

Preface

Contrary to scholarly and popular perceptions, it should be emphasized that the destruction of the Sephardi metropolis in Salonika, a city that had earned the sobriquets “Jerusalem of the Balkans” and “Madre de Israel,” was so devastating that even two generations after the war a new center for the Sephardim and their widespread diaspora has not appeared. Moreover, the political broadening of the term *Sephardi* in Israel and among scholarly and philanthropic organizations through the inclusion of all non-Ashkenazi Jews under its rubric signals both dilution and perhaps even dissolution of that proud heritage. Not even the emergence of regional scholarly and cultural centers dedicated to the Sephardim and their heritage has yet been able to generate any new creative dynamics to stimulate and develop this heritage. Perhaps two generations is not yet enough time to mourn the loss of a “mother city.” It took more than a century after the destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem in 70 CE to rejuvenate Jews with a new leadership and Judaism with the *mishnah*. The task of this generation is to sustain the survivors and teach their progeny until a new spirit arises from the children of that great Jewish metropolis.¹

A project on this subject can never be considered finished, not even after all the dead and the living have been accounted for and their various vicissitudes chronicled and explained. Then the task will be to integrate this material into the history of Greece, not as a separate chapter but rather as an integral part of the multifaceted prism that constitutes Greek history and culture. The time is overdue to bring forth this study to the public. Indeed, too many of the fifty- and sixty-year seminal anniversaries have already past: 1992, 1993, 1994, 1995, 1998, 2003, 2005. Perhaps 2008 will have a resonance to survivors and their kin.

Three factors encouraged presentation of this text at this time. The first is the announcement that the archives of Salonika, confiscated by the Nazis in 1941 and captured by the Soviets at the end of the war, will soon be returned to Greece. Whatever these archives contain, preliminary reports from Tel Aviv and Washington indicate the wealth of data about the interwar communities. Those already recovered from the Bulgarian-occupied zone and recently delivered to the Jewish community of Athens (now housed in the Jewish Museum of Greece) suggest the value of their contents. This material signals a new era in research on Greek Jewry. Greek wartime archives in Israel and prewar archives from Salonika now in New York are just beginning to be exploited. Second, only recently has there appeared a systematic attempt to interview Greek Jewish survivors, both those who went to the mountains and those who went to the camps. This process is still haphazard in Israel (despite the rich deposits at Yad Vashem) and the United States. Despite the many testimonies that have yet to be read and collated, there are many important areas of research to be pursued whose participants await their interview. Third, the holdings in principal archival collections have been made available in a variety of monographs.