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I would like to share with you a little personal story, which prompted me to initiate this project.

A few years ago, my grandson, who was then 9 years old, asked me to prepare for him a detailed list of all the members of my family who perished in the Holocaust. I prepared a list which included my grandparents, even one great grandfather, my aunts, uncles and numerous cousins. Even though I did not include the larger circle of relatives on both sides, the list was quite long. My grandson then asked me to prepare another list describing his own relationship to all the persons in the first list. He said he wanted to know who he himself had lost in the Holocaust.

Then came the last question which to me explained his process of thinking. He asked: how did you mourn them? Did you mourn all of them together, or each one separately?

The question of one little boy suddenly gave me a new perspective on my attitude to a subject which has shadowed my life since childhood. For actually none of us can truly say that he has come to terms with the enormity of the Holocaust, and all its aspects.

My grandson had heard much about the Holocaust, he had seen films, listened to conversations, and felt a need to grasp what to him was abstract. In order to understand, he had to have names, see photographs and list relationships. He had to personalize the Holocaust, in order to grasp it. He also understood, with the rare perception of a nine year old child, that each victim deserved to be mourned separately, not as part of the six million, but as a person, a man, woman or child, who lived this horror, suffered the pain and the humiliation, and slowly, day by day, hour by hour, minute by minute.

Judge Hadassa Ben-Itto is the President of the International Association of Jewish Lawyers and and Jurists.
minute, lost his human face and became part of a mass awaiting extermination.

I was reminded of my grandson’s need to personalize his own private concept of the Holocaust, when I visited the Holocaust Museum in Washington. Each visitor to the Museum is handed, on entrance, an “identity card” of one Holocaust victim: name, country, age, profession, photo, and, where possible, probable date of extermination.

The idea is the same. You do not really understand what happened to the six million, until you see the face of one single human being who was there. Relating to one single person reveals the horror, the inhumanity, but it does not reveal the enormity of the loss. Because not only human lives were extinguished in this tragedy. The six million did not only perish in the physical sense. With them perished a tremendous intellectual and spiritual potential which can never be regained. A whole culture was erased. The loss is not only ours, as Jews, for no country, no city, no community, which lost victims in the Holocaust, will ever be the same.

So, how do we remember them? First and foremost we remember them as human beings, fathers, mothers, sons, daughters, brothers and sisters. But we must also remember them as members of professional and intellectual communities, whose contribution to society lives on, and serves as a reminder that they were here.

Sharing memories among ourselves is not enough. To our horror we are facing one of the ugliest and most horrible outgrowths of the Holocaust: the spreading denial of its existence. I refuse to consider it a fringe phenomenon, for this is what we said when Hitler first started advocating his theory about the Jews. ‘He is a lunatic’, the world said, and unfortunately the Jews agreed. We must never ever make the same mistake again. The deniers are saying that there was no Holocaust, no gas chambers; it is all a hoax, a fabrication, we made it all up. They say it openly, in books and in pamphlets, in the media, in public addresses and interviews, in so-called academic publications, and now on the Internet which they blatantly use to bring their message to individual homes, teach to children, and convey to the next generations. They say it in the face of the wealth of evidence proving one of the best recorded events in human history. They dare say it in front of survivors with numbers tattooed on their arms. What happens when there are no more survivors to testify in legal proceedings and describe their personal anguish?

In some countries, in some societies, their lies are welcome, they are used for either political or anti-Semitic purposes. In most other countries they are protected by their constitutional right to lie.

We, each and every one of us, can no longer shake our heads, shrug our shoulders in despair and then go about our daily business. We have a duty to do something. On the personal level every one must make his own individual commitment, but groups and organizations must also commit themselves to their own agenda. This project of meetings and seminars to commemorate our perished colleagues and their contribution to the law in their countries is one way of responding, as an organization of lawyers.

We shall go to one country after another, where our fellow Jews lived and worked, we shall walk in their footsteps, we shall not only remember them among ourselves, we shall talk about them in public and remind those who need reminding that they were here and that they left a legacy.

The idea of holding our first conference in Salonika came to me when we decided to initiate a new chapter of our Association in Greece. I knew that the flourishing Jewish community in this city was almost completely annihilated, and it seemed right and proper to start our project in this city. So, here we are, and we are proud indeed that so many have been able to leave their busy law offices to come here and pay tribute to our dead colleagues.

We came to physically be in what was their city, to see the houses where they lived, to walk the streets they walked, to visit the markets where they shopped, to travel to the places where they took their vacations, to pray where they used to pray. Even though we do not know all their names, we come one step closer to feeling their presence, not as a vague memory, but as people who were born here, lived here, made law here, and were taken from this place to their inevitable tragic end.

