as the term is defined in Turkish dictionaries, but one who uses a knife in his work.

27. From *tütün*, Turkish for tobacco.

28. The word *warehouse* is used here throughout rather than *factory*, the literal translation of the Ladino words *fabrika* and *magazin*, because these were not truly factories, but huge warehouses where tobacco leaves were manually sorted and packed. No manufacturing of any kind was done in these facilities.

29. Εξαστρατζήδες, from the Turkish *extracı*, one who works with extra-fine leaves. The term *extra*, from which the term is derived, expresses both the quality of the tobacco leaves and the expertise of the workers. Another Greek term for them was ντεξήδες,

identifying and sorting high-quality leaves, the best of which they placed together. In the next stage, the lower-level *pastaltzides*<sup>30</sup> collected the leaves left over by the skilled workers and packed them separately. Each skilled worker had three or four *pastaltzides*. These usually were young female workers or even children, often members of the same family.

The nominal workday, at ten to twelve hours, and even more, was quite long. However, working in groups connected by neighborliness and often family ties contributed to a relaxed tempo, and this allowed for conversations and for coffee and smoking breaks. Union propaganda during work time was very easy under such circumstances, and so was collecting donations for the union or gathering workers' signatures on petitions to warehouse owners. Work time was under the control of the workers, rather than the employers. The skilled workers received the highest wages of all tobacco workers, and their wages influenced those of the other workers.

The warehouse owners' inability to control workers and their work was mitigated by the method of payment. Wages fluctuated from week to week and even from day to day; they were tied not to working hours, but to the weight of the processed leaves consigned at the end of the day to the merchant or firm that owned the warehouse. The optimal weight of the delivered leaves was fixed through negotiations between the representatives of the male specialized workers, and the firms' owners. This optimal weight represented what these male workers considered the result of a day's work sufficient to provide for their families. In addition, daily wages were fixed as a percentage of the international price of tobacco at any given time. Fluctuations in male wages affected those of female workers as well. In sum, payment received by workers bore a greater resemblance to the consideration for a certain product than to a salary, and the long working hours thus are deceptive.

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but in fact it derived from the Greek word for "right" δεξιά, as opposed to left, here meaning those who do the work right, the best way possible, with dexterity. The change of orthography is attributable to the Anatolian refugees who were the main working force in Salonika in the interwar period.

30. Πασταλατζήδες from the Turkish *pastalçı* (singular; a packer of tobacco leaves, *pastal*, a bundle of tobacco leaves).

This arrangement served both sides. It spared the merchants the need to supervise the efficiency of the work, and gave the workers a sense of identification with their labor. Their work was their life<sup>31</sup>.

However, the various actors in the field—growers, workers, merchants—were subject to economic developments afar. The surge in demand for Macedonian tobacco resulted from the American Civil War (1860–1865), which curtailed American tobacco production. However, beginning in the 1870s, American crops recuperated, reaching new heights in the following decades<sup>32</sup>. The great American tobacco companies managed to restrict the price they paid to American tobacco farmers, and in the meantime introduced machine-manufactured cigarettes<sup>33</sup>. The enormous American industry developed what was called the American blend<sup>34</sup>, consisting of poorly processed Virginia, Burley, and low-quality oriental tobacco. Both the American machine-made cigarettes and the new American blend conquered the markets of the world, resulting in ongoing pressure to limit classification of tobacco leaves as a means of lowering cigarette prices<sup>35</sup>. American money arrived in the Macedonian tobacco market in the 1880s<sup>36</sup>, and the value of tobacco it purchased there increased every year starting with 1914, when the cigarette became a basic requirement among the soldiers of all belligerent forces in the First World War<sup>37</sup>.

The global economic changes that emerged from the American tobacco market soon dictated much of the general atmosphere in which

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31. Supplement 1, *La Solidaridad Ovradera*; Fountanopoulos, *Labor and the Labor Movement*, 137–45; Hadar, “Jewish Tobacco Workers”, 129–30.

32. The value of the annual American tobacco product nearly tripled between 1870 and 1900. See Barbara Hahn, *Making Tobacco Bright: Creating an American Commodity, 1617–1937* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 2011), 76, table 3.1.

33. See Amanda Fallin and Stanton A. Glantz, “Tobacco-Control Policies in Tobacco-Growing States: Where Tobacco Was King”, *The Milbank Quarterly: A Multidisciplinary Journal of Population Health and Health Policy* 93, no. 2 (2015): 321–22; Dagkas, *Recherches sur l'histoire sociale*, 369.

34. Dagkas, *Recherches sur l'histoire sociale*, 94.

35. *Ibid.*, 254, 294, 383, 744, 758–59. See below, pp. 25–26, on the introduction of what came to be known as the tonga, i.e., minimal, method of tobacco leaf classification.

36. Dagkas, *Recherches sur l'histoire sociale*, 120.

37. *Ibid.*, 387. See also n.19 above.

the Salonikan workforce lived. Yet the equilibrium between merchants and laborers was even further destabilized during periods of social and political instability, and at times when wars flooded the city with cheap labor or the markets ceased to prefer the first-rate tobacco that Greece took such pride in producing. One such period of social and political instability followed the Young Turk Revolution of 1908<sup>38</sup>. The winds of freedom and equality that then came coursing through the Ottoman Empire, Salonika included, enhanced laborers' awareness of their power and stimulated them to conduct strikes and generally to fight for their wages and working conditions<sup>39</sup>. However, the Salonikan tobacco workers overestimated their power. They did not fully appreciate the pressures from without, and failed to create a strike fund sufficient to support two thousand striking workers. The result was that they needed to forgo many of their demands. According to the syndicate, however, the strikers did achieve reduced working hours<sup>40</sup>. Reduction of working hours meant an increase in wages, since the worker had to deliver a product of a certain weight commensurate with his work hours. If hours were reduced and wages were not, then income per hour rose.

Even if the syndicate did attain such an achievement, it was short-lived. According to its own evidence, before the Young Turk Revolution of 1908, a skilled male worker at the Regie Company received two *gürüş* for every hundred kilograms of processed tobacco, but in 1911, only one *gürüş*. Female workers who “years ago” received 12 *gürüş* for a thousand

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38. Yavuz Selim Karakişla, “The 1908 Strike Wave in the Ottoman Empire”, *Turkish Studies Association Bulletin* 16, no. 2 (1992): 153–77.

39. Hadar, “Jewish Tobacco Workers”, 132–33; Hadar, “Karmen be-Saloniki”, 5–37, esp. 8, 11–15; Fountanopoulos, *Labor and the Labor Movement*, 133, 146; Can Najjar, “Labor Activism and the State in the Ottoman Tobacco Industry”, *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 46 (2014): 534–35; Emine Tuktu Vardağlı, “Searching for Women’s Agency in the Tobacco Workshops: Female Tobacco Workers of the Province of Selanik”, in *A Social History of the Late Ottoman Women: New Perspectives*, ed. Duygu Köksel and Anastasia Falierou (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 47–63; Iakovos J. Aktoglou, “The Emergence/Development of Social and Working Class Movement in the City of Thessaloniki (Working Associations and Labor Unions)”, *Balkan Studies* 38, no. 2 (1997): 290–91; Dagkas, *Recherches sur l’histoire sociale*, 254.

40. *Raporto Annual*.

packages of sorted tobacco leaves received twelve *metelik* in 1911, representing a 75 percent decrease<sup>41</sup>. The workers again went on strike that year, demanding an increase in wages, while the company demanded further cuts, surely knowing that the superior classification for which it was paying so much had become superfluous thanks to the demands of the American market. The ninety male workers were thus compelled to negotiate a compromise cut of 5 percent. While this sufficed to bring the men back to work, the four hundred female workers, whom the male workers had not consulted before agreeing in their name, and whose demand for an advance payment for the new year had been rejected, proceeded to initiate their own strike, prompting the company to lock the gates of the warehouse<sup>42</sup>.

As will be shown, the Balkan Wars (1912–13) and the First World War (1914–18) additionally undermined the power of the workers and gave the tobacco merchants a propitious opportunity to change the established order in the warehouses. At the same time, it is obvious that conflict between the two sides had been simmering continuously since the Young Turk Revolution. The 1911 strike ended with no achievements for the workers. During 1912, the owners of the great warehouses continued to exert pressure with the goal of breaking the union and again reducing workers' wages<sup>43</sup>. On August 17, 1912, the workers tried their luck again. Their opening move came as the warehouses owners cancelled the agreements made with the syndicate and introduced a way of calculation of the worker's pay that resulted in a cut of 30 percent of the amount earned by skilled workers. This was achieved by increasing the weight of processed tobacco needed to earn what the workers considered a reasonable daily income. What is more, the employers demanded the abolition of all syndicalist privileges in the warehouses. The practical meaning of this demand was lost on no one: abolition of organized labor. The result was a strike that lasted almost a year<sup>44</sup>.

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41. Ibid.

42. Supplement 1, *La Solidaridad Ovradera*.

43. "El Lokout del Tutun" [The Tobacco Lockout], *Avanti* (Feb. 2, 1912): 3.

44. "El konflikto del tutun", *Avanti* 3, no. 200 (May 14, 1913): 1; "El konflikto del tutun", *Avanti* (May 19, 1913): 1.

The warehouses owners probably were motivated by concern that they might be unable to sell their tobacco in the absence of much demand for excellent tobacco leaf classification. Their interests soon were served by political events, as Salonika was flooded with refugees fleeing the hostilities of the First Balkan War<sup>45</sup>. Thousands of Muslim girls from Macedonia who passed through the city on their way from the battlefields of Macedonia to Ottoman Asia were willing to work in the warehouses at remarkably low wages, pushing skilled veterans of the industry out of the market<sup>46</sup>. Until this time, men had explained to their female coworkers that the union was protecting their interests and the females thus ought to be satisfied with doing less-skilled work and earning less money. Now, though, came other young females who did not care about the union and were ready to sort or pack tobacco leaves however they were told for very little money<sup>47</sup>. The ensuing conflict between big merchants and organized workers brought the former to impose a nine-month lockout, during which they continuously worked to recruit unorganized workers and particularly female Muslim refugees.

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45. On the influx of refugees during the Balkan Wars, see Walter Harrington Crawford Price, *The Balkan Cockpit: The Political and Military Story of the Balkan Wars in Macedonia* (London: T. Werner Laurie, Ltd., 1915), 108–12. Cf. *El Avenir*, Oct. 31, 1912; *El Avenir*, Nov. 5, 1912: “Thus far some thirty thousand Muslim refugees have arrived from the theaters of battle with the Greeks”; *El Avenir*, Nov. 6, 1912: “Hundreds of Muslims from the warzone arrived in the city in buffalo-harnessed carts loaded with household utensils and property”; David Starr Jordan, “The Balkan Tangle”, *The Advocate of Peace* (1894–1920) 80, no. 9 (Oct. 1918): 277, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20668121>; Jordan, “The Balkan Tragedy”, *Journal of Race Development* 9, no. 2 (1918): 120–35, esp. 131; Eleftheria Daleziou, “Adjuster and Negotiator’: Bert Hodge Hill and the Greek Refugee Crisis, 1918–1928”, in “Philhellenism, Philanthropy, or Political Convenience? American Archaeology in Greece”, special issue, *Hesperia: The Journal of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens* 82, no. 1 (Jan.–Mar. 2013): 49–65, esp. 50–51, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2972/hesperia.82.1.0049>. On the influx of refugees following the First World War and the 1918 armistice, see Dimitra Giannuli, “American Philanthropy in Action: The American Red Cross in Greece, 1918–1923”, *East European Politics and Societies* 10, no. 1 (1995): 108–32; R. Common, “Population Changes on the Salonika Campaign”, *Canadian Geographer* 4, no. 13 (1959): 31–40.

46. “Ainda la fabrika de djulis” [Again the Sack Factory], *Avanti* 3, no. 198 (May 9, 1913): 3.

47. Hadar, “Jewish Tobacco Workers”, 129–33, 136.

In the mean time, the Greek government's fear of losing share in the international tobacco market because of the wars led it in the early days of the First World War to start opening up the market for export of unprocessed and poorly processed tobacco<sup>48</sup>.

Naturally, minimal processing or not processing at all permitted a reduction in the number of workers employed in the tobacco industry. It also confuted the claim that male workers should have higher wages than females, now that most members of both genders were supposed to be doing the same work. This threatened the livelihood of tobacco workers in Salonika and across Macedonia, who came together to fight for their wages and working conditions. The resulting strike in 1914 Salonika was one where both ethnicity and gender came to the fore<sup>49</sup>. Duly instructed by their brothers and fathers, the young female Jewish workers rioted and tore off the headscarves of Muslim women workers to force them out of the packing warehouses. The Jewish women and girls, though they earned far less than their menfolk, fought the latter's struggle in the streets of Salonika<sup>50</sup>. The strike ended with the negotiation and signature by the Greek Ministry of Labor and the workers' representatives of the Kavala Protocols, a process that took place in the town of that name<sup>51</sup>. However, the end of the strike neither brought peace to

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48. "Los tutunjis kombatiran por sus pan" [The Tobacco Workers Will Fight for Their Bread], *Avanti* 17, no. 85 (Nov. 23, 1926): 2. On the precise sense of poor processing between 1914 and 1929, there is a debate that will be discussed below, pp. 21-28.

Srougo, *Ha-Po'alim ha-Yehudim*, 132-33; Dagkas, *Recherches sur l'histoire sociale*, 633; Avdela, "Class, Ethnicity, and Gender".

49. Srougo, *Ha-Po'alim ha-Yehudim*, 132-33; Dagkas, *Recherches sur l'histoire sociale*, 633; Avdela, "Class, Ethnicity, and Gender".

50. "La greve" [The Strike], *Nuevo El Avenir* 17, no. 87 (Apr. 13, 1914); "La greve", *Nuevo El Avenir* 17, no. 88 (Apr. 14, 1914). On gender in the struggles of the tobacco workers, see Avdela, "Class, Ethnicity, and Gender"; Hadar, "Karmen be-Saloniki", 10, 19. On the subordination of female workers to their male comrades even in class struggle, see "El lokout del tutun, asamblea de niniyas" [The Tobacco Lockout: The Girls' Assembly], *Avanti* 3, no. 195 (May 2, 1913): 3. Decisions made at an assembly of the male workers were conveyed to the girls' assembly as a *fait accompli*.

