

# SALONICA

## CITY OF GHOSTS

CHRISTIANS, MUSLIMS AND JEWS 1430-1950

'A tremendous book about a city unique not just in Europe,  
but in the entire history of humanity'

Jan Morris, *Guardian*



Mark Mazower (2006).

## 3

*The Arrival of the Sefardim*

WHEN EVLIYA CHELEBI, the seventeenth-century Ottoman traveller, came to describe Salonica he provided a characteristically fantastic account of its origins. The prophet Solomon – ‘may God’s blessing be on him’ – had been showing the world to the Queen of Sheba when she looked down and saw ‘in the region of Athens, in the land of the Romans, a high spot called *Bellevue*. There he built her a palace ‘whose traces are still visible’, before they moved on eastwards to Istanbul, Bursa, Baalbec and Jerusalem, building as they went, and repopulating the Earth after the Flood. Chelebi ascribes the city’s walls to the ‘philosopher Philikos’ and his son Selanik ‘after whom it is named still’. Later, he says, Jews fleeing Palestine ‘slew the Greek nation in one night and regained control of the fortress’. Hebrew kings did battle with Byzantine emperors, the Ottoman sultans eventually took over, and ‘until our own days, the city is full of Jews.’<sup>1</sup>

Evliya’s tall tale conveys one thing quite unambiguously: by the time of his visit in 1667–68, the Jews were such an integral part of Salonica that it seemed impossible to imagine they had not always been there. And indeed there had been Jews in the city before there were any Christians. In Byzantine times there were probably several hundred Greek-speaking Jewish families [or Romaniototes]; despite often severe persecution, they traded successfully across the Mediterranean, at least to judge from the correspondence found in the Cairo Geniza of many years ago. Shortly before the Turkish conquest, they were joined by refugees fleeing persecution in France and Germany. Whether or not they survived the siege of 1430 is not known but any who did were moved to Constantinople by Mehmed the Conqueror to repopulate it

after its capture in 1453, leaving their home-town entirely without a Jewish presence for perhaps the first time in over a millennium. This was why in the 1478 register they did not appear. But then came a new wave of anti-Jewish persecution in Christendom, and the Ottoman willingness to take advantage of this.<sup>2</sup>

*Flight across the Mediterranean*

When the English expelled their Jews in 1290, they inaugurated a policy which spread widely over the next two centuries. In 1492 Ferdinand and Isabella’s edict of banishment forced thousands from a homeland where they had known great security and prosperity. Sicily and Sardinia, Navarre, Provence and Naples followed suit. By the mid-sixteenth century, Jews had been evicted from much of western Europe. A few existed on sufferance, while many others converted or went underground as Marranos and New Christians, preserving their customs behind a Catholic façade. The centre of gravity of the Jewish world shifted eastwards – to the safe havens of Poland and the Ottoman domains.<sup>3</sup>

In Spain itself not everyone favoured the expulsions. (Perhaps this was why a different policy was chosen towards the far more numerous Muslims of Andalucía who were forcibly converted, and only expelled much later.) ‘Many were of the opinion,’ wrote the scholar and Inquisitor Jeronimo de Zurita, ‘that the king was making a mistake to throw out of his realms people who were so industrious and hard-working, and so outstanding in his realms both in number and esteem as well as in dedication to making money.’ A later generation of Inquisitors feared that the Jews who had been driven out ‘took with them the substance and wealth of these realms, transferring to our enemies the trade and commerce of which they are the proprietors not only in Europe but throughout the world.’<sup>4</sup>

The expulsion of the Jews formed part of a bitter struggle for power between Islam and Catholicism. One might almost see this as the contest to reunify the Roman Empire between the two great monotheistic religions that had succeeded it: on the one side, the Spanish Catholic monarchs of the Holy Roman Empire; on the other,

the Ottoman sultans, themselves heirs to the Roman Empire of the East, and rulers of the largest and most powerful Muslim empire in the world. Its climax, in the sixteenth century, pitted Charles V, possessor of the imperial throne of Germany and ruler of the Netherlands, the Austrian lands, the Spanish monarchy and its possessions in Sicily and Naples, Mexico and Peru, against Suleyman the Magnificent who held undisputed sway from Hungary to Yemen, from Algiers to Baghdad. Ottoman forces had swept north to the gates of Vienna and conquered the Arab lands while Ottoman navies clashed with the Holy League on the Mediterranean and captured Rhodes, Cyprus and Tunis, wintered in Toulon, seized Nice and terrorized the Italian coast. The Habsburgs looked for an ally in Persia; the French and English approached the Porte. It was an early modern world war.<sup>5</sup>

In the midst of this bitter conflict the Ottoman authorities exploited their enemy's anti-Jewish measures just as they had welcomed other Jewish refugees from Christian persecution in the past. They were People of the Book, and they possessed valuable skills. Sultan Murad I had a Jewish translator in his service; his successors relied upon Jewish doctors and bankers. Those fleeing Iberia would bring more knowledge and expertise with them. In the matter-of-fact words of one contemporary Jewish chronicler: 'A part of the exiled Spaniards went overseas to Turkey. Some of them were thrown into the sea and drowned, but those who arrived there the king of Turkey received kindly, as they were artisans.'<sup>6</sup> The French agent Nicolas de Nicolay noted:

[The Jews] have among them workmen of all artes and handicraftes moste excellent, and specially of the Maranes [Marranos] of late banished and driven out of Spain and Portugale, who to the great detriment and damage of the Christianitie, have taught the Turkes divers inventions, craftes and engines of warre, as to make artillerie, harquebuses, gunne powder, shot and other munitions; they have also there set up printing, not before seen in those countries, by the which in faire characters they put in light divers bookes in divers languages as Greek, Latin, Italian, Spanish and the Hebrew tongue, being to them naturell.<sup>7</sup>

The newcomers were not enough in numbers to affect the demographic balance in the empire – the Balkans remained overwhelmingly Christian, the Asian and Arab lands overwhelmingly Muslim. But they revitalized urban life after many decades of war.

And of all the towns in the empire, it was Salonica which benefited most. Since 1453, while Istanbul's population had been growing at an incredible rate thanks to compulsory resettlement and immigration by Muslims, Greeks and Armenians, turning it into perhaps the largest city in Europe, Salonica lagged far behind. Bayezid had been concerned at its slow recovery and had been doing what he could to promote it himself. Did he order the authorities to direct the Jews there? It seems likely, although no such directive has survived. According to a later chronicler, he sent orders to provincial governors to welcome the newcomers. Since Salonica was the empire's main European port, many were bound to make their way there in any case. As wave after wave of Iberian refugees arrived at the docks, the city grew by leaps and bounds. By 1520, more than half its thirty thousand inhabitants were Jewish, and it had turned into one of the most important ports of the eastern Mediterranean.<sup>8</sup>

Perhaps only now did the real break with Byzantium take place. In 1478 Salonica was still a Greek city where more than half of the inhabitants were Christians; by 1519, they were less than one quarter. Was it a sign of their growing weakness that between 1490 and 1540 several of their most magnificent churches – including Ayios Dimitrios itself – were turned into mosques? A century later still, if we are to judge from Ottoman records, the number of Christians had fallen further, both in absolute terms and as a proportion of the whole. While Istanbul remained heavily populated by Greeks, local Christians saw Salonica re-emerging into something resembling its former prosperity under a Muslim administration and a largely Jewish labour-force.

Not surprisingly, Greco-Jewish relations were infused with tension. Occasional stories of anti-Jewish machinations at the Porte, long-running complaints that the newcomers paid too little tax, bitter commercial rivalries between Christian and Jewish merchants, the emergence of the blood libel in the late sixteenth century, even the odd riot, assault and looting of Jewish properties following fire or



plague – these are the scattered documentary indications of the Greeks' deep-rooted resentment at the newcomers. It cannot have been easy living as a minority in the city they regarded as theirs. Jewish children laughed at the Orthodox priests, with their long hair tied up in a bun: *está un papas* became a way of saying it was time to visit the barber. We learn from a 1700 court case that the Greek inhabitants of Ayios Minas were so fed up with Jewish neighbours throwing their garbage into the churchyard, and mocking them from the surrounding windows during holiday services, that they appealed to the Ottoman authorities to get them to stop. The balance of confessional power within the city had shifted sharply.<sup>9</sup>

For the Jews themselves, a mass of displaced refugees living with other recent immigrants among the toppled columns, half-buried temples and ruined mementoes of the city's Roman and Byzantine past, this Macedonian port was at first equally strange and alienating. Lost 'in a country which is not theirs', they struggled to make sense of forced migration from 'the lands of the West'. Some were Jews; others were converts to Catholicism. With their families forced apart, many mourned dead relatives, and wondered if their missing ones would ever return or if new consorts would succeed in giving them children to replace those they had lost. The trauma of exile is a familiar refrain in Salonican history. One rabbi was forced to remind his congregation 'to stop cursing the Almighty and to accept as just everything that has happened.'<sup>10</sup>

If Europe had become for them – as it was for the Marrano poet Samuel Usque – 'my hell on earth', we can scarcely be surprised: Salonica, by contrast, was their refuge and liberation. 'There is a city in the Turkish kingdom,' he wrote, 'which formerly belonged to the Greeks, and in our days is a true mother-city in Judaism. For it is established on the very deep foundations of the Law. And it is filled with the choicest plants and most fruitful trees, presently known anywhere on the face of our globe. These fruits are divine, because they are watered by an abundant stream of charities. The city's walls are made of holy deeds of the greatest worth.' When Jews in Provence scouted out conditions there, they received the reply: 'Come and join us in Turkey and you will live, as we do, in peace and liberty.' In the experience of the Sefardim, we see the astonishing

capacity of refugees to make an unfamiliar city theirs. Through religious devotion and study, they turned Salonica into a 'new Jerusalem' – just as other Jews did with Amsterdam, Vilna, Montpellier, Nîmes, Bari and Otranto: wrapping their new place of exile in the mantle of biblical geography was a way of coming to feel at home. 'The Jews of Europe and other countries, persecuted and banished, have come there to find a refuge,' wrote Usque, 'and this city has received them with love and affection, as if she were Jerusalem, that old and pious mother of ours.'<sup>11</sup>

Indeed, only a few devout older people, usually men, were ever tempted to make the journey southeast to Jerusalem itself, even though it formed part of the same Ottoman realm. As in Spain itself, the Jews came to feel – as one historian has put it – 'at home in exile' and had no desire to uproot themselves once more, not even when the destination was the Land their holy books promised them. But this home was not only their 'Jerusalem'; it was also a simulacrum of the life they had known at the other end of the Mediterranean. They worshipped in synagogues named after the old long-abandoned homelands – Ispanya, Çeçilyan [Sicilian], Magrebi, Lizbon, Talyan [Italian], Otranto, Aragon, Katalan, Pulya, Evora Portukal and many others – which survived until the synagogues themselves perished in the fire of 1917. Their family names – Navarro, Cuenca, Algava – their games, curses and blessings, even their clothes, linked them with their past. They ate *Pan d'Espanya* [almond sponge cake] on holidays, *rodanchas* [pumpkin pastries], *pastel de kwezo* [cheese pie with sesame seed], *fijones kon karne* [beef and bean stew] and *keftikes de poyo* [chicken croquettes], and gave visitors *dulce de muez verde* [green walnut preserve]. People munched *pasatempo* [dried melon seeds], took the *vaporiko* across the bay, or enjoyed the evening air on the *varandado* of their home. When Spanish scholars visited the city at the end of the nineteenth century, they were astonished to find a miniature Iberia alive and flourishing under Abdul Hamid.<sup>12</sup>

