

# The Sephardi REPORT

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Sephardic House

GREAT JEWISH SEPHARDIC COMMUNITIES OF THE WORLD: FOCUS ON GREECE

SPECIAL SECTION ON  
BABYLONIAN JEWRY



"Integrated & Distinct: The Jews of Greece, 1880-1930" at the Center for Jewish History: Tavla de Dulse, Salonika c.1900; US Naturalization documents of Sam Abraham, 1929 (background above). From the ASF Archive: Wedding in Baghdad, c. 1930, Book of Pizmonim from the Louis N. Levy Ladino & Rare Book Collection



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**J**ews appear in Greece after the reign of Alexander the Great (died 323 B.C.E.). Greek was the language of politics and culture in the succeeding Hellenistic kingdoms and remained the language of culture and commerce in the Mediterranean basin until the 8th century CE, and in the Balkans and Asia Minor until the Ottoman conquests (11th to 15th centuries.)

As Jewish life flourished in these Greek-speaking regions, parts of the Hebrew Scriptures began appearing in Greek translation. Ptolemy II (285-247 B.C.E.), the Macedonian king of Egypt, commissioned, according to legend, 70 Jewish scholars to translate the Torah into Greek. In the following centuries, the remainder of the bible was translated into Greek and became known as the Septuagint. Greek words such as "bible", "synagogue" and later "piyyut" entered Jewish culture. The Philosopher Philo (30 B.C.E.- 45 C.E.) belonged to the Jewish elite of Alexandria and wrote in Greek. Contemporary sources described prosperous Jewish communities in Sparta, Delos, Sicyon, Samos, Rhodes, Kos, Gortynia, Crete, Cnidus, Aegina, Thessaly, Boeotia, Macedonia, Aetonia, Attica, Argos, Corinth and Cyprus.



## THE JEWISH COMMUNITIES OF THE HELLENISTIC WORLD

331 - 1453	Christian-Roman Empire restricted the rights of Jewish minorities of the Hellenistic tradition of tolerance and integration.		loss of traditional autonomy granted to Jews under the Ottomans weaken the Sephardi community.
1168 - 1171	Spanish Rabbi Benjamin of Tudela visits the Jewish communities of Greece and writes about them in his "Massaoth shel Rabbi Benjamin" (The Itinerary of Rabbi Benjamin).	1912	Rhodes is annexed to Italy.
1453 - 1912	Greece came under the control of the Ottomans and a new, more tolerant religious and legal system was established for the Sephardi Jews.	1914 - 1918	World War I.
1492	Jews are expelled from Spain and welcomed to Ottoman Lands. Sephardi culture and Judeo-Spanish (Ladino) became part of Jewish Greek life. Over 20,000 Spanish Jews settle in Salonika.	1917	The great fire in the Jewish quarter of Salonika destroys thirty-two of its fifty synagogues and many of the schools and businesses.
1676	More than 300 Jewish families in Salonika, following the preaching of the self-proclaimed Messiah from Izmir, Shabbetai Zvi, convert to Islam, creating a sect called Donme (Turkish for apostates or converts).	1922-1923	Influx of Greek Christian refugees from Asia Minor creates tension with the Jewish community of Salonika.
1821 -1829	Greek War of Independence.	1931	Jewish district of Kampel (originally Campbell) in Salonika is burned.
1834	The Kingdom of Greece is established.	1940	Italian troops attack Greece and are forced back into Albania.
1860	The Alliance Israélite Universelle is founded in Paris.	1941	Germany invades Greece and creates three occupation zones, respectively controlled by Germany, Italy and Bulgaria. Under Nazi anti-Jewish laws, Jewish institutional life is dismantled. Most severe damage occurs in the German and Bulgarian zones.
1881	Volos becomes part of Greece.	1942	In July, Jews living in German and Bulgarian controlled areas are called to forced labor.
1900	The Jewish community of Salonika reaches 80,000, representing 45% of the total population.	1943	Ghettoized by March 1943, more than 45,000 Jews from Salonika are sent to Auschwitz and 5,000 from the Bulgarian sector to Treblinka.
1908	The revolt of the "Young Turks", proclaimed in Salonika, initiates the Turkish nationalistic movement and includes many Jews and Donme.	1943-1944	After Italy surrenders and passes under Nazi control, approximately 8,000 Jews from the Italian sector are deported to Auschwitz.
1904 - 1915	First waves of emigration to the United States and Eretz Israel.	Present	5,000 Jews live in Greece today.
1912 - 1913	The Balkan Wars: Salonika, Ioannina and Kastoria became part of Greece. Forced Hellenization and	Jan. 27, 2004	Greek Government adopts National Day of Remembrance of Jewish-Greek Victims of the Holocaust.

# THE JEWS OF GREECE 1880 - 1930

From 1453 to 1834, most of Greece was part of the Ottoman Empire. A Muslim layer (Turks and Albanians) was added to the Orthodox Christian Greeks, Albanians, Bulgars, Slavs, Latin Christians, Italians, and of course Romaniote, Sephardi, Italian and Ashkenazi Jews. By 1880 roughly half of Salonika's 100,000 residents were Jewish. Greek Jews at the turn of the 20th century were a blend of diverse cultures, united in communities but divided by customs.

The Balkan Wars of 1912-13 brought major changes. Salonika, which had been a major port and commercial hub for the Balkan Peninsula, came within the borders of modern Greece. The Turkish province of Macedonia was divided up among Greece,

Serbia and Bulgaria. The new borders cut it off from most of the region it was serving. A severe economic downturn followed. The new political situation had several unwelcome effects for the thriving Jewish community of Salonika. The recession caused a number of them to emigrate, the merchants going mainly to France while others went to Palestine.

In 1917 Greece entered World War I. The great fire swept across Salonika in August 1917 destroying almost all of the Jewish quarter and crippled the Jewish community. The Jews continued their emigration to other places such as Athens, France, the United States and South America. This flight for wealth, coupled with the mass emigration of youth to

Palestine in the early 30's, left a relatively poor, conservative and aging population living a life that had changed little in 300 years.

After World War I and the integration of Salonika into the new Greek state, the population remained largely Turkish and Judeo-Spanish speaking, and continued its traditional ways. After the influx of huge numbers of Anatolian Greeks in the wake of the 1924 exchange populations, the changes in the political and economic climate necessitated an adjustment by the remaining Sephardic and Romaniote Jews, and many left Greece for the possibility of greater opportunities in the New World. ■

## Greece and the Jews After the Balkan Wars

Dr. Joshua Eli Plaut

With the redrawing of the map of the Balkans as a result of the Balkan Wars, the Jewish populations of Macedonia and Thrace suddenly found themselves citizens of a Greece in the process of mass-Hellenization. When Greece assumed control of Salonika, the country's Jewish population increased significantly. The Jews of Salonika had new loyalties enforced upon them in the fiercely nationalist environment of a newly expanded Greece.

During the First Balkan War, in August 1912, Eleutherios Venizelos, who had become Prime Minister in 1906, united Greece with Serbia, Montenegro and Bulgaria in order to attack Turkey. Later that year Bulgaria attacked Greece over control of Macedonia, in the Second Balkan War. The Greeks caused 15,000 Bulgarians to flee to Macedonia. The Treaty of Athens signed in November 1913 awarded the province of Epirus and part of Macedonia to Greece.

**Salonika Fire:** As a result of the August 17, 1917 fire in Salonika's Jewish quarter, the city's Jewish community began to disperse. Over 50,000 Jews were left homeless,

while 32 synagogues and 50 religious schools were destroyed. The government

offered housing compensation, but certain parts of Salonika were restricted from resettlement by Jews. Compensation was limited and although the American Joint Distribution Committee raised funds to help resettle the survivors of the fire, a May 3, 1918 law passed by the Greek government deprived real estate owners from redeeming their destroyed property. This difficult situation touched off a new wave of emigration to the United States, France, Italy and Egypt. The Jewish community of Salonika never recovered from the devastation that the fire had begun.

**Hellenization:** After Venizelos' attack on Turkey in 1920, Turkey's ruler, Kemal Pasha, expelled over half a million Greeks living in Asia Minor. During a three month period, over 100,000 of these Greeks settled in Salonika. In response, Greece expelled the Turks living in Greece, as well

- o In 1908, after Greece enforced conscription into the armed forces, 8,000 Jews left for America
- o In 1913 Greek Jews emigrated to Turkey after Macedonia and Thrace came under Greek control
- o A massive third wave of emigration was stimulated by the resettlement of hundreds of thousands of Anatolian refugees from 1917 to 1919.
- o Jews went to France and America between 1922 and 1929 after the Salonika fire.
- o Between 1923 and 1934, out from under the thumb of the Ottoman Empire, Jewish nationalists began to enjoy public expressions of their aspirations, along with Greek, Slavic and Romanian nationalists. Many Greek Jews began to emigrate to Palestine to begin the cultivation of the land and to create the infrastructure of what was to become the modern Jewish state of Israel.

as 15,000 Muslims who were descendants of the 16th century Jews who had converted to Islam after the death of Shabbetai Zvi.

Harry Policar from Marmaris wrote, "We could do what we wanted until the First World War. My grandfather and father were both bankers. During the war they took the Greeks out of Marmara and sent all of them inland because the Greeks were fighting against the Turks at the time, and the Turks felt the Greeks on Marmara might get together with the enemy. With the Greeks gone, Marmara deteriorated. We stayed as long as we could. Finally I came to this country [the USA] because my father said, 'You have to go. There's no future for young boys here.' At that time I was about to be drafted into the Turkish army."

**The Battle to Save the Jewish Sabbath:** The Greek government's pro-

gram of Hellenization had a profound impact on the Jewish community. This policy included enforcement of Sunday as the mandatory commercial rest day for Greeks of all cultural and religious persuasions in 1925. Up until that time, cities populated by other religious groups had the right to a rest day other than Sunday. Part of a royal decree of 1923 stipulated that "the Jews have the right to rest on Saturday instead of Sunday." But, this changed with the Third International Labor Conference in Geneva where Law 2990 was passed enforcing a mandatory Sunday rest day in all branches of industry "without any distinction of religion or nationality."

**Jewish Educational Restrictions:** Legislation was enacted in 1934 whereby children of Greek citizens were obliged to study at state schools and prohibited from going to schools maintained by foreign

organizations including the popular Alliance Israélite Universelle. Jewish community schools merged with Alliance schools and the education of Jewish children became decidedly more secular.

**Emigration:** The growing number of restrictions and destabilizing events of this period led many Greek Jews to gravitate towards places of greater tolerance and religious freedom with droves of Greek Jews emigrating to North and South America, France, and Palestine.

*Dr. Plaut is the author of "Greek Jewry in the 20th Century, 1913-1983; Patterns of Jewish Survival in the Greek Provinces Before and After the Holocaust" (Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1996). Also the creator of the international photography show "Scattered Lights: The Remnant of Israel in Rural Greece." ■*

Mark Cohen focused his talk on a key moment in modern Sephardic history when religious life was losing its strength, and the Sephardim began to embrace a secular education for their children. Cohen's research for his book, "Last Century of a Sephardic Community: The Jews of Monastir, 1839-1943," revealed a perfect example of this trend, which occurred in Monastir from 1863-64. Monastir's Sephardic community was weakened by a fire in 1863, and sought the financial help of the famous philanthropist Sir Moses Montefiore of London. London's Jews donated money, but also used the opportunity to encourage the Monastir Jews to adopt the new secular schools of the Alliance Israélite Universelle and in 1864, Monastir founded one of the first Alliance committees in the Ottoman Empire. The story of the early years of Sephardic history is well known. There was the Golden Age of Spain that saw the rise of Judah Ha Levi and Maimonides, the infamous expulsion from Spain in 1492, and the dangerous ocean journeys to Amsterdam, North Africa, and the Ottoman Empire. Finally, there is the welcome the Spanish Jews received in Turkey, where they again rose to prominence. For many of us, the story ends there, in the 1500s, and for good reason. The later story of the Ottoman Sephardim is a tougher sell.

