

Greece and its Jewish Problem

Greece is the historical land of myths that have influenced literature and life. No myth is more compelling than the series of heroic tasks performed by Hercules. Of these, the most enticing is his obtaining the golden apples of Hesperides.

The challenge for Greece today and the general political and financial world is whether the country has a modern-day Hercules, the new Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras, who can keep for it the golden apples lent to it in substantial amounts.

The old adage is true. If you owe the bank \$500 you are in trouble. If you owe the bank \$5 million, the bank is in trouble. The golden apples that Greece has taken amount to a debt that is 180% of its GDP. The European Union and the international banking world know they might not reclaim even a bite of those apples.

Greece owes colossal amounts of money, estimated to be about \$330 billion. About 60% is owed to the nations of the Eurozone, mostly Germany (56 billion euros), France (42 billion euros), and Italy (37 billion euros). Some 10% is owed to the IMF, 6% to the European Central Bank, and the rest to Greek banks (11 billion euros), foreign banks (2.4 billion euros), and private lenders who owe Greek government bonds.

Greece only owes the IMF 32 billion euros. In July 2015 it did not pay the \$1.8 billion payment it owed the IMF, which is owed another \$3.9 billion. This was the first time a developed country reneged on its payment. Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras, leader of the Syriza party, refused to agree to a deal that would extend the \$265 billion bailout package because it entailed new tax increases and spending cuts. The country refuses to introduce austerity and reforms. In a referendum on July 5, 2015 it rejected by a vote of 61 per cent to 39 per

cent the bail out conditions proposed by creditors to solve the financial crisis.

The country suffers from a number of factors. It has a high rate of unemployment, especially for those aged 20-29. It has been unwilling to make budget cuts, yet has increased public sector wages. Tax evasion is a way of life and borrowing has often been concealed. Most Greek workers retire at age 60, and the country has difficulty in paying pensions.

At this point it is gratifying that Tsipras and fellow politicians appear to have avoided speaking of the Greek financial crisis as a Jewish or Zionist conspiracy. The record of Greece regarding its Jewish population is an inglorious one. During World War II, 65-67,000 (92 per cent) of the Jews living in Greece were sent to their deaths. More than 46,000 Jews from Thessalonika were deported; it is shameful that in 2011 the Holocaust memorial in the town was desecrated.

Today there are 5,000 Jews in the Greek population, most of whom are Greek Orthodox Christian of 11 million. A recent public opinion survey found that Greece was the most anti-Semitic country in Europe, twice as anti-Semitic as France. It showed that 85 per cent of Greeks surveyed thought Jews had too much power in the business world, 82 per cent in the international financial markets, and 74 per cent too much control over global affairs. Anti-Semitism has cut across political lines and been transmitted from the Church, from political parties, from the newspapers, and TV channel Tele-Asty, and from well-known personalities.

Unlike the decision made by the Pope in *Nostra Aetate*, the Good Friday liturgy of the Orthodox Church still includes anti-Jewish references. The Greek Orthodox Bishop Metropolitan Seraphim of Piraeus in 2010 told his people that Jews controlled the international banking system. Earlier in 1980 the Metropolitan of Corinth, in an anti-Semitic book, had written of the "power of the Jews who suck the blood of the

people.” Some religious organizations still call for the deportation of “traitors,” among whom Jews are included.

An unusually large number of political figures from different parties have uttered anti-Semitic remarks. In 1982 Prime Minister Andreas Papandreou, leader of the PASOK party and a friend of Yasser Arafat, compared the State of Israel to the Nazis; to his credit he later apologized. As early as the 1990s, political parties, such as PASOK, the Greek Social Democratic Party, propounded the assertion of Zionism as a Jewish plot for world domination. Anti-Semitism increased, accompanied by anti-Israeli manifestations, with desecration of synagogues, Jewish cemeteries, monuments, and Holocaust memorials.

Georgios Karatzaferis, leader of LAOS, in 2001 spoke of Jewish complicity in the 9/11 attacks on the U.S. and that Jews have filled the world with crimes. The leader of the anti-immigrant and racist neo-Nazi Golden Party, now the third party, Nikolaos Michaloliakos declared there were no ovens... there were no gas chambers either. Some of the Golden Party members, whose emblem is akin to a swastika, give the Nazi salute, and one of its parliamentary members read excerpts from the notorious Protocols of the Elders of Zion into the parliamentary record.

The problem is still present. The new defense minister, Panos Kammenos of the Independent Greeks Party which is part of the coalition government, believes that Jews do not pay taxes. Prime Minister Tsipras has taken an anti-Israeli stance for some time. In 2014 he called on the world to make every possible effort so that Israel ended its criminal attack and brutality against Palestinians. His party Syriza was on record to end Greek's defense cooperation with “aggressive Israel,”

It is particularly disturbing that the well-known, politically leftist composer, Mikis Theodorakis, has spoke on many occasions of Israel as the root of evil. One can admire the

music he wrote for the films *Zorba the Greek* and *Serpico*. But his political utterances are less endearing. He pronounced himself both anti-Semitic and anti-Israeli. He sees that country as full of self-importance , and of wicked stubbornness, and Jews of course control not only Wall Street, the banks, the mass media, but also the world of music.

The composer's minor composition is that everything that happens today has to do with the Zionists. It is a sign of hope that other Greek politicians have not expressed a similar opinion in the present dire financial crisis. It is time for Greece to overcome its anti-Semitic past.

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