

The Historical Development Of the City of Thessaloniki from 1900-1950

Mr. Stavros Tsoumalakos

Kastorias 3, 40 Ekklesies, 54636, Thessaloniki, Greece

stavtsou@plandevel.auth.gr

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Abstract. The purpose of this paper is to probe into the social restructuring of the city of Thessaloniki between 1900 to 1950. The aim of this research paper is to pin-point the following: firstly, the placement of the social and cultural immigrant population into the urban region of Thessaloniki and secondly, the change and the realignment of these social groups with the already existing population in the course of these fifty years.

From the end of the 19th century until 1950 tremendous changes have taken place in the city of Thessaloniki. In the dawn of the 20th century the city was multicultural, the Jewish culture was dominant in the Ottoman Empire and both commerce and industry were well under development as infrastructure was new and interventions many (demolition of the walls, the use of the tram, the use of the harbour and the railway). The first districts, outside the walls of the city, were also built. In 1950 Thessaloniki was clearly and solely a Greek city. It was the second biggest city in Greece and it stretched out, enormously, to almost twice its original size. This paper probes into the development of the urban cluster of the city, and examines its economic, political and social changes, the two world wars and the civil war, the city's accession to Greece, the great fire of 1917 and the arrival of the refugees. The evolution of the phenomena aforementioned, which are under scrutiny, are also under analysis as are the imprints of the maps. More specifically this paper probes into the distribution of the Jewish, the Muslim and the Christian population in the area after the great fire of 1917, and the consequences this had upon the general social and ethnological composition or structure of the city center. The composition of the population of the city is also scrutinized upon especially after the arrival of the refugees in Thessaloniki. Last but not least, reference is made to the population of the city during and after the end of the Second World War.

1. Introduction

This paper delves into the historical development of the second biggest city of Greece during the period of 1900 until 1950. During this period events which marked the modern history of the city took place. These events shaped – to a large extent - the social and economic structure of the population living in the city, and which to a large extent is still living in the city today.

2. The City of Thessaloniki

2.1 The development of the city's population

Table 1.1: The population of the city between 1890 – 1950

Date	Population			
	Jews	Muslims	Christians	Total
1890	55.000	25.000	18.000	120.000
1900	81.000	39.000	30.000	158.000
1912	65.000	45.000	39.000	160.482
1916	-	-	-	165.700
1920	63.000	25.000	85.000	174.329
1928	58.000	0	160.000	225.076
1940	52.350	-	163.000	226.147
1951	3.000	-	211.000	217.000

Source: Vitopoulou (2013), Moskof (1978), Molho-Hastaoglou (2011), Maravelaki-Bakalopoulou (1993), Karpas, (1985), Greek Statistics : population census 1920, 1928, 1940, 1951.

We observe the development of the population of the city of Thessaloniki at the particular time under scrutiny. There is a divergence in the sources which deal with the number of people living in the area, as well as the ethnic and religious groups of the city. Thessaloniki during these fifty odd years (1890-1950) doubled its population, whereas in the 1951 census the population of the city decreased [Vitopoulou, 2013]. Between 1890 and 1900 the population of the city increased rapidly because of its development after 1850 (the first half of the 19th century brought about the decline of the city of Thessaloniki, whereas after the 1860's it developed at a rapid pace because of the work(s) which was/were under way (1st phase) as a result it brought about the increase of the population [Karpas, 1985]. In the next few years (1900-1912) the increase of the population is boarder line. This is because 4000 people of Bulgarian descent left the city after the end of the Balkan Wars (1904-1908) during which the population had increased enormously [Droyidis, 1996].

Deaths within the city center were double the normal numbers as there were violent clashes between the Greeks and the Bulgarians. In 1916 there was an increase in the population numbers because of the influx of the ally troops which lured merchants into the area [Hekimoglou, 1996]. Eventhough we do not have a clear picture of their numbers in 1920 these merchants departed. This is when the first wave of immigrants came to live in the city after the First World War. After the war in Asia Manar, the 1928 census highlights the influx of immigrants to the city of Thessaloniki. For the next 12 years the increase of the city's population was not very important, partly because of the death rates and partly because of the fact that a large number of Jews departed. The end of the Second World War brought about a decrease in the number of Jewish people and this decrease continued during and after the civil war. The decrease of the population, who were left - wing politically inclined, this information was never recorded in the 1950 census.