## How the West Won: The Arrival of the Alliance Israélite Universelle to the Community of Monastir

By Mark Cohen (excerpt)



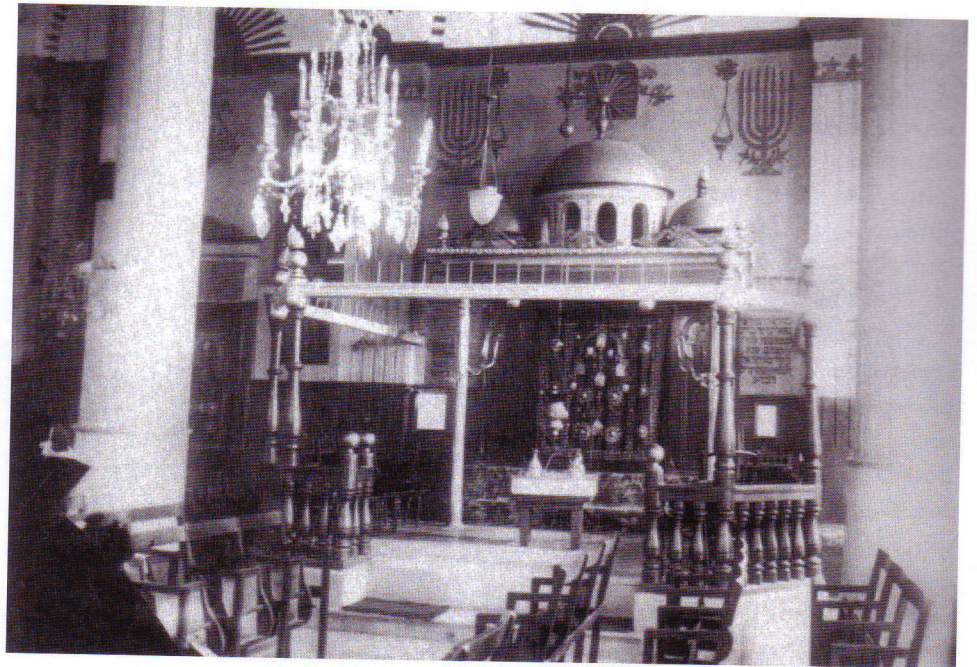
*A Street in the Jewish Quarter, early 20th century. Reprinted from "Last Century of a Sephardic Community."*

By the early 1800's the Sephardim in the Ottoman Empire had begun to lose their prestigious positions in government and business. What went wrong? There was the general decline of the Ottoman Empire, which by the mid 17th century could no longer beat Europe in war or in commerce. There was also the rise of the Jewish false messiah, Shabbetai Tzvi. Born in the Turkish city of Izmir, Tzvi won many thousands of followers among the Ottoman Sephardim. But in 1666, he converted to Islam rather than face execution by the Ottoman authorities. His followers were crushed, and many became wary of new ideas. Then, in 1826, the Ottoman army was reorganized and powerful Sephardim who had business dealings with the old guard lost their positions.

In the mid 19th century another story was unfolding. Jews began leaving their old Jewish quarters and their religious schools, and started learning French, reading novels, going to Paris to become teachers, joining political movements, and moving to Jerusalem, South America, and the United States. Traditional religious life was ending. The Sephardim were becoming modern Jews.

Probably the key movement in this change was the appearance of the French-Jewish schools of the Alliance Israélite Universelle, which by the early 20th century brought European culture and schooling to tens of thousands of Sephardim. However, the Alliance was controversial when it appeared in 1860. Europe's Jews supported it, while Sephardic rabbis opposed its secular curriculum. A great example of how the battle over the schools was fought can be found in the story of Monastir.

As the capital of much of the Ottoman lands in the Balkans, Monastir had vibrant commerce, military power, impressive architecture, a cultured elite, and political clout. It managed to become an energetic and afflu-



*Kahal Kadosh Aragon, Monastir's largest synagogue. Reprinted from "Last Century of a Sephardic Community."*

ent city of 45,000 people despite its isolated location in a mountainous region, without a port or rail link, and separated from the seaport of Salonika by four days on horseback. Its populations included about 21,000 Muslims, 1,500 Catholics, 2,500 Gypsies, 17,000 Greeks, and 3,000 Jews. Monastir was an important trading center of the Macedonian region and its army headquarters guaranteed that there was always a market for clothing, food and other goods.

European Jews learned that the traditional life they had left behind when they gained equal rights was still powerful among the Greek Sephardim. The

were pushing for changes in Ottoman society, British and French Jews were pushing for change in Sephardic society. As Europe's power grew, European Jews came into closer contact with Ottoman Jews. The kind of Sephardic life that European Jews wanted to change was being lived in places such as Monastir.