51. Dagkas, *Recherches sur l'histoire sociale*, 770; Konstantinos Tsitselikis, *Old and New Islam in Greece: From Historical Minorities to Immigrant Newcomers* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 230.



the Jewish tobacco workers of Salonika nor even obviated the political harm suffered by the entire community: the strike signalled the start of the identification of the Jews of Salonika with “international socialism”<sup>52</sup>, which sought, so it was believed, to destroy Greece. The chaos that began with rioting in the streets of Salonika by Jewish women and especially girls, as well as the small number of Christian Greeks among the city’s tobacco workers at that time, rapidly transformed the sympathy the Greek press had shown toward the strike into suspicion that it was part of a Jewish plot to subvert Greek sovereignty in the city<sup>53</sup>. What is more, the Jewishness (and the Bulgarian education) of Abraham Ben Aroya, a leader of the strike who consequently was internally exiled to the Aegean Greek islands for disrupting public order, served to further intensify the feelings of rejection towards the strikers<sup>54</sup>. As discussed below, tobacco continued to be a cornerstone of the lives of Salonikan Jews, and no less in the economy of Macedonia and Greece writ large.

### **3. The Port**

The Greek government’s insecurity regarding its continued control of Salonika led it to implement an intensive policy to affirm the city’s Greekness. One of the fundamental components of this program was an effort to break the Jewish monopoly in the port of Salonika. What proved to be the first step was a spontaneous one: a Greek employment boycott in the port. Available evidence demonstrates that the boycott erupted immediately upon the arrival of the Greek army in the city<sup>55</sup>. Faced with this threat and with claims that the Jews had not rejoiced when the Greek army had entered the city, bearing a constitutional grant of freedom for all, the leadership of the Jewish community, headed by Chief Rabbi Ya’akov Meir, protested in an audience with King George I:

The constitution did not change anything for the Jews, because we always have enjoyed freedom and equality [under the Otto-

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52. Avdela, “Class, Ethnicity, and Gender”, 430–31.

53. Ibid.

54. Dagkas, *Recherches sur l’histoire sociale*, 842; Avdela, “Class, Ethnicity, and Gender”, 430.

55. Srougo, *Ha-Po’alim ha-Yehudim*, 131.

man rule], but one thing that is occurring today must be changed: Greeks go to the shops and ask, "Who is the owner? Jew, Turk, or Greek?" and when they are told "Jew", the Greek says, "Jew? I'm not buying from you!" The same goes on in shops and tobacco stores, and in the port as well. You know that most sailors [on barges and small boats bringing goods from ships to the quay] in Salonika are Jewish, and now thirty-forty [sailors] have come from Greece. The Jews want to make a respectable living and live in friendship with the new sailors, but they stand on the boat's bow and say to those who come ashore, "Those are Jews. Don't go to their boats"<sup>56</sup>.

The prevailing view in the recollections of Salonikan Jews who immigrated to what would become Israel during the 1930s was that this boycott immediately eliminated the Jewish presence in the port<sup>57</sup>. However, recent scholarship has demonstrated that during the years 1914–18, most of the stevedores and other port workers still were Jews<sup>58</sup>. According to data recorded by Henry Morgenthau, then ambassador of the United States in Istanbul, there were in 1916 four hundred Jewish laborers in the port<sup>59</sup>, and on the eve of the Greco-Turkish population exchange of 1922–23, their number was estimated at seven hundred<sup>60</sup>.

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56. "El Rey Jorjo y el gran rabino" [King George and the Chief Rabbi], *Nuevo El Avenir* 15, no. 151 (Dec. 2, 1912).

57. Isaac Ben-Zvi, "Ketavim, Zikhronot u-Reshimot" [Literature, Memoirs, and Notes], in Yitshak R. Molkho, "Tenu'at ha-Po'alim 'al Kibbush ha-Yam be-Yisrael 'al Yedei Yamaei Saloniki u-mi-Saviv la-Tehiyyah ha-Leumit ba-Merkaz ha-Yehudi-Sefaradi shel ha-Balkanim (Likkutim mi-Sekiroi ve-Zikhronot mi-Yitshak Ben-Tsevi, Simhah Rubinshtein ve-Kotev ha-Turim ha-Elleh)" [The Labor Movement on the Conquest of the Sea in Israel by the Mariners of Salonika and concerning the National Renaissance in the Balkan Center of Sephardic Jewry (Collected from Surveys and Memories from Isaac Ben-Zvi, Simhah Rubinstein, and the Author of These Lines)], *Otsar Yehudei Sefarad: Le-Heker Toledot Yehudei Sefarad ve-Tarbutam* [A Treasury of Sephardic Jewry: Studies in the History and Culture of Sephardic Jewry] 9 (Jerusalem, 1965–66), 32; Srougo, *Ha-Po'alim ha-Yehudim*, 133.

58. Srougo, *Ha-Po'alim ha-Yehudim*, 136–38.

59. Morgenthau, "The Jews", 32.

60. Dagkas, *Recherches sur l'histoire sociale*, 561.

#### 4. *The Great War*

The arrival of the Allied fleet in 1916 led to a marked improvement in the Salonikan employment market<sup>61</sup>, where much new work became available for manual workers and day laborers<sup>62</sup>. In that year, the British forces garrisoned in the city provided work for 2,500 men who were ineligible for enlistment, which Rabbi Ya'akov Meir made sure was announced in all the city's synagogues<sup>63</sup>. The number of employees outside the tobacco industry and ports was estimated in the same year at eight thousand, including two thousand individuals working in cafés and restaurants and as peddlers, six hundred porters, five hundred drivers of carts and other vehicles, 150 customs employees, two thousand mechanics of various kinds, 1,105 merchants, and 1,200 shopkeepers, apart from 430 white-collar professionals<sup>64</sup>.

Between 1915 and 1920, several professional organizations linked to the port and other professions were founded in Salonika with the aim of replacing Ottoman-era guild regime. Not with standing the common view that the employment boycott pushed Jews out of the port as Greeks entered the city, these organizations were based not on ethnicity, but “class”, a requirement imposed by the Greek authorities that sought to keep them under government control. Users of the port's services and customers of contractors in that field formed one organization, contractors of operations in the port formed different organizations, while various types of workers formed their own.

Not all Jewish port workers joined these organizations at once. Being organized according to family ties, they preferred to adhere to their accustomed affiliations. During the years of the First World War, with

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61. Mikhael Molkho, “Ha-Shekhunot ha-Yehudiyot be-Saloniki” [The Jewish Neighborhoods of Salonika], in Recanati, *Zikhron Saloniki*, 2:24; Molkho, “Toledot Yehudei Saloniki” [The History of the Jews of Salonika], in *Saloniki 'Ir va-Em*, 23; Yosef 'Uzziel, “Saloniki 'Olah ba-Lehavot” [Salonika Is Going Up in Flames], in *Saloniki 'Ir va-Em*, 225; Dagkas, *Recherches sur l'histoire sociale*, 494.

62. Srougo, *Ha-Po'olim ha-Yehudim*, 136–38.

63. «Εργάται Ἰσραηλίται εἰς τὸν Ἀγγλικὸν Στρατὸν» [Jewish workers for the English army], *Τὸ Φῶς* [To Fos; The Light], Sep.17, 1916, p. 3.

64. Morgenthau, “The Jews”, 32.

ships of the Entente Powers anchored in Salonika, the power of the Greek government in the port had been limited, and in any case, the wartime shortage of manpower stood in the way of any Greek shipowners who perhaps wished to avoid or boycott Jewish stevedores and barge sailors<sup>65</sup>. Even between the 1918 withdrawal from Salonika of the Armée d'Orient and the acceleration in the rise of new labor organizations in 1922, most of the problems that workers confronted related to work relations with the state and the contractors who employed them, rather than ethnic conflict<sup>66</sup>. Contrary to the complaints of Rabbi Meir, the struggle of Greek-Christian laborers, to the extent that it was of an ethnic character, was at this stage aimed not at pushing the Jews out of the port, but against partiality for Jewish workers<sup>67</sup>.

At least until 1918, employment stability among Jewish port workers can be understood in terms of the economic recovery that the Allied fleet brought to the city. Yet between 1912 and 1921, despite substantial relocation of large Jewish-owned firms from Salonika and Greece<sup>68</sup>, large Jewish-owned businesses remaining in the city made their mark on it through a preference for Jewish port workers. Concurrently, a clear state policy of preferring Greek Christian workers was adopted in all public and governmental places of employment. According to the Greek press, almost all Jewish workers in the railroad industry, the trolley system, municipal government, and municipal services had by 1919 been replaced by Greek Christian workers<sup>69</sup>.

Numerous stevedores, boat and barge sailors, porters, cart drivers, factory workers, and employees of other businesses in Salonika lived in the crowded area next to the port, and a great many of these lost their homes when that neighborhood burned to the ground in August 1917<sup>70</sup>. The Great Fire also toppled the Salonikan Jewish middle class.

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65. Srougo, *Ha-Po'olim ha-Yehudim*, 135-39.

66. *Ibid.*, 151-77.

67. *Ibid.*, 160-62. See also, e.g., «Εργατικά» [Employment], *To Fos*, Mar. 4, 1921, 2.

68. Meron, *Jewish Entrepreneurship in Salonica, 1912-1940*, 53-59.

69. Dagkas, *Le mouvement social*, 71.

70. Minna Rozen, "Money, Power, Politics, and the Great Salonika Fire of 1917", *Jewish Social Studies: History, Culture, Society*, n.s., 22, no. 2 (Winter 2017): 74-115;

Artisans who had earned a decent living from their craft suddenly found themselves not only homeless, but also deprived of their means of production, their workshops and tools consumed by the flames. There were no good solutions for such individuals. If they wanted to continue working at their trades, they needed to borrow money, but no help was forthcoming from the community, the Greek government, or that of their city<sup>71</sup>. Owners of small businesses lost in the fire lacked ability and even right to reestablish their businesses where it had previously existed<sup>72</sup>. In one representative case, a teacher at the Alliance Israélite Universelle school sent a telegram to Paris in which he wrote to Jacques Bigart, president of the Alliance, that he and his family were suffering terribly and requested immediate relocation to Morocco<sup>73</sup>. Even a gynecological surgeon, Dr. Isaac Cohen, was confounded by how he might manage to purchase new equipment and rent a new clinic

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Gila Hadar, “Hebbetim be-Hayyei ha-Mishpahah ha-Yehudit be-Saloniki: 1900–1943” [Aspects in the Life of the Jewish Family in Salonika: 1900–1943] (PhD diss., University of Haifa, 2003), 56–58, 62–66; Hadar, “Régie Vardar: A Jewish ‘Garden City’ in Thessaloniki (1917–1943)” (paper presented at the Seventh International Conference on Urban History: European City in Comparative Perspective, Panteion University, Piraeus, Oct. 27–30, 2004); Hadar, «Ρεζι Βαρντάρ: μια εβραϊκή “κηπούπολη” στη Θεσσαλονίκη», [Régie Vardar: A Jewish “Garden City” in Thessaloniki], in Λυδία Σαπουνάκη-Δρακάκη, εκδότριας, *Η Ελληνική πόλη σε Ιστορική Προοπτική* (Αθήνα: Εκδόσεις Διονίκος, 2005) [The Greek City in Historical Perspective], ed. Lydia Sapounaki-Drakaki (Athens: Dionicos Publishers, 2005), 151–65]; Rena Molho, “Jewish Working-Class Neighborhoods in Salonika following the 1890 and 1917 Fires”, in *The Last Ottoman Century and Beyond*, ed. Minna Rozen, 2 vols. (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 2002), 2:188–94; Mikhael Molkho, “Ha-Shekhunot ha-Yehudiyot”, 24; Molkho, “Toledot Yehudei Saloniki”, 23; Yosef ‘Uzziel, “Saloniki ‘Olah ba-Lehavot”, 225.

71. “Minutes of the Meeting of the Council of the Jewish Community Held on September 9, 1922, at 7 p.m. in the Offices of the Community (Sarandapanou Street No. 13) at Which Meeting the Representatives of the American J.D.C. Participated”, accessed Jan. 9, 2018, [http://search.archives.jdc.org/multimedia/Documents/NY\\_AR2132/00036/NY\\_AR2132\\_04283.pdf](http://search.archives.jdc.org/multimedia/Documents/NY_AR2132/00036/NY_AR2132_04283.pdf).

72. See Rozen, “Money, Power, Politics”, 74–115.

73. Jacob Levi to Jacques Bigart, Sep. 10, 1917, GRECE\_XIX\_E\_002\_211, Archives of the Alliance Israélite Universelle, Paris. Bigart is described in all correspondence from Salonika as president of the Alliance, but in Alliance documents he is termed secretary general.

to replace the clinic and expensive instruments that he had lost to the fire<sup>74</sup>.

Employment difficulties worsened with the sailing of the Allied fleet and the thousands of soldiers of the Armée d'Orient. Overnight, the many positions created by these soldiers' presence disappeared. In 1918, even before the departure of Allied forces, increasing numbers of refugees flooded into Salonika from war-torn areas just as during the Balkan Wars. Some were Greeks who wished to remain in Greece, if not Salonika, while others were Muslims wishing to make their way to Turkey, for whom Salonika was merely a way station. All were cheap labor, and all competed with the fledgling labor organizations of the city<sup>75</sup>.

State policy preference for Old Greece over Macedonia was evident from the supply of food and the prices paid for it, and proved a main cause of an increase in the cost of living<sup>76</sup> and in turn social ferment in Salonika.

On February 21, 1919, a general strike hit Salonika. Economic activity slowed to a standstill, and ten thousand individuals gathered in the square near the iconic White Tower that became the symbol of the city to listen as workers vented their anguish. These laborers were no Bolsheviks, they shouted. They wanted work, fair wages, and food and coal at prices like those in Athens<sup>77</sup>.

The general resentment of national government policy in Macedonia was exacerbated by new changes in the tobacco warehouses. In the years 1919–20, the tobacco exporters resumed pressuring their supply chains to reduce the cost of tobacco processing, leading to a powerful reaction from workers<sup>78</sup>. Tobacco workers now understood the linkage between the American market and their plight. They claimed that American big business was pushing its way into the Greek market out of a need to dump surplus low-quality tobacco. They saw the Greek government, which

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74. Cohen to Bigart, Jan. 16, 1918, pp. 22–33, GRÈCE B II, Archives of the Alliance Israélite Universelle.

75. Srougo, *Ha-Po'olim ha-Yehudim*, 134–35.

76. Dagkas, *Recherches sur l'histoire sociale*, 467–68.

77. *Ibid.*, 638.

78. Fountanopoulos, *Labor and the Labor Movement*, 145–46.

permitted this, as an ally of these foreign capitalists, and by extension the workers' enemy<sup>79</sup>.

