Records of the Jewish Community of Salonika, Greece
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United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives
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Descriptive summary

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Scope and content of collection
The collection contains registration books containing records of vital statistics, 1920-1939; lists of Salonika Jews, ca. 1939; records of the Rabbinical Court, 1920-1938; correspondence with the Salonika Jewish Community from individuals and institutions pertaining to housing, administration of Jewish quarters, and the production and distribution of matzo; records and correspondence of the Jewish Communal Council of Salonika, the Commission of Education, Salonica-Palestine, S. A., and the Banque Union; as well miscellaneous documents relating to Jewish life in Greece, ca. 1912-1936.

Administrative Information
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Existence and location of originals: Yivo Institute for Jewish Research

Processing history: Collection arranged and guide compiled for YIVO by Devin E. Naar, with support from the Maurice Amado Foundation and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

System of arrangement
Arranged in ten series: Series I: Metric records of the Jewish population of Salonika; Series II: Records of the Beit Din; Series III: Financial Records of the Jewish Communal Council of Salonika; Series IV: Correspondence of the Jewish Communal Council of Salonika; Series V: Correspondence pertaining to the production and distribution of Matza; Series VI: Correspondence pertaining to housing and the administration of Jewish quarters; Series VII: Records and correspondence of the Commission of Education; Series VIII: Records of Salonica-Palestine, S.A.; Series IX: Records and correspondence of the Banque Union; Series X: Miscellaneous documents and printed materials relating to Jewish life in Greece, ca. 1912-1936.

Indexing terms
Jews--Greece--Thessalonikē--Registers.
Jews--Greece--Thessalonikē--Identity.
Holocaust, Jewish (1939-1945)--Greece--Thessalonikē.
Thessalonikē (Greece)--Ethnic relations.
Greece--History--Occupation, 1941-1944.

Historical Note
The city of Salonika (Thessaloniki) was founded in 315 BCE by King Cassander of Macedon, who named it after his wife, a half-sister of Alexander the Great. The Apostle Paul preached in the Etz Ahaim synagogue in Salonika in the first century CE indicating that Jewish presence in the city dates back to at least that time. During that period, a small community of Romaniote Jews inhabited Salonika. The arrival of Ashkenazi Jews escaping persecution from Hungary and Germany during the fourteenth century increased the Jewish population. Several decades after Salonika became part of the newly emerging Ottoman Empire in 1430, numerous Sephardic Jews began arriving in the city following their expulsion from Spain in 1492. Former Conversos who left the Iberian Peninsula throughout the sixteenth century also arrived in Salonika; Jews soon came to constitute the majority of the city’s population. Into the twentieth century, four hundred years after their arrival, the Sephardic Jews still spoke a Spanish-based language, called Ladino (also Judeo-Spanish or Judezmo), which they wrote in Hebrew scripts.
During the sixteenth century, the Sephardim positioned Salonika as a center of Jewish culture and commerce in the Mediterranean basin, and as one of the most important Jewish communities in the world. Jews established the first printing press in the city in 1512. Influential Jewish figures who spent their formative years in Salonika include Yosef Karo, who compiled the Shulhan Aroukh and Shelomo Alkabetz, author of Lecha Dodi. Subsequently, both of these works profoundly influenced both the Sephardic and Ashkenazic worlds. The only city to compete with Salonika as a center for the development of Kabbalah was Safed. In terms of commerce, the Jewish population made significant contributions through their production of uniforms for the sultan’s personal bodyguards, called janissaries. During the seventeenth century, conditions began to deteriorate for the Jews of Salonika as a result, in part, of Ottoman military defeats. In addition, the conversion to Islam of Shabbetai Sevi, who had proclaimed himself the messiah, destabilized Jewish communities throughout the Ottoman Empire (and beyond). In the following century, the dissolution of the janissaries by the sultan (1826), dealt a serious blow to the Jewish community’s economic productivity.

In the mid-nineteenth century, concurrent to the development of Ottoman reforms (Tanzimat), Jews in Paris established the Alliance Israélite Universelle (AIU), which operated a modern, Western-style school system that aimed to “regenerate” Jews in communities from Fez to Baghdad. In Salonika, with the aid of local Jewish elites (called francos, many of whose families had come to Salonika from Italy), the first AIU school was founded in 1873. Over the long run the AIU exerted a profound influence on Jewish life in Salonika. Equipped with educational skills and with knowledge of languages such as Italian and French, many of Salonika’s Jews reemerged as the dominant force in the local and regional economies. Jews from Salonika, a significant entrepôt situated between east and west, participated in a complex Ottoman and trans-Mediterranean commercial network. Active in banking and finance, they also exported cereal, cotton, wool, and silk, and opened some of the first factories for bricks, flour, soap, and tobacco in the Balkan region. The late nineteenth century also witnessed the advent of the Ladino and French periodical presses in Salonika and elsewhere in the Ottoman Empire, which contributed to the development of a Jewish public forum for ideas. Urbanization also boosted the population of Salonika. Around the turn of the century, eighty thousand of the 150 thousand residents of Salonika were Jews while the remainder of the population consisted of Greeks, Turks, Dönme (descendants of Jewish converts to Islam), Bulgarians, Roma and foreigners.

