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THE ANTI-SEMITIC DISTURBANCES ON CORFU AND ZAKYNTHOS
IN 1891 AND THEIR SOCIO-POLITICAL CONSEQUENCES

Eftychia Liata

ABSTRACT: The text below is a summary of my book *Η Κέρκυρα και η Ζάκυνθος στον κυκλώνα του αντισημιτισμού. Η συκοφαντία για το αίμα του 1891* [Corfu and Zakynthos in a tornado of anti-Semitism: the *ghezera* of 1891], published in 2006 by the Institute for Neohellenic Research / NHRF, on the subject of the anti-Semitic incidents that broke out in the Spring of 1891 on those two Ionian Islands. Based on hitherto unknown archival material (public documents, diary entries, private texts) and press publications of the day, while at the same time making use of the scarce available bibliography, this study endeavours to reconstruct the events in the light of fresh data, pose questions and propose answers for the causes and the mechanisms leading to the aggravation of the situation, the outbreak of violence and the multifaceted consequences thereof, not only on the local but also the national level. The study also records the depiction of the events through contemporary and subsequent works of historiography, as well as their recasting in Greek literature to this day.

One of the most impracticable fields of research, in an area constituting a hazardous tug of war, not only for Greek but also for international historiography, is the subject of Hebraism and its adjunct, anti-Semitism. As often as the Hebraic Question has been treated, it has been either from the angle of anti-Semitism or its opposite, philo-Semitism – not, of course, that more cool-headed approaches have not been attempted – as if the subject were one of legal wrangling and litigation, with the Jews in the place of either the victim or the accused, and with either tangible or imaginary proof of indictment. It does not however fall within the objectives of this brief study to write a treatise on the “demonisation” of Jews based principally on blood libel, nor to investigate the onset, development and dissemination of anti-Semitism in Greece, the initial seeds of which should be sought beyond Greek borders and in times far earlier than the eighteenth century, when it made its appearance in Greek territory.

The uninterrupted presence of Jews in Greek areas in modern times dates to the fifteenth century; they located to specific regions, since they settled in urban centres of special administrative, mainly financial, import. Thus, the principal Jewish communities are found in Corfu,¹ Thessaloniki, Athens,

¹ For the history of the Jewish community of Corfu treated herein, see Costas Daphnes, *Οι Ισραηλίτες της Κέρκυρας. Χρονικό επτά αιώνων* [The Jews of Corfu: a chronicle of seven centuries], Corfu 1978.

Kavala, Kastoria, Trikala, Xanthi, Rhodes, Arta, Zakynthos,² Crete, Thebes, Halkida and Patras. Neither the historical course nor the fate of these communities were uniform or smooth: Jewish communities, dependent as they were on diverse factors of local or more general synchronicity, unavoidably underwent the consequences of and adapted to the situations arising from time to time, which determined their stable and continuing existence, or led to their decline, violent expulsion or disappearance.

There is no doubt that one of the most heinous instances of anti-Semitism in the history of Greece is the incident known as the 1891 “Jewish affair” on Corfu, together with the almost simultaneous reflex reaction evidenced in the Zakynthos anti-Semitic events of equal gravity.³ According to the generalised view held in older Greek historiography, anti-Semitism is a European phenomenon introduced to Greece via the Ionian Islands, where the populace had been infected with the attitude while under Western rule. The troubles of 1891, therefore, acquired such intensity on Corfu and Zakynthos precisely due to the historical past of the Islands and triggered the diffusion and resurgence of a climate of anti-Semitism, which then began to grow in the remaining Greek regions where there were flourishing Jewish communities. However, prior to proceeding to an analysis of the specific phenomenon of anti-Semitic aggravation, I will summarise the occurrences instigating and leading to the pogrom against Corfiot Jewry.⁴

² For the history of the Jewish community of Zakynthos see Spyridon de Viazis, “Η εβραϊκή κοινότητα της Ζακύνθου” [The Jewish community of Zakynthos], *Παρνασσός* 14 (1891), 10 (June 1892), pp. 624-637; 11 (July 1892), pp. 662-670; 12 (August 1892), pp. 723-735.