As concerning the composition of the population, the three basic groups living in the city, were the Jews, the Muslims and the Greek Orthodox Christians who seemed to augment after the war. During the population exchange, between Turkey and Greece, we see that the Muslim population of

the city decreased whereas there was a rapid increase in the Jewish population. The Jewish population was 50% of the general population of the city at the beginning of the 20th century. Unfortunately, during and after the Second World War very few Jewish people returned to the city or continued to live in it as most of them were persecuted and slaughtered in Nazi concentration camps.

Thessaloniki remains a city within its “walls” at the beginning of the 20th century. The demolition of these walls favour the expansion of the city, the draining of the Bara marsh and the connection (1891) of the city center with the district of Exohe by tram aided towards this direction [Yerolypou, 1985].

Thessaloniki was also the cradle of some of the biggest business enterprises in Europe. Two of the biggest were Allatini and Mothiano (both families were Jewish of Italian origin). The size of their property reached 1.2 million (Turkish Lira) at a time when the lowest salary was one lira and the salary of manager of the Bank of the Ottoman Empire was 26 lira. These two families had branches of their businesses in other parts of Europe too. Nevertheless, most of the Jewish people were poor, most were porters or small salesmen whose basic work was directly connected to the port of the city (freight loading and unloading) [Molho and Hastaoglou, 2011].

These three social and religious groups lived in harmony with their dignitaries (religious leaders and their community chairmen) playing an important role in the activities of the city and relishing the respect of each other. From the beginning of the 1900's there were disputes between the Greek and the Bulgarian community. The Bulgarian population of Thessaloniki presented an increase at the time but it was never significant in numbers.

The Muslims living in the city lived in harmony with the Greek Orthodox community and there are no records of clashes between them. The Jewish community also lived in harmony with the other two communities. One of the most important facts of the time was the formation of the Neoturkish movement of 1908, which was supported by all three communities of the city, as its ideas were more liberal, and its success (with the publishing of the constitution) was celebrated by all in the square of Eleftheria (which means Freedom in Greek) and which took its name from the event [Moskof, 1978, Epaminonthas, 2013].

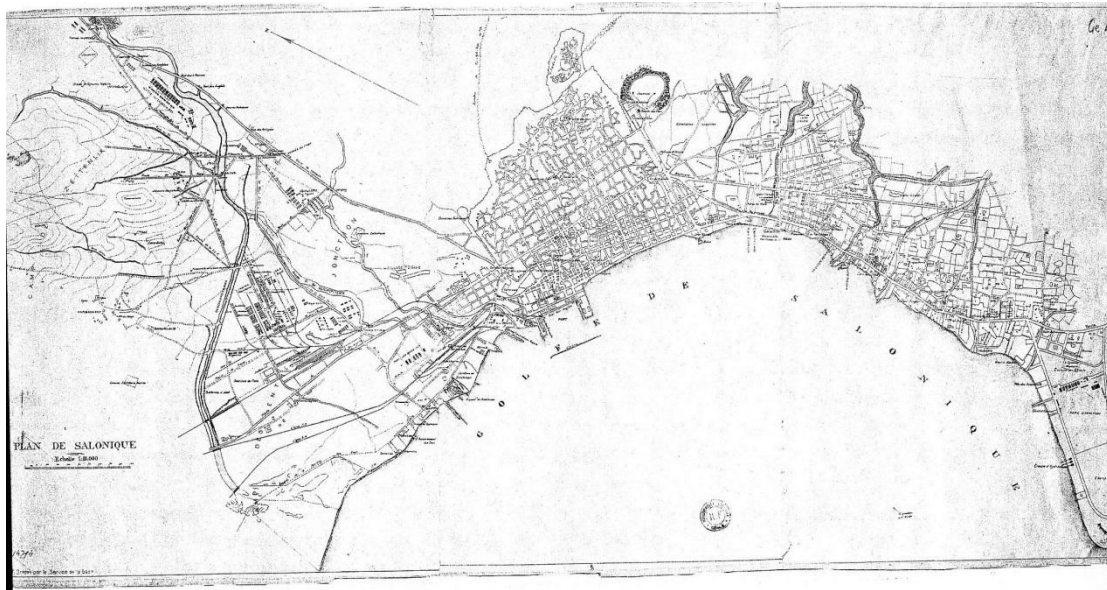
At the beginning of the 1900's, especially after the fire in 1890 there is a social separation in the city between those who were rich and those who were poor. This separation concerned the income of the aforementioned religious and ethnic groups. The people with a high income moved outside the walls of the city to the east of the city in the district of Exohe (or Pyrgon or Hamithie) which was the first district outside the walls of the city. This movement outside the walls took place because the center of the city was considered dangerous to live in. Those people who had had no money, lived within the walls of the city, to its west, where most of the industrial action took place. We find most of the villas of some of the richest families of that time in the eastern part of the city, outside the walls of the old city [Kolonas 1992, Epaminonthas, 2011].

