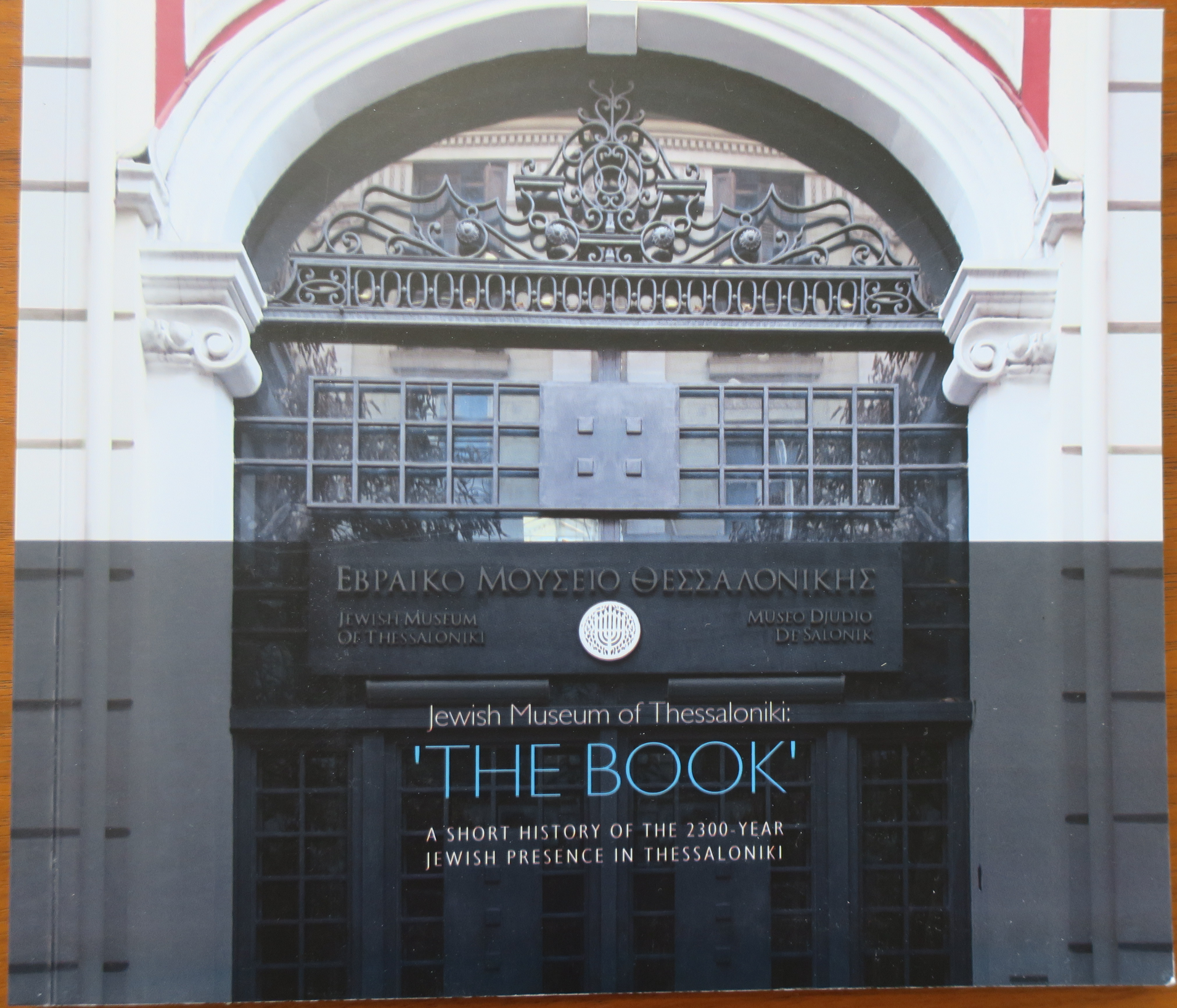
ΕΒΡΑΙΚΟ ΜΟΥΣΕΙΟ ΘΕΣΣΑΛΟΝΙΚΗΣ
JEWISH MUSEUM OF THESSALONIKI
MUSEO DJUDIO DE SALONIK
Jewish Museum of Thessaloniki:
'THE BOOK'
A SHORT HISTORY OF THE 2300-YEAR JEWISH PRESENCE IN THESSALONIKI



Hilchot Rav Alfas with commentaries, Pressburg (Bratislava) 1836 edition.
Codification of Jewish Law by Rabbi Isaak Alfasi.
Donated by David Saltiel

Jewish Museum of Thessaloniki:

'THE BOOK'

A SHORT HISTORY OF THE 2300-YEAR
JEWISH PRESENCE IN THESSALONIKI

JEWISH MUSEUM OF THESSALONIKI:
'THE BOOK'

Designed by Hy Brazil/Gatenio
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BENEFACTORS AND DONORS

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to the following individuals,
firms and organizations:

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WELCOME

By Dawid Saltiel,
President of the Jewish

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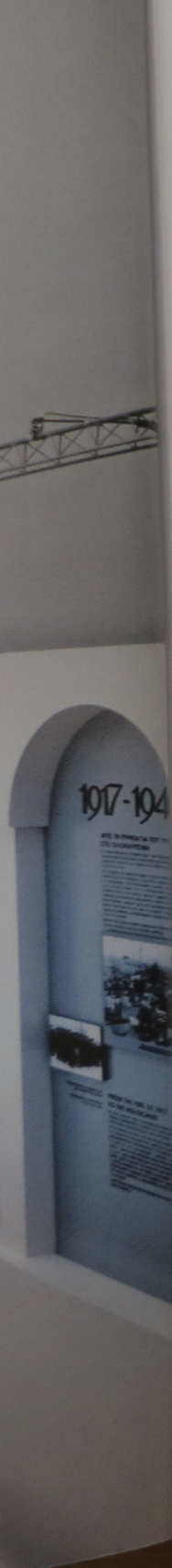

WELCOME

By David Saltiel,
President of the Jewish Community of Thessaloniki

Dear Visitor,

The premises you're visiting are filled with a great history; a history which we'll try to narrate for you in a few words.

The Jewish Community of Thessaloniki was reborn immediately after the Holocaust, during the course of which it lost 96% of its members. In a few years it managed to regroup and to lay the foundations for the achievement of its social aims: the school, the old people's home, the synagogues and other activities. From as early as 1945, the Holocaust survivors expressed the need to set up a community museum in Thessaloniki in which evidence and testimony could be preserved regarding the Community which the Nazis and their local collaborators had aimed to annihilate, to exterminate the people and to obliterate all memory of a presence going back 2,300 years.

The desire to create the museum gradually took concrete shape. It began to materialize in the 1990s, with the collection of the first photographic evidence. In 1997, with the assistance of the Organization «Thessaloniki Cultural Capital», part of the old commercial building (Yeni Han), which belongs to our Community, was restored. It was felt that this building was best suited to house the Jewish Museum of Thessaloniki. Restoration work was completed in 2000 and the museum opened for visitors the next year.

Since then, the Jewish Community of Thessaloniki has maintained the museum entirely through its own means and has undertaken to collect and record heirlooms and testimonies, so that the museum collections can be validated and enriched.

Many people have contributed to the establishment and running of the museum, either financially, through the gift of heirlooms or through their labour and hard work. We thank all of them and we remember them in this present volume

Our Community pays particular attention to educational activities, so that younger generations can be told about the history of their city and the decisive role played by the Jewish community in its development. For this reason, the museum organizes periodic exhibitions and high-quality seminars for educators.

It is our hope, dear friends, that after your visit to our museum, you will be left with a sense of the enduring and turbulent life of our community.






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THE MUSEUM'S PREMISES

The building was constructed in 1904 and has always been the property of the Jewish Community of Thessaloniki. It is one of the few buildings in the city centre to have survived the great fire of 1917 and the reconstruction works that followed. Before it was turned into a museum, the building was a commercial arcade, one of the many arcades built in the centre of Thessaloniki from 1880 to 1910. The building once housed the Athens Bank (1906-1925) and the newspaper *L'Independent*. After extensive restoration work by the Architects P. Makridis & Associates in the context of a Greek government program, the museum opened to the public in 2001. In 2010 the new "Andreas Sefiha" wing was added.

Yeni Han, which today houses the Jewish Museum of Thessaloniki, in a photograph dating from the 1930s. At the bottom left corner of the photograph, the tramlines can be seen. The tram went past the building. Collection of the Jewish Museum of Thessaloniki.



The upper floor of the Museum, where views of the history of the Jews of Thessaloniki are presented. The glass ceiling allows for a guided tour in natural light during daylight hours.



The state of the building at the end of the 20th century, after almost a hundred years of use. The damage caused by World War II made it impossible to preserve. Photographed by P. Makridis and Colleagues.



The ground floor of the Museum. On display are tombstones from the Jewish cemetery which was destroyed in 1942-3, during the German occupation, as well as exhibits from old synagogues in Thessaloniki, most of which were destroyed in that same period.



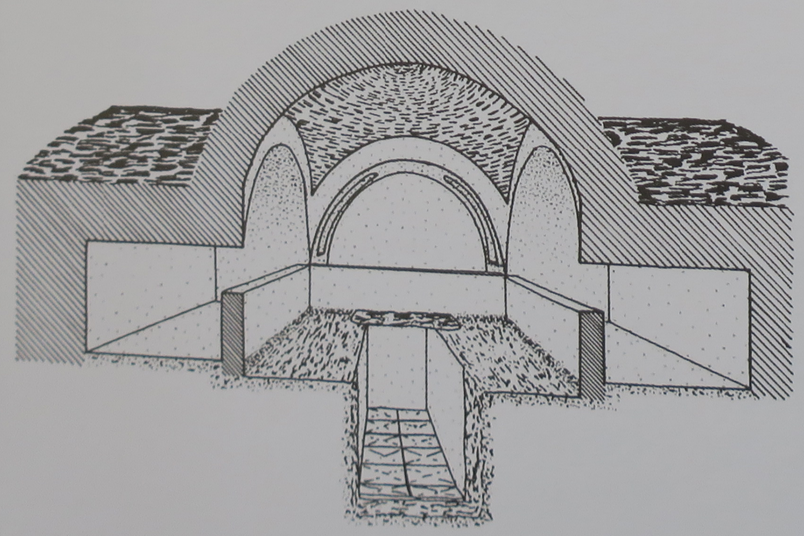
THE ROMAN AND BYZANTINE PERIODS

In 168 BCE, Thessaloniki was conquered by the Romans, who made it the capital of the Province of Macedonia. The city developed significantly after the building of the major Roman road, the Via Egnatia (146-120 BCE) and was considered the most populous city in the whole of Greek territory. The Jewish communities within Greece grew in numbers and Jews began relocating to the interior parts of the Balkan Peninsula.

The first text mentioning an organized Jewish community in Thessaloniki is the Acts of the Apostles. The Apostle Paul visited the community around 50 C.E. and preached in its synagogue "for three Shabbaths."

The ancient Jewish community of Thessaloniki was a typical example of a Jewish community in a large Mediterranean city during the Hellenistic and Roman periods. Its members used the Greek language and Hellenized their names, but kept Hebrew script which was used to write in Greek. In later years, the Greek-speaking Jews were named *Romaniotes*.

Following the separation of the Roman Empire into eastern and western halves in 395 C.E., and the consequent development of the eastern half into the Byzantine Empire, Thessaloniki became the second most important city of Byzantium after Constantinople. What little infor-



Reconstruction of the cubiculum of 'Benjamin-Dometios', which dates to the first quarter of the 4th century C.E. Evterpi Marki, *La nécropole de Thessalonique aux époques tardo-romaine et paléochrétienne* (du milieu du IIIe siècle au milieu du VIII siècle CE), Athens 2006.

mation can be taken from historical sources shows that Thessaloniki's Jewish community not only survived, but that its Jewish neighbourhoods flourished as well.

Despite the ongoing wars in the region, the sieges and ransacking of Thessaloniki, the city's population remained substantial. In 1169 the famous Jewish traveler, Benjamin of Tudela, visited Thessaloniki and mentioned in his writings that the Jewish community consisted of 500 families who were engaged mainly in silk production. By 1185 there was a Jewish neighborhood on the outskirts of the city. Jews had gained the right to settle outside existing boundaries and so they took over Christian homes and land.

In 1298 the Jewish neighborhood was located in the north-west quarter of the city. By 1420, it had burnt down and was abandoned. In 1423 the Byzantines handed Thessaloniki over to the Venetians, in order to prevent its being conquered by the increasingly powerful Ottoman Turks. The city's population decreased during the Venetian occupation (1423-1430). In 1429 the Jewish community asked the Venetian elders to reduce the burdensome taxes, which «had driven many Jews from the city». They also asked for lower fees for opening the city gates when Jews ventured out to perform their burials.



Alexander the Great (in the garb of a Byzantine emperor) welcomes rabbis (depiction from the *Booklet of Alexander*, 14th century). The central position of the gold coins, in a wooden chest, suggests taxation and suzerainty.
An old edition of the travel book of Benjamin of Tudela.

THE OTTOMAN PERIOD

In 1430 the Ottoman army captured Thessaloniki following a siege. Since the city had not surrendered, it was looted and the population enslaved. In the years which followed, Sultan Murat II allowed the return of captives and refugees to the city. When Mehmet the Conqueror captured Constantinople in 1453, however, he resettled populations from all over the empire in Constantinople, today called Istanbul. Among those resettled were the Jews of Thessaloniki and the region of Macedonia (modern Northern Greece).

In 1492, the rulers of Spain expelled all the Jews from their realm. The Ottoman Sultan Bayezit II ordered that these exiled Jews be admitted to his empire. In the next few years, about 15,000 to 20,000 Spanish Jews found refuge in Thessaloniki. They were known as Sephardim, from the Hebrew word for Spain, Sefarad. More Jews from Portugal, Sicily, Italy and North Africa would follow. The first list of Thessaloniki Jews appeared in the 1500s and included the names of 800 heads of extended families.

