

Salonica City of Ghosts – Christians, Muslims and Jews 1430-1950
by Mark Mazower. Harper Collins 2004.

In nearly five hundred pages Mark Mazower traces just over five hundred years of history of one of the most extraordinary, heroic and tragic cities in Europe. For the author this is clearly a labour of love and it should be a source of great satisfaction to him that his effort has been well worth while.

Salonica City of Ghosts is an outstanding example of the comparatively new genre of 'city biography' and the story that it tells is so rich as to be almost indescribable. Though a Greek city on the Aegean sea, Salonica's history is infinitely more varied than its geographical location would suggest, for until Greek Independence in 1830 the city was a part of the Ottoman Empire. Indeed it is largely to this fact that it owes its incredible cosmopolitan character and an almost unparalleled history of largely harmonious relations between Jews, Christians and Muslims.

For many Jews, the name of Salonica is inextricably associated with its fate during the Second World War, when its ancient Jewish community was deported to Auschwitz in 1943 and its truly cosmopolitan nature was changed forever. But Mazower shows how much more there is to Salonica than this terrible act, and also how the legacy of its past informs attitudes today in the modern Greek city.

This is a book for all kinds of readers, those of the three faiths or of none, students of European history, readers of biography of whatever kind, and anyone who enjoys work that is meticulously researched and lucidly written.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh