This is a book about Salonica, the second largest city in contemporary Greece. In this impressive work of more than five hundred pages Mark Mazower narrates the five hundred years of Salonica’s history from the Ottoman conquest to the aftermath of the Second World War and evokes the trajectories of its major groups—Christians, Muslims and Jews.

Salonica is now named Thessaloniki in Greek after the name of a sister of Alexander the Great. The city officially acquired this name in 1912 when it was incorporated into the domain of the Greek kingdom as a result of the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in the Balkan War. As Mazower points out, the city has thirteen different medieval names, which gives us a glimpse of the diversity of the population who once dwelled there. In fact, Ottoman Salonica was a city inhabited by people of linguistically, ethnically and religiously varied character.

In his book Mazower describes the city as characterized by “a society of almost kaleidoscopic interaction” (p.9) and examines how it became a Greek city. One of his purposes is to challenge the histories of the city written from a nationalist perspective. Greek scholars have exclusively articulated Christian/Greek experiences in the city while Jewish historians have claimed Salonica as a Jewish city. Strangely enough, Muslims in the city have been ignored by both. Mazower criticizes the nationalist version of history, arguing that “[t]he history of the nationalists is all about false continuities and convenient silences, the fictions necessary to tell the story of the rendez-vous of a chosen people with the land marked out for them by destiny” (p.474). Consequently, with academic rigor and a strong
sense of the historian's responsibilities, he does not hesitate to recount the breaks and discontinuities the city experienced and he struggles to make heard the voices of the ghosts in Salonica, which had been silenced by the nationalist discourse.

Yet this book does not intend to simply integrate the histories of three religious communities in the city. Its main purpose is more ambitious. Mazower puts it: "the real challenge is not merely to tell the story of this remarkable place as one of cultural and religious co-existence — in the early twenty-first century such long forgotten stories are eagerly awaited and sought out — but to see the experiences of Christians, Jews and Muslims within the terms of a single encompassing historical narrative" (p.10). In short, he aims at writing a Salonicans' history.

His method of writing is descriptive. He compiles many concrete events and episodes and presents them to readers. His description of real events provides a variety of angles to look at the city's history and makes readers understand it in a convincing way particularly in the following three aspects.

First, there had been multiple interactions among different religious communities on different levels of their daily life. By depicting actual episodes, Mazower successfully avoids a trap of the conventional nationalist standpoint which tends to regard a religious community as a unified monolithic body. Though he uses the three religious communities as analytical categories, he does not encapsulate the condition of each community in a totalizing way. Nor though does he dismiss the fact that significant religious hostility persisted throughout the Ottoman period. For example, he mentions that Christians' life in Salonica under the rule of Muslims with Jews numerically dominant was not necessarily rosy and that martyrdom was observed. But Mazower never forgets to look at the other side of the coin. He explains that Muslims were indispensable for Christians so that the latter could unify themselves, explaining that "the church, itself founded through an act of martyrdom, regarded the public suffering of new martyrs as a way of demonstrating the tenacity of Christian belief" (p.91).

While emphasizing the chasms and discords within each community, he calls readers' attention to various forms of collectivity that transcended religious distinctions. On the one hand, there were anti-Kemalist Muslims who wanted to keep the Ottoman Empire and confronted their nationalist counterparts. In the Jewish community there was discord between Zionists and Ottomanists, and between Zionists and those who advocated assimilation into Greek society after Salonica was annexed to Greece. On the other hand, religious customs and superstitions were long shared on a popular level. One example is that Christians, Muslims and Jews went to Casimiye Mosque and prayed for an Islamicized version of Christian saint. Likewise prostitution was engaged in equally by Christian, Muslim
and Jewish women. From the latter half of the nineteenth century, as European influence grew, bourgeois Christians and Jews alike enjoyed the European style. Even Muslims did the same. This phenomenon tells that it was not religion, but class that drew boundaries among Salonicans.

Second, the inhabitants in the city were very sensitive to world affairs beyond the city and actively reacted to them. Mazower does not jumble hundreds of events together. He always bears in mind the contemporary trend of the world and deliberately arranges the events happened in Salonica to consider them within the broader historical framework. For example, in 1876 two European consuls were killed by Salonian Muslims over the conversion of a Christian girl into Islam. He reads in this murder case Muslims' dissatisfaction and a form of resistance to the intervention of the European Christian Powers in Ottoman domestic affairs on the pretext of solving the Eastern Question. Moreover, the prevailing ethnic boycotts in the city in the beginning of the twentieth century — Greeks refrained from doing business with Bulgarians, and Turks and Jews boycotted purchasing Greek, Austrian and Italian goods — can be understood as the advent of a nationalism that called for total participation. Mazower argues that “one might view the boycott as the moment when nationalist politics imposed its own logic upon interactions in the Ottoman city” (p.270).