The westernizing impulse, as well as the rise of nationalism brought challenges for the Jewish community. The Young Turk Revolution (1908), organized from Salonika, led to the removal of the Ottoman sultan and the proclamation of the ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity. But it also called for the first time for the compulsory conscription into the Ottoman army of non-Muslims, including Jews, and ushered in a new era for Ottoman Jewry. Open support for Zionism became possible as did the formation of a Socialist movement, founded in Salonika in 1909 and led largely by local Jews who catered to the large Jewish working class. During this same period, the Jewish community of Salonika also established numerous charitable institutions, which joined the centuries-old Talmud Tora Agadol (the main Jewish communal school), and the Bikour Holim, in administering public needs. Such institutions included the Matanoth Laevionim (soup kitchen, est. 1901); the Hirsch Hospital (est. 1908 and named in honor of the philanthropists Baron Maurice and Clara de Hirsch); the Jewish Insane Asylum (1908); and the Allatini Orphanage (1910).

The Jews of Salonika dwelt under the administration of the Young Turks for only a few short years. The Balkan Wars (1912-1913) led to the transfer of Salonika from Ottoman to Greek control (despite alternative plans for Bulgarian annexation or the internationalization of Salonika). The Jews received assurances from Greek leaders that their rights would be safeguarded. Greece, the first Balkan state to
gain its independence from the Ottoman Empire (in 1830), had since then striven for the reformation of the Greater Greece of Five Seas and the Greece of Ancient Athens and Byzantium, for the unification of lands on which Greeks resided, and for the reclamation of Istanbul (Constantinople), then the Ottoman capital, but historically the seat of the Greek Orthodox Church. The “liberation” of Salonika by Greece was seen as a step closer to the fulfillment of the Greek national dream, the Megali Idea.

During the Great War, Salonika played a strategic role for the Allied Forces on the Eastern Front. A government in opposition to the Greek king in Athens was formed in Salonika and invited the Allies to land in the city. As under the Young Turks, Jews now were eligible for military conscription into the Greek army, which some Jews sought to evade.

In 1917, with British and French troops stationed in all corners of Salonika, a catastrophic fire swept across town leaving seventy thousands residents, fifty thousand of whom were Jews, without food or shelter, and destroying numerous synagogues, schools (including the Talmud Tora Agadol), libraries and communal archives, and hundreds of businesses, mostly Jewish owned. The Greek government’s plan for the reconstruction of Salonika—in the name of urbanization, modernization, and Hellenization—proved to alienate many of the Jews by preventing them from rebuilding their homes and businesses in the city’s center. Emigration to France, Italy and the Americas, which had begun following the Young Turk Revolution and once Salonika came under Greek control, continued. In the wake of the fire, the Jewish community also established a commission to arrange for the thousands of Jews left homeless to obtain housing, and expended considerable effort in reestablishing and centralizing the communal school system—efforts which continued through the interwar period.

At the conclusion of World War I, the Jewish community secured certain guarantees for their communal rights as part of the Greek Minorities Treaty that emerged from the Paris Peace Conference in 1919. In 1920, the Greek government passed legislation referred to as “Concerning Jewish Communities” that officially outlined the juridical standing of the Jewish communities of Greece—Salonika included—as corporate entities and delimited the extent of their powers, responsibilities, and autonomy. With the Greek defeat by the Turks in the Asia Minor War (1919-1922), however, the status of the Jewish population of Salonika changed. The Treaty of Lausanne (1923) called for a compulsory exchange of populations in order to consolidate both Greek and Turkish national identities—and signaled the end of the Greek Megali Idea. Greek Orthodox Christians from Asia Minor poured into Greece, while Muslims exited en masse. Over one hundred thousand Greek Orthodox Christians found themselves in Salonika. This permanently altered the demographic fabric of the city as now Greek Orthodox Christians became the preponderant majority, irrevocably outnumbering the Jews, who had until then constituted the most populous ethnic group. The arrival of the Greek Orthodox refugees exacerbated the still lingering burden resulting from the displacement of many Salonikan residents, largely Jews, as a consequence of the fire of 1917. Furthermore, economic competition strained Greek-Jewish relations.

Subsequent political moves taken by the Liberal party of Eleftherious Venizelos, the Greek Prime Minister, to unify Greece and impose a Hellenic identity on all Greek citizens during the interwar period—one marked by economic and political instability for Greece as a whole—materialized in ways that challenged the Jewish community. In 1924, coinciding with the establishment of the Greek Republic, a compulsory Sunday closing law came into effect, forcing Jews to choose between violating the Sabbath or losing a day of business. The implementation of education reforms requiring the increased use of the Greek language in Jewish schools at the expense of Hebrew, French, and Ladino, and the creation of a separate electoral college for the Jews, threatened their political rights. In addition, as part of the plan to rebuild the city following the fire of 1917, during the interwar years the
government sought repeatedly—with the alleged objective of enforcing public hygiene—to expropriate the four hundred year-old Jewish cemetery in order to make way for the Aristotle University. Stirred by anti-Jewish propaganda in the Greek press, refugees from Asia Minor and members of the National Union of Greece, a fascist organization, committed arson in 1931 in the Campbell quarter, a neighborhood established for Jews who were left homeless as a result of the fire of 1917. Many Jews subsequently immigrated to Palestine. The Salonica-Palestine Company, which had been established in 1921, had since then channeled funds from Salonika to Palestine and arranged for the purchase of real estate, especially in and around Tel Aviv, and the establishment of the Florentin neighborhood. However, the extent to which Jewish immigration to Palestine from Salonika was coordinated by any of the political parties in Salonika remains a point of contention among scholars.

In response to the challenges faced by the Jewish community of Salonika, various Jewish political parties emerged during first four decades of the twentieth century. These parties advocated Zionism (with a variety of factions, from General Zionists to Revisionists), Socialism and later Communism, as well as assimilationism. Each party sought to represent the interests of the Jewish community before the government and the international community. Party conflict mirrored class conflict, entrenched in Jewish communal politics during this period, and also impeded the selection of a permanent chief rabbi between 1923 until 1933.