³ This study is based on unpublished archival material: the *Αρχαία οικογένειας Δελιγιάννη* [Deliyannis family archive], *Εταιρεία των Φίλων του Λαού*, Athens, file BVI/106, sub-file 1, and on the diary kept by Antonios G. Pofanti from 1891-1895, *Συλλογή Τζώρτζη Ποφάντη* [Georgie Pofanti collection]; and on published sources: I. M. Demetis, *Κυριότερα συμβάντα της νήσου Ζακύνθου 1874-1907 υπό Διονυσίου Κλάδη, του ιερέως Παναγιώτη* [Principal events on the island of Zakynthos 1874-1907 by Dionysios Kladis, son of the priest Panayiotis], Zakynthos 2004; Ludwig Salvator, *Zante*, Vol. I, Prague 1904, pp. 448-454; Zapheris Aktypis (transl.) “Η ισραηλιτική κοινότητα στη Ζάκυνθο” [The Israelite community on Zakynthos], *Επτανησιακά Φύλλα* 24 (2004), pp. 107-112; Marinou Sigouros, *Ο δρόμος της ζωής (Αυτοβιογραφία)* [The road of life (autobiography)], ed. Phaidon Bouboulides, Athens 2004; Chaim Sarda, “Τα γεγονότα της Κέρκυρας το 1891” [The events of Corfu in 1891], *Χρονικά* 95 (May-June 1987), p. 25. A valuable source on the subject, to a great extent unexploited by historiography, is the press of the day, specifically: *Ακρόπολις* (Athens, April-July 1891); *Ελπίζ* (Zakynthos, May 1891); *Επόπτης* (Corfu, April-May 1891); *Εφημερίς* (Athens, April-June 1891); *Καιροί* (Athens, April-May 1891); and *Παλιγγενεσία* (Athens, April 1891).

⁴ Greek bibliography refers to the question only very indirectly and only in recent years.

On the morning of 1 April 1891, eight-year-old Rubina Sarda, who was out in the ghetto playing with her elder sister, disappeared. After long hours of searching for her in vain, her parents alerted the police. However, despite the mobilisation of the authorities and the crowd of Jews as well as Christians, the result was negative. After midnight on the same day, the child's father, with two other Jews, found her body in a sack in the entrance to a house outside the ghetto. The suspicions of the police were then directed against the father himself and his friends, who were arrested as perpetrators; they were however speedily released for lack of proof. Misleading testimonies, meanwhile, added greater confusion to the investigation rather than facilitating it, resulting in delays in finding the culprits, while rumours of culpability sparked a fever among the town's Christian population, as the Jews imprudently hastened to attribute the crime to them. Furthermore, among the Christians, the version grew in intensity that the little girl had been murdered by Jews themselves, intending to fulfil ritual practices relating to their feast of Passover (the use of blood in preparing the unleavened bread), in the belief of an unsubstantiated rumour that the child was a Christian, abducted as a baby to be brought up by the Jewish Sarda family and destined for human sacrifice. This conviction was not shaken, even when the official data of her birth – her birth certificate – were divulged, proving her Jewish origins.

Thus the version of accidental death – the result of a beating by the girl's parents for reasons of “unethical behaviour” – and the subsequent attempt at a cover-up and misdirection of the investigation, with the promotion of the version of a premeditated ritual crime, in no way officially concerned either the police or the investigating authorities, much less the society of the island. Such a contingency – i.e. of manslaughter – would nullify the motive for reaction on the part of the Christian population, a reaction, indeed, in the form of violence, which apparently was latent and ready to break out in Corfiot society. Seeing the rage of a considerable portion of Corfu's Christian population swelling, and increasing acts of violence and vandalism of Jewish property, the police proceeded to restrict the Jews within the ghetto, so as to avoid escalation to worse acts, that is loss of life.

A chronological summary narrating the events can be found in the composite study by Bernard Pierron, *Juifs et chrétiens de la Grèce moderne. Histoire des relations intercommunautaires de 1821 à 1945*, Paris 1996, Greek transl. by G. Saratsonis, Athens 2004, pp. 48-51. For a more detailed reference to the accounts of the events, their causes and consequences for the Jewish population of Corfu, see the unpublished Ph.D. thesis by Pearl L. Preschel, *The Jews of Corfu*, New York University 1984.