For this, the primary conduit was language. As a Salonican merchant, Emmanuel Abuaf, tried to explain in 1600 to a puzzled interrogator of the Pisan Inquisition: 'Our Jewish youngsters, when they begin from the age of six to learn the Scripture, read it and discuss it in the Spanish language, and all the business and trade of the Levant is carried

on in Spanish in Hebrew characters . . . And so it is not hard for Jews to know Spanish even if they are born outside Spain.<sup>13</sup> In Salonica, there was a religious variant – Ladino – and a vernacular which was so identified with the Jews that it became known locally as ‘Jewish’ [*judezmo*], and quickly became the language of secular learning and literature, business, science and medicine. Sacred and scholarly texts were translated into it from Hebrew, Arabic and Latin, because ‘this language is the most used among us’. In the docks, among the fishermen, in the market and the workshops the accents of Aragon, Galicia, Navarre and Castile crowded out Portuguese, Greek, Yiddish, Italian and Provençal. Eventually Castilian triumphed over the rest. ‘The Jews of Salonica and Constantinople, Alexandria, and Cairo, Venice and other commercial centres, use Spanish in their business. I know Jewish children in Salonica who speak Spanish as well as me if not better,’ noted Gonsalvo de Illescas. The sailor Diego Galan, a native of Toledo, found that the city’s Jews ‘speak Castilian as fine and well-accented as in the imperial capital’. They were proud of their tongue – its flexibility and sweetness, so quick to bring the grandiloquent or bombastic down to earth with a ready diminutive. By contrast, the Jews further inland were derisively written off as *digi digi* – incapable of speaking properly, too inclined to the harsh *ds* and *gs* of the Portuguese.<sup>14</sup>

### *Serving the Imperial Economy*

Early in the sixteenth century, the Porte entrusted the Jews of Salonica with the responsibility of manufacturing the uniforms for the janissary infantry corps, and over the next century this turned the city into one of the principal producers and exporters of cloth in the eastern Mediterranean. Wealthy Jewish merchants bought up the local supply of wool, imported dyes, and set up poorer Jews with equipment and wages for weaving, brushing, dyeing and making up the finished material. Ottoman authorities banned all exports of wool from the region until the needs of the manufacturers had been met and tried to chase back any weavers who tried to leave. By mid-century, the industry was not only supplying military uniforms, but also clothing the city itself and sending exports to Buda and beyond.<sup>15</sup>

Another imperial *corvée* a few years later jump-started silver-mining outside the city – crucially easing the desperate Ottoman shortage of precious metals. Because the silver shortage was one of the main constraints on Ottoman economic growth, Grand Vizier Maktul Ibrahim Pasha brought in Jewish metallurgists from newly-conquered Hungary, and within a few years the Siderokapsi mines had become one of the largest silver producers in the empire, with daily caravans making the fifty-mile journey to Salonica and back. Bulgarian and Jewish miners did the hard work, and rich Jewish merchants were commanded to bankroll operations. But running the economy by imperial fiat in this way was not popular with the wealthy. The bankers complained bitterly at an obligation which was not shared by the community as a whole, and which more often than not led to losses rather than profits. They bribed Ottoman officials, hid or fled the city. The industry itself became such a drain on resources that Salonican Jews shunned the miners when they came into town: ‘They would rather meet a bear that lost its cubs than one of those people.’<sup>16</sup>

In order to curb the impact of such obligations and to allow for greater fiscal predictability, the city’s Jews sent a delegation to Suleyman the Magnificent in 1562 to plead for a reform of their overall tax burden. The move indicated the surprising degree of self-confidence with which the Sefardim dealt with their Ottoman masters. It took many visits, several years, and at least one change of sultan, before an answer was forthcoming. It could easily have resulted – had the imperial mood been rather different – in the delegates losing their lives, as happened to another rabbi when he tried to negotiate a later reduction in the tax burden. But in 1568, it still seemed vital to the Porte to stay on good terms with Salonica’s Jews and the principal delegate, Moises Almosnino, was able to return with welcome news: in return for the abolition of many special taxes, the community committed itself to collecting and handing over an agreed sum annually to the authorities.

For the Ottomans were not modern capitalists. They did not aim at unlimited growth in unrestricted markets but rather at the creation and maintenance of a basically closed system to keep towns alive – in particular the ever-expanding imperial metropole – and to guarantee the domestic production of commodities essential for urban life and

the provisioning of the military. Salt, wheat, silver and woollens were what they needed from Salonica, a list to which they occasionally added gunpowder and even cannons. The primary value of the Jews lay in their ability to provide these things, thereby freeing Muslims for other occupations. After a century of Ottoman rule, more than half of the latter were now imams, muezzins, tax collectors, janissaries or other servants of the state and its ruling faith. They administered the city; the Jews ran its economy. It was a division of labour which suited both sides and the city flourished.<sup>17</sup>

For the rich, the buoyant Ottoman economy allowed them to invest their funds in attractive and profitable outlets such as the tax farms and concessions upon which the sultan relied for the gathering of many of his revenues. Salonican Jews thus came to play an important part in the regional economy of the Ottoman Balkans. Local Jewish *sarrafs* [bankers] collected taxes from drovers, vineyards, dairy farmers and slave dealers. They bankrolled prominent Muslim office-holders such as the *defterdar* and local troop and janissary commanders, and farmed the customs concession for Salonica itself – one of the most important sources of revenue for the empire – and the salt pans outside the city, where at their peak more than one thousand peasants worked. Many had interests in the capital, in Vidin, and along the Danube. Much of the wealth of the Nasi-Mendes family – the most politically successful and prominent Jewish dynasty of the sixteenth century – was invested in concessions of this kind.<sup>18</sup>

Capital accumulation was easy because Salonica was such a well-placed trading base. It reached northwards into the inland fairs and markets of the Balkans, south and east [via Jewish–Muslim partnerships] to the Asian trading routes that led to Persia, Yemen and India, and westwards through the Adriatic to Venice and the other Italian ports. Italian, Arab and Armenian merchants all participated in this traffic: but where the crucial Mediterranean triangle with Egypt and Venice was concerned, no one could compete with the extraordinary network of familial and confessional affiliates that made the Salonican Jews and Marranos so powerful. Shifting between Catholicism [when in Ancona or Venice] and Judaism [in the Ottoman lands], they dominated the Adriatic carrying trade, helped to build up Split as a major port for Venetian dealings with the Levant, and wielded their Ottoman

connections whenever the Papacy and the Inquisition turned nasty. They combined commerce with espionage and ran the best intelligence networks in the entire region. So confident did they feel, that some threatened a boycott of Papal ports when the authorities in Ancona started up the auto-da-fé in 1556, and one even talked about spreading plague deliberately to frighten the Catholics in an early attempt at biological warfare.<sup>19</sup>

Greeks and Turks must have been astonished at the assertiveness of the newcomers, for the Romaniote and Ashkenazi Jews they had known had always kept a low profile. In the early years, it is true, the Sefardim tried to tread cautiously. Congregants were reminded by their rabbis to keep their voices down when they prayed so that they would not be heard outside. In external appearance, synagogues were modest and unobtrusive and even larger ones, like the communal Talmud Torah, were hidden well away from the main thoroughfares, in the heart of the Jewish-populated district. Thanks to the benevolence of the Ottoman authorities, however, more than twenty-five synagogues were built in less than two decades. After the fire of 1545, a delegation from Salonica visited the Porte and obtained permission for many to be rebuilt.<sup>20</sup>

But the Iberian Jews had always known how to live well, and their noble families had been unabashedly conspicuous, with large retinues of servants and African slaves. Even before Murad III introduced new sumptuary legislation in the 1570s to curb Jewish and Christian luxury in the capital, the extravagant silk and gold-laced costumes of rich Salonican Jews, the displays of jewellery to which the wealthier women were prone – they were particularly fond of bracelets, gold necklaces and pearl chokers worn ‘so close to one another and so thick one would think they were riveted on to one another’ – the noise of musicians at parties and weddings, where men and women danced together – to the dismay of Greek Jews – were all attracting unfavourable comment. In 1554 a rabbinical ordinance ruled that ‘no woman who has reached maturity, including married women, may take outside her home, into the markets or the streets, any silver or gold article, rings, chains or gems, or any such object except one ring on her finger.’ Murad himself had, according to an apocryphal story, been so angered by Jewish ostentation that he even contemplated putting all the Jews



of the empire to death. Fear of exciting envy often lay behind the rabbis' efforts to urge restraint. It took more than rabbinical commands, however, to stop women wearing the diamond *rozetas*, *almendras* ['almonds'], chokers, earrings, coin necklaces and head-pieces which still awed visitors to Salonica in the early twentieth century.<sup>21</sup>

It must have been as much the sheer number of the newcomers as their behaviour which struck those who had known the town before their arrival. The once sparsely populated streets filled up and population densities soared. At first Jews settled where they could, renting from the Christian and Muslim landlords who owned the bulk of the housing stock. The very first communal ordinance tried to prevent Jews outbidding one another to avoid driving up prices. But the continuous influx led to many central districts becoming heavily settled. Muslims started to move up the higher slopes – enjoying better views, drainage and ventilation, more space and less noise – while the Greeks – mostly tailors, craftsmen, cobblers, masons and metalworkers, a few remaining scions of old, distinguished Byzantine families among them – were pushed into the margins, near Ayios Minas in the west, and around the remains of the old Hippodrome.<sup>22</sup>

South of Egnatia, with the exception of the market districts to the west, the twisting lanes of the lower town belonged to the newcomers. Here wealthy notables lived together with the large mass of Jewish artisans, workmen, *hamals*, fishermen, pedlars and the destitute, cooped up in small apartments handed down from generation to generation. The overall impression of the Jewish quarters was scarcely one of magnificence. Clusters of modest homes hidden behind their walls and large barred gates were grouped around shared *cortijos* into which housewives threw their refuse. As the city filled up, extra storeys were added to the old wooden houses, and overhanging upper floors jutted out into the street. Every so often, the claustrophobic and airless alleys opened unpredictably into a small *placa* or *placeta*. Rotted backstreets hid the synagogues and communal buildings.

These were the least hygienic or desirable residential areas, where all the refuse of the city made its way down the slopes to collect in stagnant pools by the dank stones of the sea-walls. The old harbour built by Constantine had silted up and turned into a large sewage

dump, the *Monturo*, whose noxious presence pervaded the lower town. The tanneries and slaughter-houses were located on the western fringes, but workmen kept evil-smelling vats of urine, used for tanning leather and dying wool, in their homes. People were driven mad by the din of hammers in the metal foundries; others complained of getting ill from the fumes of lead-workers and silversmiths – like the smell of the bakeries but worse, according to one sufferer. Living on top of one another, neighbours suffered when one new tenant decided to turn his bedroom into a kitchen, projecting effluent into the common passageway. The combination of overcrowding – especially after the devastating fire of 1545 – and intense manufacturing activity meant that life in the city's Jewish quarters continued to be defined by its smells, its noise and its lack of privacy. Why did people remain there, in squalor, when large tracts of the upper city lay empty? Was it choice – a desire to remain close together, strategically located between the commercial district and the city walls, their very density warding off intruders? Or was it necessity – the upper slopes of the city being already owned and settled, even if more sporadically, by Muslims? Either way, the living conditions of Salonican Jewry provoked dismay right up until the fires of 1890 and 1917, which finally dispersed the old neighbourhoods and erased the old streets from the map so definitively that not even their outlines can now be traced amid the glitzy tree-lined shopping avenues which have replaced them.

