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“It was a sunny late-summer day in 2014. During my first proper research stay in Rhodes I decided to inquire into the material held at the Hafız Ahmed Ağa Library. I was welcomed by Yusuf Bey and his dog at the gate and we started a conversation in a mix of Turkish, Greek, and German. I felt privileged to be allowed into the courtyard and the library. To my surprise, the reading room contained not only valuable manuscripts and rare books, but also miscellaneous collections and historical documents. Two things drew my attention: Firstly, several copies of the late Ottoman satirical magazine Karagöz: I would have loved to read them and use them for my book, but they were too off-topic. Secondly, covered under a pile of scattered documents, I found an original excerpt from the 1905-1907 Ottoman census, which proved to be a precious source for my study. When I think of that place, beyond pictures of its wonderful garden, I like to remind myself that libraries and archives hold hidden gems that are as rare as the determination and patience to dig beneath catalogues and inventories.”

Andreas Guidi

Within and Beyond “Communities” A Connected Approach to Confessional Diversity in Rhodes

Situated on the maritime route of the Levant connecting Istanbul and the Levant provinces of the Ottoman Empire, the island of Rhodes served as a station for travelers for centuries. More or less famous Western travelers like Gustave Flaubert and Victor Guérin stopped there and left descriptions of the island’s ancient heritage as well as anecdotes about contemporary daily life and impressions concerning a confessionally diverse population – Greeks, Jews, Muslims, and Catholics – that they encountered there. In the nineteenth century, Ottomans too became more acquainted with the town, its history, and its diverse habitants. To cite but two examples, quite different in format and content, the first modern Ottoman history of Rhodes was published in 1896 by Ziver Bey, an Ottoman bureaucrat who had spent part of his tenure on the island researching its past. In the same year, the most prestigious Ottoman illustrated journal, *Servet-i funun* dedicated a few paragraphs and a series of photographs to the town of Rhodes. In those years, innovations in infrastructure, technology, and media made it possible for readers throughout the Ottoman realm to familiarize with the empire’s provinces, including the corner of the Aegean Sea where Rhodes was located.

In the late nineteenth century (1888), Rhodes town had become the center of the Vilayet of the Archipelago (*Cezayir-i Bahr-i Sefid Vilayeti*). Although the local economy did not experience any proper boom compared to other Ottoman towns – especially in the neighboring Anatolian coast, Eastern Anatolia or the remaining Balkan provinces – in the following fifty years the town would remain a comparatively safe place, aloof of mass displacement and intercommunal violence shattering coexistence in the region. Whereas the presence of diverse ethnic and religious communities captivated the gaze of Ottoman and Western travelers, this was certainly nothing special in the empire. However, even for the empire’s standards, Rhodes was marked by a strikingly balanced ratio of confessional categories. No available Ottoman census provides precise data for the town’s population in terms of confessional belonging, but one carried out by the Italians in 1917 recorded around 5,700 Muslims, 4,000 Orthodox and 3,300 Jews – many of whom had emigrated in the previous ten years to destinations as far as Central Africa and the Americas. Catholics – like Muslims but unlike Orthodox and Jews – did not have institutions related to an official community (*millet*) in late Ottoman times.

After the Italians occupied Rhodes in 1912 and even more after the Treaty of Lausanne sealed Italian sovereignty over Rhodes in 1923, the number of Catholics in town came closer to that of the other confessional categories, thereby making Rhodes a setting in which coexistence also implied the absence of any clearly dominant group. To be true, this only applies to only one specific scale of analysis, the one encompassing the old town of Rhodes and its expanding suburbs like Saint Anastasia or Neochori. If one exclusively considers the Old Town, for instance, until 1909 only Muslims and Jews were allowed to dwell there. Everyday interactions thus stopped at sunset when shops closed, and Christians went back to their homes. If one, on the contrary, adds the whole town of Rhodes to the other villages and even the minor islands of the Vilayet (what later became the Italian *possedimento* of the Aegean), the Orthodox population would become the absolute majority, with only a few hundred Muslims and Jews living outside of Rhodes in places like Lindos and Kos.