The worst was however not avoided, since the Jews confined to the ghetto,⁵ in unhygienic living conditions because of the heat and lacking food as they could not obtain provisions, started to mourn fatalities among the more fragile age groups. When, after weeks of confinement had passed, matters began to quieten down and the life of the town to return to its former state, many of the Jews preferred to quit the island, fearing a renewal of hostile acts against them at the earliest opportunity. Consequently, of the some 7000 Jews living until then on Corfu,⁶ after the incidents of 1891 only about 2000 remained, and the Jewish community never regained its former prosperity.

The havoc ensuing after the murder, and the anti-Semitic incidents that took place on Corfu, the acts of violence perpetrated against Jews and vandalism of their property appearing in the pre-election period of municipal elections (of 7 July), swiftly took on a political dimension and became a field of contest between the candidates for the Town Hall: the governmental (Deliyannis party) nominee and the Trikoupis party member of the opposition.⁷ Initially, the opposition made use of the murder of the little Jewish girl as the principal lever to denounce the government's mishandling of the incident – possibly deliberately so as to cover up the responsibility of the Jews who, at that stage, were amicably inclined toward the Deliyannis party. Very soon, however, the murder ceased in essence to preoccupy the local society and leadership, everyone's attention focusing on the question of the Jews and the place they held in the life of the island.

⁵ For a description of Corfu's Jewish quarter, see Leonidas Stanellos, *Η εβραϊκή συνοικία της Κέρκυρας, Ιστορικά – Πολεοδομικά* [The Jewish quarter of Corfu, historical – town planning data], Athens 1991.

⁶ Ioannes Romanos, “Η εβραϊκή κοινότητα της Κέρκυρας” [Corfu's Jewish community], *Ιστορικά έργα* [Historical works], Corfu 1959, pp. 386-405; Georgios Haniotis, “Η εβραϊκή κοινότητα της Κέρκυρας (1860-1939) εντός και εκτός της Οβριακής” [The Jewish community of Corfu (1860-1939) inside and outside the ghetto], *Οι Εβραίοι στον ελληνικό χώρο. Ζητήματα ιστορίας στη μακρά διάρκεια* [The Jews in Greek territory: questions of history in the long term], *Πρακτικά του Α' Συμποσίου Ιστορίας*, Thessaloniki, 23-24 November 1991, Athens 1995, pp. 68-69.

⁷ The Theodoros Deliyannis government was favourably disposed towards Greece's Jewish population, for obvious political and financial reasons, while Harilaos Trikoupis' opposition party endeavoured in every way to turn the Jewish vote to their side. More generally on the political situation in Greece in the 19th century, see Gunnar Hering, *Τα πολιτικά κόμματα στην Ελλάδα, 1821-1936* [The political parties in Greece, 1821-1936], transl. from German by Theodoros Paraskevopoulos, Athens 2004, particularly pp. 665-666, wherein the author refers to the political attitudes and relations of Jews with the Deliyannis parliamentary party in the 1890 elections.

It is remarkable that not only simple people but the “enlightened” classes believed, with the same conviction, in the prevailing superstitions regarding Hebraic human sacrifices, wherein the Corfu child-murder was included. Amid this irrationality, the few and hesitant voices of rationality were incapable of warding off or restraining the anti-Semitic fury that erupted on Corfu and was soon transferred by reflex to Zakynthos,⁸ where incidents of a similar nature and intensity were also provoked. Zakynthos also contained a flourishing Jewish community, albeit considerably smaller than on Corfu – of less than 300 souls. In this instance, the spark for the conflagration of anti-Semitic hatred came not so much, not as directly, from the “Jewish affair” of Corfu, that is the crime, as from its sequel, which is to say the pogrom of Corfiot Jewry. Since on the island of Zakynthos too the population was in ferment because of the outbreak of violence involving Corfu’s Jewish community, it was but a matter of time for a flash point to be reached, despite the fact that at the end of the nineteenth century the two communities, Christians and Jews, had eschewed the prejudices of the past and cohabited peacefully, with mutual respect and esteem, particularly after the union of the Ionian Islands with Greece (1864), when the “gates of the ghetto” had also formally opened and complete freedom of communication and equality of citizenship had ensued. Symbiosis of Christians and Jews was not merely harmonious, it was “heartfelt and fraternal”, also due to the “Zakynthian Jews’ mild and amiable character”.