The tenure of Sevi Koretz as chief rabbi of Salonika from 1933 until the outbreak of World War II represented an attempt to achieve rapprochement between the Jewish population and the Greek government. While internal communal politics continued to divide the Jewish population of Salonika and increasing impoverishment induced further immigration to Palestine, smaller Jewish communities throughout Greece continued to look to Salonika for leadership and assistance. For example, each Pessah (Passover) the Jewish community of Salonika organized and oversaw the production of massa (matzah), which it distributed to many other Jewish communities. Many political organizations—including the National Union of Greece—were banned under the dictatorship of Ioannis Metaxas (est. 1936), thereby alleviating certain pressures that had previously burdened the Jewish community.

In April 1941, the German military forces invaded Salonika and occupied the city. They arrested leaders of the Jewish community, evicted Jewish families from their apartments, confiscated property and took over the Jewish hospital. In June 1941, members of the Nazi unit Einsatzstab Rosenberg began going into libraries and private homes and confiscated ten thousand Jewish books as well as rare manuscripts and cultural artifacts and sent them to the Institut zur Erforschung der Judenfrage in Frankfurt am Main. In December 1942, the Jewish cemetery was expropriated and destroyed. In February 1943, SS officials Dieter Wisliceny and Alois Brunner arrived in Salonika. They enacted decrees to restrict and isolate the Jews, enforced the wearing of the yellow star of David and ordered the Jewish population into a sealed ghetto. The deportation of the Jews of Salonika to Auschwitz began in March. From March to August 1943, close to 50,000 Jews—almost the entire Jewish population of Salonika—were deported to Auschwitz and gassed. Fewer than two thousand Jews survived. The Jewish community of the “Jerusalem of the Balkans” had been destroyed.

**Detailed Scope and Content Note, prepared by the project historian**

Almost all of the materials contained in this collection pertain to the period between the fire of 1917 and the beginning of the German occupation of Salonika in 1941. The materials are arranged and divided into series to reflect both chronological development and the structure and functioning of a
wide cross-section of the activities of the Jewish community and its bureaucracy. The materials include metrical records of the Jewish population, most significantly three volumes from the 1917 census of the Jewish community (series I); records of the Beit Din (series II); financial records and correspondence of the communal council (series III and IV); correspondence pertaining to the production and distribution of matzah (series V); correspondence pertaining to housing and the administration of Jewish neighborhoods (series VI); records and correspondence of the commission of education (series VII); records of the Salonica-Palestine company (series VIII); records of the Banque Union (series IX); printed materials from Salonika (series X); and miscellaneous documents and printed materials from the period of World War II and its aftermath that deal with Salonika and Greek Jewry (series XI).

Series I: Metrical Records of the Jewish population of Salonika

As in many Jewish communities, the Jewish community of Salonika had historically been under the jurisdiction of the rabbinate. A lay communal council, elected from a larger communal assembly, came into existence in Salonika in 1870, and was to deal with secular matters, whereas the chief rabbi and the spiritual council (mishlish ruhani) that the chief rabbi was to oversee, were to concern themselves with matters of a religious nature. This precise division of power caused extensive debate and conflict within the community. The Greek law of 1920, “Concerning Jewish Communities,” reinforced the chief rabbinate’s jurisdiction over religious matters, which included the production and maintenance of metrical records pertaining to the halakhically germane issue of civil status. Throughout the interwar period, a department of “statistics and civil status” operated under the auspices of the chief rabbinate, and fragments of its records constitute series I.

Following the devastating fire of 1917, the community began to reconstitute its communal archives, which had been destroyed by the fire. The resulting communal census (resansiman) initiated in 1917 represented the most important part of the reconstituted archives maintained by the department of statistics and civil status under the jurisdiction of the chief rabbinate. These census registers replaced the 1884 Ottoman census of the community that had been destroyed or lost due to the fire of 1917. The three volumes from the census of 1917 (folders 1-3) are the most valuable and unique components of the YIVO Salonika collection as a whole. Of the original 17 census volumes (containing a total of 24 books) from 1917, the three volumes in the YIVO collection relate to family names beginning with the Hebrew letters nun [N], koof [K, Q, C] and sin/shin [S or Sh]. These three volumes are the only ones known to have survived. In the wake of the fire, commissions composed of Jewish communal teachers were dispatched to the main streets and to Jewish neighborhoods and barracks to assemble the census data. According to a report of the department of statistics and civil status, the entire census recorded 75,062 individuals (but two volumes pey [P] and mem [M] had already been lost by the time of the German occupation in 1941, leaving the total population recorded in the remaining volumes at 69,812 individuals). The three extant volumes in the YIVO collection include entries for approximately thirteen thousand individuals—about twenty percent of the entire Jewish population of Salonika.

The census registers provide valuable data on a considerable number of Jewish families and individuals; special sections provide information on widows (almonoth) and orphans (yetomim). Recorded in solitreo, the Hebrew script used by the Sephardim in Salonika and elsewhere in the Mediterranean basin to write Judeo-Spanish, the census registers indicate surnames and given names; approximate ages and/or dates of birth; occupations and addresses; whether a given family was victim to the fire, and if so, what sort of damage was sustained, i.e. to the house, store, or movable property; the degree of need, i.e. whether the family was poor, middle class, or no assistance was needed; and what assistance
was received, i.e. bread, coal, clothes or milk. These census volumes can serve as a resource for the reconstruction of a partial occupational profile of the Jewish community. Numerous occupations are represented in the census: from barkeros (ferrymen), hamales (porters), maonadjis (bargemen), and peshkadores (fisherman) at the port, to hahamim (rabbis) and shamashim (rabbi’s assistant) in the synagogue; from the professional class of doktores and avokatos (lawyers), to the commercial class of negosyan tes (businessmen) and sarafs (money changers); and the vast working class of tutundjis (tobacco workers), fanileros (undergarment makers), halvadjis (helva vendors), zarzavatchis (greengrocers), and dondurmadjis (ice cream vendors).