Nonetheless, the diversity observable in Rhodes *town* has invited historians to reflect on coexistence, intercommunal interactions, and other forms of socialization that can be subsumed under a peaceful sense of belonging *to* and *in* a shared place. I have tackled this issue in a 2017 article discussing the economic dimension of intercommunality by showing how economic changes impacted both labor and business in Rhodes as the town became increasingly integrated into regional capitalist circuits. As a consequence, “modern” economy did not primarily rely on confessional exclusivism, with most companies in Rhodes being open to workers and partners of its different confessions. This does not imply that working with townsmen of other confessions was culturally valued as progressive, but rather than pragmatism and segmentation along classes mattered more than identification with one’s community as a closed circle. In a later article, I discussed how emigration affected the sense of belonging to communities. If Communities (capitalized as an official entity) existed as institutions in Ottoman and Italian Rhodes, what happened when thousands of Jews and Greeks left their hometown (or island) and moved abroad? I argued for considering communities and communal belonging as something that can – actually, that has to – be constructed through efforts that often erase other forms of collective socialization and identification. In other words, Jews and Greeks often left Rhodes on the same steamship, and the first steps in the “new world” were marked by a significant degree of proximity based on a common geographic origin and beyond confessional exclusivity. However, as years passed and new generations of Rhodians were socialized abroad, some of the emigrant elders invested considerable energy into (re)building bonds around confessionally exclusive religious institutions that – together with integration into the new society, for instance as US American naturalized citizens – eventually erased most traces of commonality based on the place of origin of Rhodes shared with emigrants of other confessions.

As other studies, notably by Alexis Rappas, have shown in recent years, a discussion on past intercommunality requires caution. Memories of the Ottoman and the Italian periods have increasingly been coded collectively along the notion of separate communities after the Second World War and the Holocaust, a rupture that – with the violent disappearance of the Jewish community – in 1944 tore once and for all the idea of peaceful coexistence in Rhodes. However, these collective memories only very superficially address relations among communities. If we add to this the lack of sources available produced before 1945 that underscore and reclaim coexistence as a cultural value, we are left with the sense that the coexistence of various communities was primarily a pragmatic consequence and heritage of imperial rule. This included its being instrumentalized by Ottoman and Italian authorities, that – with different stratagems and aims – both supported and organized Communities as institutions (with specific tribunals and schools). In so doing, they contributed to foster belonging to a community as a question of loyalty. Notables recognized as Orthodox, Jews (and later in the Italian period Muslims) sat in local councils and interacted with state authorities, thus acting as “representatives” of the community vis-à-vis the state. If one excludes the four years of proper constitutionalist rule between 1908 and 1912, Rhodians (a small portion thereof, the wealthier) never had the possibility to directly vote for their representatives at the state level. Communal belonging, for most of the period considered here, was therefore also a marker of notables aiming at political careers at the local level.

Rather than essentializing intercommunality as individuals and collectives interacting in the name of their own community with others animated by a similar awareness, this contribution proposes a different approach to the diversity of Rhodes. Instead of looking at the setting as a closed microcosm of diversity, we can open up the perspective to embed Rhodes in a changing Mediterranean context. As a result, all communities would emerge as part and parcel of broader networks and spaces where influences and ideas travelled and impacted the local reality. Important sources to infer the diversity of the population are those produced by Ottoman and

Italian authorities, including courts and police files, as well as those related to associations and newspapers that reveal such broader connections. Lastly, censuses and family sheet confirm the diversity common to all confessional groups in terms of places of origin. What follows is an overview of topics and examples emerging from those sources, that I have dealt with more in detail in my monograph *Generations of Empire*.

To begin with, the Muslims of Rhodes were a quite composite population that reflected political transformations in the last decades of Ottoman rule. Next to a majority of Muslims who had lived in Rhodes – as well as a few villages like Sgourou, Koskinou, Salakos and the town of Lindos – for several generations, some “surnames” – or, more precisely, appellations called *lakab*, like Alayalı or Faralyalizade – reveal origins from towns in Asia Minor (Alaya, Faralya), where those families often had property and land. Moreover, since Rhodes was one of the most frequent sites of political banishment (*sürgün* or *nefi*), the town hosted Muslim families of the rebellious tribe of the Hemavend from the Aleppo and Mosul vilayets as well as Yemenis. Some of them decided – or were left with no other choice than – to stay in Rhodes at the end of their banishment. A few dozen Muslims were refugees (*muhacir*) from Crete. During and following the insurrection of Cretan Greeks that led to violence against and expulsion of most of the island’s Muslims in the 1890s, the Ottoman government included Rhodes in the list of sites where these displaced families where to be hosted. A few families bore typical Cretan surnames like Yussufaki or Sulaki and most likely spoke Greek as their mother tongue.

