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**Review for the book monograph  
„Trajectories of Return: Jewish Repatriation to Greece“  
by Kateřina Králová**

This professorial dissertation broaches the issue of the Jews' faith in Greece primarily during the years 1943-1946. Before the Holocaust there were mostly Sephardim living in Greece. Along with the Yiddish speaking Ashkenazim who had been living mostly in Central Eastern Europe before the Holocaust, Sephardim and Ashkenazim are the two main branches of Judaism.

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The Sephardim who were driven away from Spain at the end of the 15th century and settled in Balkan metropolises such as Sofia, Thessaloniki, Bitola or Belgrade during the Ottoman Empire constitute only 15% of all Jewish population today, 5% in the United States, whereas 50% in Israel. The Judeo-Spanish language has become almost extinct.

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The chosen case study is extremely complex due to various reasons, all of them owing to the political history of the 1940s: during the years 1941-1944 Greece experienced a threefold occupation divided into an Italian, Bulgarian and German zone – the different regimes of occupation led to an asynchronous Holocaust (with a difference of up to 12 months regarding the deportation to the extermination camps in Poland, cf. p. 237).

However, especially the phase of the Jews' repatriation to Greece – between October 1944 (withdrawal of the German forces) and spring 1946 – was colned by inner political tensions that resulted in the outbreak of the civil war already in the spring of 1946. This led to an overlap of political and ethnic demarcations: the massive change of course from 1944 to 1946 – from a dominant

leftists Partisan movement to their disarming and finally their complete marginalisation and criminalisation – made the Sephardic Jews an inner political collateral damage (comparable to another ethnolinguistic minority in Greece, the Slavic speakers in Aegean Macedonia) and led to the concept of the enemy and the general suspicion of the “Communist Jews” during the anti-communist hysteria of the late 1940s, as Králová remarks several times.

The political climate in the anti-communist front-line-state Greece during the Cold War coined the memory culture of the Greek Holocaust survivors through taboos which enforced the gradual Jewish alienation from the Greek state and society (explicitly p. 83). Added to that was the ideological concept of the Hellenistic-Christian-Orthodox national identity as a structural historical component (*homogenis*, cf. p. 235-236) which permitted a serious discussion after 1945 on the deprivation of citizenship for Jews in Greece (religious affiliation was only removed from ID cards in the late 1990s).

In the introduction “Greece, a place to return?” (p. 1-36) Králová arranges the Greek case into the Eastern and overall European context of the murder of European Jews: The Sephardim almost exclusively lived in urban contexts with their Southern Balkan metropolis being Thessaloniki with 56.500 Jewish inhabitants. Later it will turn out that the majority of the Greek population treated the repatriates in an antisemitic and xenophobic way, so the question on how the Greek-Sephardic relationship looked like before 1941 needs to be resolved first: Králová succeeds at concisely presenting the historical settlement of the Sephardim and summing up it for the interwar period: “*it was hard for them to fully identify with the current Greek rule at the time*” (p. 20).

On the one hand this is due to the late integration of Northern Greece into the Greek state (namely 1912), on the other hand to the enormous demographic ruptures in the 1920s through a millionfold population exchange with Bulgaria and primarily with Turkey after the “Asia Minor catastrophe” in 1922, that also turned the majority relations in Thessaloniki upside down. Here I disclose a very meaningful quote of a Sephardim: “They asked me if I am Greek. I had come here in 1492, you did much later and by how many years” (p. 231). This quote internalises the irredentist-nationalist logic of the Balkan nationalisms that deduce rights of territory from autochtonicity, but especially it shows an awareness of cultural Sephardic superiority that ignores the modern Greek founding myth – the continuity to the classic antiquity. The murder of over 50.000 Jews from Thessaloniki is the second demographic rupture that lets Jewish Salonica turn into Greek Thessaloniki (p. 27).

The book’s strength lies in the innovative focus that is followed and implemented consistently: In the research review Králová stresses that the research to Jews in postwar Greece is a desideratum (p. 5), while World War II and the Holocaust have been well studied. Moreover the Oral History research on the Holocaust was less interested in the postwar period (p. 34). Therefore Králová focuses on trajectories of repatriation and, besides own interviews, primarily evaluates material (over a hundred testimonies, cf. p. 33) of the Visual History Archive and the US Holocaust Memorial Museum.

While it is primarily the longing for family members or the diffuse longing for the old life that brings the survivors of the Holocaust back to Greece – the quintessence of the book – it is the murdered and destroyed families, problems of restitution and the rejection of the majority of the society in the political climate of the emerging Cold War that makes most Jews eventually travel on (to Palestine or the US). This especially counts for Thessaloniki, the “Jerusalem of the Balkans” before 1941, which became one of the Jewish communities with the fastest deportation and murder in Europe in 1943.

By justifying the immense material with specialist literature Králová manages a dense and complex reconstruction of the repatriation processes of the Greek Jews. This original research contribution can serve as a matrix for other case studies in Central and Eastern Europe. Králová presents her immense material in four chapters as typologically there were four repatriation possibilities: from a hiding place, from the armed resistance, from the concentration camps and from emigration.