Equally significant, the census of 1917 served as the central registry of the Jewish community. Each family recorded in the census received a unique identification number (consisting of the volume and entry number where they were listed in the communal census) so that any birth (see folders 7-11), marriage, death, or residency (see folders 4, 5A, 5B, 5C, and 6) certificate issued by the department of statistics and civil status could be cross-checked and coordinated with the central census registry. The census therefore continued to be updated and appended— until the spring of 1941, when the German occupation of Salonika commenced— in order to reflect new births, marriages, deaths, divorces, conversions, emigration and appearances before the Beit Din (religious court).

The reconstruction of the communal archives and the re-issuing of destroyed certificates as well as the issuing of completely new ones required a tremendous effort on the part of the department of statistics and civil status and the office of the chief rabbinate. When Sevi Koretz became chief rabbi in 1933, the department of statistics and civil status was still in the process of trying to catch up. Koretz instituted a series of reforms to try to bring the records up to date.

The birth registers in folders 7 to 11 provide valuable information on individuals and families—including photographs, in many cases the only photographs of dozens of children who perished during the Holocaust. Of the certificates issued by the department of statistics and civil status for 630 births, 402 marriages, 29 divorces, 1 conversion, and 668 deaths in 1934, YIVO holds about 150 of the birth certificates—not a negligible fraction of the total. These types of documents are not unique to the YIVO Salonika collection; other repositories with fragments of the Salonika Archive have similar materials.

Because of the backlog, however, many of the birth certificates were issued for children already fifteen or twenty years old. Evasion of military conscription provided an incentive not to register one’s son. Girls (and boys holding foreign citizenship) were thus classified separately from boys holding Greek citizenship.

Reflecting the various nationalities among the Jewish population of Salonika, birth certificates, redacted in Ladino by the department of statistics and civil status, are accompanied by certificates issued by the Greek municipal or state governments or—for foreign nationals or those born abroad—certificates from France, Italy, Spain, or Palestine.

Series II: Records of the Beit Din
Since the Beit Din, like the department of statistics and civil status, operated under the authority of the chief rabbinate, its records constitute series II. This constitutes one of the largest collections of Beit Din cases from interwar Salonika yet to be identified. The five volumes of Beit Din cases (folders 12-16) contain entries for approximately 1700 cases during the period 1920-1940. Most entries were recorded in a combination Ladino and Hebrew (both in solitreo script), and occasionally in French, as testimony was to be recorded in the language it in which it was given. Cases include the names of the litigants,
their signatures (or thumbprints) as well as those of witnesses, in addition to, in many cases, those of the dayanim (judges) who presided over the case. Cases contained in YIVO’s collection pertain most frequently to family disputes; engagements, marriages, annulments, divorce and conversion; freeing grass widows to re-marry and levirate marriage; child support; settlement of wills and testaments, bequests and inheritance; kashruth, Sabbath desecration and circumcision; commercial disputes, business partnerships and debts; and defamation. In addition to the volumes of Beit Din cases, series II also contains a set of reports from 1930 that discuss three of the most pressing issues for the Jewish community during the interwar years: compulsory Sunday closing, the question of the chief rabbi, and the question of the expropriation of the Jewish cemetery (folder 18).

Series III and IV: Financial Records and Communal Correspondence

Whereas series I and II pertain to the chief rabbinate, series III and IV pertain specifically to the communal council and reflect the activities of the community’s lay leadership and functionaries in two spheres: first, in terms of the communal budget; and second, in terms of the council’s correspondence. In addition to a list of poor Jews receiving aid during Pessah in 1930 (folder 19), the rest of the financial records include detailed communal balance sheets and weekly accounts of the incomes and expenses of the community from 1932-34 (folders 20-80).

YIVO holds only a smattering of the original correspondence of the Jewish communal council. The most unique elements include two correspondence registers (logs) of incoming (1922) and outgoing (1926-27) correspondence (folders 81-82). They contain summaries of the topics of the community’s correspondence, as well as the names of the correspondents, whether other Jewish communities in Greece or abroad, branches of the Greek government, private individuals or companies, etc.

Other noteworthy correspondence includes letters sent by the Jewish community of Serres (folder 83); correspondence regarding the emptying of cesspools in the Baron Hirsch quarter (folder 84); and, significantly, reports submitted to the communal council by twenty local Jewish benevolent institutions in 1939, including the Bikour Holim, the Matanoth Laevionim, the Hirsch Hospital, the Jewish Insane Asylum, and the Allatini Orphanage (folder 87).

Series V: Correspondence pertaining to the Production and Distribution of Massa (Matzah)

Like the department of statistics and civil status, which functioned under the supervision of the chief rabbinate, numerous permanent and ad hoc commissions or committees functioned under the communal council. Correspondence pertaining to the production and distribution of matzah, overseen by a special commission, constitutes series V. This correspondence may be divided into three chronological periods: first, correspondence that pertains to the distribution of matzah in 1922 (folders 88-89); second, the establishment of a matzah factory and issues of production and distribution for 1929-1930 (folders 90-91); and finally, the bulk of the correspondence pertaining to matzah, from 1936-37 (folders 92-96). In this final segment, correspondence from other Jewish communities in Greece (Drama, Larissa, Florina) and elsewhere in the region (Istanbul, Sarajevo, Zagreb, Varna) with regard to the production and distribution of matzah constitutes an intriguing aspect of this series (folders 94 & 96).