Most of them remained in Rhodes and were recorded by the Italian administration as late as the 1940s. A small settlement first called Hamidiye in honor of Sultan Abdülhamid II was built in 1904. Lying some three kilometers away from the Old Town, this settlement kept a name referring to their Cretan inhabitants *Kritika* or *Villaggio Cretese* throughout the Italian period even when most of them had left the simple one-room houses that had been used by other poor newcomers – especially Greeks from the villages and Italians from Anatolia. More generally speaking, the Muslims of Rhodes kept strong ties with Anatolia before and after 1912. Not confined to land property, studying at Ottoman (and then “Muslim”, as the Italians renamed them) primary schools in Rhodes opened career options in the late Empire and the Early Republic and student as well as post-diploma mobility toward the mainland was so frequent that it became a political issue for the Italian governors in the 1930s.

Already during the Constitutional regime after 1908, political factions fragmented the community: some Muslims were attracted by the Young Turks, the Committee of Union and Progress and – in the 1920s and 1930s – by Mustafa Kemal’s Republican People’s Party (CHP) while others were categorized by observers as supporters of the “ancient régime”, namely they were closer to conservative and religious circles. Generally speaking, in both the Ottoman and Italian period (until the late 1930s), frictions *within* communities were considered by the local population as more fastidious than those *among* communities. Rather than a fracture at the local level, this polarization also reveals how the setting of Rhodes was permeable to events and ideas pervading the surrounding Aegean and Anatolian region.

The Orthodox population of Rhodes as well was diverse and mobile. Already in the late nineteenth century, both well-off families and laborers moved from Rhodes and other islands to Egypt, attracted by the prospects of the capitalist expansion in the Khedival state. The construction of the Suez Canal brought many villagers and islanders to the Port Said and Ismailia area, while those pursuing liberal professions mainly moved to urban centers, especially Alexandria. As a result, women in those lower-class emigrant families, not allowed or willing to move across long distances, settled in Rhodes from minor islands, often working as housemaids. The vibrant Greek community of Alexandria was also a cultural and political center. Since the Italian occupation

of the islands, and boosted by the news of the Greek army's victories in the Balkan Wars and the First World War, nationalists based in Alexandria agitated for the *Enosis*, the annexation of the Dodecanese into the Greek state. In a way, the center of Greek irredentism concerning the islands under Italian occupation was therefore in Egypt, far enough from the governor and his *Carabinieri*'s strict surveillance. Irredentist agitation often also involved students from the Dodecanese who had moved to Athens as well as workers who had emigrated to the United States and founded migrants associations there. Until today, by walking in the neighbors around Rhodes and in the island's villages, one can observe early-twentieth-century villas built through the fortune accumulated by certain families abroad, like the Kazoullis, or donations from expatriated communities in the Americas or Australia aimed at building or repairing churches. Until today, the oldest secondary school in town, the *Gymnasion Venetokleion* is considered with pride as a landmark of community and nation-building dating back to Ottoman times. This institution too is a result of broader Mediterranean connections, since its foundation was only made possible by donations sent from Alexandria by the brothers Venetoklis, who had kept ties with their place of origin in Rhodes.

Yet the Greek community of Rhodes is not only marked by contacts with the diaspora. It also grew through the inflow of Greek families from Anatolia, especially from Antalya, Makri (Fethiye) and Livissi (Kayaköy). These were displaced at the end of the Greek Turkish War and arrived as refugees in the Autumn of 1922. Unlike most of the Asia Minor Greeks refugees and those displaced according to the Lausanne Treaty's terms, a few dozen families did not move to Greece and remained in Rhodes throughout the Italian period. Until today, the descendants of families from Makri and Livissi consider Rhodes as one of the main sites of their own dispersed community and its memorialization through projects like those of the society *Lycia*. In this case too, the community was deeply impacted by social and political transformations in a broader space.