By the mid-16th century, Thessaloniki had become a large Jewish centre in the Ottoman Empire. According to Ottoman tax records in 1530, there were 16,700 Jews in the city, or 59% of the city's population; by 1613 there were 17,300 Jews, or 64% of the population. The traveler Lithgow mentioned that, in 1609, Jews were the majority in Thessaloniki, which had become an international centre for Rabbinic studies.

During the 16th century a number of prominent rabbis with international reputations lived in Thessaloniki. Among them were Solomon Alkabets, creator of *Lecha Dodi*; Isaac Adarbi, writer of the *Divrei Rivot* and *Divrei Shalom*; Moshe Almosnino, who wrote many excellent works; and Samuel di Medina (Rashdam), who left more than 1,000 *responsa* – questions and answers on everyday and religious matters – and who was an expert on Halacha, or Jewish religious law.

Thessaloniki was also famous as a centre for the study of Kabala, or Jewish mysticism, second only to Tsfat in what was then Ottoman Palestine. Besides this, Rabbinical schools in 16th century Thessaloniki doubled as schools for *piyyutim* (religious poetry) and song, as well as for social studies, medicine, natural sciences, astronomy and other subjects.

It is generally accepted that, in 1512, the Jewish Gedalia family produced the first book to be printed and published in Thessaloniki.

The port area of Thessaloniki as represented in an engraving from the 17th century. In the foreground, the Yialou Gate (*Yalı Kapı*) is depicted. The Jewish refugees from the Iberian Peninsula settled 'below the sea wall', very close to the Yialou Gate.



One of the first spinning mills in Thessaloniki.
It belonged to the Sayas family.
A. Papaioannou collection.



THE WORKING CLASS

La Federacion



In the early 20th century about 4,000 wage labourers worked in the factories of Thessaloniki, together with 3,000 independent craftsmen. Most of the wage labourers were Jews. Within this working class, the *Socialist Workers Federation*, more popularly known under its Ladino name *La Federacion*, sprang up in 1909. Its founder and leader was Abraham Benaroya, while Alber Arditi, Shabetai Yona, Vital Dassa and others were considered to be some of its exceptional leaders.

La Federacion operated autonomously until 1918, when along with the rest of the Greek political left-wing formations, it became part of the Socialist Workers' Party of Greece. This was later renamed the Communist Party of Greece (KKE).

The head of the Federation, *Avraam Benaroyia* (1887-1979), survived his internment in a prison camp during the German occupation. In 1945, he returned to Greece and in 1953 emigrated to Israel. Collection of the Jewish Museum of Thessaloniki.



Female tobacco workers in a workshop of *Regie Vardar* area. *Regie co-intéressée des tabacs de l'empire ottoman* was a company which had a monopoly on tobacco production and trading. Jewish Museum of Thessaloniki.

BEFORE THE FIRE IN 1917

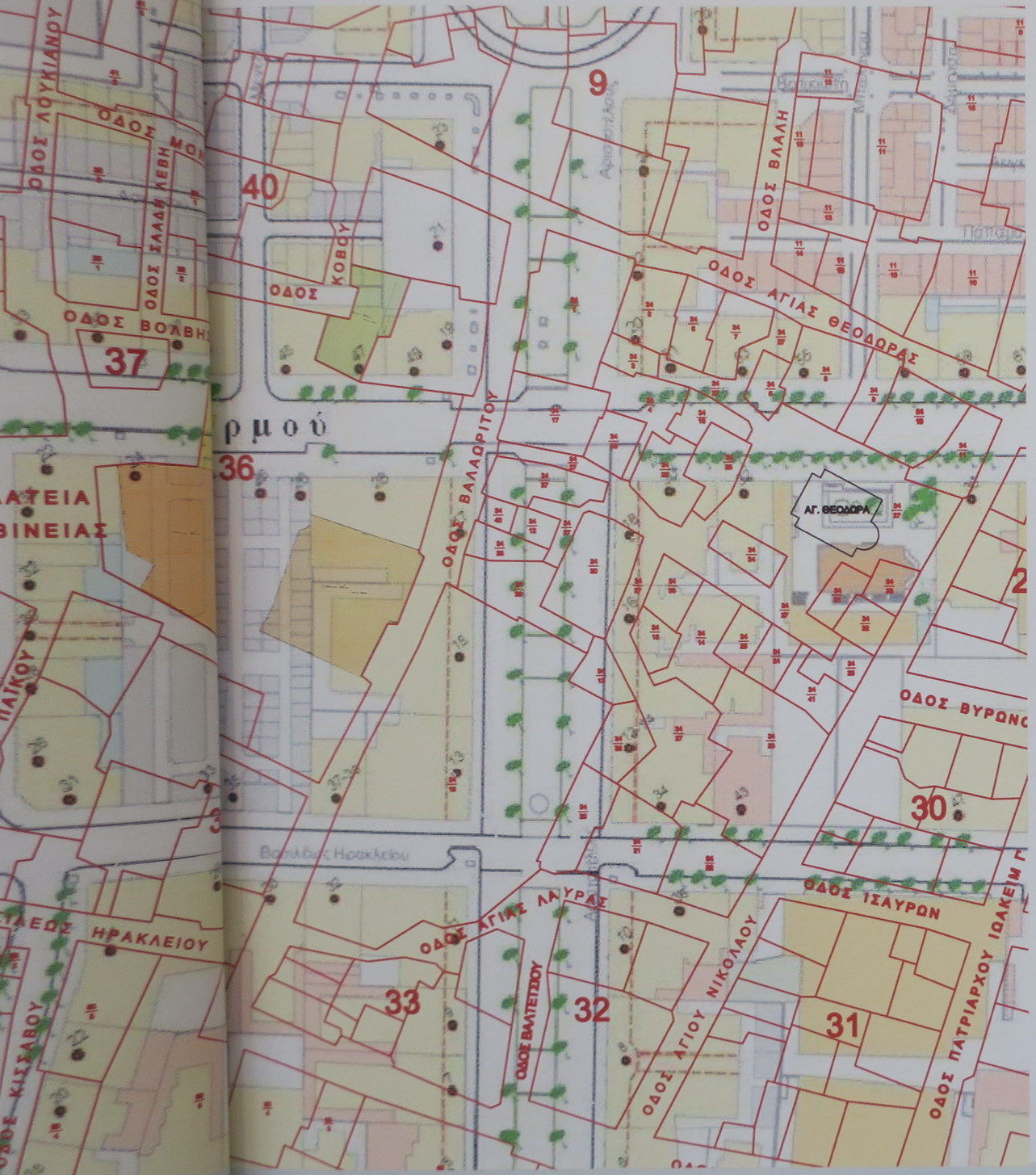
The nucleus of the neighbourhood of the Sephardim in Thessaloniki was the central synagogue, the *Talmud Torah Ha Gadol*, which stood where Ermou and Aristotelous Streets are today. There was also a school complex there, workshops and six other synagogues.

From the end of the 15th century, Jewish neighbourhoods were formed by refugees who had the same provenance, mores and language. Each neighbourhood had its synagogue as a reference point and was initially an autonomous unit for tax purposes. The central organs of the Jewish community gradually acquired greater power by reason of the need to deal with common problems.

The Jewish neighbourhoods gradually developed around the nucleus of the *Talmud Torah Ha Gadol*, where Ermou and Aristotelous Streets are today. Another nucleus grew in the Rogos neighbourhood, at the ancient Roman Market area. It was in these areas that most of the Jews of Thessaloniki were concentrated. Particularly in the zone defined by (today's) Venizelou, Egnatias, Ayias Sophias and Proxenou Koromila, the Jewish population was 89%. To the west of this zone the percentage was 61, and between Egnatias, Venizelou, Ayiou Dimitriou and Ayias Sophias Streets it was 63. These are the numbers given by the first Greek census, which took place in April 1913, after a number of Jews had already emigrated and after about 8,000 Christians from Southern Greece had settled there. So before 1912 [when Thessaloniki was incorporated in Greece], the percentage was higher. On the other hand, the ratio of the Jewish population in the new neighbourhoods which grew up to the east of Thessaloniki after 1890, was never greater than 25%.



The old town plan (outlined in red) and the new (thanks to Elli Yeorgila). The *Talmud Torah Ha Gadol* complex –which was built in the 16th century– occupied block 36, on either side of today's Ermou Street. Some twenty synagogues were to be found around the *Talmud Torah Ha Gadol*. All of these were pulled down as part of the new town planning arrangements which followed the great fire of 1917.





Courtyard of the Talmud Torah Ha Gadol synagogue, 14.6.1916. (Detail). Collection of the Jewish Museum of Thessaloniki.

THE FIRE IN 1917

In the ten-year period 1907-1916, 177 fires broke out in Thessaloniki. In most cases the fire destroyed shops and factories which were situated in the commercial *Frank's* quarter.

As Greece was being more and more involved in the WWI, the German air attacks, the lack of water, the drought, the fear of explosions due to the enormous quantities of explosives stored in Thessaloniki by the Allied troops, the huge number of these troops caused concerns that the city could be destroyed by a great fire.

The great fire broke out on Saturday, August 18th, 1917 (August 5th, by the Julian calendar), at about 15.30 hours. According to the official report, a house-wife, resident of the northern part of the intra muros city, "was frying aubergines, when sparks flew on heaps of forage, stored in the basement, and produced fire, which immediately surrounded the neighbourhood. After a while the fire sprawled in the centre of the intra muros city as well as the coastal areas. The main reason for the rapid spread of the fire was the local north wind, which blew strong these days. Another reason was the sea aura produced by the high temperature in a long distance along the coast. Other factors contributing were the stranglehold urban environment, with the narrow streets and the lack of open spaces, the wooden houses, the obsolete fire-fighting



The burnt area of Thessaloniki (1917). Detail from an aerial photo of the French Army. Ch. K. Papastathis Archive.



of Thessaloniki (1917).
rial photo of the French
h. K. Papastathis Archive.

service and the lack of water, the consumption of which had gone up because of the increase in the population and the troops camped around the city. On the other hand, the water reserves were reduced due to the drought of that summer". (Ch. K. Papastathis).

By 23.00 hours of Saturday the flames reached the area of *Talmud Torah Ha Gadol*. The spread of the fire ceased only in the evening of August 19th (August 6th by the Julian calendar) and was over at about 23.30 hours. 9,500 houses had been turned to ashes; 79,000 persons were homeless, a number counting for 45 per cent of the population registered in the 1913 survey. "The fire affected more than 50,000 Jews and the community's premises suffered the worst damages". (Ch. K. Papastathis).



Every fire insurance company, guild and neighbourhood had its team of fire-fighters who, with the inadequate means at their disposal, attempted to extinguish the frequent fires which damaged Thessaloniki. The team in the picture belonged to the «Sun Fire» insurance company. The company was represented in Thessaloniki by Samuel, the son of Daniel Modiano. The photograph (1916) was taken in front of the offices of the Ionian Bank Ltd, which was in the same block as the building of the Jewish Museum. The building escaped the fire, though the offices of the bank did not. «Sun Fire» paid out 480,000 pounds sterling in compensation and was second in the catalogue of damages. First was the «North British and Mercantile», represented by Moise D. Morpurgo. This company paid out 1,280,000 pounds sterling, which represented 30% of all the insured damage. Collection of the Jewish Museum of Thessaloniki.

An area destroyed by the fire

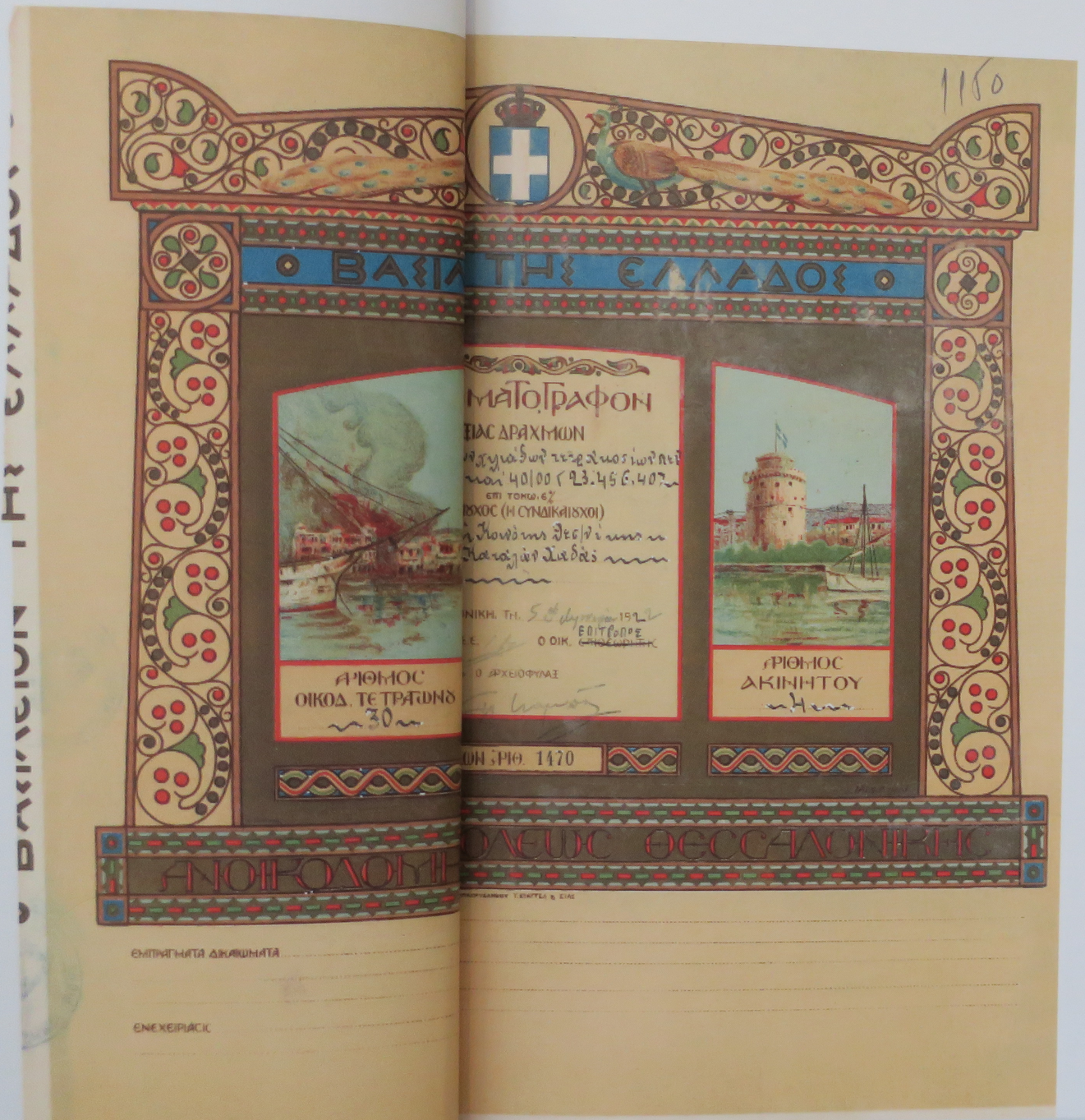
The fire of 1917 destroyed completely the Talmud Torah Ha Gadol area and the Rogos area. The rebuilding of the houses in the burnt area was forbidden, in order to prepare a new city plan for Thessaloniki. The new city plan involved new plots and streets. The residents remained homeless and unoccupied for years. In favour of the re-planning process, every legal right on land was abolished and replaced with the right of the old owners to participate in the auctions for the new plots.