Series VI. Correspondence pertaining to Housing and the Administration of Jewish Quarters
In addition to providing matzah to the local Jewish population as well as to other Jewish communities in the region, the Jewish community of Salonika continued to face the task—throughout much of the interwar years—of trying to secure housing for thousands of Jews displaced by the fire of 1917. Touching on this issue, the correspondence pertaining to housing and the administration of Jewish quarters, which constitutes series VI, includes a bound volume of copies of outgoing correspondence of the communal housing department with the administrations of the Hirsch, Kalamaria, Quarter 151 and Karagach neighborhoods (1929-1930) (folder 97); numerous requests for housing from the late 1920s (folders 98-99); protests submitted by residents of the Hirsch neighborhood regarding the neighborhood administration (folder 102); and a letter that announces the renaming of Quarter 151 in honor of the president of the communal council, Eliaou Benosiglio, in 1934 (folder 103).

Series VII. Records and correspondence of the Commission of Education. Following the census registers from 1917 and the volumes containing cases from the Beit Din, the records and correspondence of the education commission constitute one of the most valuable components of YIVO’s Salonika collection. While constituting only a very small amount of the total material generated and assembled by the education commission following the fire of 1917 until the start of the German occupation in 1941, the materials contained in series VII nonetheless offer insight into Jewish education in Salonika between the world wars—one of the most hotly politicized aspects of Jewish communal life that pitted Zionists, assimilationists and communists against each other over the nature of Jewish education and the future of the community’s youth. Following the fire of 1917, a concerted effort by communal leaders to rebuild the communal schools, and to coordinate and centralize the curriculum resulted, in combination with pressures from the Greek government, in the revamping of Jewish education in Salonika during the interwar years. By 1928, 3365 students attended the reestablished and centralized Jewish communal schools overseen by the education commission (whereas 3402 students attended Jewish private schools in the city, such as the Alliance Israélite Universelle).


Aspects of the reorganization process—as well as day-to-day issues—of Jewish communal education can be gleaned from the fragmentary minutes of the education commission (written in solitreo in pencil) covering the years 1922-1926 (folder 106) that are contained within subseries 1 of series VII. In addition to these minutes, financial reports provide information on the expenditures of the main communal schools (Calamaria, Cazes, Hirsch, Number 6, Regie-Vardar, and Talmud Tora Agadol), and the names and salaries of their directors, teachers and staff (folders 107-113).

Series VII, Subseries 2: Correspondence of Commission of Education with teachers, employees and other organizations, 1919–1941

Perhaps the most significant segment of series VII is subseries 2, which contains the correspondence largely of the school directors and teachers with the education commission (folders 119-149) and which offers a unique perspective on Jewish education in Salonika. All correspondents appear to have been arranged alphabetically (all of the names of the correspondents begin with S [or samekh, sin or shin], and this organizational system has been maintained in the present arrangement of the folders).

Noteworthy and extensive files include those of long-time teachers and school directors, Yomtov Samuel Saltiel (folder 135) and Samuel Isaac Saltiel (folder 134), both of whom submitted regular reports and complaints about the conditions in their schools throughout the interwar years. Other noteworthy
correspondence includes letters sent by the Greek Boy Scouts (Proskopi) (folder 144), and by the ChivatSion, a Mizrahi Zionist society, requesting expanded Hebrew language instruction (folder 149).

**Series VIII: Records of Salonica-Palestine**

Series VIII, records of Salonica-Palestine, S. A., contains materials produced by and for the Salonica-Palestine company, as well as the bank for small loans (Caisse de Petits Prêts) that operated, like other commissions already mentioned, under the auspices of the communal council. Research conducted about the Salonica-Palestine company and the Caisse de Petits Prêts suggests that the latter bought out the former and thus the assets and investments of the Salonica-Palestine company were transferred to the Jewish community of Salonika through its Caisse de Petits Prêts in the 1930s. This is confirmed in a list of shareholdings from 1935 that indicates the majority to be in the name of the Jewish community of Salonika itself (folder 152). In addition to the list of shareholders, a variety of correspondence and employee applications constitute the bulk of this series.

**Series IX: Records of the Banque Union**

Unlike the other departments and commissions discussed in the collection so far, the Banque Union, although owned and managed by Jews, does not appear to have operated directly under the auspices of the Jewish community of Salonika. The long-time president of the Banque Union was Joseph Nehama, who served on the communal council and was the director of the local Alliance Israélite Universelle school. Nehama was also a journalist and historian, best known for his seven-volume work Histoire des Israélites de Salonique (an entry for Nehama can be found in the communal census from 1917 [folder 1]).

Series IX therefore contains fragmentary records and correspondence of the Banque Union that pertain to financial transactions, foreign exchange, and customer references and payment for purchases of merchandise from 1932-1934 (folders 156-157).

**Series X: Printed materials relating to Jewish life in Salonika, ca. 1912-1936.**

Series X includes several French and Ladino newspaper clippings (folders 158-160) and a typed manuscript of volume IV of Nehama’s Histoire des Israélites de Salonique (folder 161).

**Series XI: Documents pertaining to the Jewish community of Salonika after 1945 and Greek Jewry, 1940-1954**

Series XI contains interesting materials such as a play in Ladino about Jews in Poland performed for Yom HaAtzmaut in Salonika in 1952 (folder 162); a letter from the Jewish community of Athens to the Jewish community of Baltimore regarding the impending Italian invasion (1940) (folder 163); clippings from Greek newspapers (1945) (folder 163); and a letter from Jacob Roth, in Yiddish, regarding a Jewish marriage on the island of Rhodes (1954) (folder 164).

