

## *Las Incantadas* of Salonica: Searching for "enchantment" in a city's exiled heritage

In 1864, some fine marble sculptures were taken by the French paleographer Emmanuel Miller from Salonica and brought to the Louvre in Paris, where they are currently displayed. The sculptures, which depict deities related to the cult of Dionysus, were part of a colonnade erected in the 2nd century AD in the Roman Forum of the city. According to a letter sent by Miller to his wife, the removal of the antiquities was a terribly complicated task that created quite a stir among the population of Salonica, then under Ottoman Rule.

Yet this is not just another story about Greek antiquities ending up in foreign museums, but one interwoven with the different ethnic and religious groups then living in the city: the Muslim-Turkish population, who called the statues *suret maleh* (angel figures), the Greek-Orthodox citizens, who referred to them as "the Idols," and, not least of all, the numerous locally-settled, Spanish-speaking Jews, who thought of the sculptured deities as petrified figures and named them *Las Incantadas*, i.e. the Enchanted Ones.

Today, exactly one hundred years after the incorporation of Salonica into the modern Greek nation-state and a few months before the planned celebrations for the centenary of its "liberation," the sculptures seem to re-emerge into a public discussion that gradually reshapes the city's frameworks of cultural memory and identity. For some Salonicans, the antiquities are in exile: they represent "the Elgin marbles of Macedonia" or even "the Caryatides of Northern Greece," and as such must return to their homeland. They constitute significant Classical monuments in a largely Oriental city, which, despite the Greek nationalist rhetoric of the twentieth century, has few verifiable affinities with the glorious Classical past of Greece and the emblematic figure of ancient Macedonia, Alexander the Great. In contrast, for others, the *Incantadas* express the very special past of multicultural Ottoman Salonica: a Roman monument which was once incorporated into a Jewish house in the middle of a typically Balkan urban centre. Finally, for the few remaining Jews of the city, the sculptures refer to the "Jerusalem of the Mediterranean" as Salonica was often called until at least 1912, i.e. before the elimination of its Jewish quarters by a great fire, an attempted new urban plan and the implementation by the Nazis of the so-called Final Solution.

In the proposed paper, we explore the competing imaginings of the exiled statues by different groups living in the city; their highly advertised inclusion in the recent exhibition on "Macedonia, a Greek kingdom," put on at the Louvre in 2011; the action that recently appeared on Facebook, taken by ever expanding groups asking for the repatriation of the antiquities; the recent reemergence of a "Jewish voice" in the city; the discussions taking place about the significance of Salonica's multicultural past and the related marketing strategy in attracting tourists, adopted by the latest local authorities; and, last, but not least, to the recent decision made by the Greek government and the Louvre to offer the city accurate replicas of the *Incantadas*. In the context of the current economic and

social crisis faced by the country, Salonica seems to look for re-enchantment in its "polysemous" heritage. The symbolic return of the *Incantadas* signifies not only the acknowledgement of a local right of ownership of the exiled objects but also a diversity of definitions locally given to the meaning of local cultural heritage.

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