The condition in december 1918

According to an unpublished report, "of these 73,000 people [who lost their property] 52,000 were Jews, and as the community itself and the Greek authorities were unable to cope with the situation, it soon became evident that eventually help would have to come from the Jews of other countries. What was the situation about a year and a half after the disaster? Practically all the 20,000 non-Jewish people had found or had been provided with some kind of shelter, but of the 52,000 Jews at least 20,000 were still without lodging other than dark cellars which became flooded with water whenever it rained, half ruined buildings where the walls and stairways were in danger of giving way, and tents which, whatever their condition when first set up, were by this time rotten and likely to become water-logged and to collapse in time of storm. As a matter of fact, practically all the tents that were still in use in December 1918, had been destroyed by rain storms before the end of May".

Families destroyed by the re-planning process

The right for participation in the auctions was documented by a legal paper (*ktimatographon*), which confirmed the value of the old plot, on the basis of an estimation held by civil servants and lower courts. During the long period between the fire and the auctions, most of the small owners sold their "ktimatographa" to survive. Moreover, their plots were too small comparing to the new plots (>240m2), so they had no chance to regain their land, even if they participated in the auctions.



The title of ownership given to the Jewish Community of Thessaloniki for the Catalan Hadash synagogue, which was destroyed in the fire of 1917. Jewish Museum of Thessaloniki.



The part of Thessaloniki with the densest Jewish presence after the conflagration of 1917. In the centre of the photograph (Ch. K. Papastathis Archive), the Talmud Torah Ha Gadol complex (above) and the Alliance School or Allatini College (the rectangular-shaped building towards the bottom).

THE PROSPEROUS CLASS

Of the sixty wealthiest families in Thessaloniki at the turn of the 20th century, forty -and the most important- were Jewish. Around this core we have records of about five hundred smaller Jewish enterprises, which constituted the majority of the middle class in Thessaloniki.

«The young people from the Allatini and Fernandez families (...) took us up a wide staircase covered with impressively beautiful, thick carpets to a wonderfully lit reception room on the first floor. The ladies of the house were waiting there for us, with the venerable matriarch in the centre. Her striking white hair was dressed and parted in the middle and she had delicate features which held an expression of gravity and gentility. Her attitude was such that I personally can find no better way of describing it than regal, like that of a queen, surrounded as she was by her charming daughters and daughters-in-law. Below, the servants awaited us, some with our hand luggage and others carrying lanterns. They took us up the road, a few steps further than the Villa Allatini, to a house which was also ordered in a lordly manner, where our lodging had been arranged (...) The expensive inlays of the furniture, the wonderful Eastern fabrics for the curtains and drapes, all of this was completely new. And yet, with the delicate way in which they matched the wonderful old rugs which were spread on the floor and also the decoration of the walls, they gave the impression of a familiar and cozy atmosphere, such as we feel when we frequent a place we know very well (...). The vials on the little dressing-table were full of the perfumes of Araby, there was glazed fruit on the table, *eau martiale*, wine, sugar, cigars in all sizes. On the bureau there was writing-paper and envelopes in all shapes, pen with nibs, pencils and so on. A specially trained, discreet servant was quick to sense and fulfill our every wish, however subtly one registered it.»

[Paul Lindau, on the hospitality accorded to him in the homes of the Allatini and Fernandez families in the «Frankish neighbourhood» of Thessaloniki, 1888.]



Family photographs taken in local studios. Collection of the Jewish Museum of Thessaloniki.





Family photographs taken in local studios. Collection of the Jewish Museum of Thessaloniki.

ENTREPRENEURSHIP

From the 16th century, a number of Jewish entrepreneurs rose to the fore in Thessaloniki. The presence of the Jewish bourgeois class became more evident from the 18th century, when Jewish merchants from Italy, known as *Francos*, settled in Thessaloniki and, protected by the European powers, dominated the port. The families which were prominent in the Mediterranean area in the 19th century were the Allatinis, the Modianos, the Morpourgos and the Fernandez. Their activities were also conducted well beyond the Ottoman realm, extending into Europe and Africa. At the beginning of the 20th century, the Confino sons, the Kapantzis, (converts to Islam), Isaac Bensusan, the Mallahs and the Sides also served on a local level as importers and exporters or industrialists. The Italo-Turkish war of 1911 was a severe blow to the urban class in Thessaloniki because the most prominent businessmen, as Italian citizens, were forced to suspend their operations. Thereafter, the Balkan Wars and the changes to the borders and commercial balances drove the most prominent Jewish businessmen abroad. Despite this, a considerable number of Jewish businessmen remained in Thessaloniki until 1943.

The Allatini Mill, one of the largest enterprises in South-East Europe, before and after the catastrophic fire of 1890. Collection of the Jewish Museum of Thessaloniki.





Moulin Allatini à Salonique.



The optics shop (Isaak Salem) in what is now 13 Ionos Dragoumi Street, on a national holiday. Inter-war years. Collection of the Jewish Museum of Thessaloniki.



The extended Amar family provided credit facilities in Thessaloniki from the 19th century, and from as early as the beginning of the 20th had formed one of the most important local banks. Archive of the National Bank of Greece.

ARCHITECTURE

Until the end of the 19th century, the wealthiest Jewish families lived in the Frangomahalas, together with the other subjects of the European powers. After the fire of 1890, however, and the establishment of a horse-drawn railway and transport along the coast, they moved to the new neighbourhoods to the east of the city, to the *Hamidiye* area, (also called *las campanias* by the Jews) where they built luxurious villas close to the sea. Thereafter the upper middle class also moved there, building simpler detached houses. It is worth noting, as V. Kolonas does, that «in 1907, the census of Hamidiye took up 6 brief books, whereas in the last census, of 1911, 173 tax manifests were needed, one for each street.» The residences of the wealthy gave a unique character to the main road, today's Vasilissis Olgas-Vasileos Georgiou Street, which disappeared with the reconstruction after World War II.



The home of a prosperous Jewish family
Yannis Megas Collection



Passage Oriental, a commercial building. Collection of the Jewish Museum of Thessaloniki.

Matanoth Laevionim. (Soup kitchen meal center for orphan boys). Collection of the Jewish Museum of Thessaloniki.





Allatini Orphanage. Collection of the Jewish Museum of Thessaloniki.

CHARITABLE INSTITUTIONS

The Jewish community of Thessaloniki operated a series of important charitable institutions and mutual-aid systems which had no equal in any other community of the Jewish Diaspora.

The health organization *Bikur Holim*, established immediately after the flight of the Jews from Spain, provided health care, medicine and hospital needs for the poor Jews of the city. Several famous doctors, exiled from Spain and Portugal and served there, settled in our city, including Amato Lusitano in 1558.

In 1786 the traveler John Howard mentioned the existence of a Jewish hospital, located in the middle of the cemetery: "Some tombstones serve as tables and chairs. It is a kind of roomy shed, divided by a wall in the middle, its sides resting on columns."

In 1908 the Hirsch Hospital was founded, thanks to a donation from Baroness Clara de Hirsch and to the tireless efforts of Dr. Moses Mizrachi. Prominent Jewish doctors such as Dreyfus, Schiaky, Jean Allalouf, Alber Israel, Meir Yoel, Leon Koenka and Moshe Modiano served there.

The community also operated the Saul Modiano Old-Age Home, the Allatini and Aboav orphanages, the psychiatric asylum, and charitable organizations such as *Matanot Laevionim* and *Torah Umlacha* (support for poor students).



The hospital of the Jewish Community. It was founded in 1907 and named in honour of its patron, Baroness Hirsch. Collection of the Jewish Museum of Thessaloniki.



The girls' orphanage Mair Aboav. On the right the Isaak and Paloma Afias Hall. Collection of the Jewish Museum of Thessaloniki.

HEALTH CARE INSTITUTIONS

- Bikour Holim
- Hirsch Hospital (est. 1908)
- Isaac Hassid Clinic
- Pinhas Dispensary (est. 1923)

WELFARE INSTITUTIONS

- Charles Allatini Boys' Orphanage
- Mair Aboav Girls' Orphanage
- Ets Ahayim Welfare Organization (est. 1923)
- Yeshua Ve Rahanim (widows' and orphans' care)
- Matanot Laevionim (est. 1901)
- Noten Besether Welfare Organization (est. 1923)
- Malbish Aroumim (est. 1923)
- Small Loan Fund (est. 1929)
- Ozer Dalim
- Unleavened Bread Plant
- Saul Modiano Home for the Elderly
- Hevra Kedusha Burial Society
- Meir Tchenio

DOCTORS

Until the end of the 19th century, most doctors in Thessaloniki were practitioners, although there were some who had completed university studies. Among these was Enrico Pereira, who left a considerable sum for the construction of a hospital, an enterprise which was undertaken by Doctor Moses Mizrahi, the chairman of the city's doctors. In 1907, 14 Jewish doctors were registered in Thessaloniki, of whom two worked in hospitals (the French and the Italian) while the rest were in private practice. Four of these worked with the Hirsch Hospital of the Jewish Community, which opened in 1908, and two more colleagues were added in the same year. After that, the number of doctors increased considerably, so that, in 1937, there were 37 Jewish doctors working in Thessaloniki.



Construction of the gynecological wing of the community hospital (1938), with the doctors Schiaky (psychiatrist), Allalouf (surgeon), Schoberg (gynecologist), Menache (gynecologist), and Cohen (gynecologist). Collection of the Jewish Museum of Thessaloniki.

PHARMACIES

Pharmacies in the modern sense appeared in Thessaloniki after 1875. Of the 146 chemists registered by 1912 (according to research by A. Grigoriou), 61 were Jews. Apart from private pharmacies, there were also some communal ones. The three surgeries of the Bikur Holim institute dispensed medicines to those unable to pay. They were located in Vardari, in «Kalamari» (Ayia Triada), and in the centre of the city, close to the *Talmud Torah Ha Gadol*. Another pharmacy for those unable to pay operated in the Hirsch Hospital. The provision of medicine to the poor was possible thanks to the generosity of wealthy Jews in Thessaloniki and grants from the Jewish Community.



Surgery of the Jewish community, in today's Papanastasiou Street. Collection of the Jewish Museum of Thessaloniki.

THE ASYLUM

The Jewish Community of Thessaloniki took care of its members who exhibited psychiatric problems, at least from the beginning of the 20th century, as can be shown by the fact that there was a committee in charge of this. Initially, treatment took place in private homes and the expenses were met by the committee. As needs increased, however, it was deemed necessary to set up a special institution. In 1930, the Jewish Community made available the building which had formerly housed the out-patients' clinic of the Hirsch Hospital, in the Baron Hirsch neighbourhood and it was here that the «Asylum for the Brain-Damaged», as it was called, was established. Thereafter, an additional building was constructed. From 1930 till 1942, 700 patients were treated at the asylum, and of these 500 were discharged as healed. At any one time there were normally 80 patients in the asylum. After the end of the German Occupation, the first hostages to return from the death camps lived in the pillaged building of the asylum.

Inauguration of the extension to the asylum, August 1940. Collection of the Jewish Museum of Thessaloniki.





The Asylum, Stavrou Voutyra St., Baron Hirsch neighbourhood. Collection of the Jewish Museum of Thessaloniki.

Inauguration of the extension to the asylum, August 1940. Collection of the Jewish Museum of Thessaloniki.

SCHOOLS

During the 16th century, Thessaloniki became an important center for Jewish religious studies, attracting students from all over Europe who came to the city to study at its Rabbinic schools.

Each synagogue had its own elementary school (*hevra*) and higher-education seminars (*yeshiva*). There was also the *Talmud Torah Ha Gadol*, an actual university of Judaism founded in 1520 with the help of the Jews of the city.

Education was reformed in the middle of the 19th century by modernizing community schools and by the founding of the Alliance Universelle School in 1873. Private Jewish schools, teaching general and professional courses, were also founded. The student bodies of the various foreign schools in Thessaloniki were comprised mainly of Jewish youth.