The workers of Salonika gathered on November 26, 1920, in the White Tower Theater to protest what they perceived as a series of ongoing injustices inflicted on them by the central government. Labor leaders representing all three religions protested the cost of living, the low wages, the mistreatment and persecution of their fellow workers, and the plan for rebuilding the city following the fire of 1917, which was entirely skewed in favor of the wealthy and offered no comfort to the poor or middle class. Strikes thenceforth became more frequent, and labor leaders in various industries, such as Abraham Ben Aroya, were imprisoned and exiled<sup>80</sup>. Tobacco workers were not the only ones who were affected by the deterioration of the city. It was felt in other industries as well. In 1921, the employees of Calderon and Aroesti's shoe factory protested the hiring of seventy-five new workers despite the insufficiency of work for existing employees, which was a few weeks later followed by the dismissal of those existing workers and the arrest of protest leaders<sup>81</sup>. Unemployment and high prices were not limited to Jewish workers. However, in Salonika, Jews were the main victims. The agitation among the workers, especially tobacco workers, became a source of grave apprehension in Athens. Concerned by communist activity and the need to ensure sufficient work for militant tobacco workers, the Greek government promulgated Act 2869/1922, which banned the export of unprocessed tobacco from the country<sup>82</sup>.

The economic experience of Salonika's Jews during the initial years of Greek rule thus was a multifaceted one. It was affected not only by the Greek aim of hellenizing the city, but also by systemic changes, such

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79. Dagkas, *Recherches sur l'histoire sociale*, 758–59.

80. Dagkas, *Recherches sur l'histoire sociale*, 640.

81. "Movimiento social. En el sindicato kalderon y Aroesti" [The Socialist Movement: In Calderon and Aroesti's Syndicate], *Avanti* 11, no. 218 (Sep. 27, 1921): 2; "El torno de los insidentes de noche de alhad" [The Aftermath of the Incidents of Sunday Night], *Avanti* 11, no. 231 (Oct. 27, 1921); "Por la liberacion de los aprezados" [For the Prisoners' Liberation], *Avanti* 11, no. 349 (Dec. 10, 1921).

82. Bakalis, "Impact of Tobacco", 250–51; Fountanopoulos, *Labor and the Labor Movement*, 147–48.



as those in Salonika's status in general and the fluctuations of the world tobacco market and Greek tobacco politics between the Balkan Wars and the population exchange of 1922–23.

## **II. The Catastrophe and the Aftermath: The Tobacco State Revisited, 1922–1936**

The employment problems created by the departure of the Armée d'Orient were minor in comparison to the troubles visited on Salonika's job market by the Greco-Turkish War of 1919–22. Economic activity throughout the city was hurt by the decline of port operations<sup>83</sup>. Yet the main change in the local labor market, and that of Greece as a whole, began in August 1922 with the defeat of the Greek Army and the arrival of refugees from Asia Minor. All of Greece now had to cope with the absorption of a million and a half destitute refugees escaping en masse from the warzones of Anatolia—an impossible task for a state that was unable to provide for all its citizens even before the Catastrophe.

Foreign aid and generous loans, mainly from Britain, helped settle part of the refugees in the tobacco-farming regions of Thrace and Macedonia, but the dismal living conditions of the many refugees who settled in the cities, especially Salonika, gained nothing from the prosperity brought by tobacco cultivation. As stressed in Mark Mazower's study, although the Greek government had feared the loss of the tobacco market due to the emigration of Muslim farmers to Anatolia in the population exchange of 1922–23, the Greek refugees from Anatolia who settled in Macedonia rapidly entered this sector, and like all others within it, they enjoyed healthy profits, which permitted the constant expansion of areas devoted to the crop. In Mazower's opinion, the combination of expanding tobacco cultivation, the flooding of the global market with Macedonian tobacco, and the preference for inferior tobacco, such as that of Bulgaria and Turkey, that resulted from the outbreak of the Great Depression in 1929 were the main causes of the crisis in the Macedonian tobacco market<sup>84</sup>. The progression of events, though, actually was more complicated: the

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83. Meron, *Jewish Entrepreneurship in Salonica, 1912–1940*, 55.

84. Mazower, *Economic Crisis*, 116–17.

official Greek sources on which Mazower's study primarily relies observe events only from the perspective of the growers, the big traders, and the Greek government, leaving the fate of the workers as a dead zone.

The studies by both Alexandros Dagkas and Christos Bakalis, which take into account the impact of Greek government policy on tobacco workers, also link the tobacco crisis mainly to the Great Depression<sup>85</sup>. However, the statistical data of the years 1926–1930 pose a problem. If Dagkas' calculations are correct, then the prosperity brought by tobacco cultivation from 1923 to 1925 led to an increase in the number of tobacco workers in Salonika, who in 1928 numbered 55,000 to 56,000, including some 2,959 Jews (5.38%). These numbers are much higher than those yielded by the population survey of May 15–16, 1928, which specifies 25,366 industrial workers, including 4,988 temporarily unemployed, and emphasizes with regard to those lacking work: "This last figure consists mainly of tobacco workers and approximates their maximum number"<sup>86</sup>. There is a logical reason for this discrepancy. The reader must remember that the workers themselves wanted to show the greatest possible number of unemployed persons, every one of them struggling for survival. From the workers' point of view, each unemployed individual who had worked at some point for a few days in the tobacco industry was an unemployed tobacco worker. The government, meanwhile, had an opposing interest.

A rigorous reading of press coverage from 1925 to 1929 shows that for the workers and for the brokers who traditionally had mediated between the growers and the big merchants, the crisis began no later than 1925. It was especially acute for the Jewish workers, whose number dropped

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85. Dagkas, *Recherches sur l'histoire*, 13; Bakalis, "Impact of Tobacco", 250–52.

86. *Résultats statistiques du recensement de la population de la Grèce du 15–16 Mai 1928, III Professions*, République Hellénique, Ministère de l'économie nationale-statistique générale de la Grèce, 702. Kostas Fountanopoulos, who cites the industrial censuses of 1920 (*Απογραφή των βιοτεχνικών και βιομηχανικών επιχειρήσεων κατά την 18 Δεκεμβρίου 1920* [Athens, 1926], [http://dlib.statistics.gr/Book/GRESYE\\_02\\_1001\\_00001.pdf](http://dlib.statistics.gr/Book/GRESYE_02_1001_00001.pdf)) and the same census for 1930 (*Απογραφή των βιομηχανικών και εμπορικών επιχειρήσεων, Σεπτέμβριος 1930*, [Athens, 1934]), reports 784 male and 1,569 female tobacco workers. For 1930, he reports sixty male and 434 female workers (*Labor and the Labor Movement*, 166), which corroborates my hypothesis.

from eight thousand in 1916 to 3,156 in 1928<sup>87</sup>, and 2,500 in 1936<sup>88</sup>. The reason for this crisis was the change in the state's tobacco politics.

In 1925, three years after imposing restrictions on the export of unprocessed tobacco, Greece completely reliberalized the market<sup>89</sup>. Causes of this about-face included the impression formed in 1922–25 that there was insatiable postwar global demand for tobacco, including fine Greek tobacco; the rapid entry of Anatolian refugees into tobacco cultivation in northern Greece, where they replaced the Muslim farmers who had departed for Asia Minor; the ongoing expansion of land devoted to tobacco in Macedonia and Thrace; and the rapid flow of foreign currency from tobacco exports into the coffers of the state. It soon became apparent that foreign firms had vociferous objections to high-quality tobacco processing, since it caused the workers, so they argued, to work inefficiently, thus increasing the cost of tobacco processing<sup>90</sup>. These firms preferred to buy cheap Bulgarian or Turkish tobacco rather than the fine, expensive tobacco of Greece<sup>91</sup>.

Liberalization doubly benefitted the big tobacco merchants. First, it let them reduce their costs by directly contacting growers, leaving the local brokers, including quite a few Jews, without a source of livelihood<sup>92</sup>. At a later point, the state became the main broker between the growers and the large firms, and took for itself the profit once earned by traditional brokers. The liberalization of the tobacco market also enabled the large firms to continue the process they had striven to execute as early as the First World War, and possibly even 1908<sup>93</sup>, of reducing production costs by switching to low-quality tobacco, processed according to the tonga method<sup>94</sup>.

The difference between the old *basmas* method of classifying tobacco

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87. Dagkas, *Recherches sur l'histoire*, table 222, pp. 30–31, on included CD.

88. Mentesh Ibn Shanji, "Ba'alei ha-Miktsot", 209.

89. Bakalis, "Impact of Tobacco", 250–51.

90. Fountanopoulos, *Labor and the Labor Movement*, 147.

91. *Ibid.*, 131.

92. "Los tutunjis kombatiran", 2; "Kestiones lavoraderas" [Work Issues], *El Pueblo* 16, no. 30 (Nov. 28, 1932): 6.

93. See above, pp. 11–12.

94. See below, p. 26.

leaves and the tonga method was that under *basmas*, a skilled worker had to sort tobacco into seven categories based on leaf size and quality, whereas the tonga method admitted only four such types. Tonga meant that the tobacco leaves were packed in bales with less distinction than the *basmas*<sup>95</sup>. Switching from *basmas* to tonga also entailed a radical change in the organization of work. Since there now was only one system, measuring workers' efficiency no longer was a problem and uniform output quotas could be established for all, regardless of sex or age. The new quotas, which far exceeded those of yesteryear, created a work pressure hitherto unknown, which utterly changed the atmosphere in the warehouses. The supremacy of skilled male workers was lost, and the pressure that their high wages had exercised on the remainder of the workforce was neutralized. Previously, the male workers had in general also been the tobacco syndicate activists who actually ran the sorting and packing floors. Now they found themselves being slowly pushed out.

The change of method, which accelerated in 1925, made many workers redundant<sup>96</sup>. By the close of 1926, thirty thousand tobacco workers were unemployed, and their families faced starvation. Among these were the Jewish tobacco workers of Salonika<sup>97</sup>. It bears note that a great number of these unemployed workers had entered the trade as the tobacco industry burgeoned only two or three years earlier, thinking that they had found a stable source of livelihood<sup>98</sup>. That hope now was shattered.

Although the Ladino sources suggest that the tonga system immediately became the accepted processing method after the 1925 liberalization, the Greek sources give 1929 as the year of the transition, and in point of fact, as shown above, the new method must first have appeared immediately after the Greeks took over the city, though not for a long time<sup>99</sup>. The

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95. Fountanopoulos, *Labor and the Labor Movement*, 158. See also Dagkas, *Recherches sur l'histoire sociale*, 291–94.

96. “El TAK puede el egzistir legalmente? ‘Si no ay lavoro no ay epidomas’” [Can the TAK Legally Exist? “If There Is No Work, There Are No Benefits”], *El Pueblo* 16, no. 25 (Nov. 21, 1932): 2.

97. “Los tutunjis kombatiran”, 2.

98. See above p. 24, nn. 85–86.

99. Kostas Fountanopoulos, *Labor and the Labor Movement*, 158, is of the opinion that the tonga system was introduced only after 1929. However, Dagkas, *Recherches*

solution to this discrepancy probably lies in the fact that female Jewish workers always had been the majority of tobacco workers in Salonika and could quickly take the places of male workers when the tonga method was introduced, while recruiting female Christian workers willing to work for the terms dictated by the warehouse owners was a novelty that took some time to be realized<sup>100</sup>. This hypothesis is borne out by available information about children's education in Salonika. As of 1920–23, there were in Salonika and its suburbs forty-four kindergartens, of which thirty-three were Jewish. The latter serviced 1,986 children, while the Greek kindergartens provided for 778. I would suggest that this disparity resulted in part from the number of Jewish working mothers, who numbered far fewer than unmarried Jewish female workers, but still greatly exceeded the number of working mothers among Christian Greeks<sup>101</sup>.

The ferment among tobacco workers, agitated ever since liberalization had ushered in the export of poorly processed tobacco, did not escape the attention of the government in Athens. When restrictions on tobacco exports were removed, significant unemployment among tobacco workers was taken into consideration, and fear that they would turn to communism led the government to act to reduce social tension and create a mechanism to keep them under supervision. A decree issued by dictator Theodoros Pangalos in April 1926 established the Tobacco Workers Insurance Fund (Ταμείο Ασφαλίσεως Καπνεργατών), or TAK for short, and the decree was validated in May as Act 3460<sup>102</sup>.

The TAK's main offices were in Salonika. It received 6 percent of registered workers' wages and 6 percent of merchants' profits from the

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*sur l'histoire sociale*, 254, 291–94, argues that this method first was introduced at the beginning of the First World War and American buyers tried to enforce it even earlier. As discussed below, the Ladino sources are fully consistent with Dagkas's view.

100. Fountanopoulos, *Labor and the Labor Movement*, 155.

101. Σπύρος Λουκάτος, «Η Εβραϊκή Κοινότητα της Θεσσαλονίκης μέσα από ελληνικές εκθέσεις 1913–1923» [Spyros Loukatos, The Jewish Community of Thessaloniki according to Greek Reports], *Χρονικά* [*Chronika*; Annals], May–June 1996: 12.

102. Γεώργιος Χριστοδούλου, *Η Θεσσαλονίκη κατά την τελευταίαν εκατονταετίαν: Εμπόριον βιομηχανία* (Θεσσαλονίκη: Ένωσις, 1936) [Georgios Christodoulou, *Thessaloniki in the course of the last hundred years: trade and industry* (Thessaloniki: Ένωσις, 1936)], 248–50.

sale of tobacco outside Greece, and the state's treasury transferred to it 4 percent of taxes collected from tobacco trading. The TAK was managed by twelve members, among them a state official, three tobacco merchants, and four tobacco workers<sup>103</sup>. The government portrayed the establishment of the bureau as a great achievement unprecedented in any other sector of the Greek economy, but the workers were of a different view. Though the TAK promised unemployed workers benefits of 40 percent of their daily wages for sixty days, liberalization left tobacco workers unemployed for an average of eight to nine months, not two<sup>104</sup>.

The workers also argued that what the state gained from liberalization was outweighed by its losses, and that the sole beneficiaries of liberalization were the great firms of the warehouses owners. It should be noted, however, that some tobacco merchants shared the view that the tonga method was harmful to the Greek tobacco industry<sup>105</sup>. Nevertheless, these were not the great foreign firms, but local merchants who preferred the fine processing that enabled tobacco to be stored for a year or two. They were a minority<sup>106</sup>. Workers claimed that the assumption that the state received a great deal of foreign currency from liberalization was negated by the fact that it had lost a quarter of a billion drachmas in foreign currency from processing the tobacco harvest of 1925, with the implication that this loss was due to inferior sorting. They argued that the liberalization law would bring devastation to the whole of Macedonia and Thrace<sup>107</sup>.