Monastir was one of the most traditional centers of Sephardic culture in all the Ottoman Balkans. Spanish ballads from the 1400s were cherished in Monastir, and songs that were forgotten in other Ottoman Sephardic communities were still recited in Monastir. Women who couldn't read told complex folktales from memory,

hundreds of proverbs that pointed out life's truths were a common possession, and an unusually old Spanish pronunciation and vocabulary were prevalent in Monastir's Ladino language. Rabbis were powerful, religious faith was deep,

***To Sir Moses Montefiore, &c., &c.,***

*We acquaint you that alas, alas! A fire from Heaven has visited our city, and has consumed our beautiful synagogues and houses of study; and our young and old wander about the streets naked, and in the greatest destitution, and women brought up delicately go about bare-footed and without garments.*

*The voice of the law is heard lamenting, because there is no place now for its study.*

*We implore you to extend to us a helping hand, and to speak to the chiefs and charitable of your city, that they may look upon us with benevolence, and bestow upon us some of the blessings wherewith God has blessed them, and thus assist us in repairing the damage done.*

Sephardim spoke their own Spanish-Jewish language, attended their own schools, lived in their own residential quarters, and followed all the requirements of Jewish law. At the same time that Britain and France

and synagogues, Jewish courts of law, and religious schools were the community's primary institutions. At the religious Talmud Torah, which only boys attended, students read the Hebrew Bible and translated it

into Ladino so its stories and lessons could be understood. No secular studies, such as grammar, math, science, history, or Western languages were offered. The purpose of the Talmud Torah was to instill Jewish faith and ensure the survival of the Jewish people.

### The Monastir Fire

The entrance to Monastir's Jewish quarter separated the Jews from more than it connected the Jews to the rest of city. A narrow, gated passageway set between two houses was meant to restrict traffic, not encourage it. Once inside, the quarter expanded. At its center was a large courtyard surrounded and enclosed by the houses. This was "The Great Court," called *cortijo* by the Sephardim.

At 4 p.m. on August 14, 1863, guns were fired at Monastir's military base. It was a fire alarm. The blaze began in a small tavern and soon spread to nearby houses. The entire covered marketplace, including 2,300 shops, burned down. Monastir's Jewish quarter was virtually wiped out. Of the 232 homes lost to the fire, 190 were in the Jewish quarter. A mere 15 Jewish homes survived. The British Consulate in Monastir reported that, "The almost total destruction of their quarter has reduced upwards of six hundred Jewish families to a state of great misery and destitution. For the present, some hundreds of them are

crowded together in the tents provided by the Government; others live in the open air under trees; and as many as have been able to afford to pay rent have got into private houses."

The Chief Rabbi of Monastir and other community leaders, wrote a letter of appeal to Sir Moses Montefiore of London, one of the wealthiest Jews of his day and also one of the most devoted to the welfare of his fellow Jews. The letter was written in Hebrew and published in English in London's Jewish Chronicle newspaper on September 25, 1863. It read, in part,

On Yom Kippur, London's Jews learned of the fire and the homeless Jews of Monastir. London's Jews contributed approximately £2,000 toward the relief of the Jews of Monastir, a large sum in its day. The money purchased food, clothing, and shelter for the Monastirlis.

The fire was also an opportunity for London to pressure the Monastir Sephardim to adopt the new schools of the Alliance. Since 1840, it had become a practice of the European Jews to leverage Sephardic weakness and use calls for help as opportunities to push for social change. London refused to let the Monastirlis use the money to rebuild their Talmud Torah. European Jews wanted to replace those institutions, not pre-

serve them.

The 1863 fire broke the back of tradition in Monastir. With their Jewish quarter destroyed, the Jews moved to several different areas of the city. Some moved to an area called Ine Bey, and others, such as one Muschon Calderon, moved to the Emin Chelebi quarter. With the community dispersed instead of unified, rabbinical control was not as easily exercised and the Jews became more free to pursue an untraditional life. The prestige of Moses Montefiore, Europe's most famous Jewish philanthropist, was thrown behind the Monastir Jews who wanted new schools that taught French.

Though an Alliance-type school would not open for another 20 years, the new Monastir Alliance committee was enormously important because it was the first formal break with traditional religious life and its institutions. The value of a Talmud Torah education could not be measured in worldly terms. Its purpose was to transmit the law that was given by God to the people of Israel. Alliance schools held out the promise of learning French and succeeding economically. By transferring their allegiance to the Alliance, the committee members revealed that a radical shift in values was in progress. ■

*Mark Cohen is a graduate of Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism and a frequent contributor to scholarly publications and newspapers on Sephardic topics. "Last Century of a Sephardic Community: The Jews of Monastir, 1839-1943" (Foundation for the Advancement of Sephardic Studies and Culture, 2003) is available in hardback from the ASF/SH Bookstore for \$35.*

## Greece's Romaniote Communities, 1880-1930

I want briefly this evening to consider this idea, that of Greece as a "mother country," a true home, for a specific group of its Jewish inhabitants, the so-called "Romaniotes," or "Roman" Jews.

**B**efore there were Greek Christians, there were Greek Jews. Despite present constitutional guarantees regarding freedom of religion, and the legal separation of church and state, in the modern era it has been very easy to assume that Orthodox Christianity is essential to Greekness, and Greekness somehow essen-

tial to Orthodoxy. Yet, if one considers the historical sweep of the Hellenic tradition, this is also a relatively new development. While Greece today is an overwhelmingly Christian country, Greeks have not by any means always been exclusively Christian.