Alliance School or Allatini College, Aristotle Square. Collection of the Jewish Museum of Thessaloniki.



Girl's School (1925) Flora Michael Archive. Collection of the Jewish Museum of Thessaloniki.

JEWISH SCHOOLS IN THESSALONIKI (MIDDLE 19TH CENTURY -1940)

- Talmud Torah Ha Gadol (main school)
- Talmud Torah (Kalamaria branch)
- Talmud Torah (Baron Hirsch district branch)
- Alliance Israelite Universelle (est. 1873)
- Hirsch School
- Ayia Paraskevi School
- Sewing School (est. 1887)
- Gattegno School (est. 1890)
- Pinto Elementary School (1897-1942)
- Altchech School (1898-1935)
- Moshe Modiano (est. 1898)
- Girls' Communal School (est. 1906)
- Ezra Kindergarten and Elementary School (est. 1908)
- Kazes School
- Isaac Cohen Benadot Girls' School
- Paladino Elementary School
- Varsano School
- "Le Progres" School

SPORTS AND BOY SCOUTING

At the turn of the 20th century, mirroring similar developments in Athens, the first systematic sporting activities made their appearance in Thessaloniki: football, tennis, cycling, fencing, swimming, rowing, track and field athletics, croquet, gymnastics and boxing. Thessaloniki was a city with a long and impressive Jewish presence in all walks of life and sport was no exception. By 1939, Jews from Thessaloniki were helping to shape the sports scene and shone in individual and team disciplines: track and field, football, boxing, wrestling, swimming, sailing events, tennis, table tennis, fencing, cycling, volleyball, mountaineering and winter sports. In the story of sport we come across Jewish sportsmen and women who competed in the colours of the Maccabi Thessaloniki Club, founded in 1908, and of other successful Jewish Clubs, such as the Akoah Thessaloniki Club, founded in 1924, as well as non-Jewish clubs such as Heracles, Aris, P.A.O.K., Aetos, Asteras, V.A.O., Makedonikos, Meghas Alexandros, Orfeas Serron, Trikala, Preveza, Doxa Dramas, the Sporting Union of Komotini, Kavala Philippi, teams from the armed forces and the scouts. They also successfully represented Greek colours at international sporting events.



Maccabi Club football team, 1933. Collection of the Jewish Museum of Thessaloniki.



Cyclists of the Maccabi Club. Collection of the Jewish Museum of Thessaloniki.

Excursion of the Maccabi Club to Athens, 1935. Collection of the Jewish Museum of Thessaloniki.

PRINTING PRESS

Thessaloniki was one of the most important centres for Jewish publishing activities. From the 16th century until the beginning of the 20th, more than 3,500 works were published by the presses of Thessaloniki. The first printing press in Thessaloniki was founded in about 1512, by Don Youda Gedalia. After this, Jonah Ben Jacob and Betsalel Alevi Ashkenazi of Amsterdam, who established a press in 1714, were «dynasties» of printers who made Thessaloniki a real book town.

Until the 19th century, the presses in Thessaloniki printed holy texts, prayer books for the Sephardim and Ashkenazim, service texts from the Talmud, Midrash, and Responsa, commentaries on the Kabbalah, as well as philosophical and scientific treatises. From the 19th century, apart from Jewish newspapers, books, periodicals and pamphlets, the Thessaloniki presses also published the famous *askamot*, the communal regulations formulated by rabbis of Thessaloniki and community leaders, which are a valuable source for the life of the Jewish community. These works were destroyed in successive fires and in the course of the Nazi occupation.

In 1864, the first Jewish periodical came into circulation in Thessaloniki, entitled *El Lunar*, with Youda Nehamah as publisher. This was followed in 1875 by Saadi Alevi's newspaper *La Epoca*. After this, dozens of Jewish periodicals and newspapers were published: dailies, weeklies, monthlies, satirical, Zionist, socialist and independent.

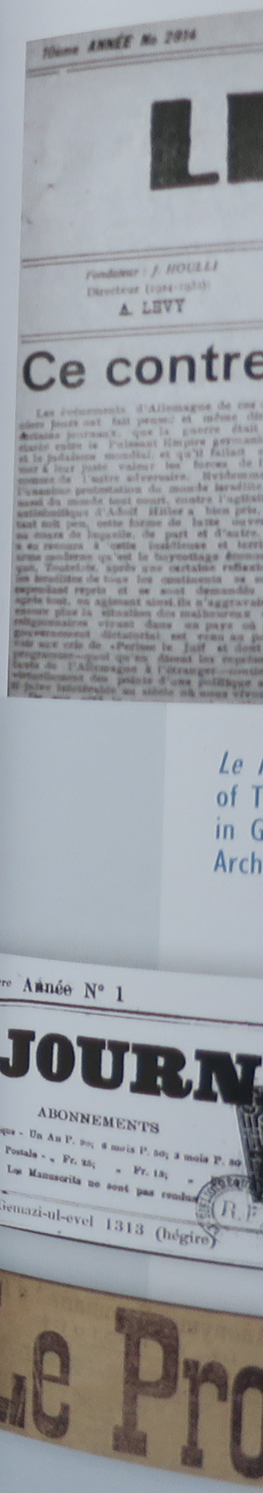
The language of most of the newspapers was Judeo-Spanish, printed in *Rashi* type. A good number of newspapers were published in French, however. Outstanding among the Jewish journalists of Thessaloniki were: Moshe Mallah, David Florentin, Joseph Uziel, Eliyahu Arditi, Albert Matarasso, Solomon Ruben, Mendesh Bensantshi, Eliyahu Veissi, Isaak Benrubi, Joseph Angel, Samuel Modiano, Jacques Ventura, Albert Molho, Albert Arditti, Avram Benaroya, Eliyahu Attas, Avram Cohen and Baruh Schiby.

In 1931, the daily circulation of Jewish newspapers reached 25,000 copies. Until the German occupation, there were three daily Jewish newspapers in circulation: El Messaggero in Judeo-Spanish and *Le Progrès* and *L'Indépendant* in French. The latter was housed in the building of the Museum.

Working hours of the staff of the newspaper *Le Progrès*, except for the reporters. Collection of the Jewish Museum of Thessaloniki.



Journal de Saloniq
7.11.1895, the newspaper
the famous journalist Saa
Levi. His gravestone is ke
in the Jewish Museum
Thessaloniki, having first be
used as building materi
in the Karipeion Institute
Thessaloni





6 Pages — LUNDI 3 AVRIL 1933

LE PROGRÈS

QUOTIDIEN DU MATIN

Directeur—Propriétaire
S. E. MODIANO

19 rue Tsimiski Palais Ergani
Adr. Télégraphique
PROGRES—SALONIQUE

Ce contre quoi les israélites protestent....

Le Progrès, 3.4.1933. Protests by the Jews of Thessaloniki against the Nazi measures in Germany. Yennadeios Library, F. Dragoumis Archive.



1re Année N° 1 — Jeudi 7 Novembre 1895 — Le Numéro Une Piastre

JOURNAL de SALONIQUE

PUBLICATION BI-HEBDOMADAIRE
POLITIQUE, COMMERCIALE ET LITTÉRAIRE
Directeur - Propriétaire : *Saadi Levy*

INSERTIONS

Administration : Caracache Han N° 13 — 27 Octobre 1895 v. s.

Journal de Salonique, 7.11.1895, the newspaper of the famous journalist Saadi Levi. His gravestone is kept in the Jewish Museum of Thessaloniki, having first been used as building material in the Karipeion Institute of Thessaloniki.



Le Progrès de Salonique

Another French-language newspaper with a similar title. Thessaloniki 1911. Collection of the Jewish Museum of Thessaloniki.

JEWISH NEWSPAPERS IN THESSALONIKI

(representative list)

La Epoca 1875-1912	El Tiempo 1925
El Avenir 1897	La Nueva Palaistina 1926
Revista Populara 1909-1912	El Gjidio 1926
La Libertad 1909	El Dror 1928
La Tribuna Libera 1910	Misrahi 1929
La Solidaridad Ovradera 1911	Action 1930
Avanti 1936	Israel 1932
El Liberal 1913	La Nation 1932
La Esperanza 1915	La Boz Sionista 1933
Journal des Lavoradores	La Prensa 1934
La Boz del Pueblo 1915	El Messaggero 1935-1941
Pueblo 1917-1931	Action Prensa 1934
Pro-Israel 1917-1926	Tikvatenu 1935
La Renacensia Judia 1917	Ha Menora
La Verdad 1921	Le Progrès 1935-1941
La Action 1921	L'Indépendant 1923-1941

SYNAGOGUES

The *kehilot* who settled in Thessaloniki at the end of the 15th and throughout the 16th centuries founded 26 synagogues. The numbers rose because, on the one hand the original *kehilot* fragmented and, on the other, because the new geographical disposition of the Jewish population after the fire in 1917 demanded more synagogues. In an official document of the Jewish Community from 1920, the following 55 synagogues are recorded (in alphabetical order). In bold are those mentioned in the tax rolls of the 16th century and are verifiably the oldest.

Apart from the synagogues mentioned above, the 16th century Ottoman tax rolls mention four others: the *Artona, Midrash, Montalto* (a branch of *Gerush Calabrese*), and *Corfu.*

Reconstruction of the synagogues after the fire of 1917 was not permitted, irrespective of the amount of damage suffered, because of the implementation of the new town plan. Almost all of them were rehoused in the new Jewish neighbourhoods which were formed away from the centre of the city.

Adar Kodesh	Beth Yuda	**Geroush**	**Mayor**	**Shalom**
Angel	Bezesh	**Har-Gavoah**	**Mograbis**	Sicilia Hadash
Aragon	Brudo	Ismael	Neve Shalom	Sicilia Yashan
Bello	Carasso	Italia Hadash	Neve Tsedek	Solomon Hassid
Beraha	**Catalan Hadash**	Italia Shalom	Or-Ahayim	Talmud Torah Akatan
Beth Abraham	Catalan Yashan	Italia Yashan	**Otranto**	Talmud Torah Ha Gadol
Beth Aharon	**Eshkenaz**	**Kastilya**	Plasa	Vardar
Beth El	**Estrug**	**Kiana**	Portugal	Yahya
Beth Isaac	**Etz Ahayim**	Lisbon Hadash	**Provencia**	
Beth Shaul	**Evora**	**Lisbon Yashan**	Pulya	
Beth Yakov Chenio	Ezrati	Marmoles	Serero	

Left:
Courtyard of the *Talmud Torah Ha Gadol* synagogue, 14.6.1916. Collection of the Jewish Museum of Thessaloniki.

Right:
The *Italia Yashan* synagogue. Collection of the Jewish Museum of Thessaloniki.







The inauguration of the *Monastirioton* synagogue, 1927. Collection Beit Ha Tetfutsot.

RABBIS

The rabbi, or teacher, is one of the chief functionaries of a Jewish community. Originally the rabbis acted more like judges, who assisted people in deciding what is proper and in accordance with the Law or Torah. Their authority rests on the practice of Moses who daily sat before his tent to discuss the Law with the Jewish people. Moses' brother, Aaron, and Aaron's sons were responsible as priests for the sacrificial practice in the Temple and kept the meticulous rites that accompanied it.

Over time, rabbis assumed other functions such as teaching, interpreting law, acting as spiritual leaders and leading prayers. Since the destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E., the priesthood ceased to exist, and the rabbis have been responsible for the religious needs of the community as well as representing it formally.

Another important functionary is the *shochet*, the ritual slaughterer. The laws governing food are complex and determine which animals and which parts of them may be eaten, the manner in which they are slaughtered, their preparation and the permissible food combinations. Permissible animals must be slaughtered in a special manner that stuns them instantly and drains the blood, as consumption of blood is forbidden according to the Covenant with Noah. The *shochet* must also possess veterinary skill in determining whether an animal has an illness, which would render it unfit for consumption.



Chief Rabbi Haim Rafael Habib. Collection of the Jewish Museum of Thessaloniki.



Yakov Meir (1856-1930), Chief Rabbi of Thessaloniki (1908-1919).

The heart of a Jewish community are the scrolls of the Law of Moses, the *Pentateuch*. It is through the law, or *Torah* in Hebrew, that Jewish identity is nurtured and developed, according to the written teachings and historical accounts that were delivered to Moses as a revelation. One of the meanings of the word *Torah* is "path" - in the sense of a path to human fulfillment. For sacred use in the synagogue, the *Torah* is always written on parchment sections sewn together as a scroll. When not in use, the *Torah* is decorated in a manner worthy of its sanctity: a fabric cover, me'il, is placed over it, and its staves have decorative finials, or *rimonim*. These *rimonim* are symbolic of the priestly garments of the Temple in Jerusalem. In some communities, the *Torah* is also draped with a breastplate and crown.

The *Sefer Torah* (Torah book) is always written on parchment made from a ritually pure animal. Special ink is used and the writer is specially-trained scribe, or *sofer*. Prior to each writing session, the scribe immerses himself in a ritual bath, or *mikve*. Any error or damage of even one letter of a *Sefer Torah* invalidates the whole *Sefer Torah*. There is usually a cloth placed inside the scroll that protects the ink writing from contact with the back of the parchment. A cloth binding keeps the scroll closed firmly when not in use. Normally worshippers read from the *Sefer Torah* on *Shabbat*, as well as on Mondays and Thursdays; a special weekly portion is read in the presence of at least ten Jewish men, a *minyan*. During the course of the year the entire *Sefer Torah* is read publicly.

The *Torah* is sometimes called the "Written Law" to distinguish it from the "Oral Law" or *Talmud*. The *Talmud* evolved over several centuries out of observations, commentaries and derived laws from the Written Law. Out of deference to the Written Law, the *Talmud* was initially memorized, though it eventually became necessary to write it down. It is, however, never written on a scroll.

Blue velvet cover for a *Sefer Torah*. Collection of the Jewish Museum of Thessaloniki.