2.2 The Liberation of the city

With the liberation of the city there is no change to the cultural character of the city. At first the Muslim and Jewish community responded negatively to the Greek administration but shortly after they were reassured that their benefits would not be affected, they settled down to a peaceful coexistence with the Greek Orthodox community. When Thessaloniki was under the Ottoman Empire the metropolis of Thessaloniki had many responsibilities and benefits and played a very important role in the administration of the Greek community (especially the education of its community and the cemeteries), this could not continue under the Greek rule. The clergy and the religious leaders of the city reacted to the aforementioned. It is characteristic that all three

communities sent a common letter to the government of the country asking, from them, to be allowed to have and keep some benefits [Darques, 2000, Epaminonthas, 2013].

Map 1.1: Thessaloniki at the beginning of the 20th century



Source: Vitopoulou (2013)

2.3 The Ally Troops

The ally troops were over 200.000 and at times 300.000. The biggest part of the ally troops (200.000) reached the city in 1915 and until 1916 they continued to come to the city. Their influence in the daily lives of the population of the city was decisive. The allies ruled the city, as a result, there was enmity between the three communities and the army of the allies. The allies were of different ethnic groups (English, French, Serbs and troops from their colonies Vietnam etc.) (Map 1.2) and the fact that the military tribunal of the allies had authority over the communities caused further malice and distrust. Because of the ally troops there was a boom in trade which led to the economic development of the city [Tomanas, 1995, Yerolymou, 1994] but there was also a boom in prostitution. The district of Bara (Map 1.2) became one of the most disreputable areas of Thessaloniki thus downgrading the western part of the city. Petropoulos (1980) named the area “brothel –city” (my translation) with its own rules and regulations and with a high criminal rate (the citizens of the area seemed to enjoy the “protection” offered to them by the pimps and the bullies). Brothels appeared in other areas of the city (in the northern part of the harbor etc.).

2.4 The Great Fire of 1917

Pictures from the fire



Source: Yerolymou, 1985

On the 5th of August 1917 the outbreak of the Great Fire destroyed the northern and north-western part of the historical center of the city, thus a very large part of the historical center of the city was destroyed. The fire started at 3.30 in the afternoon and was extinguished at 11.30 pm on the 6th of August 1917. It started in Olympou Avenue and within 32 hours it destroyed 120 hectares which is just over 1/3 of the historical center of the city which totaled 300 hectares (at the time). The fire destroyed the eastern part of the city and rubbed out its traditional structure. [Yerolimpou, 2002]. The loss in the building structure reached 9.500. Out of the 160.000 inhabitants 70.000 were homeless after the fire. Of the 70.000 inhabitants who lost their homes, 50.000 were Jews, 10.000 were Christians and the remaining 10.000 were Muslims [Yerolimpou, 1985, 1994].