The case of the Jewish community is probably the best known given the recent historiographic rediscovery that, however, gravitates around the trauma of the Holocaust that annihilated it in 1944. Yet, in this case too, the "Jews of Rhodes" proves to be a complex unit of analysis given the diversity within it. This is not to deny a feeling of belonging to this local setting based on confession, that was actually reinforced among survivors and the diaspora along with the memorialization of the past after the Holocaust. Descendants feel attached to Rhodian (or, as the old term appropriated by the group has it, *Rodesli*) heritage in terms of "traditions", sayings, and cuisine. Rather, it is interesting to observe how this eclipses the fabric of social and cultural relations impacting the *Rodeslis* in the Ottoman and Italian periods.

Their very arrival is linked to migration across the Mediterranean. As was the case in most Ottoman Jewish communities, at the turn of the 16th century, refugees from the lands of Al Andalus "reconquered" by the Catholic kings and queens traveled across the sea (often with stops of several years along the way) and brought Sephardic culture and a language that assimilated previous Jewish residents who were often Romaniotes. A few centuries later, in the years before the arrival of Italian troops in 1912, the Jewish community experienced a profound change with the opening of a new school claiming to break with the past and build modern Jewish citizens in the name of the *Francophonie*. The *Alliance Israélite Universelle* – a network that had its headquarters in Paris and ran schools in dozens of towns from Morocco to Iraq to Greece – opened its school in Rhodes in 1902. Yet, this was not only a French initiative. The Jewish Ottoman scholar Avram Galante, who had taught at the Muslim *idadiye* but also in other cities of the Aegean, participated in this initiative in the name of educational reformism. The Jewish Community (as an institution) embraced the idea and was involved – not without frictions – in the management and funding of

the school. Although the number of graduates did not exceed a few dozen per year, attendance of the lower grades was remarkable. As a consequence, the majority of Jewish children of both sexes at the dawn of the century were exposed to French language and culture. Judging from the school directors' reports and some memoirs, the impact of the *Alliance* cannot be underestimated, even if the migration trajectories of the *Rodesli* were mainly directed to English-speaking areas like Rhodesia and the Americas. After 1912 and during their military administration, willy-nilly, the Italian authorities authorized the presence of a French institution. This changed when Italian sovereignty was recognized in 1923, leading to the closing of the *Alliance* school two years later and its replacement through local Italophone *scuole ebraiche*.

Within three generations, the local Jewish population thus interiorized different cultures and links between language and belonging. Even though the fascist empire in which Rhodes was embedded did not tolerate foreign interference, the governors instrumentalized the Jewish community of Rhodes for a project aimed at expanding Italian influences among Mediterranean and Balkan Jewry. Mario Lago thus opened the *Collegio Rabbinnico*, a theological school attracting students from other communities, while teachers mostly came from Italy.

Shortly before the persecution officially started with the antisemitic Racial Laws promulgated in Italy in late 1938, a part of the Jewish population – especially a group of youngsters in their twenties and sometimes even teens – became sympathetic to the most right-wing version of Zionism, the so called "Revisionist Zionism" led by Vladimir Jabotinsky. Here too, loyalty toward Italy and its fascist imperial project, visions of settler colonialism and sovereignty in Palestine, but also generational factors (the young against the old) conflated and shaped discussion about the place of Rhodian Jews in a broader context. Whereas only a very few Rhodian Jews eventually moved to Palestine before WW2, many used family networks to attempt to escape persecutions in the crucial months between the Racial Laws and the official opening of warfare in Rhodes in 1940s. Local belonging and diasporic displacement thus coexisted in the lived experience of a large number of *Rodeslis* before Italian and German genocidal brutality exterminated the local community in 1944.

The last category to be discussed are Catholics. This confessional category, not too much relevant for the Ottoman nor the Italian administration, can be used as a steppingstone to identify those who were often not considered proper Ottoman subjects or, in the Italian period, at least for the most part were not considered "Dodecanesians". Already at the dawn of the 20th century, they were a range of Francophone and Italian families, Armenians and Syrians, as well as former captives now *protégés* of European countries like Great Britain or Sweden. In the early Italian sources from the 1910s, this group that did not fit into what the Italian considered to be the Ottoman local society were often categorized as European. For most of them, the arrival of hundreds of Italian families actually meant that the Catholics turned from being "European" (and multilingual) to "Italian", with the exception of those owning a foreign nationality. This happened parallel to the (unfinished) legal elaboration of a citizenship regime aiming at distinguishing full (metropolitan) citizens from Dodecanesians who were juridically defined as Aegean citizens (or subjects). This left a narrow door open to obtaining the status of Italian citizenship by decree for men, in most cases after their voluntary military service, for example in the Spanish Civil War. Although a few hundred Dodecanesians manage to go through the process between 1933 and 1942, this does not question the persisting separation between metropolitan citizens and colonial subjects that was, indeed, centered on the separation between Italians and members of the respective local or "indigenous" confessional communities.