No group demonstrates this better than the "Romaniotes," the Greek-speaking Jews

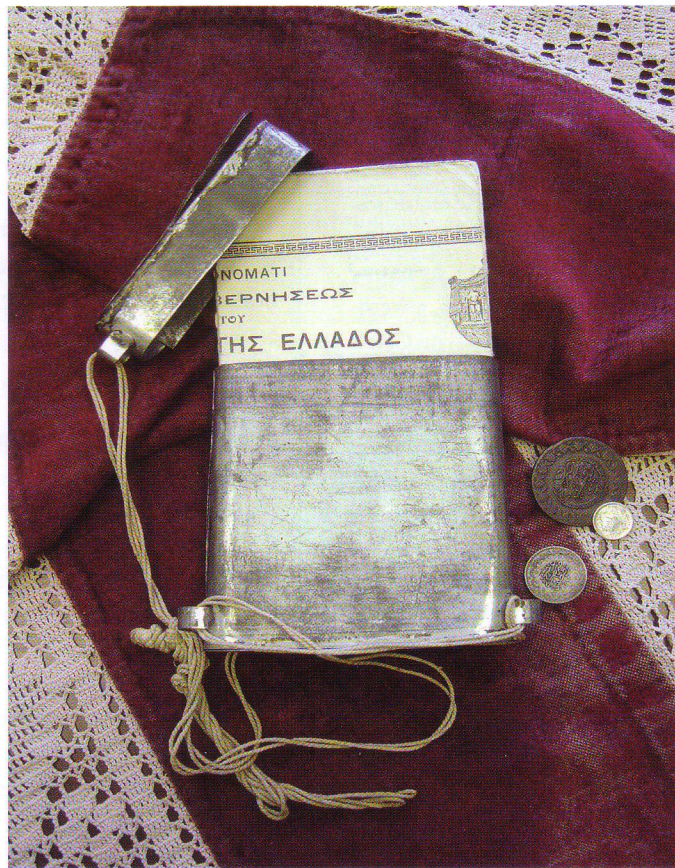
who have lived in the lands that today are Greece from as early on as the second temple period. Indeed, many scholars have argued that the Romaniotes are properly considered as an "indigenous" Jewish group - one for which exile would consist of separation from Greece, just as for centuries those expelled from Spain and Portugal have understood their exile through the lens of Sepharad.

As the Ottoman Empire crumbled, many Jews who for centuries had lived a relatively stable life suddenly found themselves members of "The Orthodox Kingdom of Greece." In some ways, this transition was just as difficult and traumatic for Romaniotes as it was for Sephardim. Take, for instance, the Romaniote Jews in Ioannina - for centuries the center of

Romaniote Judaism in much the same way that Salonika was for years the center for Sephardim. While in Salonika Jews were accustomed to being the majority, used Ladino as their language, and did not necessarily have constant contact with Greek Orthodox Christians, the reverse was the case for Jews in Ioannina. When Greece seized Salonika from the Ottomans in 1912, it was clearly a difficult transition for the Jewish community, since it had enjoyed a large degree of autonomy up to that point. To "become Greek" however, was largely a political matter - the exchange of one ruler for another.

For Romaniotes, on the other hand, things weren't so clear cut. Ioannina passed from Ottoman to Greek hands in 1913, a year after Salonika. But what did it mean to "become Greek," when one already spoke Greek, shared Greek culture to a large degree, and had already lived for years as a minority in a largely Greek Orthodox-dominated culture? Romaniotes, paradoxically, stood out as "not really Greek" - which in their case simply meant, not Christian, not the religion of the new dominant power. Romaniotes, from the moment Greece was established, were forced somehow to "prove" their loyalty to the Greek state.

The Kingdom of Greece was established in 1834 as a tiny country, supported by the western powers, and hemmed in on the east by the Ottoman Empire, of which it had once been a part, and on the north, by the Balkans, with which it had long been related. Greece spent much of the 19th century trying to expand its borders. There was a constant tension between actual Greece and this "greater Greece" of the imagination. This tension also affected Greek-speaking Jews in the region. I'll give just one example. In 1897 the Greco-Turkish war broke out. A number of Romaniotes, from Patras, Corfu, Zakynthos, Volos, Athens, and Chalkis, took part in the war, partly to fend off accusations that they were secretly



*This Box with wool cord, Ioannina, c. 1900. Photo Lyn Stome.*

on the side of the Turks. Meanwhile, on the Turkish side some of the most ardent defenders of the Ottoman status quo were Jews. Thus the Greco-Turkish war was one of the first and only instances in the modern period of Jews fighting other Jews in the context of national wars.

In 1882 the Greek state had recognized the legal status of all the Jewish communities in Greece, which at that time were almost all Romaniote. The kehila was defined as an autonomous religious body run by an elected council. It was given many rights and privileges, at least on paper. However many kehilot still suffered and faced difficulties.

Problems intensified as Greece grew, largely because of the division of Greece into two - "Old Greece," consisting of the original Greek territories of 1834, and "New Greece," consisting of the newly-conquered territories. The Greek state viewed with great suspicion the traditional cooperation between Jews and Turks. As a result, Jews of the Old Greece were considered disloyal, while those of the New Greece were seen as unwelcome additions to the state. Tensions between Greeks and Jews intensi-

fied and in 1889, only a few years after Volos became part of Greece, a blood libel followed by pogroms took place there. This event was followed by similar episodes all over Greece, with a particularly well-known one in Corfu in 1891. This wave of anti-Semitic events helped the Kehila of Athens gain centrality vis-à-vis other Romaniote communities.

During the same period, Ioannina emerged as a center for Zionism, and with the establishment in the city of the Alliance Israelite Universelle (1904), the city's Jewish community began actively to cultivate economic, intellectual, and religious contacts with the outside world. Virtually half the city's Jewish population emigrated during the next decade, most to the United States. This period marked the beginnings of the Romaniote community here in New York. The diminution of

the Ioannina community helped the further consolidation of Athens as a Romaniote center.

Despite this mixed if not grim picture, in terms of everyday life there were good relations between Greek Jews and Greek Christians in some of the communities. During the 1897 war, for instance, the Chief Rabbi of Crete, R' Ablagon, helped Christian families, hiding them from the Turks. Countless stories are told of personal encounters, friendships, and ties between Greek Jews and Greek Christians.

This all must be understood in the context of huge and difficult political, demographic, and social change. Greek census reports of the period help give some idea of the scope of this transformation. In the wake of the Balkan wars and the First World War, (between 1911 and 1922), Greece doubled its size and its population. It increased in size from 63,000 square kilometers in 1907 to 130,000 square kilometers in 1922, and in population from 2,630,000 in 1907 to 5,530,000 in 1922. According the 1928 census, 1.2 % of the total Greek population was Jewish: 72,791. 98.7 % of the Jews lived in cities and only

a few in rural areas. About 84% lived in Macedonia, almost all in the city of Salonika. In the 1928 census the language of 62,000 of the Jews was Ladino while only 10,000 declared that Greek was their language.