Vital as it is, raising their memory is not enough. We must also discuss ways and means to confront the denial of the Holocaust. This too, is something we owe to our dead colleagues as well as to the next generations.
Greetings from Greece and Israel

Minister of Culture of Greece, Evangelos Venizelos

The presence of Greek Jews has been continuous and uninterrupted in the historical evolution not only of the city of Thessaloniki but in all of Greece.

The affiliation between Greeks and Jews was forged and became even stronger during the Second World War. Many Jews who were saved during the Nazi fury owed their salvation to the helping hand which Christians offered to their Jewish brothers, with the major example of the Orthodox Bishop and the Mayor of Zakinthos. Let us not forget also the Jews who took part in the resistance and participated actively in the fight for freedom. The contribution of Greek Jews, however, is not limited to those turbulent years but extends to all courses and the whole spectrum of Thessaloniki’s cultural life. The Jewish dimension of Thessaloniki influenced and determined to a great extent the formation of the modern city’s cultural identity. The Jews of Greece, the Jews of Thessaloniki have always played an important role and continue to do so, not only in the field of politics, financial and social life, but also in the fields of science and ideas.

The horror of the Holocaust and the persecution undergone by the Greek Jews provided ample evidence of the necessity of protecting human rights. Soon afterwards, the provisions of the Greek Constitution set out the explicit intention of the legislative body to protect these unnegotiable principles.

The active contribution of Jewish jurists and lawyers, however, has not been sufficiently appraised, a fact which transforms this scientific meeting into an event duly honouring the memory of our colleagues lost in the Holocaust. As a professor of law I feel particularly moved by this event.

The fact that the Congress organized by you takes place in Thessaloniki certainly contributes a further symbolic meaning: the acknowledgment of their contribution by the city itself, whose identity holds their indelible mark. The Monument of the Holocaust which was inaugurated last year by the President of the Greek Republic is the symbolic testimony and assurance of my words. I welcome you and wish you every success for the proceedings of your Congress.

Ambassador of Israel to Greece, Ran Curiel

It is always a pleasure to be back in the beautiful city of Thessaloniki. Moreover, it is a pleasure tonight to have the privilege of addressing this important conference of Jewish Lawyers and Jurists.

I would like to congratulate you for choosing Thessaloniki and Greece as your conference place.

Being the Ambassador of Israel in this country for almost two years, I can tell you that you have chosen a country with a beautiful landscape - one that you yourselves have probably been able to appreciate during your two days here, as well as beautiful human qualities.

Serving here, also gives one the opportunity to be acquainted with the many similarities between the Jewish people and the Greek people, between Hellenism and Judaism. I will not dwell on all of them tonight, but I would like to mention one that is relevant to this conference, which is the fact that we are two peoples fiercely proud of their heritage and their contribution to modern civilization - mainly monotheism and democracy.

One of these contributions is certainly the Hebrew law and I see in your programme that you are going to dwell on this theme and its expression in modern law.

Your conference also commemorates the memory of the Jewish community of Thessaloniki, which almost entirely perished during the dark days of the Holocaust.

Thessaloniki was last year Cultural Capital of Europe.

Within the rich artistic and historical program celebrated here last year, its renowned past and dynamic present were highlighted.

Events also reflected the glorious Jewish heritage of
Thessaloniki, and its contribution to this city in all spheres of life.

But if there was a reason why Thessaloniki was known as “Mother of Israel”, it was due to the fact that its famous rabbis were consulted on legal questions by many and distant Jewish communities. This fact, of course, gives an additional dimension to your conference.

I would also like to thank you for dedicating this opening evening to the 50th anniversary of the State of Israel. Your conference is another, yet important link in the chain of events that already took and will take place in Greece, celebrating our Jubilee.

I am sure that these activities, as well as your conference in Thessaloniki will enhance the relations between Greece and Israel and will bring our two peoples closer.

Let me wish you fruitful deliberations.

Minister of Macedonia-Thrace, Filippos Petsanikos

As the Minister of Macedonia-Thrace I welcome you to Thessaloniki, the capital of Macedonia. It is my honour to be here today, among distinguished Jewish scholars. It is, moreover, an honour for the city of Thessaloniki to have been chosen to host the first in a series of successive conferences throughout Europe, held by the International Association of Jewish Lawyers and Jurists, as it contributes to the reinforcement of the city’s scientific activities and promotes Thessaloniki as a significant center in the wider region.

Of course, such a choice was not made at random, as, in the past, Europe’s largest Jewish community was situated in Thessaloniki.

Thessaloniki, as a multinational city and a metropolis of various peoples and cultures, allowed for the peaceful and creative coexistence of different nationalities, as well as different religions and cultural expressions. The city’s multinational colour and the coexistence of its various peoples established it as a center of economic, social and cultural activity with vast opportunities for further development.