**Custodial Note**

How a segment of the archives of the Jewish community of Salonika arrived at YIVO remains uncertain. Some information is available about the fate of the archives during World War II. From May to November of 1941, the Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg (ERR) confiscated an extensive amount of archival and library materials from Jewish communities throughout Greece, especially Salonika and Athens. The final report of the ERR specifically mentions the confiscations of the communal registers and the “especially interesting” records of the religious court (Beit Din), as well as the records of the
Salonica-Palestine company and the Banque Union. Fragments of these documents now constitute part of YIVO’s Salonika collection.

The ERR sent the materials that it confiscated from Salonika, and Greece as a whole, to the NSDAP Institute zur Erforschung der Judenfrage (IEJ) in Frankfurt-am-Main, headed by Alfred Rosenberg. Johannes Pohl, a senior staff member who directed the daily work of the Institute, indicated that of the 500 thousand books in the IEJ’s collection, ten thousand originated in Greece. The part of the archives of the Jewish community of Salonika that made its way to Frankfurt appears to have been collected, along with other archives and libraries of Jewish communities throughout Europe (including YIVO’s pre-war collection from Vilna), by the United States military at the Offenbach Archival Depot (OAD) in Germany at the conclusion of the war. It appears that YIVO in New York received its section of the Salonika archives from the OAD in the years immediately following the conclusion of World War II. Other segments of the archives of the Jewish community of Salonika found their way, also after the war, to Salonika, Athens, Jerusalem, Moscow and Amsterdam.

An article published in YIVO News 16 (Sept. 1946), indicates that YIVO received “a collection of documents and other source material on Jewish life in Greece” from the Association of Jewish Communities in Greece. The description provided suggests that these materials pertain largely to the post-war period and most likely comprise part of series XI.

Salonika Project: Background, Credits, and History
While over the years several scholars made use of YIVO’s Salonika archives, in the late 1990s Dr. Isaac Benmayor, a linguist, translator and native of Salonika, compiled the preliminary inventory and described the basic contents of YIVO’s Salonika collection. The collection was inventoried but no rearrangement to reflect the original order of the records of the Jewish community of Salonika was attempted at this stage.

As the result of a grant from the Maurice Amado Foundation and funding from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM), in Washington DC, YIVO undertook a project beginning in the summer of 2005 to fully arrange, catalog, microfilm and digitize the Salonika collection. Devin E. Naar, who subsequently received a Fulbright scholarship to Greece and began his doctoral studies in history, served as Project Historian and worked under the supervision of YIVO’s Chief Archivist Fruma Mohrer.

An Academic Advisory Committee of leading scholars of Sephardic and Greek Jewry was formed to provide guidance to project staff. Its members included Dr. Benmayor; Dr. Rena Molho, also a native of Salonika, and Professor of Jewish History at Panteion University in Athens; Dr. Steven Bowman, Professor of Jewish Studies at the University of Cincinnati; Dr. David Bunis, Professor of Linguistics and founder of the program in Ladino Studies at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem; Dr. Jane Gerber, Director of Jewish Studies at the Graduate Center of City University of New York; Mrs. Marcia Haddad Ikonomopoulos, President of Association of Friends of Greek Jewry; and Dr. Aron Rodrigue, Professor of Jewish History and then Director of the Taube Center for Jewish Studies at Stanford University.

Special mention must be made of Dr. Benmayor, who arranged and described much of the Greek language materials, especially those pertaining to the work of the Matzah Committee, the Salonica-Palestine company, and the Banque Union; Dr. Bunis, who analyzed and described the contents of the volumes of Beit Din cases written in the Hebrew language but in solitreo script; and Mrs. Hadad
Ikonomopoulos, who provided several valuable translations from Greek. In addition to the Academic Advisory Committee, Ladino translator Trudy Balch joined the project team to decipher and translate some of the Ladino documents.

Following the completion of the initial phase of the project in August 2005, Mr. Naar presented a lecture – co-sponsored by YIVO and the American Sephardi Federation - at the Center for Jewish History, entitled “Discovering Salonika, the ‘Jerusalem of the Balkans’: Perspectives and Insights Gleaned from the YIVO Archives.” Trudy Balch then worked to refine and confirm the arrangement of the collection and to edit the finding aid prior to microfilming of the Salonika collection in the summer of 2008 and its digitization in the Fall of 2008.

CONTAINER LIST

Note on the languages of the collection:
The following languages are represented in YIVO’s Salonika collection: Ladino, French, Hebrew, Greek, Italian, German, English, Yiddish. The bulk of the collection is in handwritten or typed Ladino. Ladino appears in four different varieties or “fonts”: standard Hebrew block type (meruba); rabbinic type (rashi); the handwritten cursive variety of the Hebrew alphabet, similar to rashi, used by Sephardim in Salonika and elsewhere in the Mediterranean basin (solitreo); and in Latin letters. Often a combination of the various “fonts” or may be found. An effort has been made to indicate which “fonts” or “scripts” are to be found in each folder.

Note on transliteration:
Ladino names and terms that appear in the collection in written or typed Latin alphabet characters have been reproduced as such below; other Ladino names and terms that appear in the collection only in some form of the Hebrew alphabet (meruba, rashi or solitreo) have been transliterated using both the Aki Yerushalayim and Ladinokomunita methods which seek to graphically represent the phonetic pronunciation of the language.

Reel 1

Series I. Metrical records of the Jewish population of Salonika


Reel 2

Reel 3

4 Bound volume of various declarations, c. 1917. Ladino (solitreo).

Reel 4

5A, 5B and 5C Declarations (many for residency), 1934. Ladino (solitreo).