It was to be expected that the events of Corfu should cause upheaval in both Zakynthian communities, and the greater among the Jews, the memories of the older generation recalling the traditional tales of the murder of a Zakynthian boy in 1712,⁹ with the consequences this had had for their co-religionists, and also similar stories about other towns with Jewish communities. While it was obvious that the storm was about to break here too, as feelings on both sides were running high, neither the local authorities nor competent agencies proceeded to take any measures to pacify tempers and facilitate a defusing of the

⁸ A fundamental source for the Zakynthos historical events and a serious effort to analyse them is constituted by the contemporary work of the high-born Zakynthian poet, writer and scholar Frederic Carrère, *Ιουδαϊσμός και Χριστιανισμός και τα εν Ζακύνθω συμβάντα κατά την Μεγάλην Παρασκευήν* [Judaism and Christianity and the incidents in Zakynthos on Good Friday], Zakynthos 1892.

⁹ On the incident of the child found drowned on Palm Sunday 1712 and whose death was attributed to the Jews, see the relevant chronicle “Χρονικό του ρεμπελιού εναντίον των Εβραίων (1712)” [Chronicle of the revolt against the Jews (1712)] in D. Konomos, *Ζακυνθινά χρονικά (1485-1953)* [Zakynthian chronicles (1485-1953)], Athens 1970, pp. 102-105, 183-185.

situation, which would have been expected from the political and military side. In the face of the inertia of the authorities, the sole measure of protection of the Jews from the insults, the abuse and assaults of the Christians was deemed to be their voluntary confinement inside the ghetto. There was, nonetheless, a first attack by a band of Christian Zakynthians against the ghetto, on the night of 12 April, upon which the Zakynthos garrison commander was motivated to request military reinforcements from Patras. On 14 April a corps of 50 troops arrived, to make an emplacement surrounding the Jewish quarter, with a view to guarding it against attack by fanatical Christians. The situation seemed thus to be temporarily under control, and isolated incidents between the military and citizens attempting a raid into the ghetto were contained without escalating. This all occurred on the eve of Easter, concurrently with the Corfu riots.

But on 19 April 1891, Good Friday, the first clashes erupted during the litany of the Crucifixion, which was attended by all municipal and military officials and a crowd of about seven to eight thousand. It all began when, in the morning, groups of turbulent townspeople congregated outside the ghetto and tried to break through the military cordon and into the Jewish quarter, with hostile intentions to wreak havoc. The guard commander lost his nerve and, incapable of negotiating with the rioters, so that in a spirit of logic, flexibility and patience they should be persuaded to disband, in a state of panic gave the order to fire, with the result that five citizens fell dead, and as many more troops and civilians were wounded. Wild rumours circulated among the crowd of worshippers at the litany, creating confusion and furore, so that the procession broke up in disorder and frenzy. Simultaneously, bands of enraged Christians gave themselves to unprecedented destruction, pillaging and vandalism of Jewish property in and outside the ghetto.

It must not however be mistakenly supposed that the whole of the society of Zakynthos turned on their Jewish fellow townsmen and that from being amicably disposed suddenly metamorphosed collectively into a raging mob. Numerous Christians secretly harboured Jews in their homes and gave them shelter in those critical hours. However, the manic fury and paroxysm of destruction of the mob, despite its intensity, soon moderated, and by the afternoon of the same day calm was restored and order seemed to have returned to the town, while armed patrols made the rounds to ensure no new hotbeds of violence were rekindled.

In a matter which, outwardly at least, as to the motivations of its origins and manifestation had a clearly religious aspect, it is to be expected that the role played by the Church should be inquired into, as well as the attitude adopted towards it by the ecclesiastical authority. It is indubitable that the very anciently

ingrained obscurantist odium concerning human sacrifice¹⁰ of Christian children by Jews at Easter time, for their blood to be used in the preparation of unleavened bread, a belief not held by Greek societies alone, was not resolutely confronted, rationally and seriously, by the higher echelons of Church hierarchy. There were occasional limited exceptions by the few of the enlightened and courageous clergy who, in vain, had attempted to illuminate their flocks.

Moreover, the widely diffused custom in Greece of the “burning of Judas” on Easter Day, condoned indeed and participated in by political and ecclesiastical officials, on the one hand operating at the symbolic level, afforded an outlet to the fanaticism of Christians against Jews – those of another religion, the “crucifiers”, while on the other hand concurrently nourished and revived hatred and hostility toward them. Hitherto, although it had triggered the explosion of minor or graver incidents in communities where there was even only a limited Jewish presence, the situation had not escalated to levels of outrage, with the exception of the “Pacífico” events of Athens in 1847.