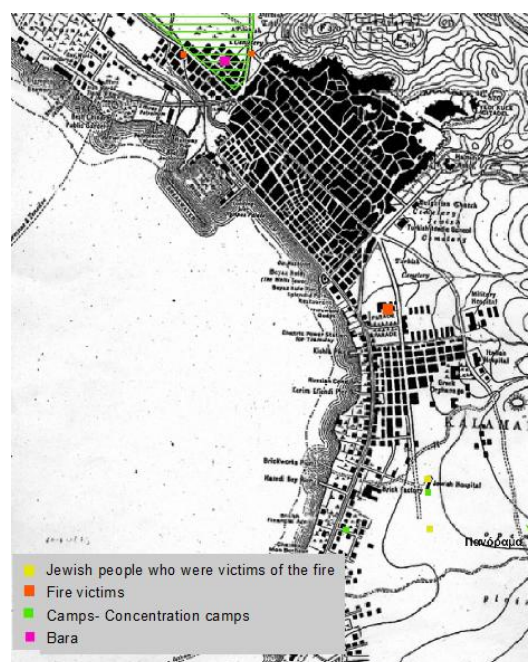
Pictures after the fire



Source: Yerolimpou, 1994

The town went through another period of economic boom after its temporary problems at the end of the Balkan Wars. More specifically, the ally occupation in the past two years (from October 1915) resulted in the influx of money to the city and a development of its market and its services. The economic boom continued, even though the Great Fire destroyed part of the city. This economic boom gave people the chance to buy new land and to build new and modern buildings. (Map 1.2) [Yerolimpou, 2004]. Nevertheless, a large part of the Jewish, Christian and Muslim community underwent serious material losses even though there were no civilian casualties [Yerolimpou, 1985, 1994].

Map 1.2: Districts of fire victims, camps of the allies and the district of Bara



Source: Vitopoulou (2013), Tomanas(1995), the same processing

2.5 The installation of the refugees in the city of Thessaloniki and its development (1922-1940)

The exchange of the population in the city of Thessaloniki, and the installation of the refugees, also aided in the development of the city. The new arrivals were over 55% of the population of the city. The Greek Orthodox population was now dominant. [Epaminonthas, 2013].

The city consisted mainly of Christian Orthodox people, and fewer Jews and Muslims, but new ethnic groups moved in (people from the Black Sea: Pontos, Sarakatsani, Caucasians). Depending on where these people came from they belonged to a different ethnic group. There didn't seem to be any hostilities among these groups but there was almost no cooperation among them either. There was nevertheless a lot of hostility among these groups of people and the native citizens of Thessaloniki, which at times became very intense as there were vivid cultural differences, as well as differences in their customs and traditions. These hostilities were also due to the fact that, on the one hand, the city had not fully recovered from the Great Fire of 1917 and on the other hand, the arrival of the allies and their departure had left the city very impoverished as a result some social groups, especially those which had a low income, were left poor and derelict [Kafkalas, Lambrianidis, Papamihos, 2008]. The situation became more intense when the government of the country enforced the "Requisition Law" according to which, people who had houses which were considered "spacious" had to give up one of the rooms in their house to the newcomers, especially families, who inhabited it for free. Over 11.179 families were housed, in this fashion, in the city of Thessaloniki. These measures may have been justified because of the very serious housing problem the newcomers faced, nevertheless it provoked conflicts between the native inhabitants of the city and the newcomers. There is no record, though, that the "Requisition Law" was enforced in the case of the wealthier native inhabitants of the city who lived in villas and who were not forced to give up one of the rooms in their houses to the newcomers [Driankos, 2011].

Map1.3 : Refugee settlements and jewish settlements



Source: Hastaoglou-Martinidis(1997)

As in the case of the Great Fire of 1917 the resettlement of the newcomers was through the Committee for the Resettlement of Refugees (CRR) which offered houses with a low rent which would pay off the loan taken by the country so as to build these homes (Map 1.3).

At the beginning these houses were given randomly (with a serial number attached to each house), later people were chosen because of their income which would also guarantee the payment of the rent. Thus the CRR gradually transformed from a social, non-speculative organization, whose initial aim was the resettlement of the general population, to an organization which granted houses to those who had the ability to pay for their rent. The main aim of the resettlement of the population was the payment of the loan [Mazower, 2004].