Reel 5

6 Declarations (many for residency), 1934. Ladino (solitreo).

7 Birth Declaration, 1933, for Perla, daughter of Yishak Shemuel Ben Natan, dated 19 October 1933 [birth date 4 February 1930]. Ladino (solitreo).

8A and 8B Birth Declarations, 1934–1935. Ladino (solitreo) and Greek. Written in Judeo-Spanish (meruba) on front of volume: “Deklarasiones de nasensias de No. 3401–3541.” The spine bears the same note but is mutilated.

9A and 9B Birth Declarations, 1938–1939. Ladino (solitreo) and Greek. Written in Greek on front label of volume: “4201–4400 from 3/1/1938 until 24/1/1939.” (Births took place earlier). (No certificate 4274 is present.)

10 Birth Declarations, 1939–1940. Ladino (solitreo) and Greek. Volume bears on spine the following Greek inscription: “Declarations of births from 4601–4750.” Declarations were made in 1939–1940. (Births took place earlier).

Reel 6

11. Birth Declarations, 1941. Ladino (solitreo) and Greek.

II. Records of the Beit Din


Reel 7

13 Beit Din cases, volume #17, 5692–5694 (ca. 1932–1934). Ladino and Hebrew.


16  Beit Din cases, volume #23, 5698–5700 (ca. 1938–1940). Ladino and Hebrew.
17  “Bonos” (promissory notes) from the Beit Din, 1916–1931. Ladino and Greek.
18  Reports on search for chief rabbi; cemetery; Sunday closing, 1930. Ladino (solitreo and meruba).

III.  Financial Records of the Jewish Communal Council

[Documents in this series are in Ladino (solitreo) unless otherwise noted; some documents are in Greek or Ladino (Rashi).]

19  List of poor receiving aid for Pessah 1930; 15 pp. Greek.
20  Community balance sheet, fiscal year 1932–1933. Ladino (Rashi).

Reel 8

22  “Entradas” (Income) and “Salidas” (Expenses). Henceforth referred to as E & S, 25–30 December 1932.
23  Folder cover: “Relevés” 1 January–30 June 1933.


Expenses of electoral commission, 3 November 1933–2 March 1934. 5 pp. (plus brief note at beginning)

Unused Income sheet.

Reel 9

IV. Correspondence of the Jewish Communal Council

Register of incoming correspondence, 1922. Ladino (solitreo).

Register of incoming correspondence, 1926–1927. Ladino (solitreo).

Reel 10

Incoming correspondence from Jewish Community of Serres, 1920–1921. Ladino (solitreo). Four letters to the council of the Jewish Community of Salonika.

Correspondence about emptying of cesspools in Baron Hirsch quarter, 1925 and 1927. Greek.

Correspondence about purchase of typewriters, May 1932. Greek and French.

Correspondence of Banque de Salonique, 1937. German and French.

Reports on communal benevolent institutions, 1939. Ladino and Greek. Letters from 20 societies responding to the Community Council with details on their functions, finances etc. (mostly typewritten in Ladino [Latin alphabet]; some Ladino (solitreo); also Greek.

V. Correspondence pertaining to the production and distribution of Massa (Matzah)


Requests from associations and unions for discounted or free matzah, 1922. Ladino (solitreo) and one Greek document. Eleven documents.


“Transformation” (conversion) of matzah production, 1936. Greek, Ladino, German, French, Hebrew. Approximately 25 documents, including some duplicates.


Correspondence with other communities regarding matzah, 1936. Ladino, typed or handwritten, in Latin alphabet; Greek & Hebrew. Approximately 25 documents.


Correspondence with other communities regarding matzah, 1937. Ladino and Greek. Approximately 20 documents.

VI. Correspondence pertaining to Housing and the Administration of Jewish Quarters


Requests for housing (divided by neighborhood blocks) and related correspondence, including medical correspondence and letters of introduction and recommendation, 1927. Ladino (solitreo, meruba, Rashi script, and Latin alphabet); French. Approximately 65 documents.

Requests for housing (loose) and related correspondence, 1927. Ladino & French. Nine documents.

Requests for housing, also including notes and letters of recommendation, 1928. Ladino & French. 85 documents plus cover sheets.

Miscellaneous materials relating to Quarter 151; mainly 1925–1928. Ladino & French, plus printed forms in Ladino (meruba and Rashi), and Greek (filled out in Ladino or French). Fourteen documents plus receipt book.

Union of residents of the Baron Hirsch quarter to the Jewish Community of Salonika, 1924, 1930–1932 [bulk Ladino (solitreo; some meruba, Rashi, Latin alphabet). Approximately 19 items.
Housing department to/from administration for Jewish quarters, 1934. Ladino (solitreo), also typewritten documents in Ladino Latin alphabet & Greek. Seven documents.

From Communal council about the administration of the Baron Hirsch quarter, 1934–35. Ladino (Latin alphabet). Three items.

Jewish Community Council to Jewish quarters and related agencies, 1939 Bulk is in Greek, some Ladino (solitreo or Latin alphabet). Nineteen documents.

VII. Records and correspondence of the Commission of Education

Subseries 1: Minutes and Financial Records of the Commission of Education

Commission of education minutes, 1922–1926. Ladino (solitreo).

Reel 11

Expenditures of communal schools, 1931–32. Administration. Ladino (solitreo).


Expenditures of communal schools, 1931–32. Talmud Torá Agadol. Ladino (solitreo), Greek & French.

Accounting slips of commission of education, 6 January 1925 – 13 April 1925. French.