But the 1891 events, with the dimensions and intensity they acquired, no longer left any margin for turning a blind eye and for the continuing inertia on the part of the official Church. This time, the Church faced an eruption of anti-Semitism of such an extent that Greek Orthodoxy was internationally stigmatised and the prestige of Greece jeopardised. The gravity of the situation brought the Church up against its responsibilities and it henceforth became obvious to ecclesiastical circles that intervention was mandatory to avoid further atrocities, as Orthodox Easter was approaching and the custom of the “Judas” would find fertile ground – because of the events of Corfu – to spark fresh iniquitous hotbeds of anti-Semitism in other parts of the country. The Holy Synod of the Church of Greece thus castigated this custom, in a circular dated 12 April 1891,¹¹ and ordered its eradication wherever it continued to be practised.

¹⁰ The profoundly hatred-breeding contemporary work by Maria Mechanidou *Η ανθρωποθυσία παρά τοις Ιουδαίοις, δράμα πρωτότυπον, απολήγον εις κωμωδίαν* [Human sacrifice by Jews, a drama of originality, ending in comedy], Athens 1891, aggravated matters even more, dividing intellectual circles and arousing strong reactions as well as fanatical supporters.

¹¹ For the circular “Περί τοῦ οὐκ ἔξεστι τοῖς πιστοῖς πυρπολεῖν ὁμοίωμα τοῦ Ἰούδα ἐν τῇ ἑορτῇ τῆς λαμπροφόρου ἀναστάσεως τοῦ Σωτῆρος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ” see Stephanos Giannopoulos, *Συλλογή Ἐγκυκλίων Ἱερᾶς Συνόδου* [Collected circulars of the Holy Synod], Athens 1901, pp. 405-406. The Church has reverted to the matter subsequently in castigatory circulars, up to our day: Anthimos, Metropolitan of Alexandroupolis “Το ἔθιμο τοῦ καψίματος τοῦ Ἰούδα” [The custom of the “burning of Judas”], *Χρονικά* 197 (May-

On the question of the Corfu and Zakynthos “Jewish affairs”, however, the Church maintained absolute neutrality and silence; not even the local authorities of the clergy evinced the slightest reaction nor intervention, albeit for different reasons on each island. On Corfu, the metropolite vanished for the duration of the incidents, while on Zakynthos the archbishop Dionysios Latas was absent from the island on Good Friday and returned the next day, when the disorder had calmed down.¹²

The particularities of Jewry have at times been a source of inspiration in literature, also secondarily in poetry, either in setting the myth-making process, or borrowing the figure of the Jew in primary or secondary roles, but with an opportune contribution to the development of the subject. It is certainly not my intention to scrutinise here in depth, nor give a comprehensive reference to, the subject of the utilisation of the persona of the Jew in Greek literature, as this would entail a different approach and is contained in a different field of research.¹³ We will therefore restrict ourselves to a brief – and not exhaustive – overview of the subject, focusing only on the impact of the Corfu and Zakynthos events in the writings of the day and up to our times.

The 1891 “Jewish affairs” indeed appear in Greek literature. It is well known that the use and effect of real historical occurrences in literary production may be direct and clear, or indirect and insinuated; it may, in other words, give shape to the myth-making of a written work with recognisable instances, referring to specific events and persons, or it may simply create a climate in which a

June 2005), pp. 9-10, and I. Ch. Mourtziotis, “Το φαινόμενο του αντισημιτισμού και η Ελληνική Ορθόδοξη Εκκλησία” [The phenomenon of anti-Semitism and the Greek Orthodox Church], *Χρονικά* 197 (May-June 2005), p. 4.

¹² The stance Archbishop Latas would have held is conjectured by F. Carrère, *op. cit.*, p. 208, and by Grigorios Xenopoulos, indirectly, in his *Rachel*, p. 55 (see note 15 herein): “And it was our bad luck that His Grace was away in Athens. Oh, if Latas had been here, he would have cast water upon the flames instead of oil as do some do-gooders.” In Carrère the reference is direct and clear. The fraternal disposition of Dionysios Latas towards Jews as well as his general spirit of religious tolerance is shown with consistency and clarity in the pages of his newspaper, *Σιών*. Theodosios Pylarinos, “Ο συντάκτης της θρησκευτικής εφημερίδος Σιών μητροπολίτης Διονύσιος (Λάτας) ως εκλαϊκευτής θεολόγος και κατηχητής” [The editor of the religious newspaper “Sion” Metropolitane Dionysios (Latas), as popularising theologian and catechist], *Άγιοι και εκκλησιαστικές προσωπικότητες στη Ζάκυνθο. Πρακτικά Διεθνούς Συνεδρίου*, Zakynthos, 6-9 November 1997, Athens 1999, Vol. I, pp. 290-291.