The TAK's promise to distribute 750,000 drachmas to assist the unemployed tobacco workers struck those workers as ludicrous, in as much as they believed that some twenty-five million drachmas would be needed. The calculations of the workers' leaders were premised on the economics of expensive tobacco, classified by the traditional *basmas* system and providing employment for the workers, who clearly believed that consumers wanted quality tobacco and were willing to pay for it. They did

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103. Ibid.

104. "El TAK puede el egzistir legalmente?", 2.

105. Fountanopoulos, *Labor and the Labor Movement*, 130.

106. Ibid., 131.

107. "Los tutunjis kombatiran".

not consider any other possibility. They believed the Greek government and the big merchants to be responsible for their predicament, and they demanded that those parties take responsibility<sup>108</sup>.

The establishment of the TAK had mixed results for the workers. Aside from paying unemployment and medical benefits and compensating families in case of death, registration with the TAK functioned much as a work license. Whereas securing employment in one of the warehouses previously had required the approval of the Tobacco Workers Syndicate, employment now was dependent on a TAK membership card, which undermined the power of organized labor and caused many workers to be removed from the work pool. The representative of the TAK could refuse a card to a worker because he was known as a Communist agitator, or because he disliked him for some other reason, or due to an order from Athens not to register workers beyond a certain number<sup>109</sup>. At the same time, employing workers who were registered with the TAK necessarily was more expensive for tobacco merchants, so that the workers found themselves fighting against others who illicitly declined to register with the TAK, whom merchants now preferred<sup>110</sup>.

The TAK failed to stanch the flight of Macedonian tobacco workers, including Salonikan Jews, to the arms of the Communist Party, which attracted the support of between 10 and 15 percent of voters in northern Greece in the parliamentary elections of November 7, 1926<sup>111</sup>. The workers' distrust of government intentions resulted from the fact that the reality they encountered constantly indicated that the governments preferred their own immediate interests over the long-term interest of the state as a whole, which included the tobacco workers. The illogic of

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108. "Los tutunjis kombatiran", 2.

109. "El shomaje en el tutun" [The Unemployment in the Tobacco Industry], *Avanti* 17, no. 85 (Nov. 23, 1926): 3.

110. "El Lavoro de los tutunjis" [The Work of the Tobacco Workers], *Aksion*, Dec. 11, 1929, 4; "La manipulacion del tutun" [Tobacco Processing], *Aksion*, Dec. 13, 1929, 1.

111. Mazower, *Economic Crisis*, 127; Δημοσθένης Δώδος, *Η εκλογική περιφέρεια της Θεσσαλονίκης: Κόμματα και υποψήφιοι*, διδακτορική διατριβή (Θεσσαλονίκη: Αριστοτέλειο Πανεπιστήμιο Θεσσαλονίκης, 1989) [Dimosthenis Dodos, The Electoral Periphery of Thessaloniki: Parties and Candidates (Thessaloniki: Aristotle University 1989)], 72–73.



liberalization, as far as the national interest was concerned, was clear to them, since it obviously served the big tobacco firms, some of which were not even Greek businesses<sup>112</sup>.

When those firms were in December 1929 granted permission to employ cheap laborers not registered with the TAK, this newest debacle was just one more indication that the government favored the merchants and industrialists. A few days later, the Workers Federation of Salonika 'Enosis' (Ενωσις) contacted the General Confederation of Greek Workers (Γενική Συνομοσπονδία Εργατών Ελλάδας), and a delegation from the confederation met with Minister of Economy Panayis Vourloumis and demanded that the government continue its support for the unemployed tobacco workers of Salonika, who they claimed had reached the point of starvation. As a result, the government allowed the TAK to borrow additional money to distribute to the workers "if the situation worsens", but the government reportedly was in no hurry to help the unemployed laborers<sup>113</sup>.

The confederation raised another issue with Vourloumis in the same meeting. As it turned out, most of the tobacco harvest of 1929 remained in the possession of the growers and had not been purchased by the tobacco merchants. The reason for this, argued the workers, was that the merchants had formed a monopsony to reduce prices, and they thus demanded that Vourloumis force the merchants to purchase the tobacco. To this he replied that he was unaware of any monopsony and that the tobacco remained unsold because of the massive expansion in tobacco cultivation that had begun in 1923 and the inferior quality of the unpurchased tobacco<sup>114</sup>.

Vourloumis was right about at least one thing: the extent of land devoted to tobacco cultivation had peaked in 1929 after years of relent-

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112. "Los tutunjis kombatiran por sus pan", *Avanti* (Nov. 23, 1926): 2; "Alos lados delos profesionales" [On the Side of the Professionals], *Avanti* (Mar. 10, 1927): 1; "La Manipulacion del tutun", *Aksion*, Dec. 13, 1929, 1.

113. "La alokasion de shomaje a los tutunjis. El governo no da mas paras" [The Tobacco Workers' Unemployment Benefits: The Government Is Not Giving More Money], *Aksion*, Dec. 13, 1929, 1.

114. "La vendida delos tutunes" [Tobacco Sales], *Aksion*, Dec. 13, 1929, 1.

lessly rising<sup>115</sup>. Also relevant is that reports that the tobacco merchants were refraining from purchasing the 1929 tobacco crop appeared about a month and a half after the New York Stock Exchange collapsed on October 24, 1929, which may have inspired the buyers to exercise caution.

The tobacco market in Macedonia, including Salonika, henceforth continued to decline, as did employment in the tobacco industry. Income from processed tobacco in Kavala in 1928 came to 801 million drachmas; in 1930 the amount 112 million drachmas, in 1932 it reached 72 million drachmas, and the forecast for 1933 was 50 million<sup>116</sup>.

At the close of December 1929, the Italian monopoly<sup>117</sup> was on the cusp of signing a deal with the Kavala agricultural cooperative to buy all of its remaining tobacco as *kazal*, the Turkish professional term for tobacco packed according to the lowest standards prior to leaving the field<sup>118</sup>. The transaction was to be conditioned on the performance of processing by girls—meaning, at the cheapest wages possible<sup>119</sup>.

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115. Mazower, *Economic Crisis*, 87–88, 116–20.

116. “La konferensia por el shomaje tuvo lugar ayer in Kavala. Para la manipulasion del tutun las kompanyas avian gastado en 1928 180 millones i agora gastan solo 50 millones” [Yesterday’s Unemployment Conference in Kavala: The Companies Made 180 Million Drachmas from Tobacco Processing in 1928, and Now They Are Making Only 50 Million], *El Puevlo* 16, no. 162 (May 8, 1932): 1. Cf. Bakalis, “Impact of Tobacco”, 243–44.

117. In 1927, the government of Italy created the Autonomous Administration of Government Monopolies (Amministrazione Autonoma dei Monopoli di Stato), a state-owned body to which it entrusted the production and sale of tobacco, salt, and quinine, and management of the monopoly on rolling paper, matches, and lighters (Pietro Cova, “The Italian Tobacco Industry: A State Monopoly”, *PSL Quarterly Review* [S.I.] 1, no. 3 (Oct. 2014), accessed Jul. 25, 2020, <https://ojs.uniroma1.it/index.php/PSLQuarterlyReview/article/view/12819/12623>: 157.

118. I believe that the term is borrowed from the Ottoman Turkish designation for barley mixed with black grains, from the Arabic *kaşal*: *buğday içinde olan siyah taneler*. See Ömer Asım Aksoy and Dehri Dilçin, *XIII. asırdan günümüze kadar kitaplardan toplanmış tamıklarıyle tarama sözlüğü: Türkiye Türkçesinin tarihi sözlüğü hazırlıklarından* (Ankara: Cumhuriyet Basımevi, 1943), vol. 2, no. 2,641; Fatih Kaya, *Lisânü'l-etibbâ: (tabiplerin dili)* (Istanbul: Hiperyayın, 2018), p. 185, no. a/3.

119. “Merkidas de tutunis” [Tobacco Acquisitions], *Aksion* 1, no. 109 (Dec. 24, 1929): 1.



Figure no. 1.

*Members of the Matarasso family sorting tobacco leaves (kazal) in the field.  
Courtesy of Dr. Gila Hadar.*

While the Italian monopoly's offer of eighty drachmas per ounce amounted to only 60 percent of the 1928 price, it was much higher than that of other monopolies, and the Greek market was very hopeful<sup>120</sup>. However, Salonika's tobacco workers could not eat hope. At the end of the day, in the competition between large foreign tobacco buyers, the owners of the city's tobacco warehouses, and the workers, the Greek government stood with the big merchants. Both the tobacco warehouses and the Italian monopoly that had raised so many hopes lowered wages, banned protests outside the warehouses, and threatened that any strike would lead to the introduction of strikebreakers<sup>121</sup>.

The drop in wages came about due to not only the direct purchase of tobacco from growers' cooperatives, which enabled buyers to condition the purchase on the lowest grade of packing in the field itself, but also foreign merchants' decision that they no longer would purchase Macedonian basmas tobacco or even somewhat lower-grade tobacco

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120. Ibid.

121. "El shomaje en el tutun empesa de nuevo; la polisia interdizi la asamblea del sindikat 'Prodos'" [Unemployment in the Tobacco Industry Erupts Again; Police Disallow Prodos Syndicate Meeting], *El Popular* 2, no. 28 (June 12, 1930): 1. Strikebreakers are here termed "Italian" laborers, which does not indicate a country of origin.

(Turkish: *başı bağı*, bound by the head)<sup>122</sup>, but would buy only tobacco processed according to the tonga method, by women and girls. The decision came in 1930<sup>123</sup>, and by 1932, the tonga method had become the accepted practice among all tobacco merchants<sup>124</sup>.

The latest change in the market precipitated distress among tobacco workers, and many of the Jewish and non-Jewish male tobacco workers in Salonika responded by calling for the removal of women from the warehouses. At first these calls were answered by opposing voices that rejected the idea of a conflict with their sisters and mothers, who had stood with them throughout their struggles against the merchants. These latter voices called upon the men to process tonga tobacco for the usual wage paid for such work. The implication of agreeing to the usual wage was fair competition with the women<sup>125</sup>.

These voices of equality, however, were rapidly outnumbered<sup>126</sup>. The TAK called for women to be returned to their rightful place: the home<sup>127</sup>. It began refusing to give women work cards and suggested that they undergo professional retraining in a different field. The women responded by rioting, and then reacted with violence when gendarmes arrived to

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122. Dagkas, *Recherches sur l'histoire sociale*, 294–95.

123. “Los merkadores de tutun kieren lavorar tonga” [The Tobacco Merchants Want to Process Tonga], *El Popular* 2, no. 28 (June 12, 1930): 1.

124. “La kriz en el tutun se agrava: la ‘ostro elenik’ non lavorara mas bashi bali” [The Tobacco Crisis Worsens: The Austro-Hellenic Company No Longer Will Process Başlı Bağlı Tobacco], *El Puevlo*, Nov. 20, 1932, 1.

125. “El problema de la manipulacion a la tonga, la importante konferensia de anoche a la ‘ergatiki lischei’, el representante dela federasion del tutun, Malama, mostra ke los laboradores ne se deven boltar kontra sus ermanas y sus madres, ma lavorar tonga kon salario regular” [The Problem of Tonga Processing; Last Night’s Important Meeting at the Employment Office; Malamas, the Tobacco Federation Representative, Has Shown that the Workers Cannot Turn against Their Sisters and Mothers, but Will Work for Regular Wages], *El Popular* 2, no. 29 (June 13, 1930), 1.

126. See regarding this conflict Hadar, “Karmen be-Saloniki”, 21–22.

127. “La kestion del shomaje y el TAK” [The Issue of Unemployment and the TAK], *El Popular* 2, no. 44 (July 1, 1930): 1; “El problema de la shomaje y las soluciones del ‘TAK’” [The Unemployment Problem and the Solutions of the “TAK”], *El Popular* 2, no. 47 (July 4, 1930): 2.

remove them from the warehouses<sup>128</sup>. The warehouse owners for their part opposed the TAK's decision, because they preferred women workers' lower wages and greater obedience. Meanwhile, the crop of 1930 also piled up without interest from buyers, and merchants who had purchased tobacco and discovered that they could not sell it set fire to their warehouses in hopes of at least receiving compensation from their insurers<sup>129</sup>.

On June 7, 1930, some one hundred tobacco workers gathered in the Labor Council<sup>130</sup> to offer themselves to the various tobacco warehouses. First they went to the warehouse of the Fix Company, and then to the office of the owner, Mr. Papastratou. Unsatisfied, they continued on, and the procession took on the trappings of a demonstration with cries of "Kieremos pan!" (Ladino: we want bread). The police immediately sent gendarmes to forcibly disperse the demonstration, and seven laborers, including Hayyim Molkho and Carasso, were arrested for incitement<sup>131</sup>.

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128. "Tutunjias y jandarmes se aharran de parte a parte" [Female Tobacco Workers and Gendarmes Exchange Blows], *El Pueblo*, Jan. 4, 1931, 1.

129. Mazower, *Economic Crisis*, 123–24; "Un terso merkader de tutun... rovinado. El Fuego desbrocho anoje, misteriozamente, en el magazen de tutun Karaleanido yeno de tenekelis de petrolio y de naftalina" [A Third Tobacco Merchant... Ruined: A Fire Mysteriously Broke Out at Night in Karaleonidas's Tobacco Warehouse. Cans of Fuel and Naphthalene Galore], *El Popular* 2, no. 41 (June 27, 1930): 1.

130. A translation of the French *Bourse du Travail*, literally: work exchange, signifying a Communist-orientated umbrella organization of various syndicates that promoted mutual aid, education, and unionism. Its offices, at 11 Frangon Street, were an accustomed meeting place for day laborers seeking work and employers seeking workers. (Dagkas, *Recherches sur l'histoire sociale*, 358, 622, 631, 638–46).

131. "Insidentes entre tutunjis y polisia" [Incidents between Tobacco Workers and the Police], *Aksion* 2, no. 122 (June 8, 1930): 1. Carasso's first name is not mentioned and is impossible to ascertain. Among the candidates of the Communist-identified Blok Popular who were elected to the communal council (a communal legislative body elected by all taxpayers in the community) were three different Carassos, *El Popular* (Oct. 22, 1930): 1. One Joseph Carasso and P. Molkho are mentioned as leading a group of one hundred Jewish communists who tried to disrupt the Jewish community's Executive Council elections of October 31, 1926, with shouts of "Long live the Communists" and "Down with those sold" (i.e., politicians who have sold themselves). In what appears to have been a separate event, Communist activists interrupted a meeting of community leaders at the Maccabi Club, whose athletes those leaders sought

As unrest grew, an attempt was made to transfer one thousand tobacco workers to agricultural work and forbid the cultivation of tobacco in regions not optimally suited for it—a practice that had been favored when the market was flourishing<sup>132</sup>.