This nationalist expansion, which was accompanied by processes of modernization, also had some positive effects for the Romaniotes. In some areas, it contributed to vibrant Jewish communal activity, mostly in the areas of education and culture. Romaniotes, as native Greek speakers, found it much easier to engage the Greek government on the legal and policy levels than did Sephardim. The Greek national project included making Greek the official language of the state, so while Ladino speakers came under government pressure, Romaniotes were effectively able to further their own political agenda. While the 1920's and 30's were difficult for Sephardim, who struggled to "become Greek," Romaniote life, comparatively speaking, thrived.

We know now, of course, that this relative efflorescence of the interwar period was brief indeed. In 1930 there were 71,611 Jews in Greece. Within fifteen years, 58,885 of them would be killed. Among them were the descendants of one of Europe's very oldest Jewish communities. In his letter to the Galatians, Saul of Tarsus - the apostle Paul - wrote that "There is no Jew, and there is no Greek" (Galatians 3:28) - all are equal in the eyes of God. This passage was cited in the famous letter sent on March 23, 1943, by the Greek Archbishop Damaskinos to the puppet president, Konstantinos Logothetis. In the Romaniotes, though, we find the unique example of a people who are fully both. ■

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## Spotlight on Salonika, Greece: Shabbetai Tzvi and Salonika's Jews

Salonika, Greece played center stage for one of the most tumultuous episodes in Jewish History: the story of Shabbetai Tzvi. While Jewish history has had more than its share of dramatic occasions, few have compared to the furor aroused by the actions of Shabbetai Tzvi, perhaps the most infamous of all the false Messiahs.

Located on Greece's northeast coast, along the Aegean Sea, Salonika was once one of the most Jewish cities in the world. By the 16th century, although Salonika was comprised of many different ethnic and religious groups, Jews were the single largest ethnic minority in the city. It achieved renown for its level of Jewish learning and culture, and was even acclaimed as the "Jerusalem of the Balkans." Salonika was also a center for the study of Jewish mysticism, or Kabbalah, a fact that was to assume great prominence in the subsequent Shabbetai Tzvi drama.

Shabbetai Tzvi was born in Smyrna, Turkey in 1626 and received a typical traditional education and upbringing. Due to his charisma

# BOUMWELOS

## Rhodes

Traditionally, there were made in special pans resembling egg poachers. Each depression was almost filled with oil and heated. Then the spoonfuls of dough were dropped in and cooked.

### 6 matsoth

Milk to soak the matsoth

3 eggs, beaten

Pinch of salt

3 cups of olive oil for frying

A well-chilled syrup (see below, make first)

Almonds or walnuts and cinnamon

Soak the matsoth overnight in enough milk to cover completely. The next day, break up the matsoth and, using your hands, squeeze out as much of the milk as you can. Put the pulp in a large bowl and mash it until fairly smooth. Beat the eggs and stir them in with a pinch of salt. Beat the mixture until smooth and set aside while the oil is heating.

Heat 3 cups of olive oil in a heavy saucepan. When it has almost reached the smoking point, take out tablespoons of the dough and, using your finger, push them off into the hot oil. Fry on both sides until golden brown.

As the boumwelos are cooked, drop them on by one into the syrup for a few minutes, then put them on a large dish. Before serving, sprinkle with chopped almonds or walnuts and cinnamon. Makes 20-30.

### Syrup:

1 cup water

¼ cup honey

½ cup sugar

Juice of 1 lemon

(optional)

Boil together until you have a syrup that will coat the back of a wooden spoon. If you wish, you may add the juice of 1 lemon shortly before removing from the heat. Chill well.

Reprinted from *Cookbook of the Jews of Greece* by Nicholas Stavroulakis





and intelligence, he was marked by the Jewish community for great success in his future undertakings. Shabbetai Tzvi, however, had a dual personality that began to emerge as he grew older, and his behavior became increasingly erratic. He alternated between extreme emotional highs of euphoria where he considered himself to be the Messiah, and depressed states that drove him to violate traditional Jewish laws. He was ultimately banned from his hometown as a result of his deviant behavior.

After wandering through parts of Greece, Shabbetai Tzvi settled in Salonika. It was there that he openly proclaimed himself as the Messiah, and gained many adherents. He engaged in many strange mystical activities to prove his exalted spiritual state, including a ceremony in which he married the Torah under a chuppah (wedding canopy). As a result of these actions, the rabbis expelled him from Salonika.

From this point on, Shabbetai Tzvi traveled through a number of other places, including Jerusalem and Cairo. During this

time, he expanded his entourage, engaged in even more untraditional and bizarre activities and declared himself with an unprecedented sense of surety to be the Messiah. By the spring of 1665, Shabbetai Tzvi's messianic movement was established and had swept throughout the Jewish world. Thousands of desperate Jews the world over, fresh from the recent persecutions of the Chmilnietzki massacres, excitedly awaited their upcoming salvation by Shabbetai Tzvi.

In 1666, Shabbetai Tzvi announced that he was going to Constantinople to demand that the sultan relinquish his throne, and allow him to rule in his stead as befitting his status as the Messiah. Upon arrival at the Turkish port, however, he was placed under arrest and sent to prison. The sultan, far from being prepared to hand over power to Shabbetai Tzvi, demanded that he convert to Islam immediately or face the death penalty. To the shock and horror of most of his followers, Shabbetai Tzvi converted to Islam.

The story of Shabbetai Tzvi, however, does not end with his conversion. Some of his most faithful adherents claimed by way of mystical reasoning that Shabbetai Tzvi was still the Messiah and simply preparing the world in preparation for its final redemption. This group of the faithful, known as the Doenmeh ("Apostates" in Turkish), chose Salonika as their religious center, and from there their ideology spread to Constantinople and neighboring places as well. In response, the Salonika Jewish community united and reorganized its leadership to counter the Sabbatean threat.