¹³ This is precisely the sociological approach of Frangkiski Abazopoulou in her book *Ο Άλλος εν διωγμώ. Η εικόνα του εβραίου στη λογοτεχνία. Ζητήματα ιστορίας και μυθοπλασίας* [The Other under persecution: the image of the Jew in literature: questions of history and myth-making], Athens 1998.

sensitised author chooses to tell a story on a Jewish theme without specific and identifiable reference to the actual occurrence inspiring him.

Influenced by the anti-Semitic turmoil on Zakynthos in 1891, and in indirect reference to it, the Zakynthian writer Grigorios Xenopoulos published a novella in 1891, and later a scathing article in the form of a humoristic piece.¹⁴ However, as declared by Xenopoulos himself in his autobiography, his play *Ραχήλ* [Rachel] written in 1909, was directly influenced by the 1891 upheaval in Zakynthos.¹⁵

The play's story is the familiar stereotype of the ill-fated love of a young Christian and a rich and beautiful Jewess. The protagonists belong to the island's high society, the financial and intellectual élite, and may be included in the roll of positive heroes of Greek literature.¹⁶ A few years later Xenopoulos recast the Rachel theme in a novel with the title *Μεγάλη περιπέτεια* [Great adventure],¹⁷ changing only the names of the characters and keeping to the basic lines of the play's plot. Xenopoulos' philo-Semitism is discernable in these works, restrained, of a distancing objectivity and eclectic, although he is pro-Semitic with a specific orientation in referring to the Jews of Zakynthos – whom he distinguishes from among all the Jewry of the rest of Greece – considering them absolutely integrated in Zakynthos society and the equals of Ionian Islanders.

While the liberal cultural tradition of Xenopoulos the Ionian Islander permits his affirmative stance towards the “other” – in this case the Jew – with whom there is a familiarity from centuries of cohabitation, Alexandros Papadiamantis' Orthodoxy, centred on Hellenism, was put to the test by Corfu's anti-Semitic stance, which he treated several years later in his novella “Ο αντίκτυπος του νου” [The repercussion of the mind].¹⁸

¹⁴ G. Xenopoulos “Σκιά έργου” [Shadow of a work], *Έστία* (1891), pp. 17-18; the subject of the novella is precisely an incident from the Zakynthos anti-Semitic episodes. *Ibid.*, “Αντισημιτισμός” [Anti-Semitism] *Εικόνογραφημένη Έστία* (1893), pp. 186-188.

¹⁵ G. Xenopoulos, *Θέατρο* [Theatre], Athens: Vlassi Bros, 1991, Vol. II, *Ραχήλ* [Rachel], pp. 11-85.

¹⁶ For a detailed analysis of the work in relation to the Zakynthos town-plan see Eftychia Amilitou, “Έρωτας και θάνατος στο γκέτο. Η άλλη Ζάκυνθος του Γρηγορίου Ξενόπουλου” [Love and death in the ghetto: the other Zakynthos of Grigorios Xenopoulos], *Νέα Έστία* 150, no. 1738 (Oct 2001), pp. 403-445, in which a general picture is given of the town as depicted in the Jewish references in the complete works of Xenopoulos.

¹⁷ The book was first published in instalments in *Αθηναϊκά Νέα* in 1937; a complete version was published in 1984 by Vlassi Bros: G. Xenopoulos, *Μεγάλη περιπέτεια* [Great adventure], Athens 1984.

¹⁸ Alexandros Papadiamantis, “Ο αντίκτυπος του νου” [The repercussion of the mind], *Άπαντα* [Complete works], ed. N. Triantaphyllopoulos, Athens 1993, Vol. IV, pp. 367-380.