The income of the TAK always was based on the previous year. In the midst of a declining market, this income could not cover outlays to the unemployed, and the bureau was compelled to seek approval for loans, which the government was increasingly reluctant to approve. In 1930, the TAK still had 20 million drachmas, sufficient for two months of unemployment benefits at a daily rate of thirty-four drachmas per person. However, such payments were conditioned on workers' ability to prove that they had worked forty days in the previous year, or eighty in the previous three. Without such evidence, workers were denied a TAK card and all unemployment benefits. To make matters worse, while unemployed workers had in the past been entitled to three meals a day from the public soup kitchen, they now were entitled only to two meals<sup>133</sup>.

As the tobacco crisis worsened, it became clear whom the TAK benefited. The solution it proposed was to lay off some of the workers for a one-time compensation. The decision was supported by the large tobacco merchants, who wished to use the opportunity to get rid of long-time workers with lower productivity, and of the Syndicate leaders on the sorting floors<sup>134</sup>. The passage of time brought more difficulties for laborers. In May 1932, the price of bread was raised and all the workers of Macedonia embarked on a general strike<sup>135</sup>. The TAK was obviously unable to help by continuing to pay unemployment benefits based on

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to use to shield them from the Communists. In the ensuing riot, individuals on both sides were injured. Molkho and other members of his group were arrested (Dagkas, *Le mouvement social*, 86).

132. "La kriza en el tutun. Lavoradores seran transformados en agricultures" [The Tobacco Crisis: Workers to Be Transformed into Farmers], *Aksion* 2, no. 131 (June 19, 1930): 1.

133. "Las kestionos delos tutunjis" [The Problems of the Tobacco Workers], *Aksion*, Aug. 26, 1930, 1.

134. "La seduta de anoche del Tak" [The TAK's Meeting Last Night], *Aksion*, Sep. 9, 1930, 1.

135. "La diskontentes se jeneralisa kontra la augmantasion del presio del pan"

its own conditions, because many workers did not meet those conditions. The government, which guaranteed the obligations of the TAK, was torn between unwillingness to finance the striking workers and fear that their discontent would enflame the social and political instability already present in the country.

By now, the crisis was not about Jewish tobacco workers, but about tobacco workers throughout Greece. Even in Salonika, Jews no longer were the majority of tobacco workers. In 1928, according to Dagkas's calculations, only 4.34 percent of tobacco workers in Salonika were natives of the city: 2,405 indigenous workers out of 55,357. Dagkas put the number of Jewish tobacco workers in Salonika at 3,156 out of a total of 56,819<sup>136</sup>.

On October 24, 1932, a special meeting of the TAK was held in Salonika to determine the fate of the unemployment benefits, while crowds of workers gathered outside. The tobacco merchants did not attend the meeting for fear of the workers, but police reinforcements were nonetheless dispatched to the scene. The workers were enraged when their demand that a delegation be permitted to address the TAK committee was refused, and they were further angered when the director general of the Ministry of Economy, Mr. Zakas, sent the committee a telegram announcing that the issue of benefits would in fact be discussed on a different occasion<sup>137</sup>.

When the government realized that completely renegeing on its commitment to the TAK was a sure recipe for riots, it agreed to approve a loan of eleven to twelve million drachmas, which would finance sixty days of unemployment benefits at fifteen drachmas per day or thirty days of unemployment at thirty drachmas per day, according to the preference

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[Discontent with the Rise in the Price of Bread Spreading Everywhere], *El Pueblo* 16, no. 165 (May 11, 1932): 2.

136. Dagkas, *Recherches sur l'histoire sociale*, 489; cf. tables 222 and 224, on pages 30–31 of the disc attached to his book. I cannot account for the discrepancy in the overall number of workers in the two tables.

137. "El Tak va decidir definitivamente viernes por las epidomas" [TAK to Make a Final Decision about Benefits], *El Pueblo* 16, no. 3 (Oct. 25, 1932): 1; "Los tununjis se van a ajuntar de nuevo viernes delante el Tak" [The Tobacco Workers Are about to Assemble Again against the TAK], *El Pueblo* 16, no. 4 (Oct. 26, 1932): 1.



of the TAK. In response, the TAK announced that it would distribute only eight million drachmas, and the workers, calculating that the TAK already had some nineteen million drachmas available, demanded the distribution of the entire sum. Seventeen thousand unemployed workers prepared for battle<sup>138</sup>.

At this juncture the chairman of the TAK offered to distribute daily benefits of fifteen drachmas for forty-five days, but this offer was rejected by the workers, whose representatives resigned from the committee. In the course of these deliberations, the place of women in the struggle for work conditions was forgotten. Their male fellow workers were willing to forgo their plight, Jew and gentile alike. Now the men demanded to be exclusively allowed to process tonga, as well as that benefit moneys be distributed to them alone, for sixty days of unemployment at thirty-eight drachmas per day<sup>139</sup>.

In any case, it transpired that the men's attempt to remove female workers from tonga processing was a double-edged sword. The men were not hired instead of women. Instead, the various firms were able to

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138. See n. 137 above.

139. "Las Epidomas del Tak no puederan ser akordadas antes de 10 dias" [TAK Benefits to Be Given Only in Ten Days], *El Puevo* 16, no. 17 (Oct. 30, 1932): 2; "Kunto daran de epidomas alos tutunjis?" [How Much of the Benefits Will Be Given to the Tobacco Workers?], *El Puevo* 16, no. 8 (Oct. 31, 1932): 1; "Shomaje permanente en el tutun. El numero de shomadores se eleva a 17 mil" [Permanent Unemployment in the Tobacco Industry: The Number of Unemployed Has Risen to Seventeen Thousand], *El Puevo* 16, no. 9 (Nov. 1, 1932): 2; "Los tutunjis empesan un pleto organizado por la tonga. Organizasion de un miting lavorador" [Tobacco Workers Initiate Organized Struggle on Account of the Tonga. Organization of Workers' Meeting], *El Puevo*, Nov. 1, 1932, 4; "Los lavoradores demandan ayudos para todos los shomadores en jeneral" [Workers Demand General Assistance for All Unemployed], *El Puevo* 16, no. 12 (Nov. 4, 1932): 1; "Las epidomas alos tutunjis para ke eyas non sean reducidas. El pleto por la tonga" [The Benefits for the Tobacco Workers for Them Should Not Be Reduced: The Struggle for Tonga], *El Puevo*, Nov. 4, 1932, 4; "Epidomas alos tutunjis empesaran aser akordadas al 15 novembre" [Benefits for Tobacco Workers to Start Being Given on November 15], *El Puevo* 16, no. 15 (Nov. 9, 1932): 4; "Los tutunjis demandan" [The Tobacco Workers Demand], *El Puevo* 16, no. 24 (Nov. 18, 1932): 1; "La kriza en el tutun se agrava. La ostro-elenik non lavorara mas bashi bali" [The Tobacco Crisis Worsens: Austro-Hellenic (Monopoly) to Cease Working with *Başı Bağlı*], *El Puevo* 16, no. 24 (Nov. 26, 1932): 1.

require women workers to produce quotas of tobacco for even further reduced wages thanks to competition from the men. The women workers responded with strikes and demonstrations of their own, which were met with violence by the police. Then the men stood beside them, not out of chivalry, but because they had unwillingly come to understand the damage caused to both groups by their disunity<sup>140</sup>.

Disappointment with the TAK led to demands to disband it altogether<sup>141</sup>. These were a protest not merely against a dysfunctional institution, but also against the Greek government and its economic policy, which was viewed as serving the interests of foreign big business and not those of poor workers and the nation at large<sup>142</sup>.

Unrest among tobacco workers simmered to such a point that when Venizelos came to Salonika in the course of an election campaign and gave a speech from the balcony of the Mediterranean Palace Hotel, the police, concerned about the discontented tobacco workers, arrested fifty of them on the grounds that they were Communists engaged in incitement. Most were Christian Greeks, but among the five girls arrested were the Jewish names of Esterina Cohen and Olga Yehuda. All five were beaten by the police<sup>143</sup>.

In April 1933, it was predicted that only 2,500 of eight thousand tobacco workers in Salonika would work, and even then, for only two months of the year<sup>144</sup>. The meaning of these numbers is that thousands of workers had given up the profession since 1928. Demonstrations, strikes,

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140. "Las tutunjias del magazin vlahaki en greve" [Female Tobacco Workers at the Vlahaki Warehouse on Strike], *El Puevo* 16, no. 62 (Jan. 4, 1933): 4; "La greve de las tutunjias" [The Female Tobacco Workers' Strike], *El Puevo* 16, no. 5 (Jan. 5, 1933): 1; "La greve de las tutunjias", *El Puevo* 16, no. 64 (Jan. 6, 1933): 1; "Insidentes entre lavoraderas de tutun y jandarmes" [Incidents between Female Tobacco Workers and Gendarmes], *El Puevo* 16, no. 92 (Feb. 8, 1933): 2.

141. "El Tak puede el egzistir legalmente?", 2; "Kestiones lavoraderas", 6.

142. *Ibid.*

143. "Las arestaciones de ayer" [Yesterday's Arrests], *El Puevo* 16, no. 108 (Feb. 27, 1933): 1.

144. "Solo 2,500 tutunjis sovre 8,000 lavoraran oganio en Saloniko" [Only 2,500 of 8,000 Tobacco Workers Will Work this Year in Salonika], *El Puevo* 16, no. 149 (Apr. 21, 1933): 1.

and arrests of tobacco workers protesting declining wages, the dwindling number of jobs, and the helplessness of the TAK became common<sup>145</sup>.

Even as changes in the sorting of tobacco continued destroying workers' livelihood, mechanization came to the city's cigarette factories. The Komersial and Pomero factories, owned by the Nahmias family, introduced tobacco processing machines and started laying off girls, whose attempt to stop mechanization by occupying the factory ended in the arrest of them all<sup>146</sup>.

Two months earlier, a reporter for the *Efimeris ton Valkanion* (Εφημερίς των Βαλκανίων; Gazette of the Balkans) had interviewed the secretary of the national Tobacco Workers Union (Καπνεργατική οργάνωση της Ελλάδος), one Mr. Ekonomos. It appears from the interview that despite the understanding that a lack of solidarity between men and women was harmful to both groups, at the end of 1934 the Tobacco Workers Union saw it as natural that a man's daily wage for processing tonga be sixty-five drachmas, and a woman's, twenty-five to thirty<sup>147</sup>. One of the union's demands was a minimum daily unemployment benefit of fifty drachmas for a man and twenty-five drachmas for females. To the journalist's amazed question—"To all women?"—Ekonomos answered: "No matter how many days they worked"<sup>148</sup>. On the face of it, the difference in wages and unemployment benefits was discriminatory, but it was a boon to the women as a group, because they were preferred by warehouses owners. The union persisted in demanding that the firms

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145. "Los tutunjis manifiestan kontra la abashada de sus salarios" [Tobacco Workers Demonstrate against Salary Cuts], *El Pueblo* 16, no. 142 (Apr. 9, 1933): 1; "Insidentes entre lavoraderas de tutun y jandarmes", 2; "La situasion del Tak" [The TAK's Situation], *El Pueblo* 16, no. 152 (Apr. 25, 1933): 1.

146. "En el tutun" [In the Tobacco Industry], *Aksion*, Nov. 20, 1934; "En el tutun", *Aksion*, Dec. 2, 1934; "Onze delos lavoradores de la 'Komersial' aprezados a Yedi Kule" [Eleven Komersial Workers Detained in Yedi Kule], *Aksion*, Dec. 28, 1934. Yedi Kule is the Turkish name of the Citadel, the prison of Salonika; see Hadar, "Karmen be-Saloniki", 22. Only one of the detainees was a man.

147. «Μια Ματιά στο Εργατικό Κίνημα. Με Τους Εργάτες και τα Σωματεία των» [An overview on the labour movement, its workers, and their associations], *Efimeris ton Valkanion*, Oct. 22, 1934, 1.

148. "An overview", *Efimeris ton Valkanion*, Oct. 23, 1934, 1.

be required to fill 50 percent of positions with men, which was blatantly inconsistent with the firms' interests<sup>149</sup>.

Unemployment and despair were not the exclusive province of Jewish workers in Salonika: the situation was identical throughout Greece. Ekonomos noted that tobacco workers had experienced about three years of unemployment after which 85 percent remained unemployed. They were employed for four or five months of the year at most, and in that time, their wages were starvation wages. Ekonomos, who spoke harshly of the Greek legal system and the TAK, said that both the judges and the TAK believed that the tobacco merchants were right and the workers' wages too high. Further, at the time the interview was conducted, hundreds of unemployment claims were going unpaid on the pretext that the TAK committee had been dismissed and a new one had yet to be chosen. This state of flux, however, did not keep the outgoing committee members from receiving generous salaries that helped them remain indifferent to the workers' suffering<sup>150</sup>.

Particularly shocking is the description of medical benefits ostensibly provided by the TAK. In 1934, any tobacco worker seeking medical care had to prove that he or she had worked for forty-five days the previous year. During 1934, the TAK rejected five thousand requests for medical care from men, who constituted only a small proportion of tobacco workers<sup>151</sup>.

The pension situation was similar. Only those who had joined the TAK in 1927 were entitled to a pension, and only if they had worked 135 days per year. Who had been able to work so many days? In just August, September, and October of 1934, the TAK rejected 150 pension requests<sup>152</sup>.

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149. Ibid.

150. "An overview", *Efimeris ton Valkanion*, Oct. 22, 1934, 1.

151. Ibid.; "Anoverview", *Efimeris ton Valkanion*, Oct. 24, 1934, 1.

152. "Anoverview", *Efimeris ton Valkanion*, Oct. 23, 1934, 1; "Anoverview", *Efimeris ton Valkanion*, Oct. 24, 1934, 1. See also "El 'Tak' y los ayidos a los tutunjis" [The TAK and Assistance to Tobacco Workers], *Aksion*, July 18, 1935, 1.

### III. Salonika in National Context: 1925–1936

For the Jews of Salonika, the changes in the tobacco market meant that starting in 1925, at least half of the city's Jewish workforce was unemployed and seeking work. They did not live in a vacuum. Around them were thousands of refugees begging for food; come 1929, these were joined by still more refugees who became tobacco growers. In the same year, the crisis was aggravated by the need to repay the loans granted by the government and the cessation of foreign assistance. Under these conditions, many refugees who had been settled in villages decided to abandon their farms and try their luck in the city, and the influx of refugees from rural areas further worsened the employment crisis in Salonika<sup>153</sup>.