### *The Power of the Rabbis*

Historians of the Ottoman empire often extoll its hierarchical system of communal autonomy through which the sultan supposedly appointed leaders of each confessional group [or *millet*] and made them responsible for collecting taxes, administering justice and ecclesiastical affairs. The autonomy was real enough, but where, in the case of the Jews, was the hierarchy? It is true that in 1453, after the fall of Constantinople, Mehmed the Conqueror appointed a chief rabbi just as he had a Greek patriarch: the first incumbent was an elderly Romaniote rabbi who had served under the last Byzantine emperor. But this position probably applied only to the capital rather than

to the empire as a whole, did not last for long and was then left vacant. Once Salonica emerged as the largest Jewish community in the empire, dwarfing that in Istanbul itself, the authority of the chief rabbi of the capital depended on obtaining the obedience of Salonican Jewry. But this was not forthcoming. 'There is no town subordinated to another town,' insisted one Salonican rabbi early in the sixteenth century. What he meant was that his town would be subordinated to no other.<sup>23</sup>

The usual rule among Jews was that newcomers conformed to local practice. But the overwhelming numbers of the immigrants, and their well-developed sense of cultural superiority, put this principle to the test. The Spanish and Italian Jews regarded the established traditions of the *Griegos* (Greeks) or the *Alemanos* (Germans) as they were now somewhat dismissively known, as distinctly inferior. 'Ni ajo dulce ni Tudesco bueno,' – neither can we find sweet garlic nor a good German [Jew] – was a local saying. No one likes being condescended to. Outside Salonica, the French naturalist Pierre Belon witnessed an argument that flared up around a fish-stall. Did the *claria* have scales or not? Some Jews gathered and said that as it did not, it could be eaten. Others – 'newly come from Spain' – said they could see minute traces of scales and accused the first group of lax observance. A fist-fight was about to erupt before the fish was taken off for further inspection.<sup>24</sup>

Rabbis took the same unbending line over the superiority of the Sefardic way that their congregants had done in the fish-market. As early as 1509, one wrote:

It is well-known that Sephardic Jews and their *hakhanim* [rabbis] in this kingdom, together with the other congregations who join them, comprise the majority here, may the Lord be praised. The land was given uniquely to them, and they are its majesty, its radiance and splendour, a light unto the land and all who dwell in it. Surely, they were not brought hither in order to depart! For all these places are ours too, and it would be worthy of all the minority peoples who first resided in this kingdom to follow their example and do as they do in all that pertains to the Torah and its customs.<sup>25</sup>

Less than twenty years since the expulsions, this was a stunning display of arrogance – turning the Romaniotes [Greek-speaking Jews], who had lived in those lands since antiquity, into a subservient minority. Such an attitude created friction with Istanbul where Romaniotes were more numerous and not inclined to bow so easily. In Salonica itself, the argument for Spanish superiority was repeated over and over again until it needed no longer to be made. 'As matters stand today in Salonica,' commented rabbi Samuel de Medina in the 1560s, 'the holy communities of Calabria, Provincia, Sicilia and Apulia have all adopted the ways of Sefarad, and only the holy community of Ashkenaz [Germany] has not changed its ways.' Thus it was not only because of the lack of a Jewish hierarchy comparable to that which structured the Orthodox Church that the model of communal administration suggested by the patriarchate was bound to fail. Salonica's largely Sefardic Jewry never for a moment contemplated allowing itself to fall under the guidance of a Romaniote chief rabbi.<sup>26</sup>

Yet not only did the Ottoman authorities apparently not bother with a centralized imperial Jewish hierarchy based in the capital, they scarcely bothered to formalize how the Jews organized themselves in Salonica either. Under the Byzantine emperors, there was apparently a Jewish 'provost'. No such post was established by the Ottomans. The community could not fix upon a single chief rabbi, and its early efforts to set up a triumvirate of elderly but respected figures met the same fate as the chief rabbinate in the capital. There was thus not even a Jewish counterpart to the city's Greek metropolitan. For a time, the local authorities appointed a spokesman for the Jews to act as intermediary between the community and themselves. But the only mention of this figure in the historical record paints him as an unmitigated disaster, who used the position for his own advancement, insulted respected rabbis and eventually, through his blasphemous conduct, brought down the wrath of God in the shape of the fire and plague of 1545. We do not hear about a successor: if he existed, he was of no importance. More or less all that mattered for the local Ottoman authorities was that taxes were regularly paid to the court of the *kadi* or to the assigned collectors. The community as a whole gathered as an assembly of synagogue representatives to apportion taxes. When there were difficulties it sent



elders to Istanbul to plead at court, or contacted prominent Jewish notables for help.<sup>27</sup>

In fact, in many ways it is misleading to talk about a Jewish community in Salonica at all. From the outside, Jews could be identified by language and officially-imposed dress and colour codes. But with the exception of a small number of institutions which *were* organized for the common good – the redemption fund that ransomed Jewish slaves and captives, or the Talmud Torah, the community's combined school, shelter [for travellers and the poor], insane asylum and hospital – what the Sefardim created for themselves was a highly de-centralized, indeed almost anarchic system, in which Jewish life revolved around the individual synagogue, and Jews argued bitterly among themselves as to what constituted right practice. Fifteenth-century Spain had in fact been not a unitary country so much as a collection of disparate cities, regions and states united eventually under the authority of a single monarch; it was this keenly local and often rivalrous sense of place that was reproduced in Salonica.

From the outset, congregations guarded their independence jealously from each other. Synagogues multiplied – a fundamental principle of Jewish life was that everyone *had* to belong to one congregation or another – and within half a century there were more than twenty. Not all were of equal standing or size and many of the larger ones were constantly splitting apart thanks to the factionalism which seemed endemic to the community: before long, the Sicilians were divided into 'Old' and 'New' as were the 'Spanish Refugees'. But the congregation was, at least at first, a link to the past and a way of keeping those who spoke the same language together. No significant differences of liturgy or practice divided the worshippers in the New Lisbon or Evora synagogues; only the small Romaniote Etz Haim and the Ashkenazi congregations might have pleaded the preservation of their traditions. Nevertheless whether the differences were liturgical or purely cultural and linguistic, each group preserved its autonomy as passionately as if its very identity was at stake. 'In Salonica each and every man speaks in the tongue of his own people,' wrote the rabbi Yosef ibn Lev in the 1560s. 'When the refugees arrived after the expulsion, they designated *kehalim* [congregations] each according to his tongue . . . Every *kahal* supports its own poor, and each and every *kahal* is

singly recorded into the king's register. Every *kahal* is like a city unto itself.<sup>28</sup>

This then was what the city actually meant for most Jews – a *kahal* based in a squat and modestly decorated building, unobtrusive from the street and plainly adorned inside, from which they ran their charity funds, their burial societies and study groups. There they organized the allocation and collection of taxes and agreed salaries for their cantor, ritual slaughterers, the *mohel* [responsible for circumcisions] and rabbi. Since usually only the taxable members of the community voted on communal policies, the domination of the notables was a frequent bone of contention with the poorer members.

Not surprisingly, such a system was highly unstable. Indeed the Jews were well-known for their dissension and often bemoaned the lack of fellow-feeling. Acute tensions between rich and poor, extreme factionalism, and the lack of any central organization made wider agreement very difficult and delayed badly-needed social reforms: marriages took place with startling informality outside the supervision of rabbis, leading unfortunate girls astray; conversions – especially of slaves – to Judaism were perfunctory; moreover, any rabbi was free to issue ordinances and excommunications, and some on occasions evidently abused these rights. In 1565 it was finally agreed that an ordinance could be applied to the community as a whole only when it was signed by a majority of the rabbis in the city.<sup>29</sup>

Rabbis formed a privileged ruling caste free of communal or government taxes. There was, of course, an Ottoman court system, presided over by the *kadi*, an appointed official, who dispensed justice throughout the city. The *kadi* courts, though designed primarily for Muslims [who were treated on a different footing to non-Muslims], were considerate of Jewish religious demands: they never obliged a Jew to appear on the Jewish Sabbath, and sent Jewish witnesses to the rabbi when it was necessary to swear an oath. But the *kadi* did not try to monopolize the provision of justice, and it was the rabbinical courts which constituted the chief means through which Jews settled their differences. Because they were never given any formal legal recognition, these existed for centuries in a kind of legal limbo sanctioned by the force of custom. It was an extraordinary state of affairs and one which offers an important clue into the way the Ottoman

authorities ran their state: strictly regimented where taxes and production were concerned, it was in other areas – such as law – almost uninvolved and only sporadically prescriptive.<sup>30</sup>

Interventions by the Ottoman authorities in rabbinical affairs were rare. It is true that a *kadi* would be deeply displeased to learn that rabbis treated his court with disdain, or to be informed that Jews were being urged by their rabbis not to use them. But only rarely did he stir into action. In one case, a dispute between two contenders for the position of rabbi in the Aragon synagogue led to the *kadi* stepping in and making the appointment himself; but this rendered the victorious candidate so unpopular with his congregants, who were after all paying his salary, that he was forced soon after to move on. Another *kadi* dismissed a rabbi for instructing his congregants not to have recourse to the Ottoman courts. But in this case it was the congregants themselves who had shopped their rabbi by bringing his alleged remarks to the attention of the authorities so as to get rid of him, and in any case he was employed soon after by another congregation.<sup>31</sup>

In fact Jews did attend the Muslim courts, despite rabbinical injunctions against their doing so, usually to register commercial agreements, or divorce settlements in case of future legal disputes [for which the rabbinical courts were useless precisely because of their unofficial status]. Jewish workers ran to the courtroom to disclaim responsibility when a soldier's gun accidentally went off in their yard and killed someone: only a judgement from the Ottoman judge could help them escape paying a blood price for a death which they had not caused. Otherwise, the Ottoman authorities seemed happy for the rabbis to run the legal affairs of their community, cooperating with them and giving them support, for instance, in enforcing sentences, an area where the rabbis often felt their weakness. Without this backing, the rabbinical courts could not have functioned.<sup>32</sup>

For the main point about this system was the enormous power it gave to the rabbis themselves. Although they were appointed and paid by the lay notables who ran the synagogues, Ottoman practice in effect turned them into something approximating Jewish *kadis* – religiously-trained lawyers. But this is not really so surprising when one bears in mind how, over time, Salonica's Jews were beginning to adapt some Ottoman legal institutions to their own needs – for instance, the chari-

table foundation [*vakf*] and inheritable usufruct [*yediki*] – and starting to follow Muslim custom by growing their beards longer, wearing turbans, robes and outer cloaks, and making their women cover themselves more than in the past. In the law, as in other areas of life, the Jews of Sefarad were becoming Ottoman.<sup>33</sup>

The range of issues rabbis pronounced on was vast: tenancy disputes, matrimonial, probate and commercial law made up the bread and butter business, but there were also medical matters – what kinds of venereal disease justified a woman in divorcing her husband; or when abortion was permissible. The traumatic rupture of family life experienced by the refugees was reflected in various dilemmas: Could the son of a Jewish man and a black slave inherit his father's estate? What was the situation of women whose husbands had converted to Christianity and had remained in Spain? How many wives was a man allowed to take? To help decide, entire libraries were brought over from Spain and Italy, and merchants paid scribes and copyists to transcribe rare manuscripts and translate Hebrew texts into Ladino. In fact, rabbis felt at a disadvantage when forced to rule without the judgements of their predecessors to guide them. One, caught outside the city by a supplicant at a time when the plague was raging, apologizes in advance for offering an opinion without having his books at his elbow.<sup>34</sup>

Controlling power and resources unmatched by their peers elsewhere, Salonica's rabbis possessed a degree of training and a breadth of outlook which made the city a centre of learning throughout the sixteenth-century eastern Mediterranean. A centre of print culture too: Jewish books were printed there centuries before any appeared in Greek, Arabic or Ottoman Turkish where religious objections to seeing the sacred texts in print held things back. Equipped with the wide-ranging interests of the Spanish rabbinate, exploiting the familiarity with the holy sources that their availability in translation offered, these scholars simultaneously kept in touch with the latest intellectual fashions in western Europe and pursued extensive programmes of study that took them far beyond the confines of scriptural commentary. They applied Aristotle and Aquinas to the tasks of Talmudic exegesis, engaged with Latin literature, Italian humanism and Arab science, and were not surprisingly intensely proud of the range of their expertise.