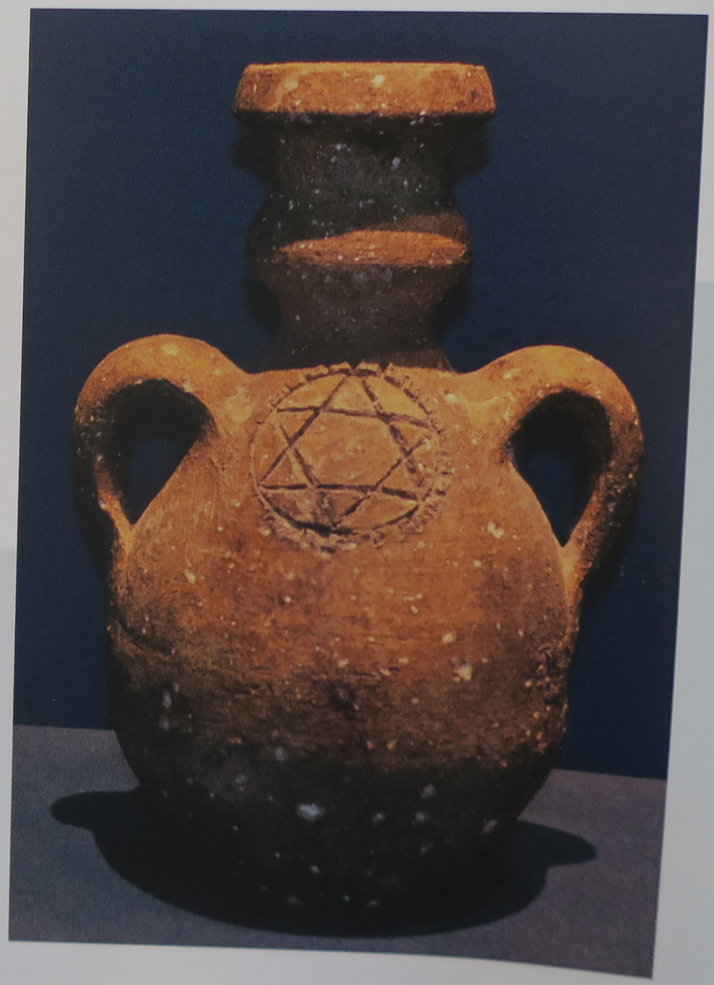


Sefer Torah. Collection of the Jewish Museum of Thessaloniki.

SABBATH

The *Sabbath* or *Shabbat*, is a solemn day of rest that has had perhaps more influence in the formation of the Jew than any other festival. Each week, from before sunset Friday evening to after sunset on Saturday evening, the observant Jew enters into a state of rest, or better still, calmness. During this sacred period, man is freed from the distractions of work and the ordinary tasks that maintain physical life. Special rites and ceremonies mark the beginning and end of the *Sabbath*. Candles are kindled on the eve, and wine and bread are blessed. At its conclusion, wine, spices and candle-flames are blessed to mark the beginning of the week.

The *Sabbath* is a day of freedom. Preparations for it take place all during the days preceding it and, as the "Bride of the Lord," it is greeted with a beautiful hymn, *Lecha Dodi*. This song was composed by Solomon ben Moses HaLevi Alkabetz, a Spanish-Jewish mystic of the 16th century who lived in Safed. Alkabetz was introduced to the world of *Kabbala* by the famous Rabbi Yosef Taitachak of Thessaloniki as initiated to the Kabbalah by the famous Rabbis.



Storage vessel from a Jewish household, with the *Magen David*, 19th c. Collection of the Jewish Museum of Thessaloniki.



Pre-war, bronze *hanukkiah*, with the star of David at the top. It belonged to the family of Luna and Israel Nomer. It was handed down to their daughter Rachel Torres and then to their grand-daughter Liana Parente. Collection of the Jewish Museum of Thessaloniki.

JEWISH HOLIDAYS

All Jewish holidays are determined according to the lunar calendar.

During *Pessah* (Passover), the story of the Exodus from Egypt is read; this is known as the *Haggadah*. During the eight days of the festivities, only unleavened bread and food may be eaten. The focus of Pessah is a communal or family meal known as the *seder*, at which symbolic foods are presented on a platter at the center of the table. The foods are a shank-bone of a lamb, an egg, bitter herbs, a mixture of nuts and fruits, and *matza* (unleavened bread).

Hanukkah is the celebration of light and miracle: the Seleucid King Antiochus attempted to Hellenize the Jews like the other peoples of the kingdom. The king had demanded the abrogation of the Law of Moses, the abolition of circumcision, and the desecration of the Temple by sacrificing pigs and other unclean animals to pagan idols. A revolt started by Matathias Maccabeus and his son Judah that drove the conquerors out of Jerusalem and Judea.

After the successful Jewish revolt, the Temple was cleansed. The tradition says that only one small container of oil was found to light the great *menorah*, the seven-branched candelabrum that stood before the Holy of Holies. This oil miraculously replenished itself for eight days until a new supply could be found. To commemorate this miracle, a special candelabrum holding nine lights, the *hanukkiah*, is used. One candle is used as the source flame, and the other eight are lit one-by-one on eight successive nights until all are burning together.

CHILDREN

BRIT MILA (circumcision). On the eighth day after the birth of a boy, and provided there are no health issues, the *brit mila* or circumcision, is performed. The circumcision symbolizes the entry of the boy into Judaism, as a renewal of Abraham's covenant with God. The word *brit* means «agreement», or «pact». The celebrant who performs circumcisions is called the *mohel* and he has been specially trained as a surgeon.

FADARIO. The ceremony for the naming of a little girl is called *fadario*. It takes place at home or at the Synagogue when the *Torah* is read.

PIDYON HABEN (redemption of the first-born son). Every first-born son, apart from the sons of the Cohens or the Levis, are dedicated to God in remembrance of their deliverance from the tenth plague with which God struck the Egyptians, causing the death of all the first-born sons. On the 31st day after his birth, the first-born son is redeemed by his father from the Cohen (God's representative) by giving the latter silver coins or metal objects to the value of five *shekels* (corresponding to ninety-four grams of pure silver). The father says a prayer, the Cohen takes the *shekels*, gives his blessing and hands the boy back to his father.

BAR MITZVAH. After circumcision, the *bar mitzvah* is the most important ceremony in the life of a boy. It symbolizes the beginning of maturity and the start of a consciously Jewish life. The celebration takes place in the synagogue, usually at the morning service of the *Sabbath*, as soon as the boy becomes 13. From that day, the boy is considered an adult and is called *bar mitzvah*, meaning «son of the testament».

BAT MITZVAH. When a girl is 12, she becomes an adult and undertakes the responsibilities prescribed by the Jewish religion, such as lighting the Sabbath candles, and observing the customs at every feast. The ceremony of the *bat mitzvah*- «daughter of the testament»- takes place in the Synagogue. The young girls dress in white, receive the blessing of the rabbi and make a speech on the role of women in the Jewish religion.

Mother in traditional dress with her three children. Inter-war period. Collection of the Jewish Museum of Thessaloniki.



Three children (between 1936 and 1939). One was called Solomo Matalon. Collection of the Jewish Museum of Thessaloniki.



WOMEN

The traditional Jewish family consists of two autonomous and equal persons with different responsibilities. The man is charged with earning a living. Apart from the care of the home, the woman is responsible for the proper functioning, cohesion and happiness of the family.

The role of the mother was of outstanding importance for the Jewish family. In fact, only someone born of a Jewish mother is considered to be really Jewish. In other words, the mother defines the religion of the child.

Depending on the time and the conditions, well-known and unknown women have made their own contribution to the multicultural mosaic of the Jewish Community of Thessaloniki. The philanthropist Baroness Klara de Hirsch, teachers who taught in Jewish Schools and Ladies' Colleges, nurses who worked in hospitals and who took care of the wounded in times of war, and poor widows from the Baron Hirsch neighbourhood, who struggled to raise their orphan children, were unique examples of the selfless input which confirms the role of women in the Hebrew religion.



Women in the kitchen of the former insane asylum. Collection of the Jewish Museum of Thessaloniki.

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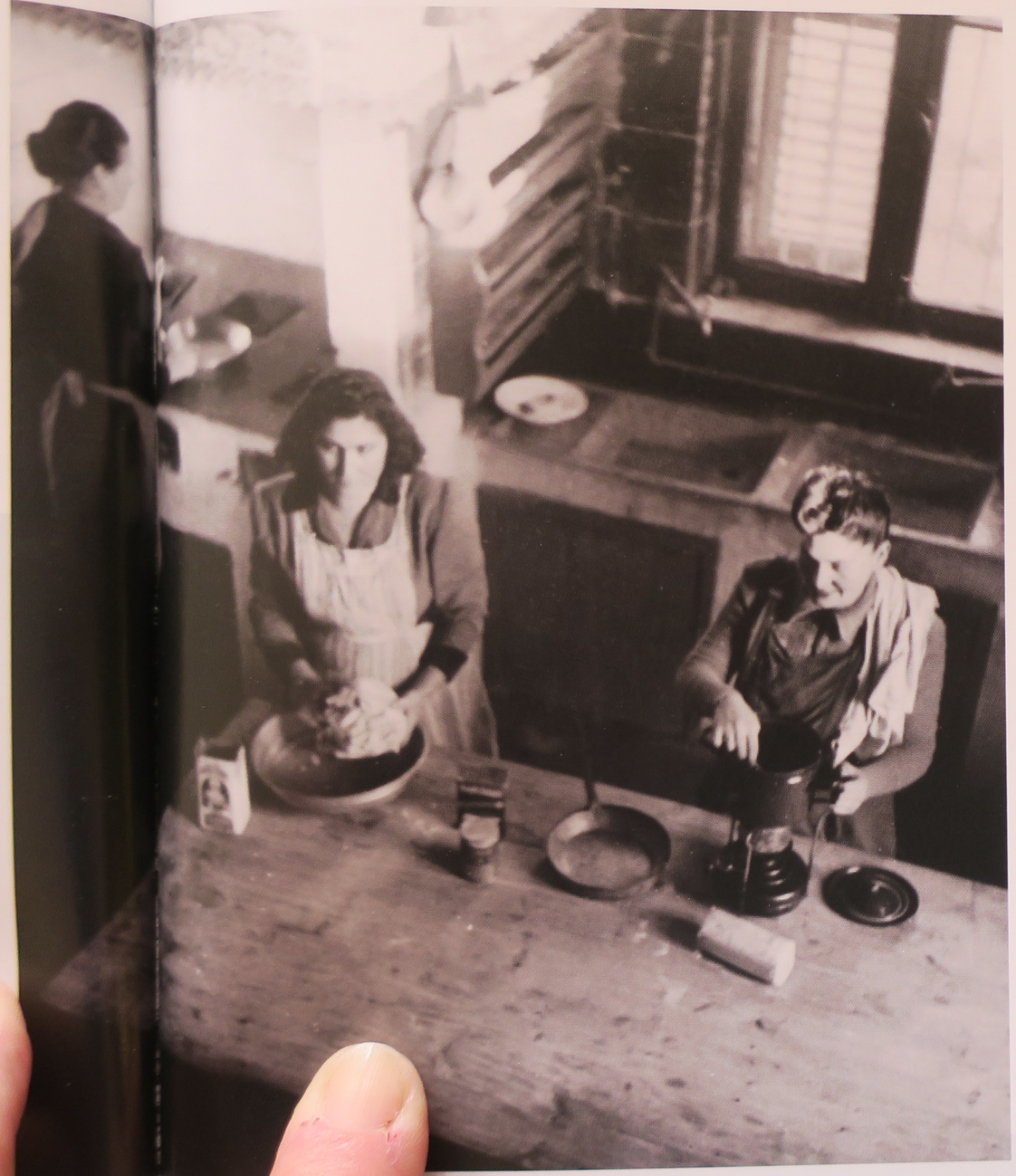


Portrait of Sarina Saltiel. Collection of the
Jewish Museum of Thessaloniki.



THE JEWISH HOME

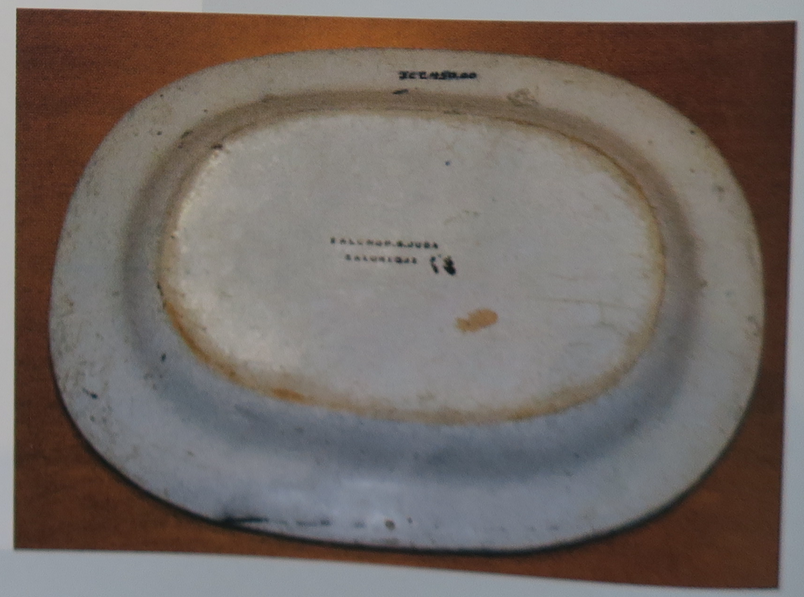
The Jewish home is seen as an almost sacred place, especially since the Destruction of the Second Temple. Over the centuries, rites were developed that are reserved almost solely for the home. On Fridays, the complicated meals for the *Shabbath* are prepared, and the candles or *Shabbath* lamps are blessed in the evening. On Satuday evening the ceremony of the *havdala* or conclusion of *Shabbath* is performed.