The chapter "Return from Hiding" (p. 37-78) narrates the destiny of approximately 3.300 people by means of reconstructed paths of life, and portrays firstly Athens, then Thessaloniki and then smaller communities (cf. numbers from 1940-1967: p. 130-131). While in the interwar period the Sephardim were mostly endogamous and little oriented to assimilation, during the occupation mixed marriage seemed an important survival strategy, furthermore Greek language skills, citizenship (Greek, Spanish and/or Italian), financial means and networks. In the overview "Communities Doomed to Eradication" Králová illustrates very different prospects of surviving: While these were lower in the part occupied by the Bulgarians (East Macedonia and Thrace), the communities in the zone occupied by the Italians as well as in Central Greece had higher chances of surviving.

The chapter "Return of the Armed Forces" (p. 79-128) shows the political dimension of postwar antisemitism and the entanglement of over a hundred Jewish survivors with the Left (cf. the tragicomic report of a survivor who was first labeled as a capitalist, then a communist and then – due to him originally being from Xanthi – as Bulgarian, p. 118). Again and again Králová is able to show how survivors censor their own memoirs in order to escape the political stigma of being a communist.

Even though Churchill and Stalin divided their areas of interest in the East already in 1943 and Greece was allocated to British influence, communist resistance grew in occupied Greece – also as a consequence of the brutal German policy of occupation – so that to the end of the war two thirds of Greek territory were controlled by the partisans which were then disarmed after the intervention in the Treaty of Varkiza of February 1945. The subchapter "Women in the Armed Forces" (p. 107 ff.) takes up the gender question and shows options for young women in the armed resistance.

Králová stresses that in both chapters on survivors in the autumn/winter of 1944/45 a time period is addressed that does not have any repatriates from the extermination camps in Greece yet (Auschwitz wasn't liberated by the Red Army until January 1945) so the extent of the Holocaust wasn't known yet in Greece.

The chapter "Return from the Camps" (p. 129-231) is the longest chapter and is arrayed along the three camps Treblinka, Auschwitz-Birkenau (here subdivided into Minors, Siblings, Parents) and Bergen-Belsen. The pseudo rationalisation of the xenophobic antisemitism and the general suspicion against the Jewish survivors from the camps was not political as with the repatriates from the resistance but moral: apparently only the worst survived, in fact on the expense of the other Jews (p. 137).

While none of the deportees from the Bulgarian occupied territories returned from Treblinka, approximately 2.000 people survived Auschwitz-Birkenau. Here Králová shows intricate ways how Greek Jews who worked in Auschwitz came back to Greece via various stopovers. During internment as well as in the dealing of Soviet and/or allied administration an ethnicising principle prevails that envisages citizenship as a first categorisation. In the chapters Minors,

Siblings and Parents Králová shows strategies of survival such as the hiding of the detainees' kinship.

Even though only 2 out of 22 transports from Greece arrived at the camp Bergen-Belsen these survivors are important for the Greek community after 1945: The relatively loose detention conditions led to accusations of collaboration with the Germans on the part of the Jewish community in Thessaloniki which was already in dispute before the war. This escalated in a *Special Court on Collaborators* in July 1946 and ended in the Greek narrative that the traitors in their own ranks were jointly responsible for the murder of Jews.

The chapter "Return from Emigration" (p. 232-271) discusses the emigration to neighbouring countries such as Bulgaria, Turkey and Albania as well as Palestine. Given the cultural proximity owing to the Ottoman legacy and the national borders that were perceived as arbitrary and not drawn until the 1910s-1920s, emigration to neighbouring countries was low, whereas for emigration to Palestine the political climate (the UK's relationship to the Arabs) as an opening for a passageway was not ideal.

The concluding chapter "After the Return. Conclusion" (p. 272-288) emphasises that the Holocaust definitely sealed the extinction of Sephardic (Judeospanish) in Greece. Next to various strategies of hostility (as traitor of the own group or as a Leftist threat) the question of restitution of property became an important issue between the Greek community and the repatriates that had to take up with lawsuits that often lasted decades. The survivors' legal claim is in opposition to the majority populations' accusation that the Jews lack the loyalty to the Greek state and nation. This and especially the political circumstances of the Greek civil war are the main migration triggers in the medium term.

The portrayal is completed with four own maps (p. I-III) (*Map of Axis-Occupied Greece 1941-1944*, *Map of Transports of Jews from Greece to Auschwitz and Treblinka in 1943*, *Map of Transportation of Jews within Greece in Advance of Transport to Concentration Camps*, *Map of Jews in Armed Forces: Trajectories and Return Back to Greece 1941-1945*) as well as three tables: *Postwar Population of Jewish Communities in Greece counting at least one hundred souls 1940 until 1967* (p. 130-131), *Number of Holocaust Survivors in prewar Jewish Communities* (p. 273) and *Transports of Jews of Greece to Concentration Camps (1943-1944* (p. 294-297)

I conclude: Králová provides a mature scientific accomplishment that approaches a complex contemporary historical topic of South East European research in an interdisciplinary approach for which she did elaborate studies of sources in the US. As already mentioned the book focuses on a rather underexposed topic of the Holocaust Studies, namely Post Conflict Societies, return and reintegration. Králová examines Greece as a highly complex case study on the intersection of Memory Studies, Oral History and Sociology. The manuscript is excellently written and very good to read in the combination of many testimonies with very profound background knowledge.

I'd like to emphasise that there is no suspicion of my being biased in my role as reviewer. I recommend the Faculty of Social Sciences to accept the manuscript as a written professorial dissertation and the award of the title "docent/associate professor".

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