Insulted by charges of parochialism, for instance, one young scholar challenged an older rabbi from Edirne to an intellectual duel:

Come out to the field and let us compete in our knowledge of the Bible, the Mishnah and the Talmud, Sifra and Sifre and all of rabbinic literature; in secular sciences – practical and theoretical fields of science; science of nature, and of the Divine; in logic – the *Organon*, in geometry, astronomy *Physics*; . . . *Generatio et Corruptio*, *De Anima* and *Meteora*, *De Animalia* and *Ethics*. In your profession as well, that of medicine, if in your eyes it is a science, we consider it an occupation of no special distinction and all the more in practical matters. Try me, for you have opened your mouth and belittled my dwelling-place, and you shall see that we know whatever can be known in the proper manner.<sup>35</sup>

All this was not love of learning for its own sake – though that there was too – so much as the fruits of the sophisticated curriculum required by the city's scholar-judges, and their response to the opportunities created by Ottoman policy.

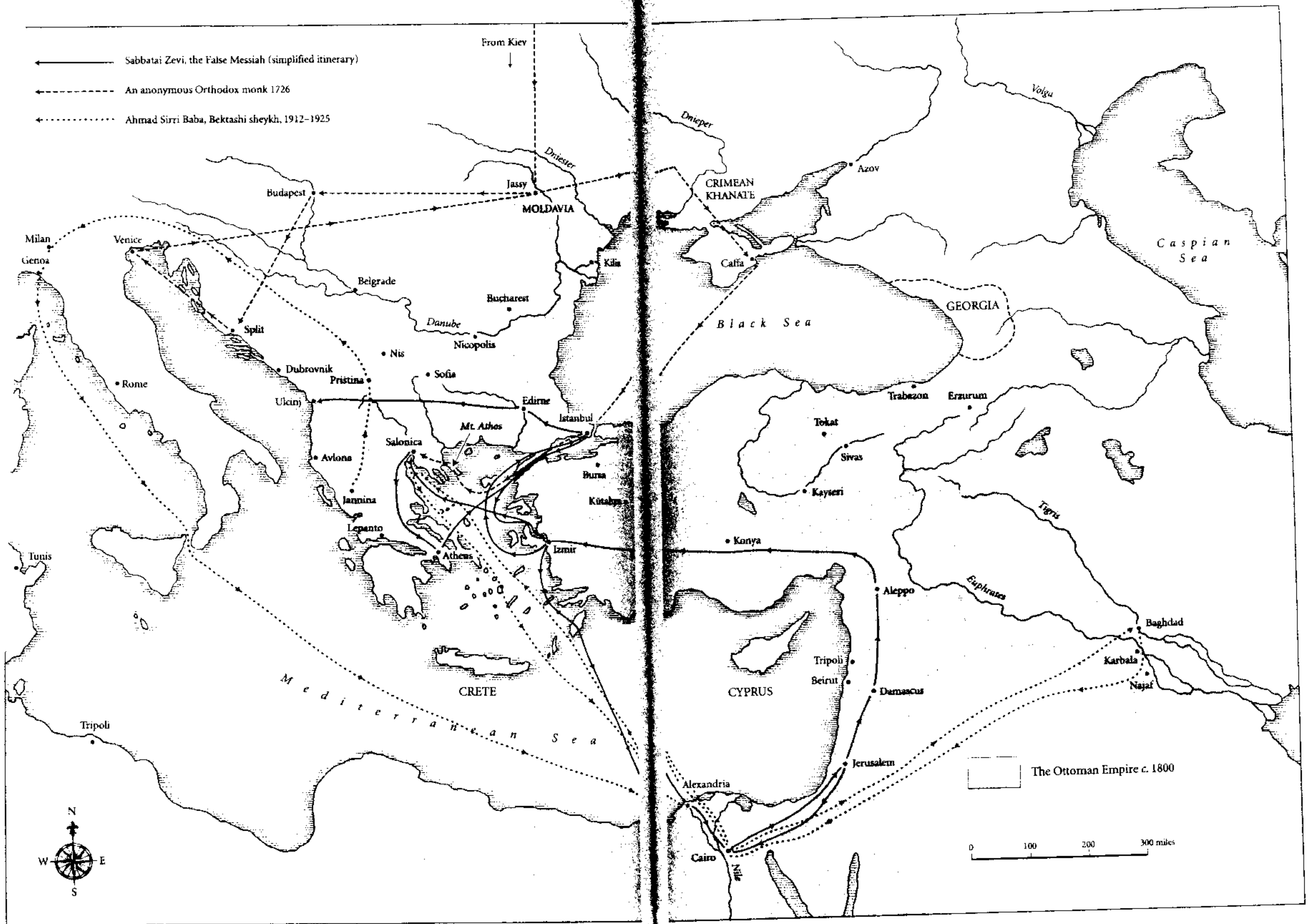
Nor did the rabbis, left to their own devices as they mostly were, ignore the fact that they lived in a state run on the basis of the *shari'a*: Jews might be represented by Muslims professionally if they lived in certain neighbourhoods or belonged to certain guilds; Jewish men [like Christians] converted to Islam for financial advantage or to marry – even on one occasion to get the help of the authorities in wresting another man's wife away from him; some Jewish women married Muslim men, or converted to facilitate a divorce when their husband was reluctant to grant it. All these situations made a knowledge of the *shari'a* desirable on the part of the rabbi-judge. But if a degree of familiarity with secular Ottoman law, the Qur'an and the *shari'a* was common practice in many Ottoman Jewish communities, a few Salonican scholars took their interest in Arab thought even further. 'I will only mention the name of Abuhamed and his book, because it is very widespread among us,' notes rabbi Isaac ibn Aroyo, referring to the philosopher al-Ghazali. Rabbi David ibn Shoshan, blind and wealthy, was said to have been not only 'a master of all wisdom, both Talmud and secular studies, astronomy and philosophy', but also 'very familiar

with books on the Moslem religion to such an extent that Moslem scholars and judges used to visit him to learn their own religious tomes from him.' When he moved to Istanbul, 'the greatest Arab scholars used to honour him there greatly because of his great wisdom.' One of his students, Jacob HaLevi, translated the Qur'an, a book which we know other Jewish scholars too kept in their libraries.<sup>36</sup>

Where Salonica was concerned, the Ottoman strategy proved highly effective, and by attracting a large number of Jews and Marranos, the sultans succeeded in revitalizing the city. By the mid-sixteenth century its population had grown to 30,000 and it generated the highest per capita yield of taxes in the Balkans and the largest revenue of any urban settlement to the west of Istanbul. It would not be going too far to say that this economic success provided much of the fiscal sinew for the sultan's military triumphs. The Jewish immigrants embraced the opportunity Bayezid II had given them and brought an entrepreneurial and productive energy which astonished the city's existing residents. The resulting Hispanization of its culture was long-lasting: although there were ups and downs in the state of the economy, and in standards of rabbinical learning, the cultural imprint of Judeo-Spanish was felt right up to the end of the empire. In 1892, on the four-hundredth anniversary of the edict of expulsion, Spanish journalists and politicians visited the Macedonian port. There they found a continuing link to their own past, an outpost of Iberian life which had been forgotten in the home-country for centuries. In the words of the Spanish senator Dr Angel Pulido Fernandez, they were *Spaniards without a Homeland*; but this was not quite true. Their homeland was Salonica itself.<sup>37</sup>



SALONICA, CITY OF GHOSTS



Salonica's Sacred Geographies.