In accordance with one of the commandments, all the doorposts of a house have a small metal or wooden case, the *mezuzah*, affixed to them. Each contains the complete text of the *Shema* prayer: "Hear O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One."

The rituals of *Pessah* are performed around the family table, as are the festival meals of the other holidays. The home is almost an adjunct of the synagogue concerning the complicated food laws of *kasherut*. These dictate what can be eaten; that milk and meat products not be consumed together; and that separate sets of dishes, vessels and utensils be used for milk and meat.

It is also in the home that a child takes his first steps in becoming a Jew: learning respect for elders, for the Law, and for Jewish traditions.





Serving dish, made in Thessaloniki by Salomon B. Yuda in the style of 19th century British ware. Collection of the Jewish Museum of Thessaloniki.

Ketuba
the Jew







Ketubah (marriage agreement). Collection of the Jewish Museum of Thessaloniki.



MARRIAGE

The Jewish wedding has religious significance, since it prepares man to fulfil the first commandment the Lord gave to Adam and Eve, to increase and multiply. It is a legal bond, and though usually blessed and witnessed in the synagogue, any Jew can perform it. Its validity is determined by the physical acceptance by the bride of the marriage contract, the *ketubah*. The *ketubah* lays out the financial obligations the husband undertakes toward his wife as a result of their marriage. The form of the *ketubah* is dictated by the *Talmud* and it is usually written in Aramaic.

The *ketubah* has several specific sections. It must state where the marriage takes place, the date, the full names of the groom and bride, and the full names of their parents. The second section usually contains a detailed list of the bride's dowry, any financial settlement reached by the families involved, and conditions that must be met in case of a divorce. Many historical and local customs surround Jewish weddings, but the one essential rite is the performance of a *mikve*, the bride's immersion in a special pool reserved for this purpose. At times, among Sephardic Jews, this ritual was performed in the Turkish baths, or hammam.



Wedding of Izo and Sultance Mulcho. Collection of the Jewish Museum of Thessaloniki.

THE JEWISH CEMETERY OF THESSALONIKI

The area of land outside the eastern walls of Ottoman Thessaloniki was dedicated to use as a burial-site. The cemeteries that were created there, from at least the 16th century (Jewish, Muslim, Greek Orthodox Christian, Bulgarian Orthodox Christian, Protestant, Armenian and, formerly, Roman Catholic) developed on the site of more ancient cemeteries, excavation of which has revealed Jewish graves from the 3rd and 4th centuries C.E.

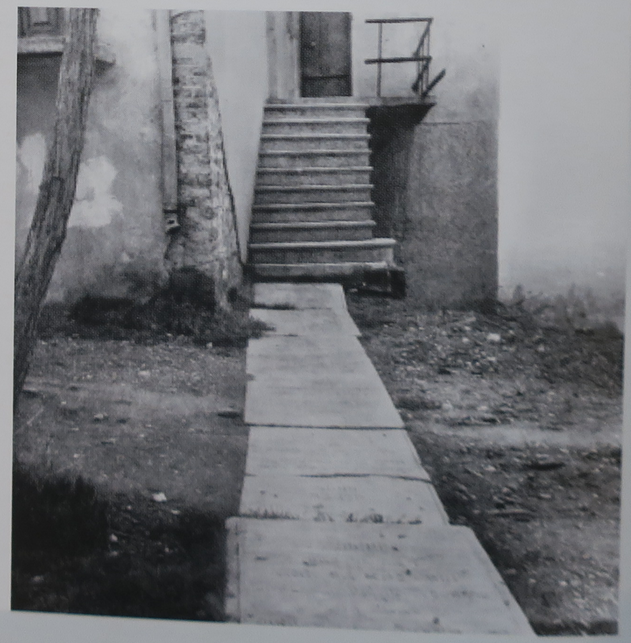
The Jewish cemetery was the largest, on the one hand because the Jewish community was the largest in terms of population and secondly because the Jewish religion forbids disinterment. It stretched from the Saranda Ekklesies neighbourhood down to today's Karamanlis Avenue, and from the square of the Chemistry Building of the University to the Students' Hall of Residence. It is estimated that it contained at least 300,000 graves, of which a large number were those of little children, because of the high rate of child mortality.

Maintenance of the cemeteries (other than the Greek Orthodox one) was called into question in the inter-war years, because the city had expanded and the eastern burial grounds were now part of the city centre. The Muslim cemetery had already been decommissioned in 1916, before the departure of the Muslims of Thessaloniki at the time of the exchange of populations (1923-4), though the legal connection between the Muslim community and the land of the cemetery was never questioned. Also in 1913, the Bulgarian cemetery was decommissioned and incorporated into the Greek. All that remained was its church.

As regards the Jewish cemetery -the extent of which was a bone of contention- the following solution was proposed with a compulsory law dating from 1937: with the exception of 12 stremmata (3.5 acres), which were to be set aside for university buildings, the whole of the cemetery was designated a park, where trees were to be planted. The graves would remain, but henceforth burials would take place in the new cemetery.



The boundaries of the Jewish and Christian cemeteries ca. 1890. Istanbul Üniversitesi Kütüphanesi.



Entrance way in a private house made from graves stones. Jewish Museum of Greece.



View of the Jewish cemetery, ca. 1916. Jewish Museum of Thessaloniki.





Column from the Roman period which was used as a tombstone in the Jewish cemetery. Jewish Museum of Thessaloniki.



Headstone from the Jewish cemetery of Thessaloniki, 18th century. Jewish Museum of Thessaloniki.

THE DESTRUCTION OF THE JEWISH CEMETERY

Before the law of 1937 could be applied in practice, the German Occupation of Thessaloniki was imposed. In the autumn of 1942, pressure was exerted from several sides (such as the Greek General Administration of Macedonia, appointed by the Germans, and the neighbouring Christians who were refugees from Turkey) and this was exploited by the German administration. Its representative, Max Merten, demanded extortion money from the Jewish Community of Thessaloniki (a legal entity in Greek law since 1920) for the retention of the cemetery. Given that it was impossible for the Community to pay the enormous sum demanded (simultaneously and additionally paying the even greater sums involved in buying off forced labour -see the entry), the German administration decided to raze a portion of the cemetery. The demolition began on 9/12/1942, at the same time as replacement of the administration of the Jewish Community appointed by the Germans. The demolition was carried out under the responsibility of the General Administration of Macedonia and continued until at least April 1943, because of the enormous numbers of graves. As the municipal archives show, the General Administration of Macedonia made the building materials available for a variety of functions in Thessaloniki (school toilets, roads, churches). This disposal continued even after the Occupation, the most important example being the building of the church of Saint Dimitrios which was completed in 1948.

In November 1943, the Occupation government passed an illegal administrative act declaring the Jewish cemetery to be «municipal land», and, in April 1945, the council of ministers passed an act handing over the «municipal land» to the University of Thessaloniki. It was here that the University campus was later constructed.

In 2014, after seventy years of silence, a commemorative plaque was unveiled on the campus, mentioning the existence and destruction of the Jewish cemetery.

Since 1945, the new Jewish cemetery has been in use in the Stavroupolis area. It was to this spot that as many bones and gravestones that could be collected from the old cemetery were brought.





View of the cemetery after its destruction. Jewish Museum of Thessaloniki.

THE PRE-WAR ARCHIVE OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITY

In our Museum, we retain a part of the pre-war archive of the Jewish Community of Thessaloniki, which provides a valuable picture of the life of this community before the catastrophe of the Holocaust.

By and large, the documents have to do with the running of the institutions of the Jewish community, though they also frequently reveal facets of the private life of the Jews of Thessaloniki and snapshots from this which can be cross-referenced with the public life of the community.

The archive is a treasury of the Judeo-Spanish language, the historical language of the Jewish community of Thessaloniki, the language in which, over a succession of generations, the administrative procedures of the community were recorded, as were everyday correspondence, commercial transactions, newspapers and books. This was no outpost of Judeo-Spanish culture in South-Eastern Europe, but a much wider linguistic and cultural community, extending throughout the Balkans and the Eastern Mediterranean. Thessaloniki was simply a part of this broader Judeo-Spanish community, though it was the mother community, the «Jerusalem of the Balkans», or in Judeo-Spanish, «La Madre de Israel». This image of the Jewish community of Thessaloniki as the mother of the other communities emerges from the documents in the archives.

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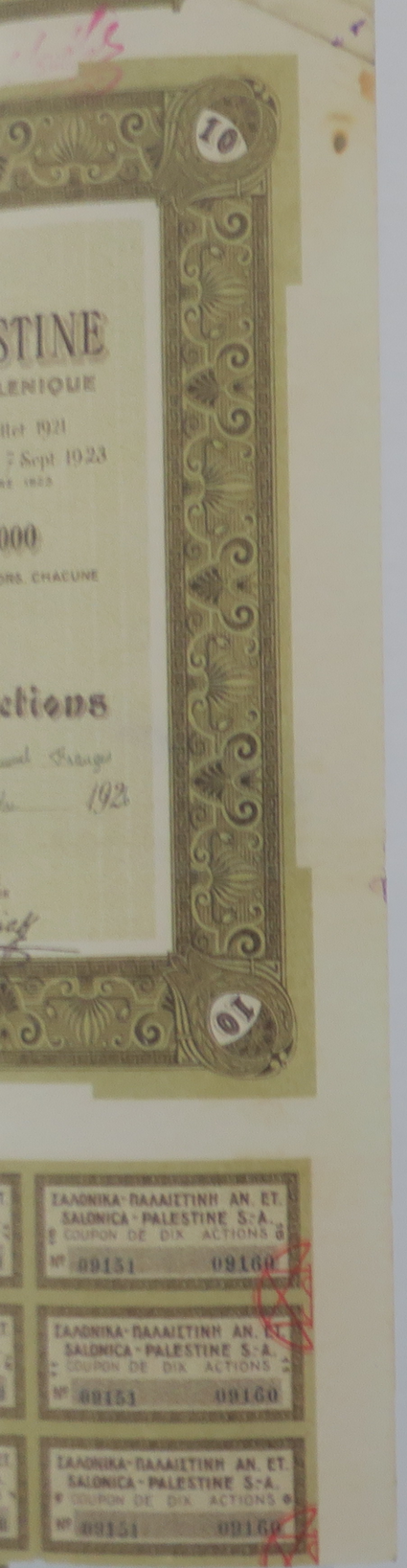
A share in the Salonica-Palestine Company, which funded the emigration of Jews from Thessaloniki to Palestine. Jewish Museum of Thessaloniki.

Judeo-Spanish is referred to as, among other things, spanyol, espanyol, ladino or muestro Castellano (our Castellan). It is based on Castellan Spanish, and other Iberian languages from before the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492, and from the beginning contained powerful Hebrew/Aramaic elements. Judeo-Spanish also incorporated other philological features, which derived from interaction with local languages (Turkish and Greek) and the languages of the social elite (Italian and French over the centuries following the expulsion). A definitive and especially characteristic feature of Judeo-Spanish were the systems of writing Hebrew, which were traditionally: *meruba* (formalized, square script), *rashi* (Hebrew script for non-religious texts) and *solitreo* (a cursive script used by the Sephardim of the Eastern Mediterranean). By the twentieth century, Western influences resulted in Judeo-Spanish being written in Latin letters as well, though this was not formalized.



A share in the Salonica-Palestine Company, which funded the emigration of Jews from Thessaloniki to Palestine. Jewish Museum of Thessaloniki.

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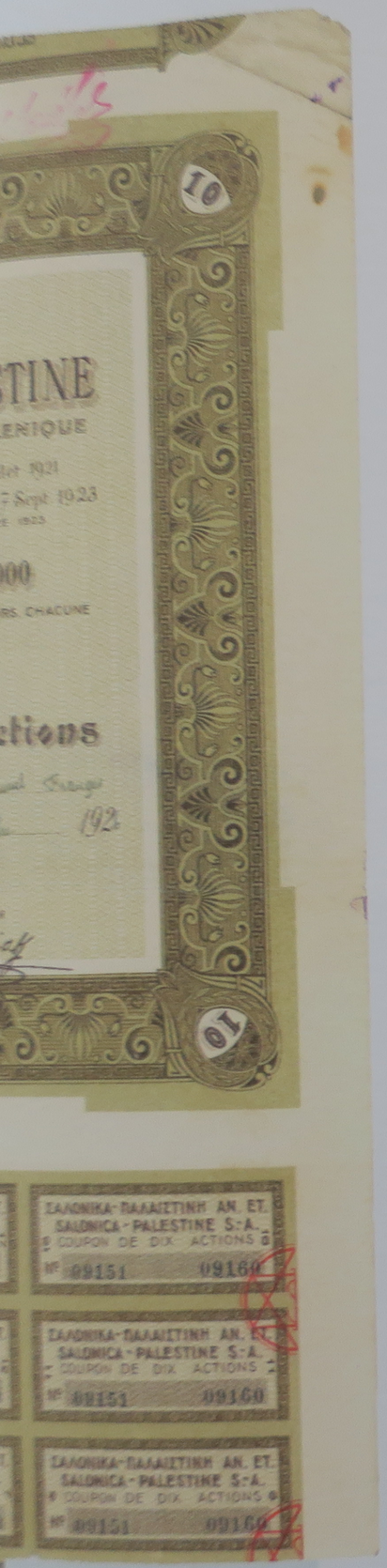


A share in the Salonica-Palestine Company, which funded the emigration of Jews from Thessaloniki to Palestine. Jewish Museum of Thessaloniki.