We see a general deviation, from the initial approach of the government of the country, which was to aid in the resettlement of the newcomers and of the general population of the city. In other words, instead of a social-welfare state which takes care of the indisposed and destitute population of the city of Thessaloniki and the country in general, we see a deviation of its initial welfare policy towards a private ownership of housing in the country. This was further emphasized by the enactment of a decree which protected the private property in the country. The resettlement of the newcomers and their “embodiment” into the community of the city of Thessaloniki was not a peaceful one but it ended when atrocities of the civil war started in Greece. [Driankos, 2011].

2.6 The Nazi Occupation

The Nazi occupation was one of the most difficult periods in the history of the Greek people. Nevertheless, there were industries and businesses which flourished or even made a lot of money. Such industries were Efanet, Fix, ABEZ, Floka and Allatini whose business was partly requisitioned by the Nazis but who still boomed financially as the Germans were their best clientele. The area around these industries was also the breeding ground of the resistance and here is where the first free newspaper of the resistance in Europe was published. Its name was “Eleftheria” which means freedom. The city was also inhabited by quislings and collaborators of the German Nazis, as well as an army battalion, with its major, who were all under the Nazi administration. This battalion was active during the civil war in Greece too [Papayiannopoulos, 2009].

During the Nazi occupation the Jewish people (47.000) were sent to concentration camps. It was at that time when the university campus of the city was built. Part of the university was built upon a Jewish cemetery and even though there was a pending law-suit concerning its reinstallation the Nazi administration hastily decided upon destroying it (Molho and Hastaoglou, 2011).

2.7 The Civil War

The influence of the Greek Popular Liberation Army – National Liberating Forefront (GPLA-NLF) and the Greek Communist Party (GCP) which was under the administration and influence of the GPLA-NLF were both in the forefront of the civil war. After the Treaty of Varkiza the Greek battalion which co-operated with the Nazis will continue their activities against the left-wing party until their extermination from the city of Thessaloniki. Between 1946 and 1947 the guerrilla war within Thessaloniki took a new form. The Greek Communist Party formed the “Tightknit Self-defence Group” also known as OPLA (meaning arms in Greek) which fought against the Greek battalion and the Greek administration which supported the Greek battalion. The TSG or OPLA was active in the city of Thessaloniki until its dislocation [Papayiannopoulos, 2009].

The friction between the native Greeks and the newcomers who had relocated in the city of Thessaloniki died down. Its place was taken by the segregation between the right-wing party which was in government and the left-wing supporters who were basically outlaws.

3. Concluding Remarks

The Concluding Remarks are briefly described as follows:

- Thessaloniki is historically a multicultural and commercial center.
- The city had different ethno-religious communities which lived in harmony (with perhaps very few exceptions).
- In the two state interventions of the city (in other words, the restoration of the areas afflicted by the fire, the redesigning of the city, the resettlement of refugees), there is no enforcement of social policy, the wealthier people are favoured and supported by the government thus supporting social segregation.
- After the economic depression of 1929, which also influenced Greece (the country's bankruptcy in 1932), the first signs of fascism become evident. In 1931 the first pogrom in the history of the city is a reality.
- During the Second World War living conditions are bad nevertheless, business enterprises in the area are booming. The city is also a cradle of resistance but quite a few quislings are free to roam the area.
- The city was liberated from the Nazis by ELAS (The Greek People's Liberation Army) whose influence was vast. During the civil war, and after many internal clashes within the nucleus of ELAS, Thessaloniki becomes the head-quarters of the National Army of Macedonia.

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All efforts have been made to contact all the copyright holders but if any have been overlooked, we will be pleased to make the necessary arrangements at the first opportunity.

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Conducted Tours for Educational Purposes

Attendance of a tour conducted for educational purposes at the Educational Foundation at the National Bank of Greece (Villa Kapantzi) under the guidance and exposition of Ioanni Epaminontha "The West of the East: the century which shaped the Thessaloniki of 1912". Attended on the 24th of March 2013 (translation from Greek).