Displaced migrants who had settled in the city in 1923 had taken advantage of the prosperity of the mid-twenties, the availability of cheap credit, and the assistance of the Greek legal system to set up small businesses, such as grocery shops, cafés, and hair salons. Many made a living as brokers for imports. During the early thirties, these small business owners from the immigrant community faced a hopeless situation as inflation gave way to deflation. Merchants who had taken cheap loans to build up stock had trouble repaying them, the banking system that had granted them credit was facing collapse, poor grain harvests reduced consumption in rural communities, and a moratorium on farmers' debts added still more fuel to the fire<sup>154</sup>.

The struggle for work continued every day. At the port and in customs, the railroad, infrastructure, and various other industries, where thousands of Jewish day laborers had worked in the past, the Jewish population was pushed out by the refugees from Asia Minor<sup>155</sup>. Prior to the Greco-Turkish population exchange, seven hundred Jewish stevedores were employed at the port; according to *Efimeris ton Valkanion*, only five hundred remained

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153. Mazower, *Economic Crisis*, 119–21, 134–35.

154. *Ibid.*, 134–35.

155. Press Office in Salonika to Press Office of the Foreign Ministry in Athens, May 18, 1928, protocol no. 2073/15494 (Greek Foreign Ministry Archives, viewed as photocopy in Kandilakis archive).

in 1925<sup>156</sup>, an excessively low estimate<sup>157</sup> that nevertheless manages to reflect the pressure felt from thousands of unemployed refugees. The sailors on barques, the porters, the cart owners and drivers—all struggled for a living in a market where there were thousands of unemployed refugees just like them<sup>158</sup>. The Jewish press extensively reported in 1928 about the community's economic decline as a result of Jews' being pushed out of industries they once had controlled. In addition to the damage suffered by day laborers, the replacement of Saturday by Sunday as the day of rest in Salonika greatly harmed Jewish retailers<sup>159</sup>.

The impact of the world economic depression was moderated by the fact that Greece imported more than it exported, and import prices declined more rapidly than those of exports. Yet by the end of 1931, the implications of the crisis could not be ignored. Greece was obliged to place controls on the price of gold and very reluctantly imposed restrictions on imports. From the spring of 1932, the Greek economy as a whole headed toward autarky, which led to a slight improvement in the situation of the country. The trade deficit shrank, international trade was greatly limited, agricultural cultivation expanded, and industry developed. However, the fruits of this progress were directed toward domestic consumption.

In the case of industry, the improvement stemmed from the same elements as at the start of the century: low wages, long work hours, and restrictions on imports. Industrial laborers were the worst situated in Greece in terms of income, and because the government refused to help them through legislation, it was left to employ force to suppress the workers' unrest<sup>160</sup>.

The transition to autarky was yet another blow to the port of Salonika<sup>161</sup>.

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156. Dagkas, *Recherches sur l'histoire sociale*, 561.

157. See Srougo, *Ha-Po'alim ha-Yehudim*, 179–80.

158. Dagkas, *Recherches sur l'histoire sociale*, 561–62.

159. Press Office in Salonika to Press Office of the Foreign Ministry in Athens (n. 155 above).

160. Mazower, *Economic Crisis*, 203–79; Dagkas, *Recherches sur l'histoire sociale*, 13, 17–18, 807–8, 834; George Th. Mavrogordatos, *Stillborn Republic: Social Conditions and Party Strategies in Greece, 1922–1936* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 135, 146, 165–66.

161. Srougo, *Ha-Po'alim ha-Yehudim*, 73–77.

The solution dubbed the Port Workers Insurance Fund, established by the Venizelos government, was identical to that offered to tobacco workers through the TAK. On October 4, 1933, in a meeting held at the port, it was decided to try to reduce the number of port employees in order to leave sufficient income for those who remained. To this end, the Port Workers Insurance Fund would transfer to workers who voluntarily retired a total sum of four million drachmas. In parallel, it was decided to establish a bureau that would help retiring workers find work in the future<sup>162</sup>.

The newspaper item did not disclose details, but these become clearer against the background of other sources written about the crisis in the port. The decision to reduce the number of port workers was made by the Greek state. The Greek parliament passed a law to this effect in July 1931, also requiring that every port in Greece create an employment office to ensure the resizing of its workforce to suit the actual volume of work. The same legislation ordered the mandatory retirement and concomitant compensation of older stevedores. However, until May 1934, employment offices were not opened and unemployment among port workers went unresolved. Only after the port workers threatened a strike were 150 fired, with the government guaranteeing payment of the compensation due them<sup>163</sup>. The firing of the 150 stevedores, many Jewish, had repercussions for the Jewish and the overall job market, further inflating the number of unemployed in the city and adding the forced retirees to the ranks of the unemployed tobacco workers and the rest of the jobless Salonikans.

According to Abba Hushi, who came to Salonika in the autumn of 1933 to recruit workers for the port of Haifa, there still were at that time “several hundred Jewish stevedores in the port of Salonika”<sup>164</sup>, of whom the Histadrut planned to bring a hundred to “conquer” the operation of the port of Haifa. Hushi interviewed them, went to see them at their

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162. «Θα αποζημιωθούν οι εξερχόμενοι λιμνεργάται» [The port workers will receive compensation for retirement from work at the port], *Makedonia*, Oct. 5, 1933, 3.

163. Srougo, *Ha-Polim ha-Yehudim*, 252–54.

164. Abba Hushi to the Histadrut executive in Tel Aviv, Sep. 16, 1933, Maurice Aharon Raphael, Municipal Archives of Haifa unclassified collection. The Histadrut is Israel's general labor organization.



work, and investigated their way of life, with reference to the neighborhood committees<sup>165</sup> and the executive committee of the Salonikan Jewish community. He deemed these last components of research necessary because the community leadership had warned him that he would find among the port workers “Communists, hash smokers, and players of cards”. Hushi was appalled by the workers’ poverty, their horrible living conditions, their hungry and pale children, and what he regarded as constant harassment by their Christian colleagues. In the first draft of his letter, he recommended that the Histadrut recant its target of one hundred stevedores and instead do everything in its power to bring all of them to Palestine, but this paragraph was erased, either by Maurice Raphael or by Abba Hushi himself<sup>166</sup>. In spite of this retreat, some 250 Jewish stevedores are reported to have immigrated to the Land of Israel between 1933 and 1935<sup>167</sup>.

From Abba Hushi’s letter, it transpires that Communism was a swear word to the ears of the community leadership. They found it as wrong, dangerous, and frightening as did the Greek government and the Histadrut. However, it was there, and it could not be ignored.

The great pressures on the Salonikan work market were reflected in internal Jewish politics and in relations between Jewish politicians and the rest of the Greek political system. Jewish day laborers, particularly tobacco workers, were readers of *Rizospastis* (*Ριζοσπάστης*; The Radical),

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165. The neighborhood committees were responsible for the administration of their respective neighborhoods and the collection of rent from community-owned properties. See e.g. “Las economias en la administrasion del quarteer 151” [The Savings in the Administration of Neighborhood 151], *El Puevlo* (May 2, 1932): 1. These committees functioned as operational organs of the Jewish community’s executive committee, which was its supreme governing body. See Minna Rozen, “The Jewish Community of Salonika, 1912–1941: Organizational Patterns”, in «*Αρχείων Ανάλεκτα: Περιοδική έκδοση μελέτης και έρευνας αρχείων* (δεύτερη περίοδος)», 1 (Θεσσαλονίκη 2016) [Compiled from the Archives: A Journal of Studies and Archival Research], 2nd series, 1 (2016): 306–67.

166. Abba Hushi to the Histadrut executive.

167. Mentesh Ibn Shanji, “Ba’alei ha-Miktsot”, 208–10, first published in *Der Orden Bne Briss: Mitteilungen der Grossloge für Deutschland VIII* (a newsletter published in Berlin by the UOBB, or Unabhängiger Orden Bne Briss, in the years 1921–1936) 9–10 (Sep.–Oct. 1936).

the official organ of the Greek Communist Party. From it they learned that anti-minority policy in general and anti-Semitism in particular were being fed by capitalist ideology, and this ideology groomed by the Greek government<sup>168</sup>. Whereas the xenophobic and anti-Semitic actions of the Venizelists were no secret<sup>169</sup>, this was not the case with the conservative Laiko Koma (People's Party), which strove to accommodate the Slavs and the Jews<sup>170</sup>. However, *Rizospastis* explained to the workers that the leadership of the Jewish community was being bribed by the Laiko Koma through the municipal government of Salonika, which the party had held since 1932, to ensure the Jewish community's support in municipal elections. The poor, disclosed *Rizospastis*, got nothing from this money: neither the city government nor the community leadership was attentive to their problems<sup>171</sup>.

In addition to the propaganda in *Rizospastis*, which aimed to convince workers to support the Communist Party on the municipal level, tobacco workers gave due attention to the national arena. This latter battle could not be fought on the pages of *Rizospastis*, since Jewish members of parliament did not read that paper. Thus in the spring of 1933, a group of tobacco workers arranged to publish in the moderate, Zionist newspaper *Aksion* an article denouncing the Jewish members of Parliament for doing nothing for unemployed Jewish tobacco workers<sup>172</sup>. One of these legislators, Isaac Molkho, was quick to deny the accusation on the pages of *El Puevlo*, another moderate newspaper

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168. «Κάτω με την τυραννία για τις εθνικές μειονότητες» [Down with the Tyranny over the Ethnic Minorities], *Rizospastis*, June 27, 1931, 1; «Αισχρή Συκοφαντία» [Disgusting Dirt], *Rizospastis*, April 28, 1932, 1.

169. See Minna Rozen, *A Very Narrow Bridge: The Jewish Community of Salonika, 1912–1941* (in preparation), section 2.2: The External Circle. See also «Η Εβραϊκή μειονότητα Πογκρόμ-Σκλαβιά-Πείνα» [The Jewish Minority: Pogrom, Slavery, Hunger], *Rizospastis*, Aug. 9, 1932, 1; «Τα αστικά κόμματα παλεύουν για την εξαπάτηση των φτωχών Εβραίων, Πώς προετοιμάζονται τα Πογκρόμ» [The Political Parties Are Struggling to Cheat the Poor Jews—How the Pogroms Are Being Prepared], *Rizospastis*, May 29, 1933, 1.

170. Minna Rozen, *A Very Narrow Bridge: The Jewish Community of Salonika, 1912–1941* (in preparation), section 2.2.1: The Jews in Greek Politics.

171. “The Political Parties”, 1.

172. I was unable to find the relevant article, published in *Aksion* on April 24, 1933,

of Zionist orientation, claiming that he was very active on the issue<sup>173</sup>. Nevertheless, it appears that even he understood that he had not accomplished much, because a few days later he published a long article directed at the newly formed Greek government, headed by the conservative Laiko Koma, which in contrast to the Venizelist parties was considered sympathetic to the Jewish community. Molkho was one of the party's main financial backers in the Jewish community<sup>174</sup>.

The motivation behind Molkho's article was the need to deal with the problem of the masses of militant tobacco workers who were being enticed by the cause of the "dictatorship of the proletariat"<sup>175</sup>, but its content related to the relationship of the entire community with the Greek labor world and the Greek state at large. Molkho noted that the government's statements against various manifestations of anti-Semitism were important and as valuable as actions, but the Jews of Salonika demanded real action with regard to employment. It behooved the central government and regional officials, Molkho argued, to create sources of income for "various sectors" of the population that had been decimated by unemployment. By "various sectors", he meant the Jews<sup>176</sup>.

Molkho went on to emphasize that in Greece, as in other countries in Europe, Jews suffered discrimination among Christians. "Salonika has been under Greek rule for twenty years already", wrote Molkho, "and we can say that no Jew has enjoyed his rights under the

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due to the absence of several issues from the archive to which I referred. My analysis here is based on Molkho's reaction.

173. "El Engajamento de laboradores jidios en los magazines de tutun" [Jewish Workers' Employment in the Tobacco Warehouses], *El Pueblo* 16, no. 153 (Apr. 26, 1933), 1.

174. See also Rozen, *A Very Narrow Bridge*, section 2.2.1: The Jews in Greek Politics (in preparation).

175. «Κάτω η 'Δημοκρατία' των τραπεζιτών, βιομηχάνων, τσιφλικάδων» [Down with the "Democracy" of the Bankers, Industrialists, and Land Owners], *Rizospastis*, Mar. 23, 1934, 1.

176. "El Engajamento de laboradores jidios en los magazines de tutun" [Jewish Workers' Employment in the Tobacco Warehouses], *El Pueblo* 16, no. 153 (Apr. 26, 1933): 1.

state's administration". In Molkho's opinion, the situation of the Jewish tobacco workers was worse than that of others, because Christian workers received preferential treatment by employers. Where others were employed by the month, Jews were employed by the week. Where others were employed by the week, they were employed by the day. Where others were given a hundred days of work, Jewish workers were given ten. Molkho argued that the employment of Jewish and Christian tobacco workers did not reflect their numbers, and that Jews were systematically excluded from work. "We do not say that this is anti-Semitism", he wrote. "It is more accurate to say that this results from pressure and preference. But the fact is that the work options of the tobacco workers amount to complete unemployment, and they and their families are destined for oblivion". He called upon the government to intervene<sup>177</sup>.

Molkho was a politician, and he did what politicians do to continue being elected. The heavily Communist tobacco workers were not his voters<sup>178</sup>. They considered the Laiko Koma government as anti-Jewish as the Venizelist governments that had preceded it<sup>179</sup>. Despite what Molkho wrote, it is totally clear from the texts written in those years that the distress of Jewish workers in Salonika was but one stitch in a vast tapestry of economic despair. The Greek press described the difficulties of the refugees from Anatolia, who were unemployed just like the Jews, going to the offices of the municipality every day to ask for work and some bread to bring home, and being turned away. From there they went to the offices of the Governate General of Macedonia complaining of their hunger, and when they were answered with a question—"What can I do about the fact you're hungry?"—they raised

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177. "El estado deve azer alguna koza por los tutunjis jidios" [The Government Must Do Something for the Jewish Tobacco Workers], *El Puevlo* 16, no. 156 (Apr. 30, 1933): 1.