In modern, contemporary literature, the only author to utilise the Corfu pogrom of 1891 in his literary production is Vassilis Boutos in his novel *H συκοφαντία του αίματος* [Blood libel].¹⁹ The writer places his story in the continuum of Corfu under German occupation, beginning the narrative with the order given by the German commandant on 7 June 1944 for the registration of the island's Jewish inhabitants. This causes commotion among the Jews and alarms them greatly; memories of the past are reawakened – for some among them had experienced what happened in 1891, and the younger had heard about it from their elders: the recollection is still fresh in all of them. The author's references to the events of the nineteenth century and to the past history of Corfu's Jewish community, albeit appearing as the invocation of memory, and Jewish memory in particular, nevertheless attributes an interpretative dimension to them in historicising the literary medium.

The incidences of anti-Semitism occurring on Corfu and Zakynthos in 1891 have similarities purely in their expression; they differed as to the causes instigating them, the motives behind their explosion, the duration of the ferment, and also their consequences – the Corfu episodes, initially bloodless, were longer lasting and more extensive – but differed mainly as to the quality of the tone of the social reactions. Contrary to the conditions on Corfu, on Zakynthos the stance of the society towards their Jewish community was not merely tolerant and one of generalised acceptance: it was, according to circumstances, of actual friendship. Despite the town-plan aspect of ghetto life, Zakynthos Jews were to a major extent integrated in the town's social web. There were on the one hand the distinguished Jews, personalities universally esteemed, associating on an equal footing with the island's Christian high society, and on the other peaceable bread-winners, in minor businesses and professions, operating as guilds – such as the mattress-makers – who fulfilled the basic needs and functions of the town and who, despite some habitual teasing and harassment they endured, mainly from unruly bands of children, lived in peace and quiet side by side with their Christian fellow-citizens.

It is evident that the latent anti-Semitism of the nineteenth century, whether on Corfu or on Zakynthos, was of the “popular” type²⁰ and was therefore, as has

¹⁹ Vassilis Boutos, *H συκοφαντία του αίματος* [Blood libel], Athens 1997, references to the events of 1891 on pp. 14, 18, 25, 31, 51-53.

²⁰ For the particular variations presented in anti-Semitism in Greece, see Giorgos Margaritis, “Ελληνικός αντισημιτισμός. Μία περιήγηση 1821, 1891, 1931” [Greek anti-Semitism: a tour of the years 1821, 1891, 1931], *Πρακτικά Επιστημονικού Συμποσίου. Ο ελληνικός εβραϊσμός*, 3-4 April 1998, Εταιρεία Σπουδών Νεοελληνικού Πολιτισμού και Γενικής Παιδείας, Athens 1999, pp. 18-21, 27.

been seen, easily manipulated and utilised by influential groups in the attainment of various goals, political in the main. The phenomenon exists and its characteristics appear clearly: religious – zealot – fanatic, even though the notion of “grass-roots anti-Semitism” is nowhere expressed in the texts of the day, in the press or memoirs. A note should be introduced here as to a difference of essence in the anti-Semitism of the two islands: while on Corfu the upheaval swiftly took on a strong political hue, this was not the case on Zakynthos, where the reasons for the clashes remained more obscure and unspecified, concentrated rather on the religious level. On Corfu, under the religious cloak, all classes concealed their rabid anti-Semitism (deriving from differing sources) and the “enlightened” were as active as the “ignorant” mob, because it was in their best interests, interests which again were not the same as those of the populace: the plebeian lower classes, the poor, wished the Jews to disappear, for religious reasons, although at the heart of the matter was the calculation and the claim for expropriating their labour in the lower, humble occupations where the Jews operated a practically closed shop. The élite of the administration, the local bigwigs of the intellectual and financial world on the other hand, were reactionary because they saw, in equality of citizenship and the involvement of Jews in the administrative and political sectors, a threat to their exclusive primacy therein and, of course, in the administration of the local economy. They therefore desired, with perhaps even greater eagerness than the simple people, that the Jews should quit the island.