Shabbetai Tzvi's teachings and apostasy caused turmoil throughout the Jewish world. However, the Salonika Jewish community was especially hard hit, as a result of its geography, prominence and openness to Jewish mysticism. Remnants of the Doenmeh and its culture have survived into modern-day Salonika. ■

*Ilana Sperling*

## A Record of the Past: Ioannina

"All of this that you see here was Jewish, all the stores, Jewish ... Lots of Jews fixed ... tinware ... in Ioannina the majority were merchants (embori) - fabrics, glass, threads, threads are threads, and haberdashery. There were lots of peddlers, they lived and sold small things, for 10 drachmes. We also had three doctors, two pathologists and one dentist" (interview, N. and A. Negrin 10 Nov. 1983).

At the start of the 20th century, Ioannina, the provincial capital of Epirus, was a military, governmental and market center. The population in 1913, approximately 20,000, included Greek Christians, Turkish and Albanian Muslims, Greek-speaking Jews, peripatetic gypsies and Vlachs, and others. The Jewish population numbered about 4,000 people. The city was comprised of the ancient Byzantine walled fortress (kastro) jutting into Lake Pamvotis and neighborhoods on the plain spreading west and south of the kastro.

At the turn of the 20th century the Jews of Ioannina resided in several distinct neighborhoods inside the kastro, close to the synagogue, and outside the kastro, close

to its walls. Two sides of the kastro were surrounded by a moat with wooden bridges and gates that were closed at sunset. Historically, both Jews and Muslim Turks lived in the kastro.

Outside of the kastro, the Jewish neighborhoods were Vakoufika, Kondouriotou, Livadiotis, the Mikri Rouga, and the Megali Rouga. They, too, were not exclusively Jewish, Christians lived next to Jews. All were centrally located within a five minute walk of business places, both synagogues, and the Alliance schools. Family members lived side-by-side in adjoining houses. Marriages joined together other families. Some houses were part of the dowry (prika) of a number of women.

The Jews of Ioannina worked primarily in the cloth industry. They were central in textile manufacture especially the production of silk braid and gold lace used in dress throughout Europe and scarves and other costume pieces marketed in Albania. They were also merchants selling domestic and imported fabrics at locally wholesale and retail levels.

Up to the late 19th century, the Jews in Ioannina held a virtual monopoly in some

trades, such as peddling and as porters.

They also carried goods to the villages of Epirus. The next most common occupations of the Jews were butchers, or animal factors, small goods or haberdashery stores, and brokers, both of property and wholesale goods. This was a community deeply rooted in history and traditions.

*Note: When doing research for my doctoral dissertation, I strolled the former Jewish neighborhoods with Alberto Negrin and Michael Matsas. Quiet hours each week were spent walking through the residential areas. Streets which had once been primarily Jewish, and others which were quite mixed, were described. The purpose of our walks was to create a record of the past. The cobblestone streets echoed with early morning footsteps, and our voices reverberated off of the stone buildings.*

### By Annette B. Fromm, Ph.D.

Dr. Annette B. Fromm is a folklorist and museum specialist. Her doctoral dissertation, "We Are Few: Folklore and Ethnic Identity of the Jewish Community of Ioannina, Greece," was written for Indiana University.

Dr. Fromm has published articles on Jews in Greece, Greek folklore, immigrant-ethnic groups in America, multicultural museums, Native Americans in museums, and folk art. Another area of research is food history and traditions. She has taught many workshops on folklore and folklife, American ethnicity and museum issues.

Dr. Fromm is the Manager of the Deering Estate at Cutler, in Miami, Florida. ■

# Rabbi Avraam Nahmias Words for the Swearing-In Ceremony

During the Days of the Greek Republic 1924-1935

The following text was found, amongst the numerous manuscripts that the daughter and son of the late Ribí Avraam Nahmias had given to the Institute Maale Adumim, in Israel, to be conserved and archived.

The text in Judeo-Spanish was written in beautiful Hebrew letters by Ribí Nahmias sometime during the years 1924/1935, while Greece was a republic.

What is surprising is that, even though all the small countries that came out of the ruins of the Ottoman Empire, including Turkey and Greece, imposed their language on the minorities that lived within their confines, the Greek government recognized the language of the Sephardim for this "Oath of Allegiance" that the Jewish soldiers swore as they joined the Greek army.

It was Ribí Avraam Nahmias that led the swearing in ceremony. ■

*Karos ijos,*

This is what he said in Judeo-Spanish:

*Antes de dar vuestra djura, devesh de entender su importansa para vozos, ijos de Israel.  
Esta djura ke vozos vash a dar agora, no es koza nueva para nozotros, es una ser-  
emonia de munchos miles de anyos: Kuando nozotros eramos puevlo libero  
kada ijo de Israel ke iva soldado el dava la djura de fidelidad ala patria, komo  
vimos en Yeoshua komo la armada djuro en diziendo: "Todo lo ke mos  
enkomentates aremos, I onde kiere ke nos enbiara, andaremos, I guai de akel ke  
no egzekutiva I no se sometia a sus superiores el era severamente apenado, el era  
mizmo matado si haz-veshalom el dezertava la armada.  
Kon esto, karo ijos, vozotros devesh de ser unos valyentes soldados I de guarar  
siempre por lo bueno de la patria I ke digan manyana ke los djidios tambien son  
unos veros patriotas, I kon esta arma pueremos defendernos kontra nuestros  
enemigos de rasa.  
Vozotros devesh de ser el egzemplo de la buena kondukta I disiplina en la arma-  
da afin ke seash el buen egzemple entre los soldados. Esto bien seguro ke mis  
palavras seran tomadas en konsiderasion I de esta manera aresh onor a vuestro  
puevlo Am Israel.  
I agora vos rogo de alevantar los dos dedos de la mano derecha I responder bier-  
vo por biervo a todo lo ke vo dizir:*