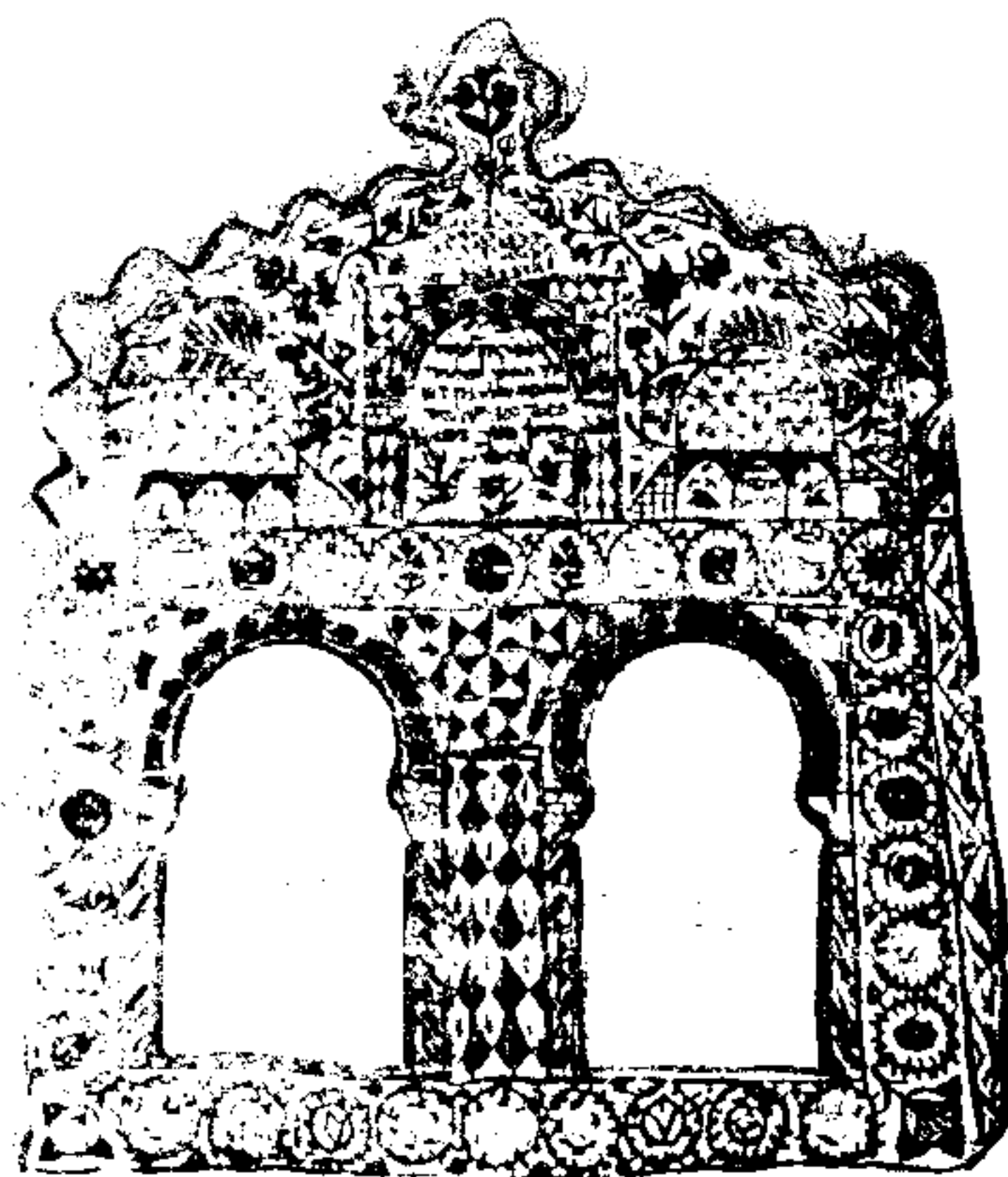
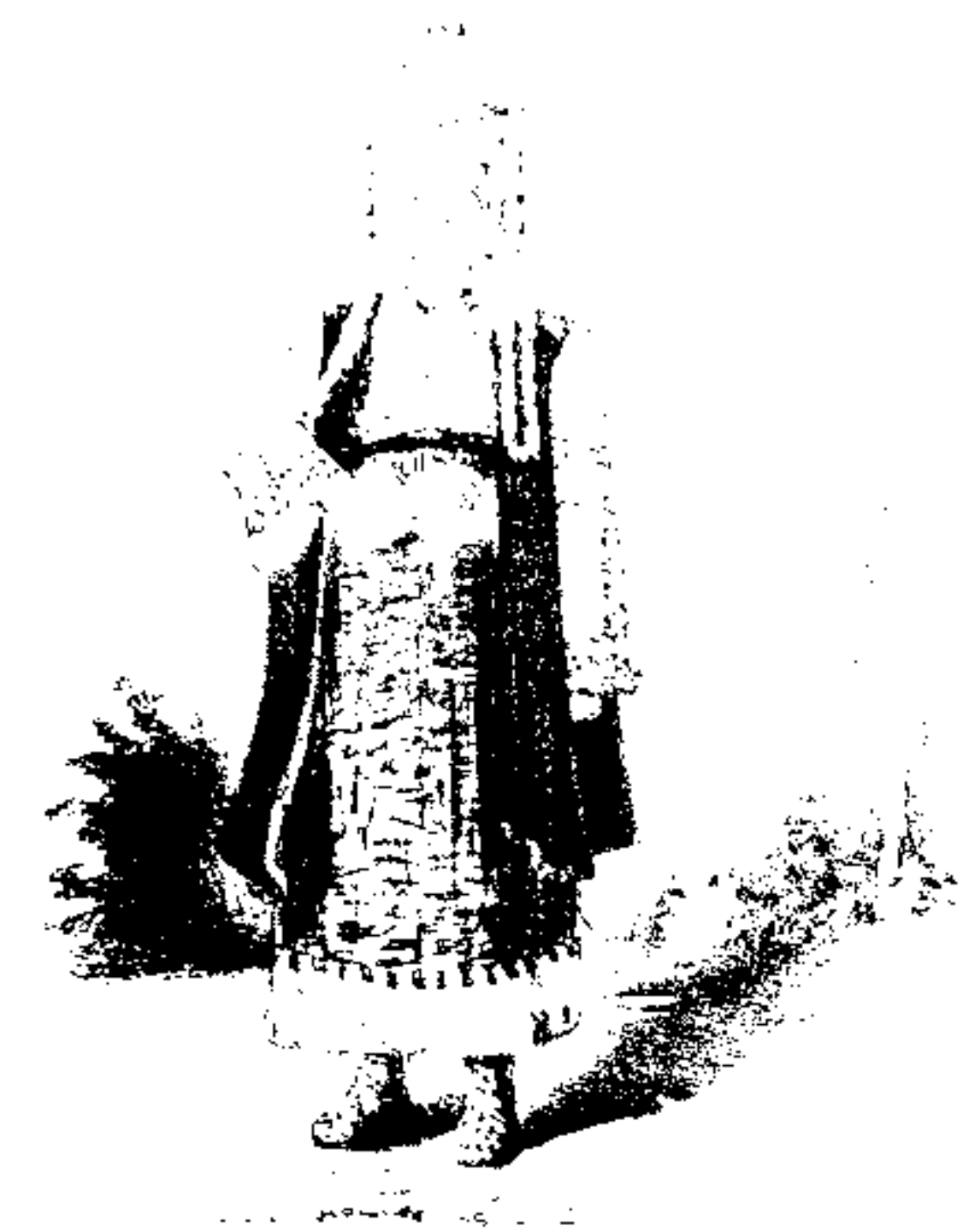
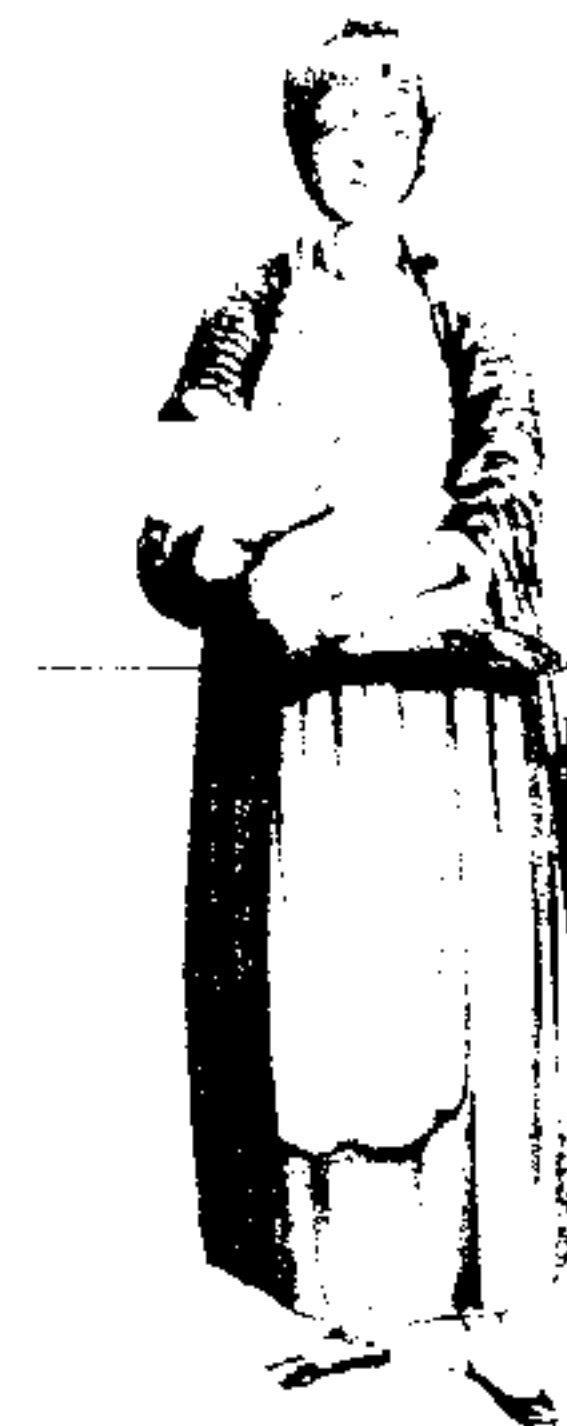


*left* Jewish singers and musicians, late nineteenth century.

*below left* Jewish marriage contract, 1790.

*opposite* Jewish wet-nurse (*left*) and Bulgarian peasant bride (*right*), c.1860.

*below* The picturesque city: the panorama from the fortress slopes, Edward Lear, 1848.



## The Ma'min

Hundreds more, however, did actually follow Zevi into Islam – some at the time, and others a few years later – and by doing so they gave rise to what was perhaps one of the most unusual religious communities in the Levant. To the Turks they were called *Dönmehs* [turn-coats], a derogatory term which conveyed the suspicion with which others always regarded them. But they called themselves simply *Ma'min* – the Faithful – a term commonly used by all Muslims.\* There were small groups of them elsewhere, but Zevi's last wife, Ayse, and her father, a respected rabbi called Joseph Filosofo, were from Salonica, and after Zevi's death, they returned there and helped to establish the new sect which he had created. By 1900, the city's ten-thousand-strong community of Judeo-Spanish-speaking Muslims was one of the most extraordinary and (for its size) influential elements in the confessional mosaic of the late Ottoman empire.

Schism was built into their history from the start. Not unlike the Sunni-Shia split in mainstream Islam, the internal divisions of the *Ma'min* stemmed from disagreement over the line of succession which followed their Prophet's death. In 1683 his widow Ayse hailed her brother Jacob – Zevi's brother-in-law – as the *Querido* [Beloved] who had received Zevi's spirit, and there was a second wave of conversions. Many of those who had converted at the same time as Zevi regarded this as impious nonsense: they were known as *Izmirlis*, after Zevi's birthplace. Jacob Querido himself helped Islamicize his followers and left Salonica to make the *haj* in the early 1690s but died during his return from Mecca. As the historian Nikos Stavroulakis points out, both the *Izmirlis* and the *Yakublar* [the followers of Jacob Querido] saw themselves as the faithful awaiting the return of the Messiah who had 'withdrawn' himself from the world; it was a stance which crossed the Judeo-Muslim divide and turned Sabbatai Zevi himself into something like a hidden Imam of the kind found in some Shia theology.<sup>19</sup> A few years later, a third group, drawn mostly from among the poor and artisanal classes, broke off from the *Izmirlis* to follow another

\* In Hebrew, the term is Maminim; in Turkish Mümin. Ma'min was a Salonica derivation.



and otherworldly figures with their whirling dances and strange ritual howlings. But dwelling on such eccentricities – abstracted from their theological context – turned their acolytes into figures of fun and overlooked their central role in bridging confessional divides during the Ottoman centuries.<sup>27</sup>

Many of these mystical orders borrowed heavily from the shamanistic traditions of central Asian nomad life and from the eastern Christianity they found around them. But by the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries they were powerful forces in their own right, supported by – and supportive of – sultans like Murad II, who founded a large Mevlevi monastery in Edirne. When Ottoman troops conquered the Balkans, they were accompanied and sometimes preceded by holy men who spread the ideas of the missionary-warrior Haci Bektash, the poet Rumi and Baha' al-Din Naqshband. Their highly unorthodox visions of the ways to God were shared in religious brotherhoods financed by pious benefactions. Some of their leaders – men like the fifteenth-century heretic *sheykh* Bedreddin – saw themselves as the Mahdi, revealing the secret of divine unity across faiths, and legalizing what the *shari'a* had previously forbidden. From the early sixteenth century, as the Ottoman state, and its clerical class, the *ulema*, conquered the Arab lands and became more conscious of the responsibility of the caliphate and the dangers of Persian heterodoxy, these unorthodox and sometimes heretical movements came under attack. In the mid-seventeenth century, Vani Effendi, the puritanical court preacher who converted Sabbatai Zevi, was outraged by the permissive attitude of some of them to stimulants such as coffee, alcohol and opium, as well as by their worship of saints and their pantheist tendencies. Murad IV took a dim view of such practices, and at least one tobacco-smoking *mufti* of Salonica got in trouble as a result. In practice, however, many leading statesmen and clergymen were also 'brothers' of one group or another, and generally they prospered.<sup>28</sup>

Most major orders had their representatives in a place as important as Salonica where there were more than twenty shrines and monasteries, guarding all the city's gates and approaches. We know of the existence of the Halvetiye, who expanded into the Balkans in the sixteenth century and gave the city several of its *muftis*. Even during the First World War, the Rifa'i were still attracting tourists to their

ceremonies: Alicia Little watched them jumping and howling, and was struck by their generous hospitality and their courtesy to guests. One nineteenth-century Albanian merchant, who made his fortune in Egypt, allowed his villa in the new suburb along the seashore to be used as a Melami *tekke*; among its adepts were the head of the Military School, an army colonel, a local book-dealer and a Czech political refugee who had converted to Islam.<sup>29</sup>

There were *tekkes* of the Nakshbandis, the Sa'dis and many others. The magnificent gardens and cypresses of the Mevlevi monastery, situated strategically next to a reservoir which stored much of the city's drinking water, attracted many of the city's notable families and appear to have been popular with wealthy *Ma'min* as well. The Mevlevi were extremely well-funded, and controlled access to the tomb of Ayios Dimitrios and many other holy places in the city. They retained close ties with local Christians and were reportedly 'always to be found in company with the Greek [monks].' One British diplomat at the end of the nineteenth century recounts a long conversation with a senior Mevlevi *sheykh*, a man whose 'shaggy yellow beard and golden spectacles made him look more like a German professor than a dancing dervish'. Together, in the *sheykh's* office, the two men drank raki, discussed photography – local prejudices hindered him using his Kodak, the *sheykh* complained – and talked about the impact a new translation of the central Mevlevi text, the *Mesnevi*, had made in London. 'He did not care about the introduction of Mohammedanism into England,' noted the British diplomat, 'but he had hoped that people might have seen that the mystic principles enunciated in the *Mesnevi* were compatible with all religions and could be grafted on Christianity as well as on Islam.'<sup>30</sup>