It is nonetheless noteworthy that in the gravest of anti-Semitic quarrels, not a note of local anti-plutocratic resentment is heard, although this is the fundamental element upon which the general Jewish Question is based, and it would normally be expected, especially in the case of Corfu, where conflicting financial interests and arrogations existed between the two communities, in the export trade principally. Even the fanatical adversary of Jews, Iakovos Polyas, does not accept that the anti-Semitism of the Corfiots had its source in financial interests. Therefore, it cannot be located within specific social groups: it is universal, pervading the entire Christian community of the island. In his opinion, it is the “natural reaction of younger societies against the invasion, the supremacy of the Jews”. Jews are parasites on the social body since, in his view, “the Jew absorbs but does not yield anything”. The view, on the contrary, of Georgios Theotokis, brother of Corfu’s mayor, is summed up as that his fellow citizens are “most chivalrous and would never admit to persecuting Jews for lowly motives”, meaning therefore that, being profoundly patriotic, they detest Jews “for the sole reason that they are not Greeks”.

It is typical that these two Corfiot personalities categorically deny any financial interest as being at the core of the uprising against the Jews, putting forward the most obvious: Polyas on the one hand religious and political incentives, and Theotokis on the other national and racial motives. Nevertheless, neither conceals nor suppresses the collective satisfaction at the outcome, achieved in the end, of the ejection of the Corfu and Zakynthos Jews in the Spring of 1891.

It is a fact that before union with Greece, the Ionian Islands Jewry lived under conditions of contempt and persecution by the Christians, whichever ruler was in power.²¹ Under the British, the last foreign occupiers of the Ionians, Jews had restricted rights and existed absolutely manacled and controlled by the British administration; their role in the economy was fixed in specified areas (olive-oil export and, principally, usury), essentially serving the purposes of the British-ruled local society's entire economic system. Activities of Jews outside the walls of the ghetto, virtually inexistant before union, continued to be sporadic and restricted also under the new regime, although the trend on the part of the Jews to make greater claims pressurised and irritated Corfiot society.

The quarter century of equality of citizenship up until 1891 did not suffice to enable the "multitudinous, illiterate, superstitious Jewish people" – in the opinion of the learned Jewish doctor of Corfu, Victor de Semo – easily to forget "such repeated persecution, to ignore the suspicion and supreme contempt in which they were held by the Christians". It was furthermore the common conviction, and not only of illustrious Corfiots but also of the Jewish intellectual élite, that the political rights granted to the Jews following union had puffed them up with arrogance and "aroused their insolence", resulting in provoking the ire of their Christian fellow citizens.

It was in consequence, beyond their financial activities, the social dimension of the Jews' equality of citizenship, as well as their political objectives, that mostly vexed the Ionian Islanders. Jews were, and continued to be, the "enemy within" that did not only cease to constitute a threat to Corfu society but on the contrary increased it by their acquired legitimised equality.

The reason for the votes of the Jews becoming a *casus belli* in every electoral reckoning (whether parliamentary or municipal) was not only in regard to the ballot result but had more to do with the alliances and financial facilitations expected by local dignitaries from the Jewish community's financiers. It was in

²¹ Grig. P. Kasimatis, "Οι Εβραίοι της Επτανήσου και η Ένωσις" [The Jews of the Ionian Islands and union], *Νέα Εστία* 21, no. 250 (1937), pp. 724-735.

reality the acquisition of financial gain at the individual or community level that was the objective of a political rapprochement and inducement of the Jewish element. This is why the riots on Corfu, sparked by a criminal act, speedily escalated from the original provocation and evolved into a socio-political confrontation between the Deliyannists and Trikoupists, in view of the forthcoming municipal elections of 7 July 1891.

Finally, responsibility for the anti-Semitic paroxysm evinced by the Ionian Island society of the day, triggered by the murder of Rubina Sarda, was attributed by many (first and foremost Iakovos Polyas) to the Jews, who “were not capable of maintaining an unobtrusive stance from the start” and, in order to cover up the crime, unwisely put the blame on the Christians. On the other hand, the deficiency or impotence of the system of public order in the protection of Jews, when the persecution began, in essence left the Ionian Islanders themselves exposed to revilement and outcry on the part not only of the remainder of the Greeks but of Europeans also for their excessive reaction.

The events of the 1891 “Jewish affairs” provided the Athenian press with further ammunition to pursue its anti-Ionian Islands polemic and propaganda, thus allowing us to ascertain that about thirty years after union certain circles were noticeably intensely reactionary, for now the ranks of the anti-unionists had been swelled by the disenchanted Ionian Island unionists, who saw their aspirations for acceptance and nationalistic incorporation in the Greek State negated and that they were placed in the necessary position to find every excuse for the self-defence of their Hellenism and national loyalty.

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