Accounting slips of commission of education, 2 November 1931-31 - December 1931. French.


Miscellaneous expenses of commission of education about ‘albashá’ [funds for distribution of clothing to needy students] and tramway, 1935–1938. Ladino, Greek and French.
Series VII, Subseries 2: Correspondence of Commission of Education with teachers, employees and other organizations, 1919–1941.


120 J. Kohn, [n.d.]. One document. French.

121 Sabetay Moché Sabetay, 1939–40. Four documents. Ladino (solitreo) and Greek.

122 Haim Sadicario, 1938–39. Two documents. Ladino (solitreo) and Greek.


124 Abram Yeochoua Salem, 1926–1927. Two documents. Ladino, typed, Latin alphabet. Includes copy of Abram Yeochoua Salem’s will, 26 February 1926, which deals with setting aside funds to support needy students.

125 Gracia Salem, 1932–1940. 10 documents. Ladino (Latin alphabet), French, Greek.

126 Rafael Yeuda Salem, 5678 [ca. 1918]–1932. Six documents. Ladino (solitreo).

127 Moché Salomon (Mochon Chélomo), 1927–1940. Nine documents. Ladino (solitreo and Latin alphabet), French. Two documents also signed by Yakov Saporta (one solitreo and one handwritten Ladino in Latin alphabet). The one in Latin alphabet is also signed by Rikola Ventura.

128 Banque de Salonique, one document dated 31 March 1936, French.

129 Avram Shmuel Saltiel, one document dated 20 Adar 5682 [20 March 1922], Ladino (solitreo).

130 Benico Saltiel, one document dated 4 June 1924, French.

131 Daniel Saltiel, one document dated 5679 [c. 1919]. Ladino (solitreo).

132 Marie Saltiel, 8 Sept 1936 – May 1940. Four documents in Ladino (Latin alphabet). One document in Greek.

133 Moshe David Saltiel, one document dated 5 Heshvan 5691 [27 October 1930], offering services as teacher of religion. Ladino (solitreo).

134 Samuel Isaac Saltiel, 11 April 1921 – 5 August 1940. 22 documents and a business card. Ladino (solitreo and Latin alphabet), Hebrew, French.

135 Yomtov Samuel Saltiel, 23 Iyar 5678 [5 May 1918] – 4 August 1940. 64 documents, Ladino (solitreo and Latin alphabet), French, and one document in Greek.
Allegre Samuel, 12 March 1931 – 8 November 1937. 11 documents. Mostly Ladino (solitreo and Latin alphabet), French.


Jako Haim Sarfati, 2 August 1937 – 11 August 1940. 14 documents. Ladino (solitreo and Latin alphabet), Greek.


Professor Doctor Henri Sciaky, 22 October 1925 and 27 June 1927. French.


Jewish community of Serres, 20 May 1937 and 7 June 1937. Two documents regarding curriculum in Jewish schools. Ladino (Latin alphabet).

Doudoun [née] Sevy (Shelomo), 5 February 1936 – 6 March 1940. 14 documents. Ladino (Latin alphabet and solitreo), French, Greek.

Gabriel Shabetai Shabato, 29 August 1933. One document. Letter requesting permission to sell sweets in courtyard of Kazes school. Ladino (solitreo).


Société Chivat-Sion, Section Misrachiste, 13 Elul 5686 [23 August 1926] and 2 Heshvan 5688 [28 October 1927]. Two documents regarding the instruction of Hebrew. Ladino (solitreo).

VIII. Records of Salonica-Palestine, S. A.

Salonica-Palestine S. A., 1926. French, Greek & Ladino.

152 Caisse de Petits Prêts and Salonica-Palestine S. A., 1935. Ladino and French. Nine documents, including financial statements and reports, and list of shares and shareholders.


IX. Records and correspondence of the Banque Union

156A, 156B and 156C Banque Union S. A., 1932. Mostly French, also English, German, Greek & Italian. Approximately 300 documents.

Reel 12

157 Banque Union S. A., 1933–34. Mostly French, some Greek and German.

X. Miscellaneous documents and printed materials relating to the Jewish life in Greece, ca. 1912-1936

158 Clippings from L’Independent, 13 November 1912 and 13 November [year unknown (possibly 1911). French.

159 Two letters to Le Progrès, 8 June 1934 and 21 August 1934, from the Royal Legation of Bulgaria, regarding receipts for subscription payments. French.

160 Two clippings from Aksyon, 12 November 1934, both encapsulated and moved to Oversize Folder 160a. Ladino.


XI. Miscellaneous documents pertaining to the Jewish community of Salonika after 1945 and to Greek Jewry, 1940-1954

162 Script for Yom Aatsmaouth, a Zionist play in Ladino about Jews in Poland. Judeo-Spanish, Latin alphabet.

163 Documents and newspaper clipping pertaining to Jews of Greece mostly during and immediately following World War II. 38 documents.
Letter from Jacob Roth regarding Greece and Rhodes after World War II. The letter includes a description of a Jewish wedding which took place in Rhodes after WWII. In order to complete the quorum of 10 people traditionally present at a Jewish wedding, a radio message was sent from Rhodes out to passing ships. An American warship was passing by at the time. The U.S. commander of the warship responded to the radio message by sending five Jewish servicemen offshore to attend the wedding. Yiddish, 1954.

Not microfilmed

Unidentified items found stored with the Salonika archives (not filmed). Calling card printed with name of Madame Fernand Halphen, with handwritten note dated 19 June 1926, French; handwritten note in Greek, dated 6 April 1926; white sheet labeled “Greek proverbs 6.2,” containing small pieces of paper with Greek handwriting.