Of all the Sufi orders in the Balkans, perhaps the most successful and influential were the Bektashi. They had monastic foundations everywhere and they were very closely associated with the janissary corps, the militia of forcibly converted Christian boys which was the spearhead of the Ottoman army. Often they took over existing holy places, saints' tombs and Christian churches, a practice which had started in Anatolia and continued with the Ottoman advance into Europe. In the early twentieth century, the brilliant young British scholar Hasluck charted the dozens of Bektashi foundations which still

charismatic leader, the youthful Barouch Russo [known to his followers as Osman Baba], who claimed to be not merely the vessel for Zevi's spirit but his very reincarnation.<sup>20</sup>

Although they differed on doctrinal matters, the three factions had features in common. Following the advice of Zevi himself, whose eighteen commandments forbade any form of proselytism, they preserved an extreme discretion as a precaution against the suspicions and accusations which they encountered from both Turks and Jews. Even their prayers were suffused with mystical allusions to protect their inner meanings from being deciphered by outsiders.<sup>21</sup>

Gradually they developed a kind of mystical Islam with a Judaic component not found in mainstream Muslim life. While they attended mosque and sometimes made the *haj*, they initially preserved Judeo-Spanish for use within the home, something which lasted longest among Russo's followers. They celebrated Ramadan, and ate the traditional sweets on the 10th of *Moharrem*, to mark the deaths of Hasan and Huseyn. Like their cooking, the eighteen commandments which they attributed to Zevi showed clearly the influence of both Muslim and Talmudic practice. [Was it coincidence that eighteen was also a number of special significance to the Mevlevi order?] They prayed to their Messiah, 'our King, our Redeemer' in 'the name of God, the God of Israel', but followed many of the patterns of Muslim prayer. They increasingly followed Muslim custom in circumcizing their males just before puberty, and read the Qur'an, but referred to their festivals using the Jewish calendar. Some hired rabbis to teach the Torah to their children. Although the common suspicion throughout the city – certainly well into the nineteenth century – was that they were really Jews (if of a highly unreliable kind), in fact they were evolving over time into a distinctive heterodox Muslim sect, much influenced by the Sufi orders.

The Ottoman authorities clearly regarded their heterodoxy with some suspicion and as late as 1905 treated a case of a *Ma'min* girl who had fallen in love with her tutor, Hadji Feyzullah Effendi, as a question of conversion. Yet with their usual indifference to inner belief, they left them alone. A pasha who proposed to put them all to death was, according to local myth, removed by God before he could realize his plan. In 1859, at a time when the Ottoman authorities were starting

to worry more about religious orthodoxy, a governor of the city carried out an enquiry which concluded they posed no threat to public order. All he did was to prevent rabbis from instructing them any longer. A later investigation confirmed their prosperity and honesty and after 1875 such official monitoring lapsed. *Ma'min* spearheaded the expansion of Muslim – including women's – schooling in the city, and were prominent in its commercial and intellectual life. Merchant dynasties like the fez-makers, the Kapandjis, accumulated huge fortunes, built villas in the European style by the sea and entered the municipal administration. Others were in humbler trades – barbers, copper-smiths, town-criers and butchers.<sup>22</sup>

Gradually – as with the Marranos of Portugal, from whom many were descended – their connection with their ancestral religion faded. High-class *Ma'min* married into mainstream Muslim society, though most resided in central quarters, between the Muslim neighbourhoods of the Upper Town and the Jewish quarters below, streets where often the two religions lived side by side. 'They will be converted purely and simply into Muslims', predicted one scholar in 1897. But like many of Salonica's Muslims at this time, the *Ma'min* also embraced European learning, and identified themselves with secular knowledge, political radicalism and freemasonry. By a strange twist of fate it was thus the Muslim followers of a Jewish messiah who helped turn late nineteenth-century Salonica into the most liberal, progressive and revolutionary city in the empire.

The juxtaposition of old and new outlooks in a fin-de-siècle *Ma'min* household is vividly evoked in the memoirs of Ahmed Emin Yalman. His father, Osman Tewfik Bey, was a civil servant and a teacher of calligraphy. Living in the house with him and his parents were his uncle and aunt, his seven siblings, two orphaned cousins and at least five servants. 'The strife between the old and the new was ever present in our house,' he recalls. His uncle was of the old school: a devout man, he prayed five times a day, abhorred alcohol, and disliked travel or innovation. For some reason, he refused to wear white shirts; 'a coloured shirt with attached collar was, for him, the extreme limit of westernization in dress to which he felt that one could go without falling into conflict with religion . . . He objected to the theatre, music, drinking, card playing, and photography – all new inventions which



he considered part of Satan's world.' Yalman's father, on the other hand – Osman Tewfik Bey – was 'a progressive, perhaps even a revolutionary', who wore 'the highest possible white collars', beautiful cravats and stylish shoes in the latest fashion, loved poetry, theatre and anything that was new, taking his children on long trips and photographing them with enthusiasm. He adorned his rooms with their pictures and prayed but rarely.<sup>23</sup>

Esin Eden's memoir of the following generation shows Europeanization taken even further. Hers was a well-to-do family of tobacco merchants which combined a strong consciousness of its Jewish ancestry with pride in its contemporary achievements as part of a special Muslim community, umbilically linked to Salonica itself. The women were all highly educated – one was even a teacher at the famous new Terakki lycée – sociable, energetic and articulate. They smoked lemon-scented cigarettes in the garden of their modern villa by the sea, played cards endlessly, and kept their eyes on the latest European fashions. Their servants were Greek, their furnishings French and German, and their cuisine a mix of 'traditionally high Ottoman cuisine as well as traditional Sephardic cooking', though with no concern for the dietary laws of Judaism.<sup>24</sup>

When the Young Turk revolt broke out in Salonica in 1908, *Ma'min* economics professors, newspaper men, businessmen and lawyers were among the leading activists and there were three *Ma'min* ministers in the first Young Turk government. Indeed conspiracy theorists saw the *Ma'min* everywhere and assumed any Muslim from Salonica must be one. Today some people even argue that Mustafa Kemal Atatürk must have been a *Ma'min* (there is no evidence for this), and see the destruction of the Ottoman empire and the creation of the secular republic of Turkey as their handiwork – the final revenge, as it were, of Sabbatai Zevi, and the unexpected fulfilment of his dreams. In fact, many of the *Ma'min* themselves had mixed feelings at what was happening in nationalist Turkey: some were Kemalists, others opposed him. In 1923, however, they were all counted as Muslims in the compulsory exchange of populations and packed off to Istanbul, where a small but distinguished community of businessmen, newspaper magnates, industrialists and diplomats has since flourished. As the writer John Freely tells us, their cemetery, in the Valley of the Nightingales above Üsküdar,

on the Asian side of the Bosphorus, is still known as the *Selanikliler Mezarligi* – the Cemetery of Those from Salonica.<sup>25</sup>

Meanwhile, in the city which nurtured them for many years in its curiously unconcerned atmosphere, little trace of their presence now remains. Their old quarters were destroyed in the 1917 fire, or in the rebuilding which followed; their cemetery, which lay next to the large Sephardic necropolis outside the walls, became a football field. Today their chief monument is the magnificent fin-de-siècle *Yeni Djami*, tucked away in a postwar suburb on the way to the airport. Used as an annexe to the Archaeological Museum, its leafy precinct is stacked with ancient grave stelai and mausoleums, and its airy light interior is opened occasionally for exhibitions. Built in 1902 by the local architect Vitaliano Poselli, it is surely one of the most eclectic and unusual mosques in the world, a domed neo-Renaissance villa, with windows framed in the style of late Habsburg Orientalism and pillars which flank the entrance supporting a solid horse-shoe arch straight out of Moorish Spain. Complete with sundial [with Ottoman instructions on how to set your watch] and clocktower, the *Yeni Djami* sums up the extraordinary blending of influences – Islamic and European, Art Nouveau meets a neo-Baroque Alhambra, with a discreet hint of the ancestral faith in the star of David patterns cut into the upper-floor balconies – which made up the *Ma'mins'* world.<sup>26</sup>

### *The Sufi Orders*

The city, delicately poised in its confessional balance of power – ruled by Muslims, dominated by Jews, in an overwhelmingly Christian hinterland – lent itself to an atmosphere of overlapping devotion. With time it became covered in a dense grid of holy places – fountains, tombs, cemeteries, shrines and monasteries – frequented by members of all faiths in search of divine intercession. One of the most important institutions in the creation of this sanctified world were the heterodox Islamic orders – known to scholars as Sufis and to the public, inaccurately, as dervishes – who played such a pivotal role in consolidating Ottoman rule in the Balkans. Western travellers to the empire never, if they could help it, lost the opportunity to describe these mysterious



existed at the time of the Balkan Wars as far north as Budapest, most of which (outside Albania, which is even today an important centre) have long since disappeared. In such places, people came, lit candles and stuck rags in nearby trees – a common way of soliciting saintly assistance. In Macedonia, the Evrenos family supported the order; in Salonica itself, it owned several modestly-appointed *tekkes*.<sup>31</sup>

The Bektashi themselves had a close connection with the worship of Christ. Their use of bread and wine in their rituals, their stress on the twelve Imams [akin to the twelve apostles], and many other features of their rites all bore a close resemblance to Christian practice. In southern Albania, according to Hasluck, legend claimed that Haji Bektash was himself from a Christian family – he had converted to Islam before coming to recognize the superiority of his original faith, whereupon he invented Bektashism as a bridge between the two. The lack of any basis in fact for the story should not disguise its symbolic truth. As one close observer of the movement explained: 'It is their doctrine to be liberal towards all professions and religions, and to consider all men as equal in the eyes of God.'<sup>32</sup>

### *The Powers of the City*

Beneath the confessional divides and helped by such creeds, there existed a kind of submerged popular religion, defined by common belief in the location and timing of divine power. Take the calendar itself: whether under their Christian or Muslim titles, St George's Day in the spring and St Dimitrios's Day in the winter marked key points in the year for business and legal arrangements affecting the entire society, the dates for instance when residential leases expired, shepherds moved between lowland and upland pastures, and bread prices were set by the local authorities.

Salonica's Casimiye Mosque, which had formerly been St Dimitrios's church, saw the cult of the city's patron saint continuing under Muslim auspices. Casim himself was an example – one of many in the Balkans – of those holy figures who were Islamicized versions of Christian saints. Dimitrios's tomb was kept open for pilgrims of both faiths by the Mevlevi officials who looked after the mosque. Near the very

end of the empire, a French traveller caught the final moments of this arrangement and described how it worked. He was ushered into a dark chapel by the *hodja*, together with two Greeks who had come for divine help. This conversation followed:

'Your name?' asked the Turk . . . 'Georgios', replied the Greek, and the Turk, repeating 'Georgios', held the knot in the flame, then commented to the Greek with an air of satisfaction that the knot had not burned. A second time. 'The name of your father and your mother?' 'Nikolaos my father, Calliope my mother.' 'And your children?' And when he had thus made three knots carefully, he put the sacred cord in a small packet which he dipped in the oil of the lamp, added a few bits of soil from the tomb, wrapped it all up and handed it to the Greek who seemed entirely content. Then he explained: 'If you are ill, or your father, your mother, your children, put the knot on the suffering part and you will be cured.' After which, turning to me, the Turk asked 'And you?' I shook my head. The Greek was amazed and believed I had not understood and explained it all to me. When I continued to refuse he seemed regretful. 'Einai kalon' [It is good] he told me sympathetically . . . and the two Greeks, together with the Muslim sacristan, left the mosque happily.<sup>33</sup>