THE GERMAN OCCUPATION

On 28 October 1940 the Italian army invaded Greece through Albania. All adult Greek males were mobilized. During the Greek-Italian fighting that followed, 12,898 Greek Jews served in the armed forces, 343 of whom were officers. Many were distinguished for valor; 294 were killed and 3,743 were injured. A uniform belonging to a Jewish officer killed during the fighting is on display in the Holocaust room. Next to the uniform, you can see a 1940 registration book of the Greek military hospital department in which Greek Jewish names can be seen.

The Italian invasion was stopped by the Greek army on Albanian territory, and Italy was defeated. However on 6 April 1941 German forces invaded Greece. The first Germans entered Thessaloniki only three days later and they reached Athens on 27 April. Control of mainland Greece was split between Germany, Italy and Bulgaria. German forces occupied the areas of most strategic value, including Thessaloniki.

The surrender of Thessaloniki to Axis forces on 9 April 1941 was the beginning of the terrible end for most of the members of the historic Jewish community of the city.

THE ANTI-JEWISH REGULATION

The Nazis applied anti-Jewish measures in the first days of the occupation. They prohibited Jews from entering coffee shops, restaurants, pastry shops etc. They commandeered the Hirsch hospital as well as many Jewish homes, imprisoned the members of the Jewish community board, and looted the community offices, synagogues and archives. The documents were never returned. The Jewish community administration was thrown out and a new one appointed under the control of the German occupation forces. The city's Chief Rabbi, Dr. Tzvi Koretz, was imprisoned in Vienna for several months.

The harsh winter of 1941-2 subjected the Greek people to cruel trials, since there were huge shortfalls in foodstuffs, fuel and medicines. Consumption fell to 40% of the level of the last year before the war. German propaganda openly accused the Jews of being the main culprits for the war. The anti-Semitic Greek newspapers (the only ones permitted to publish legally in Thessaloniki) repeated this view and demanded that anti-Jewish measures be taken.

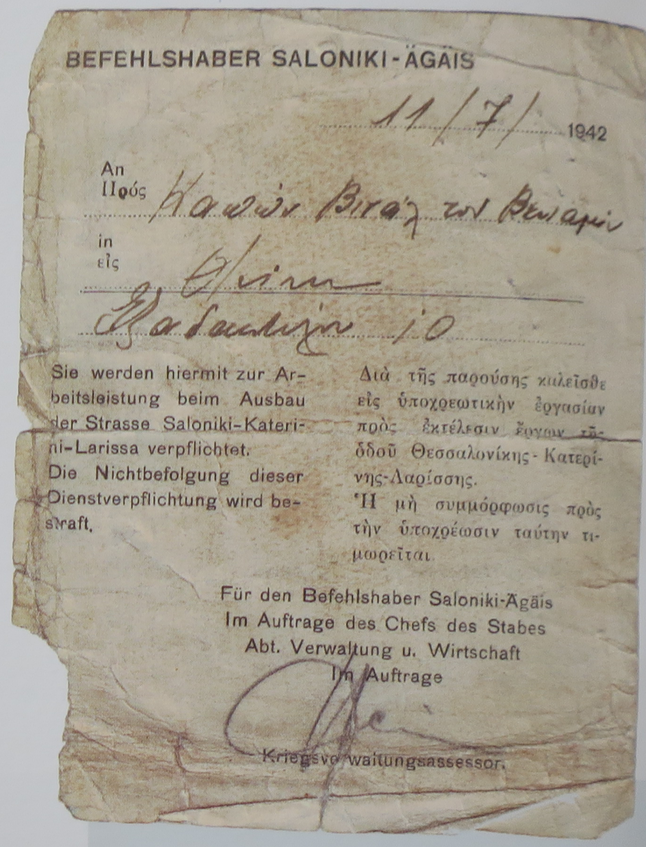


Signs saying 'Jews not welcome in this shop' were posted by German collaborators from the very first days of the Occupation.

JULY 11TH 1942

In early July 1942, the Germans issued an order summoning all Jewish males aged 18 to 45 to assemble in Plateia Eleftherias (Freedom Square). On Saturday, 11 July, the Jewish men were assembled there and publicly humiliated while being beaten and hosed down with water by German soldiers. Greeks and Germans viewed the spectacle from the balconies of surrounding buildings. The tactic of marginalizing the Jews began on that day and continued for several more days. No professional or university group, not even the Greek Church, protested against this event.

The Jewish men were assembled in the same place two days later, given work cards and sent into forced labor in the countryside, without regard to their fitness for such work.



BEFEHLSHABER SALONIKI-ÄGÄIS

11/7/ 1942

An
Πρός Καπών Βιτάλ τοῦ Βενιαμίν

in
εἰς Ο/ίνη

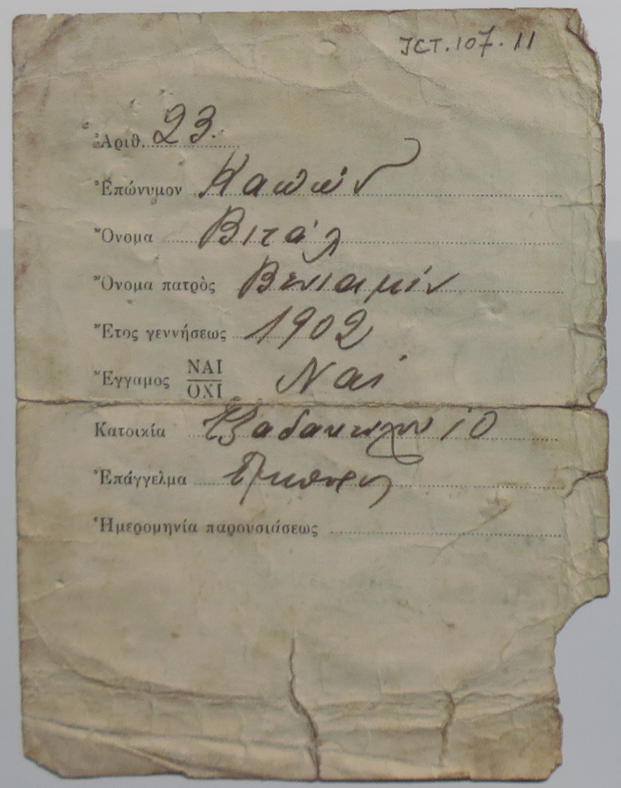
Βαδανιάχου 10

Sie werden hiermit zur Arbeitsleistung beim Ausbau der Strasse Saloniki-Katerini-Larissa verpflichtet.
Die Nichtbefolgung dieser Dienstverpflichtung wird bestraft.

Διὰ τῆς παρούσης καλεῖσθε εἰς ὑποχρεωτικὴν ἐργασίαν πρὸς ἐκτέλεσιν ἔργων τῆς ὁδοῦ Θεσσαλονίκης-Κατερίνης-Λαρίσσης.
Ἡ μὴ συμμόρφωσις πρὸς τὴν ὑποχρέωσιν ταύτην τιμωρεῖται.

Für den Befehlshaber Saloniki-Ägäis
Im Auftrage des Chefs des Stabes
Abt. Verwaltung u. Wirtschaft
Im Auftrage

Kriegsverwaltungsassessor.



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Ἀριθ. 23

Ἐπώνυμον Καπών

Ὄνομα Βιτάλ

Ὄνομα πατρὸς Βενιαμίν

Ἔτος γεννήσεως 1902

Ἔγγαμος ΝΑΙ/ΟΧΙ Ναί

Κατοικία Βαδανιάχου 10

Ἐπάγγελμα Ἔμπορος

Ἡμερομηνία παρουσιάσεως

Call-up papers for forced labour for the merchant Vital Kapon, son of Benjamin (11/7/1942). Jewish Museum of Thessaloniki.



11 July 1942. Freedom Square, Thessaloniki.

The cheque wit
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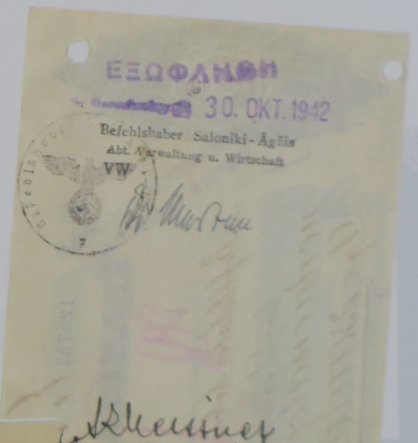
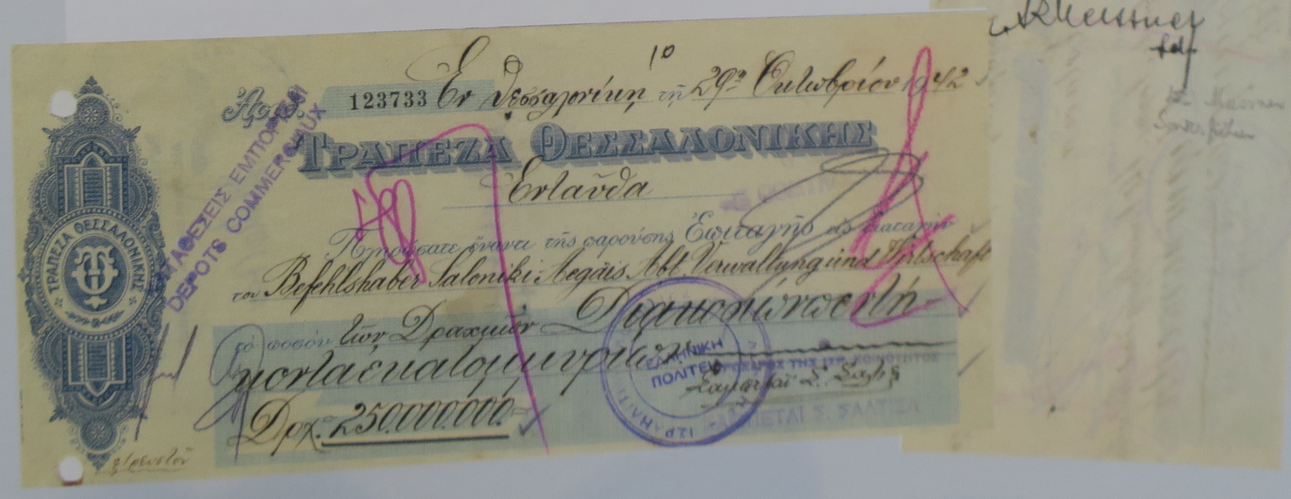
FORCED LABOUR AND «RANSOMS»

Over the next three months, the Jews who were sent in stages to building sites were deliberately selected from those men who were not used to manual labour. On top of this, they were forced to work on short rations and in conditions which, from hygiene and other points of view, were wretched. The result was that an increasingly large number of deaths occurred.

In October 1942, the Germans made an offer that the Jewish Community should pay the sum of money that would meet the costs of replacing the press-ganged Jews with ordinary workers. The sum was fixed at 2.5 billion drachmas (corresponding to 2,500,000 daily wages) and in order to meet this, the Jewish community completely exhausted its remaining coffers. Payment of these «ransoms», in order to free those working in the forced labour camps, is confirmed by a series of cheques issued by the Jewish Community for payment to of the German Administration of Thessaloniki/Aegean from the end of October until the end of December 1942. The cheques were discovered in 2003 in the archives of the Banque de Salonique, a Jewish-owned bank which operated in Thessaloniki.





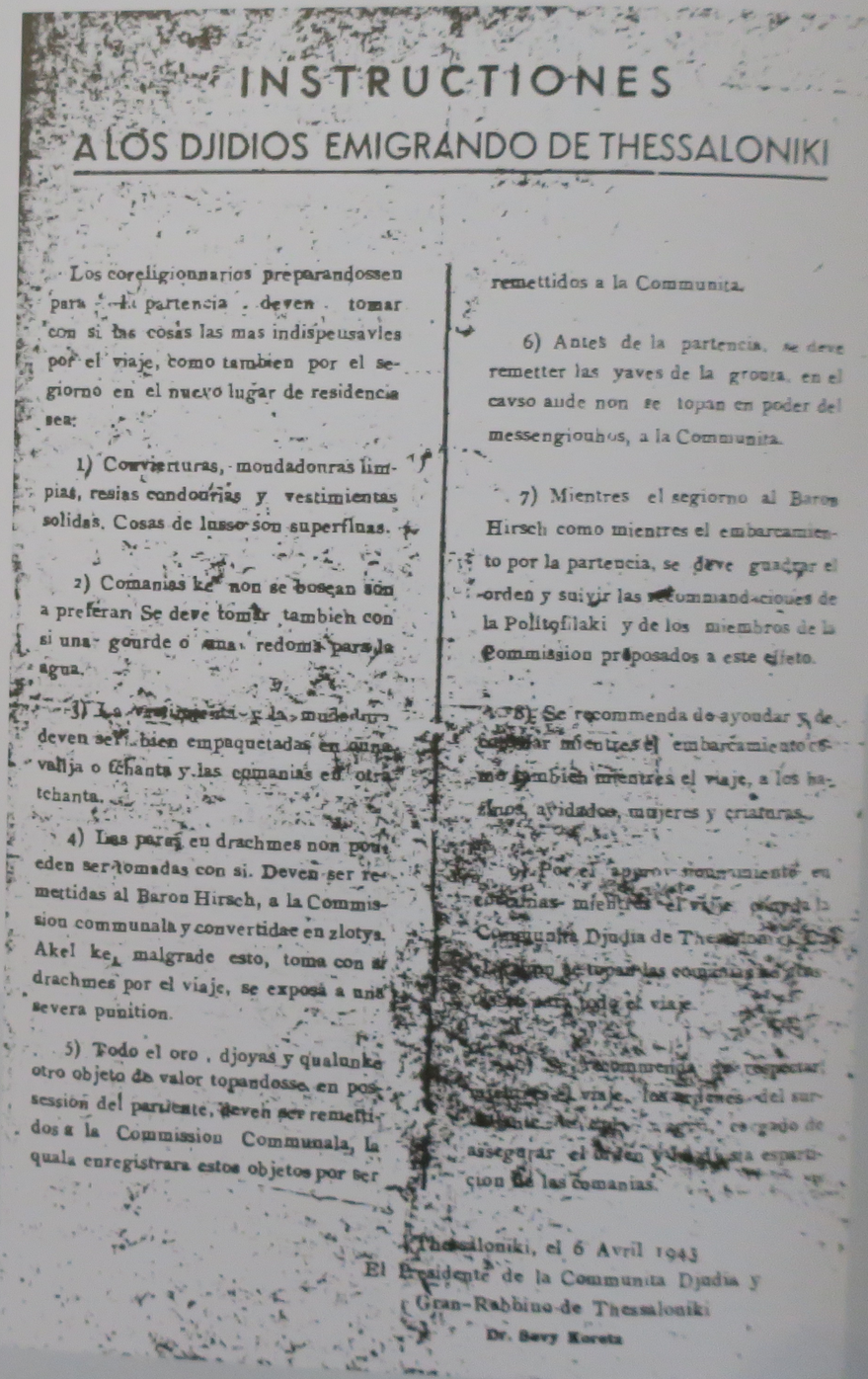
The cheque with which the first installment of the «ransom» was paid on 29 October 1942. It was handed over to the office of the advisor to the military administration of Thessaloniki and the Aegean, M. Merten by name, and cashed the next day by his assistant, one Meissner. Historical Archive of the National Bank of Greece.