*Djuro al nombre de Dio de ser fidel ala patria I  
Al rejim republikano de obedeser alas leyes I dekretos  
Del governo, de sotometerme a mis superiores I  
Egzekutir kon veluntad I sin kontradiksion sus  
ordenes, de defender kon fey I abrigasion fin la ultima  
gotera de sangre la bandiera Elena, de no abandonarla ni  
espartirme de eya, de guarar siempre las leyes  
militaras I de bivir siempre komo fiel I dinyo soldado.*

*Before you take this oath you must understand its special meaning for you, sons of  
Israel.  
This oath that you are about to take is not a new thing for us. On the contrary it is  
a ceremony that is thousands of years old. When we were a free people, every son of  
Israel who went into the army took an oath of loyalty to his country, as we read in  
the chapter dedicated to Joshua. Every soldier swore his allegiance saying, "We will  
do everything you ask us to do, we will go everywhere you ask us to go, and woe to  
those who do not fulfill their obligations, for they will be seriously punished and,  
even, in case of desertion, "haz-veshalom", suffer the death penalty. With this, dear  
sons, you must be valiant soldiers, and always work for the good of the country so  
that, some day, they will say that the Jews also were true patriots. With this weapon,  
we can respond to the enemies of our people. You must set the example of good  
manners and discipline in the army so that the other soldiers will follow your ways.  
I am sure that my words will be taken seriously and in this way will you bring  
honor to your people, Am Israel.  
Now, I ask you to lift the two fingers of your right hand and repeat after me word  
for word:*

*"I swear in God's name to be loyal to  
my country and to the republican  
regime, to obey the laws decreed by  
the government, to obey my superiors  
and to execute their orders with good will and  
without contradiction, to defend til the last drop  
of my blood the Hellenic flag, never to abandon it nor  
to separate myself from it, to always obey  
the military laws and to always live as  
a faithful and honorable soldier."*

# National Day of Remembrance of Greek Jewish Holocaust Victims

Speech given by George Papandreou,  
Greek Minister of Foreign Affairs. January 27, 2004

January 27th has now officially been designated as a national day of remembrance for Greek Jewish victims of the Holocaust. For the first time, the day was commemorated in Greece. The Greek Minister of Foreign Affairs, George Papandreou, speaking in Athens, used the opportunity to speak out against racism and anti-Semitism: "In our country, Greek citizens, who were selected only because they were Jewish, were arrested, loaded onto trains, sent to concentration camps which today have become the symbol of man's inhumanity to man. The Jewish community of Greece, which has contributed to the richness of life and national identity in our country, was almost completely wiped out: a community which contributed to every aspect of Greek society, a community that has lived on Greek soil for more than 2000 years was destroyed. It is my duty to express my gratitude towards the Community of Greek Jewry, towards the survivors and their descendants who are with us today. We are grateful to them for keeping the flame of Greek Jewry alive. I want to add something else. I image that those who perished would not want us to live in fear and mourning. Rather, they would have wanted

us to live our lives in the same way that they had lived theirs, with love, compassion and kindness towards our fellow man. But, surely they would have wanted us to oppose, not only the great barbarities and genocides throughout the world, but also here in our own country. They would have wanted us to oppose even the smallest injustices, the smallest biases, the tiniest exclusions. Surely, they would have wanted to see our society open, creative, and fully inclusive, where cultural, religious and ethnic differences don't threaten but rather enhance, inspire and strengthen creativity. . . . ."

"Greece now stands on the threshold of a new community, not only a European community, but also a universal community, one that respects human rights and peace. With these thoughts in mind, I would like to extend my thanks to all political parties in the parliament, and their unanimous decision to designate January 27th as a National Day of Remembrance of Greek Jewish victims of the Holocaust. This decision is a credit to all of us, both as a country and as a people. It keeps alive historical memory, important and necessary in our contemporary period. It is a lesson

not only in history, but also a means to educate our youth and future generations. The struggle of memory over oblivion is a struggle against totalitarianism and hate: it is the continuous struggle for a free democracy and the respect for differences, both cultural and religious.

The decision of the Greek Parliament is an obligation towards Greek citizens, Jewish by faith. They fought on the Albanian Front in 1940, joined us in the Resistance against the Fascists during the Occupation and gave their lives for their country, Greece. This most important Jewish community which contributed to the economic and cultural advancement of our country was destroyed in the Nazi concentration camps. Now, annually, on January 27th, we will pay our respects to them, our dead brothers and sisters: it is our historical obligation. . . . ."

*Coinciding with these historical events in Greece, by invitation of the Consul General of Greece in New York, Dimitris Platis, Greek Jews from the New York metropolitan area were invited to gather in the consulate (which is considered Greek soil) to join in commemorating this day with their co-religionists in Greece. We were deeply grateful for this opportunity. Consul General Platis individually welcomed and greeted each arrival as they entered the consulate and opened the ceremonies by stating that it was the obligation of the Greek government to remember the Greek Jews who perished during the Holocaust. ■*

## Book Review

### A Liter of Soup and Sixty Grams of Bread

By Heinz Salvator Kounio

For a Greek Jew like Heinz Salvator Kounio, the ability to speak German saved his life, and the lives of his family.

When Kounio, then 15, his mother, father and sister arrived at Auschwitz in 1943, having been deported from their home in Thessaloniki,

they were asked about other languages. Kounio's Czech-born mother had taught them all German, and in the camps they were called on as translators.

The Kounios were the only Greek Jewish family to survive the Nazi concentration camps intact. Although the males and females were separated during their incarceration and didn't always know the others' fate, the four of them returned to Greece after liberation. Of the 46,000 Jews deported from Thessaloniki, 1200 returned.

In a powerful memoir, "A Liter of Soup and Sixty Grams of Bread: The Diary of Prisoner Number 109565" (Sephardic House/Bloch Publishing), Kounio meticulously describes his experience in Auschwitz and other camps. The book, adapted and

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