These rituals were not especially unusual, though the setting was. 'If your heart is perplexed with sorrow,' the Prophet Mohammed is said to have advised, 'go seek consolation at the graves of holy men.' Muslims – especially women – made the *ziyaret* at times of domestic need, and the Arabic term was taken over by Salonica's Jews, who spoke of going on a *ziyara* to pray at the tomb of rabbis or deceased relatives. Christian women used both the Jewish cemetery and Muslim mausoleums when collecting earth from freshly dug graves to use against evil spirits. Mousa Baba, Meydan-Sultan Baba and Gul Baba gathered pilgrims to their tombs, even after the twentieth-century exodus of the city's Turks. In the 1930s, Christian women from nearby neighbourhoods were still lighting candles at the tomb of Mousa Baba and asking his help [against malaria], to the surprise of some Greek commentators who could not understand how they could do this 'in a city where hundreds of martyrs

and holy saints were tortured and martyred in the name of Christ'. The answer was that for many of those who came to seek his help, Mousa Baba was not really a Muslim holy man at all. Rather he was Saint George himself, who had metamorphosed into a Turk with supernatural powers: 'I heard this when we refugees first came here from Thrace, from a Turkish woman, who told me she had heard it from elderly Turkish women who had explained it to her.' Why had Saint George assumed this disguise? For the same reason that Sabbatai Zevi had converted, according to his followers: to make the unbelievers believe.<sup>34</sup>

Power to keep the dead at rest was one of the chief attributes of religious authority, the reverse side of the power to curse or excommunicate. Both powers formed a key weapon in the armoury of the city's spiritual leaders but also transcended the bounds of religious community. According to a local story an archbishop converted to Islam and became a leading *mollah*. While he was still a Christian he had, in a moment of anger, cursed one of his congregation: 'May the earth refuse to receive you!' The man died and after three years passed his body was exhumed. Of course it was found in pristine condition 'just as if he had been buried the day before' – the power of the excommunication had evidently endured even though the cleric himself had since converted, and only he could revoke it, even though he was now a Muslim: 'Having obtained the Pasha's permission, he repaired to the open tomb, knelt beside it, lifted his hands and prayed for a few minutes. He had hardly risen to his feet when, wondrous to relate, the flesh of the corpse crumbled away from the bones and the skeleton remained bare and clean as it had never known pollution.' Christian, Muslim or Jew, one looked wherever it was necessary to make the spell work and bring peace to the living and the dead.<sup>35</sup>

For the city was peopled by spirits – evil as well as good. 'There are invisible influences everywhere in Turkey', writes Fanny Blunt, a long-time resident of Salonica, in her classic study of Ottoman beliefs and customs – vampires in cemeteries, spirits guarding treasures buried in haunted houses, djinns in abandoned *konaks*, and enticing white-clad *peris* who gathered anywhere near running water. Fountains were dangerous, especially at certain times of the year, and antiquities like

the Arch of Galerius were well known to possess evil powers, if approached from the wrong angle. Church leaders tried to draw doctrinal distinctions between acceptable and unacceptable forms of the supernatural, but Salonica's inhabitants did not bother. If the rabbi or bishop could not help them, they appealed to witches, wise men or healers. The religious authorities never felt seriously threatened by such practices, and it is a striking difference with Christian Europe that there were never witchcraft trials in the Ottoman domains. Devils, demons and evil spirits – euphemistically termed 'those from below', or 'those without number', or more placatingly, 'the best of us' – were a fact of life.<sup>36</sup>

'*De ozo ke lo guadre el Dio* – May God guard him from the Eye', elderly Jewish ladies muttered. Was there anyone in the city who did not fear being jinxed by the evil eye – *to mati* for the Greeks, the *fena göz* for the Turks – and sought remedies against it? All avoided excessive compliments and feared those who paid them, cursing them under their breath. Moises Bourlas tells us in his wonderful memoirs how his mother was sitting out in the sun one fine Saturday with her neighbours, gossiping and chewing pumpkin seeds when some gypsy fortune-tellers passed them and shouted: 'Fine for you, ladies, sitting in the sun and eating pumpkin seeds!' To which his mother instantly and prudently replied – *sotto voce* in Judeo-Spanish, so that they could not understand: '*Tu ozo en mi kulo*' [Your eye in my arse].<sup>37</sup>

Fanny Blunt lists accepted remedies: 'garlic, cheriot, wild thyme, boar's tusks, hares' heads, terebinth, alum, blue glass, turquoise, pearls, the bloodstone, carnelian, eggs [principally those of the ostrich], a gland extracted from the neck of the ass, written amulets and a thousand other objects.' She tried out the ass gland on her husband, the British consul, when he was ill, and reported it a success. For keeping babies in good health, experts recommended old gold coins, a cock's spur or silver phylacteries containing cotton wool from the inauguration of a new church [for Christians], bits of paper with the Star of David drawn on them [Jews], or the pentagram [Muslims]. Holy water helped Christians, Bulgarians were fond of salt; others used the heads of small salted fish mixed in water, while everyone believed in the power of spitting in the face of a pretty child.

Spells required counter-spells. Mendicant dervishes and gypsy



women were believed to know secret remedies, especially for afflicted animals. *Hodjas* provided pest control in the shape of small squares of paper with holy inscriptions that were nailed to the wall of afflicted rooms and Jews wore amulets containing verses from the Torah to ward off the 'spirits of the air' which caused depression or fever. Blunt describes some striking cases of cross-faith activity: a Turkish woman snatching hairs from the beard of a Jewish pedlar as a remedy for fever; Muslim children having prayers read over them in church; Christian children similarly blessed by Muslim *hodjas*, who would blow or spit on them, or twist a piece of cotton thread around their wrist to stop their fever. Doctors were not much esteemed; the reputation of *la indulcadera* – the healer – stood much higher. Against the fear of infertility, ill health, envy or bad luck, the barriers between faiths quickly crumbled.

### *Orthodoxy: Tax-Collectors and Martyrs*

But we should not paint too rosy a picture of the city's religious possibilities under Ottoman rule. Life was clearly better for some than for others. Muslims were in the ascendant, and the assertive Sefardic Jews, who dominated numerically, found their rule welcoming and were duly grateful. Mosques and synagogues proliferated as a result of official encouragement, and even the extraordinary episode of Sabbatai Zevi can be seen as illustrating the Ottoman state's flexibility with regard to the Jews, who lived in Salonica, as a Jesuit priest noted in 1734, with 'more liberty and privileges than anywhere else'.<sup>38</sup>

For the city's Christians, on the other hand, Ottoman rule was very much harder to accept. The Byzantine scholar Ioannis Evgenikos lamented the capture of 'the most beautiful and God-fearing city of the Romans', and a sense of loss continued to flow beneath the surface of Orthodox life. After all, not even Saint Dimitrios, its guardian, had saved it from 'enslavement'. Catholic visitors to the Greek lands often saw their plight as a punishment for their sins. So did many Orthodox believers. An anonymous seventeenth-century author pleaded in tones of desperation with the city's saint:

O great martyr of the Lord Christ, Dimitrios, where are now the miracles which you once performed daily in your own country? Why do you not help us? Why do you not reappear to us? Why, St Dimitrios, do you fail us and abandon us completely? Can you not see the multitude of hardships, temptations and debts that crowd upon us? Can you not see our shame and disgrace as our enemies trample upon us, the impious jeer at us, the Saracens mock us, and everybody laughs at us?<sup>39</sup>

The small size of the surviving Orthodox population, its lack of wealth, and the constant erosion of its power left none in any doubt of its plight. The Byzantine scholars who had made its intellectual life so vibrant fled abroad – Theodoros Gazis to Italy, Andronikos Kallistos ending up in London – where they helped hand down classical Greek texts to European humanists. Within the city, while rabbinical scholarship flourished, the flame of Christian learning flickered tenuously through the eighteenth century. Such intellectual and spiritual discussions as were taking place within the empire were going on in the monasteries of Mount Athos itself, in the capital, or in the Danubian Principalities to the north. Salonica – the 'mother of Orthodoxy' – became a backwater. Bright local Christian boys usually ended up being schooled elsewhere. It is scarcely a coincidence that one of the best-known works to have been composed by a sixteenth-century scholar from the city, the cleric Damaskinos Stouditis (1500–1580), was a collection of religious texts put into simple language for the use of unlearned priests. Stouditis himself had been educated in Istanbul.<sup>40</sup>

First among the temptations that afflicted its Christians, of course, was Islam itself. During the prosperous sixteenth century, in particular, many poor young villagers flocked into the city from the mountains, and these newcomers soon formed a very large part of the local Christian population. Some of them, finding themselves adrift and vulnerable to the dangers facing those far from home, converted for the sake of greater security. Other converts were Christian boys apprenticed to Muslim craftsmen, or girls who had entered Muslim households as domestic servants: in both cases the economic power of the employers paved the way to conversion. But this was a dramatic



step at the best of times and one which laid the individual open to unrestrained criticism from his relatives and community. Relatively few Christians (or Jews) with families in Salonica appear to have abandoned their faith. To judge from the mid-eighteenth century, which is when the first data became available, the overall numbers of converts were not great – perhaps ten cases a year in the city and its hinterland.<sup>41</sup>

Even so, Orthodox clerics were always deeply anxious about this. A monk called Nikanor (1491–1549) travelled in the villages to the west of the city, urging the inhabitants to stay true to Christ: ‘by his sweet precepts and the shining example of his virtuous conduct,’ we are told by his hagiographer, ‘he was able to hold many in Christ’s faith’ before retiring to the solitude of an inaccessible cave high above the Aliakmon river. Nikanor also built a monastery nearby, and in his will urged the monks to refrain from begging for alms without permission, not to mix with those of ‘another faith’ and to avoid seeking justice in Turkish courts, stipulations which suggest the extent to which monks and other pious Christians were usually interacting with the Ottoman authorities in one way or another.<sup>42</sup>

In fact, the very manner in which the Church’s ecclesiastical hierarchy was brought within the Ottoman administrative system added to Christian woes. Patriarchs paid an annual tribute to the Porte and acted as tax-collectors from the Christians. When one sixteenth-century Patriarch toured the Balkans, Suleyman the Magnificent ordered officials to summon the metropolitans, bishops and other clerics to help him collect ‘in full the back payments from the past years and the present year in the amounts which will be established by your examination.’ In the early eighteenth century, the city’s *kadi* was told to help when it turned out that ‘Ignatius, the metropolitan of Salonica, owes two years’ taxes and resists fulfilling his obligations towards the Patriarchate.’ Fiscal and religious power were separated in both the Muslim and the Jewish communities [where rabbis were salaried employees of their congregations]; for the Orthodox they overlapped, damaging the clergy’s relations with their flock.<sup>43</sup>

The buying and selling of ecclesiastical favours and offices did not help either: in the seventeenth century alone, there were sixty-one changes of Patriarch. Most Metropolitans of Salonica had run up debts

to get into office, and one of the earliest records to survive in the city’s archives is a 1695 Ottoman decree from the Porte on behalf of a Christian money-lender ordering Archbishop Methodios to pay what he owed him. The problem travelled down the hierarchy. One priest demanded to be paid before he would read the sacrament to a dying man; others were accused of taking payment to hear confession. The more their seniors took from them, the more the priests required.<sup>44</sup>

Money also explained the endless tussles between Salonica’s religious leaders and the lay council of Christian notables, the *archons*, which supposedly ran the non-religious side of community affairs. When the *archons* demanded control over management of the city’s charitable Christian foundations, the Patriarchate angrily told them ‘not to involve themselves in priestly affairs.’ ‘There is order in everything,’ they were rebuked, ‘and all things in the world, heavenly and mundane, royal and ecclesiastical and civil, right down to the smallest and least important, have their order before God and before men, according to which they are governed and stand in their place.’ The message was simple: there was no way that ‘lay people’, whatever their motivations, would be allowed to ‘become rebels and controllers of church affairs.’ Ironically, the main defence against the rapacity of the clergy were the Ottoman authorities themselves. In 1697 Salonica’s Christians complained directly to the Porte about the demands of their bishops, and the *kadi* was instructed to look into the matter. Twenty years later, their anger was so great that they even got the local Ottoman officials to throw one archbishop in jail until he could be removed.<sup>45</sup>