178. Dagkas, *Recherches sur l'histoire sociale*, 680–81, 693, 772–77, 787, 878.

179. "Antes ke la lei kontra el komonizmo sia votada. Las kriminis de Tzaldaris kontra las masas lazdradiras del paez" [Before Voting for the Anti-Communist Law: The Crimes of Tzaldaris against the Working Masses of the Country], *Avanti* 26, no. 26 (June 23, 1934): 1.

their voices, and the police were called in to remove them<sup>180</sup>. The Greek press in Salonika was full of complaints that the city was dying, the port deserted, and the shops empty of customers<sup>181</sup>. In December 1931, at the height of the crisis, *Makedonia* reported the depth of despair that Greek workers in Salonika had reached:

The number of unemployed increases each day. At the crossroads of Hagia Sophia and Egnatia Streets a drama unfolds every morning. Thousands of construction workers with their tools crowd together at the edge of the park and wait anxiously: perhaps someone will come, someone who is looking for a builder. They are still quiet and law-abiding... Passersby are indifferent to the question of whether they have any food in their bags. They wait nervously and in vain, and gradually change their form. They become gloomy, their eyes expressionless, their faces filled with wrinkles; they sigh, smoke, remain silent, and eventually load up their work tools and leave, walking heavily, as though returning from a funeral, leaving without bread for their children waiting at home<sup>182</sup>.

The next day, the same reporter wrote:

Wages are paid by the hour rather than by the workday, and do not exceed fifty drachmas per day (just as in the tobacco industry). When it rains or snows, there is no work. Similar unemployment exists in tailoring, cobbling, and hairdressing. The number of unemployed among the self-employed has reached three thousand or more. The modern offices and shops, the small professionals, the grocery stores, the cafés, the restaurants, the butchers, the dairy shops—all have downsized their businesses as much as possible. The number of unemployed in these industries is dra-

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180. «Δουλειά και ψωμί στους ανέργους» [Work and Bread for the Unemployed], *Makedonia*, Dec. 28, 1933, 3.

181. «Η Θεσσαλονίκη πεθαίνει οικονομικώς» [Salonika's Economy Is Dying], *Efimeris ton Valkanion*, Apr. 1, 1934, 1.

182. Αδ. Θεοδωρίδης, «Ένα σπουδαιόν κοινωνικόν πρόβλημα: Η ανεργία μαστίζει τον κόσμον. Όταν ομιλούν οι σκληροί αριθμοί» [Ad. Theodoridis, An Important Social Problem: Unemployment Has Ravaged the People; When Hard Numbers Speak], *Makedonia*, Dec. 7, 1931, 1.

matic. One waiter told me that he works twelve hours a day to earn fifteen drachmas to bring home. The crisis is so severe that the lack of turnover and earnings leads merchants to be reluctant to purchase goods, and workers are afraid to buy. A customs agent wanders between the customhouse and the free zone<sup>183</sup>, hands in pockets, looking out at the calm sea empty of cargo ships. A boat owner is thinking of selling his boat and becoming a porter, but he is aware that even in this industry he would not find work, so he goes out to sea with his barque and seeks his food upon the open sea. He fishes what God grants him. The port area is deserted. The owners of the café and the restaurant do not know whether their businesses will open tomorrow<sup>184</sup>.

#### IV. Employment among the Jews of Salonika on the Eve of the Metaxas Dictatorship (1936)

Richer lines and hues flood into the picture painted above from the internal sources of the Jewish community and the archive of the Palestine Office in Salonika. In 1936, one of the Jewish politicians of Salonika, Mentesh Ibn Shanji, published a survey of breadwinners in the city<sup>185</sup>.

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183. The free zone was part of the port of Salonika, constructed in 1904 and thereafter operated by the Société Anonyme Ottomane de Construction et Exploitation du Port de Salonique, a French company with a forty-year license. In 1914, the Greek government established a public company called Thessaloniki Free Zone, which took over most of the port's activities with private funding beginning in 1925. In 1930, the Thessaloniki Port Fund was established and purchased the rights of the Société Anonyme Ottomane de Construction et Exploitation du Port de Salonique. See <https://www.thpa.gr/index.php?lang=en&Itemid=1169> accessed 23 Mar. 2017. See also Srougo, *Ha-Po'alimha-Yehudim*, 58–59, 211–13, 250–51, 260.

184. Αδ. Θεοδωρίδης, «Ένα σπουδαίον κοινωνικόν πρόβλημα: Η ανεργία μαστίζει τον κόσμον. Όταν ομιλούν οι σκληροί αριθμοί» [Ad. Theodoridis, A Social Problem: Unemployment Has Ravaged the People; When Hard Numbers Speak], *Makedonia*, Dec. 8, 1931, 1; Idem, «Ένα σπουδαίον κοινωνικόν πρόβλημα: Η ανεργία μαστίζει τον κόσμον. Όταν ομιλούν οι σκληροί αριθμοί» [A Social Problem: Unemployment Has Ravaged the People; When Hard Numbers Speak], *Makedonia*, Dec. 9, 1931, 1.

185. Mentesh Ibn Shanji, “Ba’alei ha-Miktsót”, 208–10, first published in *Der Orden Bne Briss: Mitteilungen der Grossloge für Deutschland VIII* (a newsletter published in

From 1926 to the end of the community's life, Ibn Shanji held central roles in its administration, and for a significant period he served as a member of Parliament, first as an independent supporter of Venzelist parties and later as a member of the Laiko Koma. As such, he presumably had access to internal community statistics.

Ibn Shanji reported that in the railroad, port, and customs industries, where prior to 1922 most positions had been held by Jews, in 1936 only about 150 to 200 Jews remained. He estimated the number of large Jewish merchants at 300 (compared with 1,150 in 1916)<sup>186</sup>, and claimed that they still were the majority of merchants in the city (a clear exaggeration). He estimated the number of individuals employed in haulage, including self-employed individuals and associated clerical workers, at about 2,000. By haulage, he intended individuals who owned and drive carts, who used the term *arabaji* (from Turkish: *arabacı*). The clerical workers probably are an inaccurate translation into Hebrew of the term for assistant drivers (*arabaji ergat*, the latter word signifying *laborer* in Greek). Each of the above self-employed individuals was the owner and sole operator of a carting business. The most interesting information in Ibn Shanji's review lies in the list of "the various profession in which Jews engage (1936)", which includes the manufacturing sector, the number of workshops in it, and the total number of workers in the sector. His list includes about sixty manufacturing industries (excluding those listed above) employing 2,423 workers. In ten of these industries there was only one worker per workshop, meaning that the owner was the worker as well. In another twenty, one or two persons worked in each workshop. Nineteen other workshops employed between three and five individuals, four employed over ten, and no number is given for those remaining.

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Berlin by the UOBB, or Unabhängiger Orden Bne Briss, in the years 1921–1936) 9–10 (Sep.–Oct. 1936).

186. See n. 17 above.



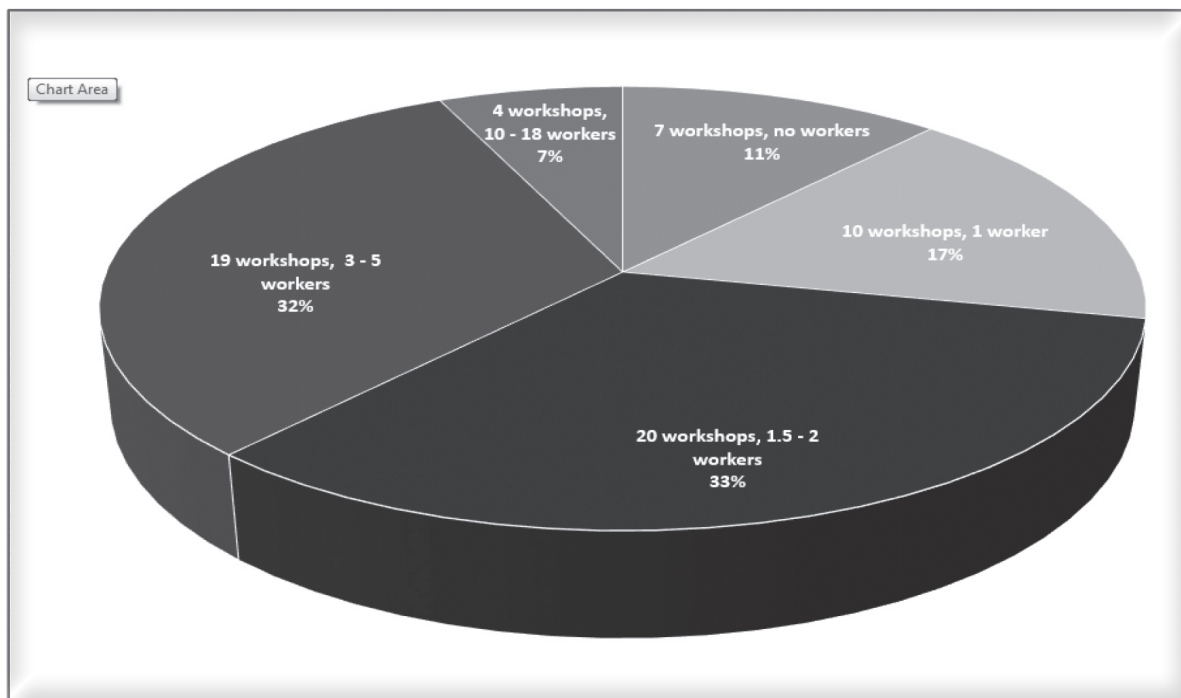


Figure no. 2.  
*Number of workers per workshop according to Mentesh Ibn Shanji's list, 1936.*

The data demonstrate that about one-third of these artisans were self-employed. Most of the businesses were very small. If they are taken together with the self-employed cart owners, it transpires that at least three thousand breadwinners were self-employed and employed no one but themselves. More than ten workers were employed per factory only in the production of nails and wires (eighty workers in two factories) and the cookie industry (thirty workers in two factories).

Ibn Shanji's list takes on its full significance when placed alongside the lists of immigration certificate applicants in the years 1933–35 held in the archive of the Palestine Office in Salonika<sup>187</sup>. The last of these lists were filed around March 1936, but none includes a single application from that year. In other words, the recording of applications ceased in 1936. Each application includes the name and profession of the head of household, the names of accompanying family members, and the ages of them all. The number of certificate applicants from Salonika was 600 in 1933<sup>188</sup> and 2,173 in 1934–35<sup>189</sup>, totaling 2,773, of whom only a few dozens were single and the remainder families. If we assume five members per household, these lists represent more than thirteen thousand individuals from the Salonika community.

The professions listed in the applications were declared by the applicants, and some must be doubted, since whoever could claim a skill

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187. The data below are derived from the archival material of the Jewish community of Salonika that was confiscated by the Nazis and transferred to Germany in 1941. Since 1945, it has been housed in the Russian State Military Archive in Moscow, in the collection entitled *Ocobyi Arkhiv* (Special Archive). Since 1992, the entire archive has been termed the Center for Preservation of Historical Collections (*Tsentr Khraneniia Istoriko-Dokumental'nykh Kollektii*, or *TsKhIDK*). It was photographed in video form for the Documentation Project of Turkish and Balkan Jewry of the Goldstein-Goren Diaspora Research Center at Tel Aviv University. In total, there are some 500,000 documents, of which fifty thousand have been analyzed and digitized (hereafter: digitized archive). The portion of the archive on which this section is based is fond 1435, opis 1, which contains the archives of the Bureau Palestinien, or Palestine Office (hereafter: Moscow Archive).

188. I manually counted the applications from 1933 found in the files.

189. Application statistics for 1934–1935, file 15, no. 185–87, Moscow Archive (digitized archive no. 9539).

that would not make him a burden on the Yishuv (the Jewish community of pre-state Israel) was given preference. For example, seven unmarried young men (ages eighteen to twenty-two) declared themselves farmers, a declaration presumably intended to improve their chances of emigration. Still, the occupations declared by certificate applicants shed light on the ability of Salonika's Jews to support themselves in 1933–35. One hundred and thirteen persons defined themselves as porters. It is reasonable to assume that they were indeed porters, or else possessed no skills and relied only on their physical strength, and lacked sufficient imagination or information about Palestine to state that they were farmers. Seventy-nine applicants claimed that they were laborers, and some of these noted a more specific such profession, meaning that they were employed by others and indicating that the vast majority of these applicants too could offer nothing but their strength. Notably, only persons described themselves as stevedores, a datum that matches Ibn Shanji's statement that most of the stevedores had by 1936 immigrated to Palestine and that those who had yet to emigrate no longer were working in the port and so no longer could declare themselves occupied as stevedores. Seventy-four individuals defined themselves as drivers, meaning cart owners, which accords with Ibn Shanji's estimate of two thousand individuals working in haulage.

Most interesting is that among those who declared a particular, defined profession, such as baker, tailor, seamstress, hatter, glazier, electrician, mechanic, or driver, very few stated that they were employed by someone else, as with the *arabaji ergat* (cart owner's assistant) mentioned above. This suggests that all other applicants did not see themselves as being employed by others. They were self-employed in the best case, and had difficulty finding work in their field in the worst. A seventeen-year-old girl who declared that she was a seamstress (*shastra*) was at best someone with access to a sewing machine, and not necessarily her own. She was not a laborer, because she worked for herself.

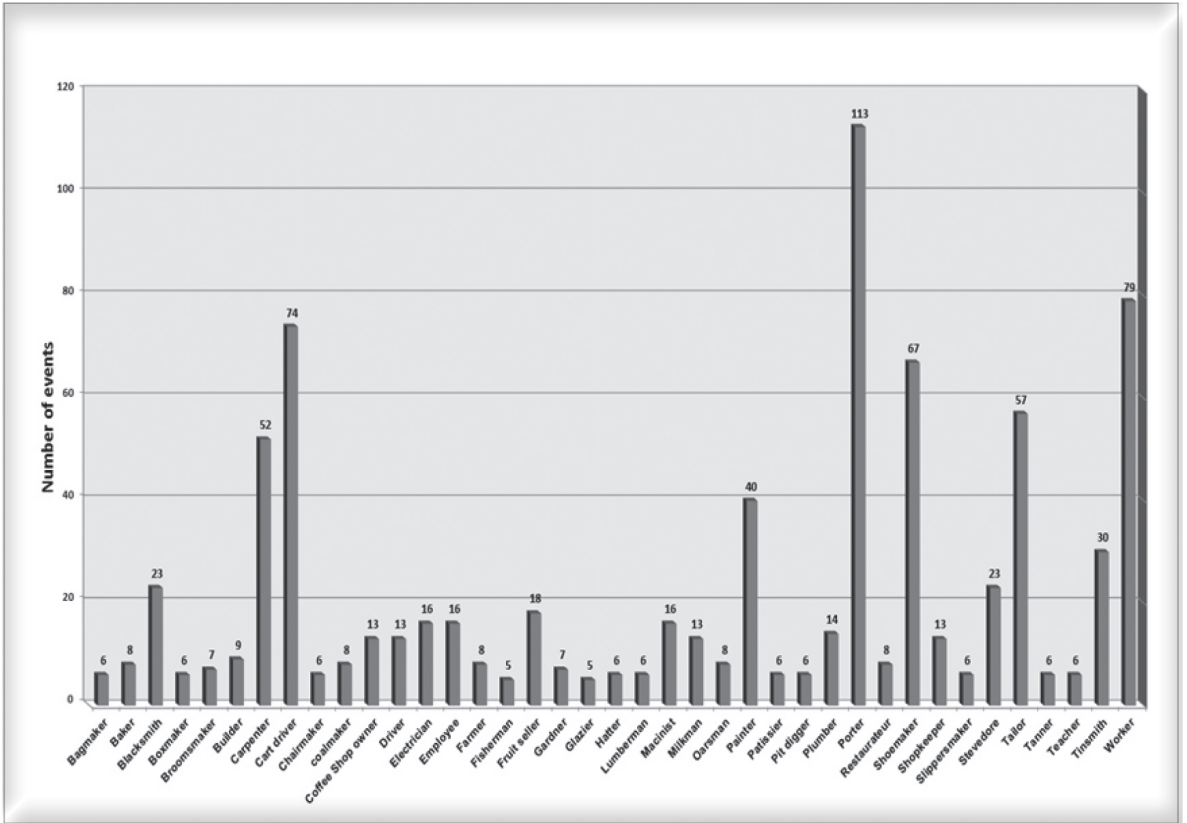


Figure no. 3.  
*Distribution of trades among certificate seekers, 1933-1935.*

In comparing the number of Salonikan Jews employed in various workshops in Ibn Shanji's list to the list of certificate applicants, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that a significant number of them, especially those listed by Ibn Shanji as self-employed, were the same ones requesting certificates to immigrate to Palestine, having despaired of making a living in Salonika. In any case, about twelve thousand of about fifty thousand Jews in the city that year were such individuals<sup>190</sup>. All in all, Ibn Shanji's list includes 4,873 breadwinners representing about 24,365 people, half of whom wished to emigrate.