Third, Salonica has experienced a long and tough process of transforming itself from a city of the Ottoman Empire to that of the Greek state since 1912. As Mazower mentions, the elimination of the Ottoman legacy opened up the possibility of Greek modernity as a nation state. This process of erasure ate away at the urban landscape, on which five hundred years of Ottoman memories were engraved, but also attacked the very existence of Muslims and Jews. The great fire of 1917 and the consequent reconstruction of the city, the exodus of Muslims and the influx of Greek refugees from Asia Minor under the treaty of population exchange of 1923 between Turkey and Greece, and finally the genocide of Jews by Germans in 1943 helped physically obliterate the Ottoman elements and contributed to hellenization of the city. These events were surely the significant blows that disjoined Salonica from the Ottoman past, but nor were they the whole story.

Against the backdrop of the above-mentioned clear breaks from the Ottoman period, Ottoman legacies remained part of Greek Salonica’s life. Administratively, the Ottoman land title remained in use until well into the 1920s though it had no legal backing while the restitution of Jewish properties caused tensions after the Second World War. In daily life a Jewish grocer retained both Jewish and Greek customers by speaking Turkish, Judeo-Spanish and Greek. Greek and Jewish children played together in the streets. Business people and workers in the factories maintained the inter-communal relations and solidari-
ty. Rembetika with an Oriental musical scale flourished.

Mazower also refers to many episodes in which Greek nationalism has played a crucial role to hellenize Salonica. The intolerance of Greek nationalism marginalized Muslims and Jews in the Greek nation state. It is true that the impact of the Greek refugees was so overwhelming that Greek politics had to assign high priority to the issue and that they had less concern for non-Greek inhabitants in Salonica. Yet one can perceive, throughout the chain of events, that Greek nationalistic thought deliberately rejected that which it understood as ‘non-Greek.’ The words of former Greek premier Eleftherios Venizelos in 1934 clearly embody this stance: “The Greeks do not want the Jews to influence Hellenic politics... The Jews of Salonica follow a national Jewish policy. They are not Greeks and do not feel as such. Hence they ought not to involve themselves in Greek affairs” (p.409).

Whole chapters are loosely connected in a chronological order, but each chapter is also thematically self-contained. Readers can start with any chapter they are most interested in. I recommend Japanese readers to note in particular the chapter titled “Travelers and the European Imagination,” which deals with Salonica as an object represented by Europeans. One finds out that Pierre Loti, who is known as the author of Madame Chrysantème, or Okikusan in Japanese, stayed in Salonica in 1876, ten years before he came to Japan. With his work about a love affair with a Muslim woman Azizadé, he did much to stereotype Salonica as an erotic Oriental city among readers of French literature. Loti’s persistently Orientalist gaze contradicts the reality that Salonica was being de-orientalized and westernized at an astonishing speed in the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries. Japanese readers will remark the similarities to his Okikusan, the setting to which is also a port city, like Salonica, in the period of Japanese westernization.

This book can be read as political, social and cultural history alike. What makes Mazower’s wide perspective possible is the huge amount of sources such as archived official documents, personal testimonies and memoirs, newspapers, novels and songs, and his ability to collect and interpret them. Salonica is really an ambitious book in an academic sense. At the same time it is fascinating not only for historians of any field, but for general readers. This is thanks to the combination of gripping content and fine style. Mazower’s beautifully and clearly written English is a great advantage of this book. In addition, more than sixty illustrations visually revive various historical events in Salonica and its daily life.

Salonica, with its multiethnic and multireligious character since the Ottoman period, provides an appropriate topos for Mazower to attempt his ‘history beyond nationalist discourse,’ which is a success. Even readers who are not familiar with Greek history or Salonican Jewish history can come away with satisfaction after reading the book. Mazower
has proved that Salonica’s history can be presented in its own right.

Mazower regards ethnocentric nation-state logic and its biased history as invalid in the present and future world where both small and big countries are starting to collaborate and help each other. In this point lies the contemporary meaning of writing “the history of a small city, with complex polyglot population, which disappeared many decades before” (p. 474). He declares, “Other futures may require other pasts” (p. 474). This statement holds true not only for nation states in the Balkans and in the Middle East with an Ottoman past, but for all countries.

Ph.D. Candidate, Graduate School of Arts and Science, New York University

Book Review: Salonica, City of Ghosts (Murata)