Three hundred years after the conquest, the city was still suffering from a dearth of priests, and lay figures regularly performed ecclesiastical duties. ‘Not many years ago,’ reports the Jesuit Father Souciet in 1734, ‘a lay figure married with children not only had charge of the revenues of the archbishop but acted even as a kind of vicar, giving the priests permission to celebrate and confess, and preventing them as and when he saw fit. I am not even sure he did not claim to be able to carry out excommunications.’ The underlying problem was economic, for until the commercial boom of the mid-eighteenth century, the Christians of the city were, on the whole, of modest means. Only a few descendants of the great Byzantine families still lived there; most were artisans, shopkeepers, sailors or traders.<sup>46</sup>

For them, faith was not really a matter of theology. Poorly educated, few could bridge the gap between the complex formal Greek of the church and the language of daily life, which for many Orthodox Christians was often not Greek at all, but Slavic or Vlach. 'The priests and even the pastors – the metropolitans, archbishops and bishops – are extremely simple and unlearned men, who do not know the Hellenic language and have no explanations in the vulgar tongue, so that they don't know and don't understand anything they read,' noted a visiting Ukrainian notable. 'The people don't know anything at all except the sign of the cross [and this not everyone]. When we asked them about the Our Father, they would answer that "this is the priest's business, not ours."<sup>47</sup> Sometimes this uncertainty could be taken surprisingly far, as when a young Greek village priest asked whether Jesus was really God [though perhaps the questioner had been influenced by the scorn with which both Muslims and Jews treated such a claim].<sup>48</sup>

On the other hand, Salonica's Christians were deeply attached to their traditional customs – especially fasting, about which they were extremely conscientious – and to the observance of local festivals, which were celebrated vigorously in the city and the neighbouring countryside, combining spiritual and commercial satisfaction. On Saint Dimitrios's day a majestic service was attended by all the suffragan bishops. There was also a rapidly developing cult of Gregory Palamas, the fourteenth-century archbishop of the city, whose mystical and political views had made him a highly controversial figure in his lifetime. To the surprise of visiting Christians, who knew him for his much-disputed theology, his memory was revered as that of a saint and his mummified body, laid out on a bier, attracted increasing numbers of worshippers.<sup>49</sup>

Orthodox Christians were constantly reminded that theirs was a second-class faith: they were not allowed to ring church bells or even beat wooden clappers to bring the faithful to prayer. Yet so far as the Ottomans were concerned, they were a people of the Book and one distinctly superior to the Catholic Franks. During the long wars with both Venice and Austria, Catholic missionaries were accused of leading the local Orthodox astray, and introducing them to 'polytheism, cunning and craftiness'. When an early eighteenth-century visitor discussed Christianity with one of Salonica's *mollahs*, the latter told him 'that

the three faiths, the Papist, the Lutheran, and the Calvinist are the worst, while the Greek is better than all.' According to him, many of the town's Muslim scholars studied the Gospels in Arabic and valued the Greek Church above the rest because 'the Greeks don't depart from evangelical teachings and from church traditions and . . . they don't introduce anything new into their religion or remove anything.' The very conservatism denounced by visiting Jesuits was thus understood and appreciated by Muslims.<sup>50</sup>

This sympathy, however, had its limits. The primacy of the ruling faith was axiomatic, and any public assertion of the superiority of Christianity over Islam was punished with severity. But even here Ottoman and Orthodox interests fitted strangely together, since the church, itself founded through an act of martyrdom, regarded the public suffering of new martyrs as a way of demonstrating the tenacity of Christian belief. Priests or monks instructed would-be candidates who then presented themselves to the authorities, or carried out acts designed to lead to their arrest, dragging crosses through the streets, or loudly insulting Mohammed. Seeing apostates – in particular – return to the fold was, wrote one priest, 'as if one were to see spring flowers and roses bloom in the heart of winter.'<sup>51</sup>

Those who died for their faith were the popular voice of spiritual protest – the senior church hierarchy, by contrast, were servants of the sultan – and their deeds were carefully recorded by monks at the time. Even today modern editions of these 'witnesses for Christ' circulate within the Orthodox world, with stories which are well worth reading for their unexpected insights into Ottoman religious culture. Like most Christians in Salonica, the city's 'neo-martyrs' were humble men [and a few women] – a painter, a coppersmith, a fisherman, gardener, tailor, baker and a servant to take just a few of them. Michael, for instance, who was executed in 1547, was one of the many Christian immigrants from the mountains; a baker, he had got into trouble after chatting about religion with a Muslim boy who came to buy bread. Kyrill's father died young and he was brought up by his uncle, who had converted to Islam. Alexandros, who also converted, had wandered the Arab world as a dervish, and made the pilgrimage to Mecca, before returning to his ancestral faith, and testifying – in the words that distinguished Christians from Muslims – that 'one is three and three



are one'. Although many of these martyrs had converted to Islam before seeing the error of their ways, what had induced their initial apostasy did not matter to the church – it might have been nothing more noble than the desire to pay lower taxes or to escape punishment for earlier crimes. All their sins were wiped out by their intention to repent and to testify to the superiority of the true faith.

Nor were all martyrs apostates. Some sought to emulate the martyrs of the early Church, or wanted to blot out the stain on the family name caused by the conversion of relatives. Aquilina's mother had remained a Christian when her father had converted to Islam and brought shame on them. Nicetas was outraged when relatives became Muslims and he decided on martyrdom as a way of upholding the family honour. Pilgrimage to the Holy Land inspired one or two to follow in the footsteps of The Lord. In 1527 the noble Macarios, a monk on Mount Athos, became 'completely consumed with the heartfelt desire to finish his life with a martyric death.' He went into the streets of Salonica and began to tell a large crowd of Muslims about the teachings of Christ. Brought before the *kadi*, Macarios prayed that the judge might come 'to know the true and irreproachable Faith of the Christians' and 'be extricated from the erroneous religion of your fathers by the Holy and Consubstantial Trinity'. His martyrdom followed.<sup>52</sup>

The path to death could be very dramatic indeed. An eighteen-year-old French convert to Islam repented of his apostasy, confessed to a Greek priest, and then – this appears to have been exceptional even among the neo-martyrs – put a crown of thorns on his head, a small cross round his neck, thrust small spikes into his limbs, and paraded in public, whipping himself and shouting 'I was an apostate but I am a Christian'. He was arrested, rejected various attempts to get him to return to Islam, and was put to death. Christodoulos, a tanner, was so disturbed to hear of a fellow-Christian planning to convert, that he took a small cross, entered the tavern where the convert's circumcision was about to take place, and tried to stop the ceremony. He was arrested, beaten and hanged outside the door of the church of Ayios Minas.<sup>53</sup>

Executions were as public as the celebrations which marked conversion itself. In fact vast crowds gathered to witness the last moments

of the dying and to pick up relics of martyrdom. Following the Frenchman's death, 'the Christians took away his corpse and buried it with honour in a church'. Many people carefully collected drops of his blood and pieces of his clothing, just as they did with the holy remains of other martyrs: the Ottoman authorities respected this practice and made no attempt to stop it. When a young Bulgarian girl who spurned the advances of a Turk, died after being thrown into prison falsely accused of having pledged to convert to Islam, the guards noticed a great light emanating from the room, and were so struck by the miracle that they spread the news around the city. Once again, the clothes of the martyr were carefully parcelled out as relics.

Ottoman reactions generally ranged from bewilderment to anger. Officials considered would-be martyrs insane, and hence not responsible for their actions. Romanos was regarded as mad and consigned to the galleys the first time round. Cyprian was dismissed as a lunatic by the pasha of Salonica and having 'reasoned that he would not receive the martyric end he desired at the hands of the Turks in that unbelieving city' took himself off to the capital where by writing an anti-Muslim epistle to the grand vizier and having it specially translated into Turkish, he achieved the desired goal. The biographer of Nicetas recounts an extraordinary conversation that took place in 1808 between that would-be martyr and the *mufti* of Serres. After offering him coffee, the latter asked Nicetas if he had gone mad, coming into the town and preaching to Muslims that they should abandon their faith. Nicetas explained that it was only zeal for the true faith that motivated him, and he began to debate the merits of the two religions. Other Turks asked him if he had been forced to do this, and this too he denied. But the *mufti* only became truly angry when Nicetas described Mohammed as 'a charlatan and a sensual devil'. 'Monk!', said the *mufti*. 'It is obvious you are an ill-mannered person. I try to set you free, but by your own brutal words you cause your own death.' To which Nicetas replied: 'This is what I desire, and for this have I come freely to offer myself as a sacrifice for the love of my Master and God, Jesus Christ.'<sup>54</sup>

What is surprising in many of these accounts is how reluctant the *kadis* were to order the death sentence. They could be forced to change their minds by local Muslim opinion, but they must have been



conscious of the power of religious self-sacrifice and unwilling to add to the list of victims. As it is, martyrdom was not a common choice, and the vast majority of Christians who converted to Islam evidently never returned to the fold. The hagiographer of the martyr Nicetas suggests that by the early nineteenth century a note of scepticism was beginning to prevail among Christians themselves. A Salonica merchant, he tells us, cast doubt on the merit of what Nicetas had done, saying 'it is not necessary to go to martyrdom in these days, when there is no persecution of the Christian church.' Only after a terrifying dream, in which a loud voice told him that Nicetas was indeed a true martyr, did he change his mind. Following British pressure in the 1840s, capital punishment for apostasy was abandoned, and the need for such dreams ceased.<sup>55</sup>

### *Sacred Geographies*

In 1926, an eminent Albanian Bektashi *sheykh*, Ahmad Sirri Baba, stopped for a rest in Salonica during arduous travels which took him from Albania to Cairo, Baghdad, Karbala and back. By this point, the city's Muslim population had been forced to leave Greece entirely as a result of the Greco-Turkish 1923 population exchange, and the *tekkes* had been abandoned. The *sheykh's* journeys, as he moved between the worlds of Balkan and Middle Eastern Islam, were a last indication of channels of religious devotion which had once linked the city with extraordinarily diverse and far-flung parts of the world.

For centuries, Muslims from all over the Balkans congregated in Salonica to find a sea passage to Aleppo or Alexandria for the *haj* caravans to Mecca. Christians followed their example, acquiring the title of Hadji after visiting their own holy places. Others came to visit the remains of St Dimitrios before travelling onwards to the Holy Mountain. A Ukrainian monk, Cyril, from Lviv, arrived to raise money for the monastery in Sinai where he worked, and brought catalogues of the library collections there which he passed on to the head of the Jesuit mission in the city, Père Souciet, whose brother ran the royal library in Paris. For Muslim mendicant dervishes and Christian monks, the region's network of charitable and hospitable religious institutions

offered a means of permanent support, especially in the cold winter months when work and money were hard to come by. 'One monk, almost a vagabond, came from Kiev to Moldavia,' noted a Salonica resident who met him in 1727, 'and from there wandered aimlessly through Hungary, Croatia, Dalmatia, Venice, then returned from that unnecessary peregrination to Moldavia, and from there to the Zaporozhian Sich whence, by way of the Black Sea, he came to Constantinople and to Mount Athos.'<sup>56</sup>

In short, the city found itself at the intersection of many different creeds. Through the Sufi orders it was linked to Iran, Anatolia, Thrace and Egypt; the Marranos bridged the Catholicism of the Iberian peninsula, Antwerp and Papal Italy; the faith of the Sabbataians was carried by Jewish believers into Poland, Bohemia, Germany and eventually North America, while the seventeenth-century Metropolitan Athanasios Patellarios came to the city via Venetian Crete and Ottoman Sinai before he moved on to Jassy, Istanbul, Russia and the Ukraine, his final resting-place. Salonica lay in the centre of an Ottoman *oikumeni*, which was at the same time Muslim, Christian and Jewish. Perhaps only now, since the end of the Cold War and the re-opening of many of these same routes, is it again possible to calculate the impact of such an extensive sacred geography and to see how it underpinned the profusion of faiths which sustained the city's inhabitants.<sup>57</sup>