But how "Italian" was this growing population? Several hundred newcomers in Rhodes did indeed come from the Italian Kingdom. Policemen and military who decided to stay at the end

of their service often married local women, especially Greek women who had moved to Rhodes town from the nearby villages and islands. Others can be classified as “adventurers” starting a new life in Rhodes, mostly with poor advancement in terms of economic situation. Their social status was, however, often enhanced by the alignment with and activism in Fascist institutions such as the party and its militias, the *Camicie nere* (Blackshirts). Moreover, Governor Mario Lago launched a few projects to establish colonies on the main island. Woodcutters from the northern Italian Trentino region (that Rome had recently annexed in 1918) and peasants from Veneto came to rather remote parts of Rhodes island, but these projects were abandoned after WW2, leaving only abandoned buildings.

Not all Italian citizens came from the peninsula. Several families moved to Rhodes from other former Ottoman cities, mostly Izmir, starting in the mid 1920s. The most striking marker of this mobility is the first name Policarpo in honor of the patron saint of the Catholics in Izmir, quite common in the family certificates produced by the Italian administration but otherwise extremely rare in the Italian peninsula. Next to a very few wealthy individuals already running prosperous business in Turkey, the majority of these Smyrniote newcomers found themselves in a rather marginal and precarious economic position, partly compensated by membership in fascist institutions and marriage with local women who owned modest properties. The reason why most of them arrived in Rhodes was the nationalization of the economy in the newborn Republic of Turkey that, in the late 1920s, passed laws and decrees aimed at excluding foreigners – like those Catholics Italian citizens – from a wide range of professions and occupations. One could wonder why they chose to move to Rhodes instead of moving to the Kingdom of Italy. Generally speaking, this represented a convergence of interests between, on the one hand, the Italian government needing to assert its legitimacy in the Dodecanese by increasing the presence of Italian citizens and, on the other hand, a certain familiarity and proximity with an Aegean setting in which older Ottoman modes of governance and institutions were not erased but adapted to the fascist colonial project. This also meant that, for a part of the Catholic population in Rhodes, being the spearhead of Italianness in a colonial setting could coexist with the fact they had never – or only very briefly – set foot in metropolitan Italy.

Allegiance to fascism embraced by many of these newcomers in Rhodes implied an advantage in terms of social status, but this made them dependent on the fate of a dictatorial, colonialist, and genocidal regime. When the end of WW2 dealt the final blow to Mussolini and his Mediterranean dreams of *Mare Nostrum*, the British authorities taking over during the interregnum of 1945-1947 and then the new sovereign Greek institutions made it clear that Italians would lose all privileges that the fascist regime had conferred on them. Most of the Italians citizens in the Dodecanese left after the war in a legally and economically chaotic and precarious framework that cannot be simply portrayed as a smooth “repatriation”. Once again, as Pamela Ballinger recently showed in her monograph *The World Refugees made*, the fate of the Italians in Rhodes cannot only be explained in a local, communitarian, or national lens: it has equally much to do with regional dynamics of imperial collapse and dispersion in the Mediterranean and international geopolitical shifts.

Conclusions

This contribution aimed at discussing the notion of community from an alternative perspective. Instead of using confessional belonging as the sole perimeter of analysis for the people we study and learn about, but also instead of searching for definitions of coexistence and intercommunality often elaborated retrospectively, I have proposed two possible avenues. One is to distinguish between, one the one hand, institutional Communities shaped by state authorities to mediate with the local population and, on the other hand, people sharing a confession but not necessarily social or political interests. The other, more important here, is to stress that confessional categories include fragmentation within themselves and above all a variety that reveal interesting links (and ruptures) with the broader Mediterranean world in which Rhodes was embedded during both the Ottoman and the Italian period. This approach can be thought of as a “conversation in the library” (or the archive), that seems to fit well the purpose of the volume. A library in which all the fascinating local histories and life trajectories of people from Rhodes are valued and preserved, but also one in which wide windows are open to remind us of the broader outside world and its impact on those histories and trajectories, without which much of the fascination of Rhodes would be impossible to understand.