The above analysis bears consideration in light of a secret report prepared in 1940 by Keren Hayesod emissary Dr. Tzevi Zohar<sup>191</sup> to evaluate the Zionist movement in Salonika and its prospects. According to his report:

The Zionist institutions are present and active, and based on the sympathies of the broad public, because it can be truly said that all the Jews here, in terms of their love for the enterprise of the building of the Land of Israel, are Zionists. However, the Zionist spirit is non-existent. Zionism exists here as a framework—without Zionist culture, without guidance, without leadership. A farthing for the Land of Israel, interest in the hardships of the Yishuv, a copy in the local press of an article—usually an old one—from the press of the Land of Israel, *and the wish of the underprivileged to make Aliyah*—this is all the Zionism<sup>192</sup>.

The juxtaposition of Zohar's statement with Ibn Shanji's report and

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190. For the basis of this figure, see Minna Rozen, "On Nationalizing Minorities: The Education of Salonikan Jewry, 1912–1941", in «Αρχείων Ανάλεκτα: Περιοδική έκδοση μελέτης και έρευνας αρχείων (δεύτερη περίοδος)», 3 (Θεσσαλονίκη 2018) [Compiled from the Archives: A Journal of Studies and Archival Research], 2nd ser., 3 (2018): 127–232.

191. Tzevi Zohar (1896, Rozdil, Galizia–1974, Mishmar Ha-Emek) was one of the founders of Hashomer Hatsa'ir, and a renowned educator and author. See *Leksikon ha-Ishim shel Erets Yisrael, 1799–1948* [A Lexicon of Personalities of the Land of Israel, 1799–1948], eds. Hayyim Beer, Ya'akov Goldstein, and Ya'akov Shavit (Tel Aviv, 1983), s.v. "Zohar, Tzevi".

192. Tzevi Zohar, secret report for the main office of Keren Hayesod from December 2, 1940, sent by the Organization Department of the Jewish Agency to Mosheh Sher-tok (Sharett), then head of the Political Department of the Jewish Agency (S25/5282, Central Zionist Archives). Emphasis added.

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BUREAU PALESTINIEN  
Salonique

Salonique le 24/1/1932

DEMANDE DE PERMISSE D'EMIGRATION  
"SIN MEZOS"

Nombre *David Daniel Mano* Idad *49 ans*

Nombre de la mujer *Riketa* Idad *40 ans*

Nombre de los hijos *Daniel* *17 ans*

*Rachel* *14 ans*

*Bella* *12 ans*

*Alberto* *10 ans*

Oficio en "salonico" *fabrication de sofas*

¿Es oficio otro conoce? *Ustrada de Kivada*

¿Es societa sionista appartiene?

¿Sabe hablar y escribir? *poco*

¿Es capital pensa llevarlo con el? *300 drach*

¿Es pensa usar en Palestina? *fabrication de sofas*

Referencia en salonico? *Michael Shaltiel, Nissim Galidi*

Figure no. 4.

Request, dated January 24, 1932, to begin the process of emigration to Palestine for a "destitute" immigrant, David Daniel Mano (49), his wife, Riketa (40), and their four children: Daniel (17), Rachelle (14), Bella (12), and Alberto (10). "Destitute. Not a member of a Zionist organization. Has not contributed the shekel [annual tax of the World Zionist Organization]. Poor literacy. Brings three hundred drachmas. Profession: furniture carpenter. No relatives in Palestine. Recommendations: Michael Shaltiel and Nissim Galidi. Address: Salonika, 23 Eschaton Street" (fond 1435, opis 1, not yet processed).



emigration requests submitted to the Palestine Office is enlightening. Zohar's assessment that most who wish to make *'aliyah* were destitute corroborates the foregoing analysis. Yet despite Zohar's criticism of Salonikan Zionism, he sees all of Salonikan Jews as Zionists—although a great many were not, even according to his minimal criteria. This inaccuracy is a result of Zohar's informants: leaders of the community and Zionist leaders, all of whom belonged to the upper middle class. The fact that those who wished to make *'aliyah*, at least from 1935, numbered among the destitute could be denied neither by his interlocutors nor by the Jewish communists<sup>193</sup>. At the same time, the idea that all Salonikans were sympathetic to the Zionist cause was verbalized by the individuals with whom he spoke, who could afford to stay in Salonika and were not looking for a way out.



Figure no. 5.

*Yosef Shoef's family posing to obtain a certificate to immigrate to Palestine.*

*Salonika, January 1, 1935*

*(fond 1435, opis 1, file 20, Moscow Archive, digitized archive no. 369).*

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193. «Η Γη της Επαγγελίας των Εβραίων» [The Promised Land of the Jews], *Rizospastis*, July 13, 1935, 1.



## V. Reconsidering the Plight of Jewish Tobacco Workers and Other Laborers

Prospects were bleak for Jewish workers in 1935 Salonika. However, the perception that refugees from Anatolia had created this situation—a perception that prevails in scholarly literature<sup>194</sup> and is reflected by the memoirs of Salonikan Jews who immigrated to Palestine during the 1930s<sup>195</sup>, the letter of an Ashkenazi critic from European Zionist circles who must have derived his information from equivalent circles in Salonika<sup>196</sup>, and even the Jewish community's internal sources<sup>197</sup>—is a generalization in need of refinement. There can be no doubt that the influx of 150,000 destitute refugees was fatefully significant for the city's society, economy, and politics. Yet the weight of national politics, national socioeconomic policy, and the Great Depression was no less significant than the Catastrophe of 1922–23 and its repercussions.

Reality, as ever, inspired different points of view. The tobacco workers did not share the perception that the Anatolian refugees were the cause of their plight. They struggled together with Greek Christian workers for their right to earn a living with dignity. In their eyes, the enemy was not the other, but the state and its organs, and the capitalists. Only eight of them were among those who applied for emigration certificates. The thousands of male and female tobacco workers are barely mentioned in the Palestine Office's archives and those of the community. They saw the Zionist organizations at large and especially the Maccabi organization as Fascist organizations aimed at promoting a chauvinist nationalistic spirit among the working class<sup>198</sup>. They themselves were organized as a union, and through it they fought for their income and rights. The Communist

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194. See above, p. 47.

195. David A. Recanati, *Zikhron Saloniki* 2:197; "Ha-Kalkalah la-'Anafeha", 234.

196. See e.g. Zeev von Weizel, "Mi-Zikhronotai 'al Saloniki de-Az" [From My Memoirs of the Salonika of Yesteryear], in *Zikhron Saloniki* 2:423–24.

197. Berakhah Rivlin, ed., *Pinkas ha-Kehillot—Yavan* [Pinkas Hakehilot: Encyclopaedia of Jewish Communities from Their Foundation till after the Holocaust, Greece] (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1998), 248.

198. "Los fashistas jidios provocan las masas lazdradiras judias. La Makabi organiza una parada por maniana alhad despues de midio dia" [Jewish Fascists Provoke Jewish

Party was their ideological mainstay. In 1936, most were unemployed, but immigration to Palestine was not on the list of solutions for most of them. Instead, they continued to fight the working class's struggle. Their goal was not the Jewish state in the Land of Israel, but the dictatorship of the proletariat in Greece.

Most of the Jewish breadwinners in the city, whether laborers or owners of small businesses, found that year that their ability to support their families was greatly diminished, if not obliterated. Even for those who wanted to immigrate, there was no way out. Nonetheless, they were not alone. The Great Depression oppressed all, Jew and Christian alike. The rise in the cost of living and grave unemployment produced a wave of strikes among the tobacco workers in northern Greece, which peaked with the general strike in Salonika that began on May 12, 1936. Thirty thousand tobacco workers marched through the city's streets, and its other workers joined in, followed by the workers of the rest of Greece. The strike in Salonika was suppressed by gendarmes brought in from other parts of the country, and ended with twelve dead and 282 injured. Socialist sources reported 100,000 or even 150,000 participants in the funerals, while official sources admitted at least 80,000<sup>199</sup>. The population of Salonika that year was approximately 244,000, meaning that between 61 and 32 percent of the city's residents participated in the funerals. From here, it was a short way to the Metaxas dictatorship.

Salonika's Jewish workers had no chance of redemption. Seemingly,

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Working Masses. Maccabi Organizing a Parade for Tomorrow, Sunday, Afternoon], *Avanti* 26, no. 26 (June 30, 1934): 1.

199. Mazower, *Economic Crisis*, 268–69, 288–89; Jon V. Kofas, *Authoritarianism in Greece: The Metaxas Regime* (Boulder, CO: East European Monographs; distributed by Columbia University Press, New York, 1983), 12–31; Φαίδων Βρανάς, *Ιωάννης Μεταξάς το προσωπικό του ημερολόγιο, τόμος τέταρτος, 25 Οκτωβρίου 1932 έως 17 Ιανουαρίου 1941* (Αθήνα: Εκδόσεις Γκοβόστη, 2005) [Faidon Branás, ed., Ioannis Metaxas: The Journal and the Man; October 25, 1932, to January 17, 1941 (Athens: Govostis Publishers, 2005)], 212–15; Bert Birtles, *Exiles in the Aegean: A Personal Narrative of Greek Politics and Travel* (London, 1938), 255–59; Hadar, “Karmen be-Saloniki”, 22–23; “La greve” [The Strike], *Aksion Prensa*, May 13, 1936; “Los Evenimientos dramáticos de estos días” [The Dramatic Events of the Present Days], *El Mesajero*, May 12, 1936; “Despues delos evenimientos sangrientes de shabat” [After the Bloody Events of This Saturday], *El Mesajero*, May 12, 1936; “El dia de ayer” [Yesterday], *El Mesajero*, May 14, 1936.

their poverty could not be ignored. In February 1941, at the end of the war with Italy, the community's officials calculated that the number of poor entitled to aid from public soup kitchens was 31,036 of 46,000 community members<sup>200</sup>. Only eleven thousand were granted nourishment in those soup kitchens.

Looking at these numbers, one cannot but wonder how Tzevi Zohar could have reacted mere months earlier to the information disseminated about the grave unemployment of the Jews of Salonika that it was erroneous: "Everybody's opinion is that there is no unemployment among the Jews"<sup>201</sup>. True, most able-bodied Jewish men were now in uniform, but that could not change the grim truth that their families at home continued to face. On recalling that Zohar's interlocutors in Salonika belonged to the class of leaders and dignitaries, it transpires that in spite of having to finance soup kitchens for the families of soldiers only recently removed from the army of unemployed, these leaders accepted the realities of the war as normal. Their evaluations as transmitted to the emissary from the Land of Israel were a fanciful façade formulated to accommodate their vision of the world.

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200. Protocol of the Executive Committee of the Jewish Community of Salonika, Sep. 15, 1940, fond 1428, opis 1, file 145, Moscow Archive (cassette no. 129, time 0:16:55 doc. 849); table detailing poverty in Jewish neighborhoods after the outbreak of war with Italy, n.d., old catalog no. SA/GR 227, new catalog no. SA/GR 375, Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People, Jerusalem. The figure given for the total number of Jews in Salonika is that given in the documents; our estimate is that the actual number on the eve of the German occupation was some 10 percent higher (see above, n.190). The numbers in the document also are smaller than those given by Evangelos Hekimoglou, based on unspecified documents of the Jewish community, in his article "Jewish Pauperism in Salonika, 1940–1941", in Rozen, *The Last Ottoman Century*, 2:203. Tzevi Zohar estimated the number of Jews in Salonika in 1940 to be 60,000 (Zohar, secret report).

201. Zohar, secret report.

## ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

*Minna Rozen*

Στην παρούσα εργασία παρουσιάζεται μια επικαιροποιημένη εικόνα του Εβραϊκού εργασιακού κόσμου της Θεσσαλονίκης από τους Βαλκανικούς Πολέμους (1912/3) έως την έναρξη της δικτατορίας του Ιωάννη Μεταξά (1936). Με βάση τον Ισπανοεβραϊκό και ελληνικό τύπο, τον κατάλογο των αιτούντων πιστοποιητικά για μετανάστευση στην Παλαιστίνη μεταξύ 1930 και 1935 και στατιστικά στοιχεία που συνέταξε ο βουλευτής Mentesh Ibn Shanji το 1936 αναφορικά με Εβραίους επαγγελματίες στην πόλη, υποστηρίζεται ότι η μείωση του εβραϊκού πληθυσμού της Θεσσαλονίκης και η χρονολογία της πρέπει να κατανοηθούν στο φόντο της παρακμής της πόλης εν γένει και των αλλαγών στην ελληνική πολιτική καπνού κατά τη διάρκεια του μεσοπολέμου, και όχι μόνο στην ένταση μεταξύ των εθνών και των προσπαθειών για εξελληνισμό της πόλης. Αυτό το πορτρέτο του εργασιακού κόσμου στη Θεσσαλονίκη του μεσοπολέμου αντικρούει επίσης την κοινώς αποδεκτή άποψη για την επιτυχία του Σιωνισμού σε αυτήν την πόλη.