On 6 February 1943, a special Nazi SS team arrived in Thessaloniki, led by Dieter Wisliczeny and Alois Brunner. They were to apply all anti-Jewish laws and set in motion the machinery of the "Final Solution," the German euphemism for the destruction of the Jews.

The order forcing Jews to wear the yellow Star of David was given two days later, along with orders for new identity cards and numbers for the Jews. You can see some of these yellow stars in the exhibit, as well as the machine and cutting pattern used to make them.

In a few days a catalogue containing the names and addresses of all Jewish citizens was compiled. The Jewish community leadership was ordered to issue special forms to Jews for recording and valuating their property and belongings. All reported assets were confiscated by the German authorities.

The Germans created three ghettos in the areas inhabited mainly by Jews. All Jews had to relocate into those ghettos, after which they were cut off from the life of the city. Any Jew who changed residence without a permit was considered a deserter and shot in cold blood. No Jew was allowed to walk in the street after sunset, use the tram or a telephone.



INSTRUCTIONES

A LOS DJIDIOS EMIGRANDO DE THESSALONIKI

Los coreligionnarios preparandossen para la partencia deven tomar con si tas cosas las mas indispensavles por el viaje, tomo tambien por el segiorno en el nuevo lugar de residencia sea:

1) Convierturas, moudadonras limpias, resias condourias y vestimientas solidas. Cosas de lusso son superfluas.

2) Comanias ke non se bosean son a preferan Se deve tomar tambich con si una gourde o ama redoma para la agua.

3) La vestimenta y la moudadura deven ser bien empaquetadas en una valija o tchanta y las comanias en otra tchanta.

4) Las paras en drachmes non pueden ser tomadas con si. Deven ser remettidas al Baron Hirsch, a la Commission communala y convertidae en zlotya. Akel ke, malgrade esto, toma con si drachmes por el viaje, se exposa a una severa punition.

5) Todo el oro, djoyas y qualunke otro objeto de valor topandosse en possession del partente, deven ser remettidos a la Commission Communala, la quala enregistrara estos objetos por ser remettidos a la Communita.

6) Antes de la partencia, se deve remetter las yaves de la grouta, en el cavso aude non se topan en poder del messengiouhos, a la Communita.

7) Mientres el segiorno al Baron Hirsch como mientres el embarcamiento por la partencia, se deve guadrar el orden y suivir las recommandaciones de la Politofilaki y de los miembros de la Commission proposados a este efeto.

8) Se recommenda de ayoudar y de cuidar mientres el embarcamiento como tambien mientres el viaje, a los malatos, ayidados, mujeres y criaturas.

9) Por el apuro nourimiento en comanias mientres el viaje ocupa la Communita Djudia de Thessaloniki.

10) Se recommenda de respectar mientres el viaje, los ordenes del surintendante del viaje, encargado de asseguar el bien y la disciplina esparcion de las comanias.

Thessaloniki, el 6 Avril 1943

El Presidente de la Communita Djudia y Gran-Rabbino de Thessaloniki

Dr. Sevy Koretz

Instructions to the Jewish deportees issued by the President of the Jewish Community

The couple Rasel and Iosif Hassid, with the yellow star. Jewish Museum of Thessaloniki.



THE DEPORTATION

On the morning of 14 March 1943, the residents of the Baron Hirsch ghetto assembled in their synagogue where Chief Rabbi Koretz told them they were to be moved to Poland. There they would find a new home, he told them, among their own people. They were sold Polish currency and train tickets.

The Hirsch ghetto Jews were assembled and moved to the train station the next morning. They were packed into livestock wagons, which were overloaded to twice their capacity. The cars were shut and sealed. The train departed for Poland with the first 2,800 deportees.

After a tortuous, five-day journey, these Thessaloniki Jews reached Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp. Immediately, 2,191 of them were led to the gas chambers, gassed to death, and their bodies burnt in the industrial crematoriums. Another 417 men and 192 women from the train were led to the forced labor camp.

The Baron Hirsch ghetto was now empty and ready to receive new prisoners. Within hours the Jews of the Ayia Paraskevi ghetto were surrounded and ordered to pack their bags and leave in 20 minutes. The elderly, children, sick and disabled were herded on foot to the Hirsch ghetto, to which Jews from other areas were being sent. On 17 March 1943 another train-load of Jews was sent north under the same inhumane conditions as the first.

These scenes were repeated many times. From March through August 1943, nineteen train-loads of Jews left the city for Auschwitz-Birkenau, where the Thessaloniki Jews were murdered. It was industrial, mass murder.

The last two trains, in August 1943, transferred to Bergen-Belsen camp the Thessaloniki Jews who held Spanish passports, along with the imposed Jewish community administrators and Jews who had been used by, or cooperated with, the Germans.

Out of the 48,533 Thessaloniki Jews sent to the camps, 37,386 were sent to the gas chambers immediately (77%). Most of the rest were killed through forced manual labor, exhaustion and starvation.

Within some months, the largest center of Sephardic Jews and Sephardic Judaism in the world was destroyed forever.



9 April 1943: Jews from the eastern ghetto of Thessaloniki are taken on foot along Egnatia Street to the Baron Hirsch transit camp, next to the railway station, for transportation. The curious and the passers-by observe the event. Jewish Museum of Thessaloniki.

HIDDEN OR FIGHTING

Hundreds of Jews from throughout Greece did not wear the yellow star and went into hiding. In Athens, the police issued false identity papers with Christian names to a large number of Jews, facilitating their escape. In Thessaloniki, the best-known case is that of the Pardo family, which stayed hidden for many months in the apartment of a Christian family in the centre of the city. And yet, the sheer size of the Jewish population of Thessaloniki, their limited familiarity with Christians, their concentration in particular, isolated neighbourhoods after the fire in 1917, the perennial activity of anti-Semitic elements and the fact that the majority of the Christian population were new inhabitants without links to the city's past, were all factors which played a negative role in the survival of Jewish families. By and large, those who survived were the ones who managed to flee to Southern Greece and hide there.

It is believed that 650 Jews fought against the Germans in the Resistance organizations. Of these, 100 died fighting. A recent study by the Jewish Museum of Greece highlighted some of the 250 instances of Jews of Thessaloniki who took part in the national resistance movements, such as: Manolis Baruch, a doctor with the Greek Popular Liberation Army (ELAS); David Brudo, the son of a rabbi who escaped from the forced labour he had been sent to perform and served in the logistics arm of ELAS; Joseph Nissim, a reserve officer who escaped to the Middle East, fought with the faithful to the British units of the Greek Army and was decorated; Baruch Schiby, who enlisted in the National Liberation Front (partisans), and many others.



Jewish Partisans, Shabbetai Varsano, Leon Matalon, Matilda Massarano, Marco Carasso, David Brudo and others, 1943. Jewish Museum of Greece.

THE SURVIVORS

Very few returned to their city, mostly the young, though these were psychological wrecks. They had no relatives, their houses had been ransacked and were now inhabited by others who had also lost their homes. Some survivors were happy to find four walls standing from their shops.

The first post-war period was one of retrenchment: creating families, becoming established professionally, reestablishment of the Jewish Community. Living doubled-up in a city that was at best indifferent, where absolutely no-one talked about the disappearance of 47,000 citizens, where they were careful not to speak to their children in their mother, Sephardic tongue in order to protect them from another possible catastrophe in the future.

In the 1980s, the second period began: the Community opened up to the city and steps were taken to preserve the memory. Survivors began to speak, answering questions, not from their children but from their grandchildren. It was a time when, in Greece -as indeed in the rest of Europe- books were being published with the testimony of the survivors and when a very few scholars in academic circles began to concern themselves with the subject of the Holocaust.

In the third period, starting about the year 2000, the second (post-war) generation of academics dealt with the subject and so we have a proliferation of studies, conferences, and seminars, such as -in the last two years- an impressive increase in visits by schoolchildren to the Jewish Museum of Thessaloniki.



Photograph of Tarfon Aaron in the striped uniform of the camp at Buchenwald, 1943. Jewish Museum of Thessaloniki.

LIVING AGAIN IN THESSALONIKI

Thessaloniki was reoccupied by Greek and Allied forces in October 1944. Only a handful of Jews returned to the city whose history had been intertwined with theirs for some 2,300 years. What did they find?

They found their homes occupied, their belongings stolen, most of their synagogues destroyed, several other synagogues used for other purposes, and the vast Jewish cemetery used as a marble quarry. Among the ruins, the survivors started their lives over. Survivors from surrounding areas gathered in Thessaloniki, and as they usually spoke Greek, Greek displaced Ladino as the language of the community. Bitter memories and economic hardship in post-war Greece forced many surviving Jews to emigrate to Israel and the United States.

Today, there is an organized Jewish community in Thessaloniki. It has two synagogues, a Jewish kindergarten and elementary school, a community center, a youth center, a retirement home and the Jewish museum. The community organizes a summer camp for Greek Jewish youth, and it has a youth-sports club, *Maccabi*.

A few minutes' walk from the Jewish museum is the notorious *Plateia Eleftherias*, (Freedom Square), where the Nazis initiated their evil plan here on 11 July 1942. After years of efforts by the Jewish community, the Greek state erected a Holocaust memorial there.

The Jewish Community of Thessaloniki, presently numbering about 1,000 members, endeavors to secure for its members the means to deepen their experience of the Jewish way of life. We follow in the footsteps of our ancestors who built this Jewish city, and we hope that some day it will become a new center of Judaism, a new "Ir vaem be Yisrael."



Seder Pessah for youngsters at the Community club. Jewish Museum of Thessaloniki.



The march organized by the Municipality of Thessaloniki and the academic community on the occasion of the anniversary of the departure of the first train to Auschwitz (15/3/1943).



Speech by Yannis Boutaris, the Mayor of Thessaloniki, at the old railway station, after the march (2015).

BOARD OF THE
JEWISH COMMUNITY OF THESSALONIKI

David Saltiel, President
Lazaros Sefiha, Vice President
Israel Rousso, Secretary
Pighas Parente, Treasurer
Annita Pinto, Comptroller

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Museum was created in a 1904 shopping arcade building, property of the Jewish Community of Thessaloniki and renovated by the "Organization Thessaloniki Cultural Capital of Europe 1997" for this purpose.
The Jewish Community of Thessaloniki, under the presidency of the late Andreas Sefiha, with the generous support of private donors provided the financial means.
Dr Nikolas Stavroulakis designed the Museum core exhibition display and is the author of most of the explanatory texts.

Graphic design and art work was developed by Hy Brazil.

The museum logo was designed by Victor Koen.

Works for the Museum set up were conducted under the supervision of Mr David Frances. Chief technician was the late Nikos Sapounas.

Most of the Museum artifacts and archival material were donated by Thessaloniki Jews or their descendants, residing all over the world.

Special thanks to Mrs Gilda Benmayor, Mr Jacky Benmayor, Mr Kevin Berkowitz, Mr Joseph Gategno, Mr Yannis Megas, Dr Rena Molho, Ms Solita Saltiel, Mr Haim Vidal Sephiha, Mr Yakov Schibi, Mrs Rina Taraboulous and all those who contributed -each in his/her own specialization and knowledge- at the various tasks and issues we encountered during the Museum set up. We are also obliged to Mrs Eleni Saltiel for her long-year services at the Museum's Library.

MUSEUM COMMITTEES

The Museum Committee acts as the advisory section to the Board of the Jewish Community.
The members of the Committee are volunteers, appointed by the Community Board.
Until now there have been five Committees at the Museum which were presided by Dr Paul Haguel, Ms Solita Saltiel, Mr Andreas Sefiha, Ms Kelly Benmayor and Mr Leon Errera respectively.

Members of the Committee have been the above and Ms Emily Bacola, Mr Kevin Berkowitz, Ms Sara Carasso, Mr Hasdai Capon, Ms Rea Gatenio, Mr Zozis Gatenio, Ms Hella Matalon, Mr Leon Nar, Mr Nino Saltiel, Mr Sam Saltiel, Mr Lazaros Sefiha, Mr David Taraboulous, Ms Simony Tiano, Mr Samis Varsano.

MUSEUM STAFF *(and editors of 'The Book")*

Ms Iliana Errera
Ms Lucy Nachmia
Ms Erika Perahia Zemour
Ms Mirjam Sadikario

MUSEUM ADVISOR *(and co-editor of 'The Book")*

Dr Evanghelos Hekimoglou

Thessaloniki, 2017