Unquestionably, Thessaloniki’s Jewish community, one of the most significant and populous communities in the Jewish Diaspora, has made a vast contribution to the city’s economic, social and cultural development. Its peoples have been part of the city’s lengthy historical course and, along with all of Northern Greece’s Jewish communities, fostered the economic, commercial and intellectual activity of the region since the early 16th century.

Thessaloniki’s Jews were a highly dynamic group which not only propelled the region’s progress, but also contributed to the formulation of the city’s distinct and charismatic character. Today, albeit decimated, Thessaloniki’s Jewish community is entrenched in the city’s economic and social activities, upholding the traditions of its ancestors, contributing to civic activities and carrying out a significant role in the city’s life.

The parallel course of Thessaloniki’s Jewish and Hellenistic communities also reflects, overall, the course of the two peoples. The Jews and the Greeks followed parallel lives marked with the plights of Diaspora and immigration. In all the countries where they travelled, they developed civilization and magnificently affected the region’s developments. Armed with centuries of tradition and ancient cultural heritage, they created. Their unflagging creativity and tireless passion for survival has allowed them to maintain their culture and tradition to the present day.

Particularly, in humanity’s struggle against fascism and racism, the two nations fought for freedom, the basic principles of culture, human rights, dignity and honour. The price was often unbearable and inhumane. The Holocaust of the Jews, where over 50,000 innocent Jews of Thessaloniki were wiped out constituted one of the most horrendous acts in the history of man.

The city of Thessaloniki recently honoured the victims of the Nazi atrocities with a monument, serving as a resounding reminder to humanity of these people’s sacrifice and as an inspiration for all those who struggle for a peaceful and prosperous world.

In this modern era of ours, we live in a new world order where new opportunities are evinced and new hopes emerge. The end of the millennium is marked with realignments that radically
alter the shape, character, structure and operation of the inter-
national system. These new conditions necessitate coexistence, beyond race, nationality and religion. Through collective and personal action we must be vigilant to avert the reoccurrence of horrendous catastrophes such as the Jewish Holocaust.

The actions and initiatives you are undertaking through the International Association certainly contribute to the ideal of a peaceful and creative coexistence among peoples.

President of the Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece, Moses Constantinis

Greece, Israel and Egypt are the most ancient countries of the Mediterranean, providing a contribution both to the development of the area and to European culture. Today, humanity is proud of this culture which is the unifying factor behind the newly created European Union.

The Jewish people offered to humanity monotheism, as well as the religious and social principles deriving from the Ten Commandments. Those principles evolved into legislative systems and were inspired by the Greek intellect. Byzantine Greece enhanced these principles, originating from Judaism.

In Greece, Jewish Communities have existed continuously for over 2,300 years. It is believed that the first Jews coming to Greece were slaves who were sold, by the various conquerors of Judea, to nearby countries. The book of Maccabees refers to a number of cities, dating back to 142 B.C.E., which related to a list of cities compiled by the Historian Filon the Judean, confirming the presence of Jews in many cities of Greece and Cyprus.

From the 15th century until the end of the Second World War, famous schools of philosophy and centres of law teaching flourished in Thessaloniki, and promoted the principles of Judaism. Thessaloniki was home to distinguished teachers of law and scholars who analyzed the legal rules according to the religious commandments and the Jewish holy texts, which constituted a source of interpretation that is still valid in our time.

I will not mention the special aspects of the Jewish presence in Greece, or the enormous and historic significance of Thessaloniki for the Jewish people all over the world. Several of these points are part of the themes which will be covered during the Conference. I would only confirm that the choice of the city of Thessaloniki, where the Conference is being held, is symbolic and successful.

The Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece was established in Athens after the Holocaust. Nevertheless, the most important goal of the Jews of Greece, and one which they succeeded in achieving, was to convince the Greek Government in 1947 to establish the Restitution and Relief Organization for the Jews of Greece. This organization handled the properties of those Greek Jews who had perished in the Holocaust without leaving any heirs. Such legislation is, as far as I know, unique in Europe.

Currently, only a few thousand Jews live in Greece. Most are gathered in Athens and Thessaloniki and the remainder live in another six cities. The present Greek Democratic State provides for us, as well as for every citizen, the opportunity to practice our religious duties and maintain our traditions, and manners.

Our Community exerts great efforts to preserve its religious and cultural identity. There are many difficulties, but we try to overcome them responsibly, based on the legacy of our past which was brutally destroyed by the Holocaust, on our faith in the principles of democracy, and on the customs of our religion. We are resisting and we are sure that we are engaged in an effort of great significance.

On behalf of the Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece, which represents Greek Jewry, I extend a warm welcome and I wish you all the best for the outcome of the Conference.

President of the Jewish Community of Thessaloniki, Andrea Sefiha

We feel honoured that you have selected Thessaloniki for the venue of your conference, the city which, until the recent past,
was enriched and stimulated by a large and active Jewish Community, perhaps the most important in all of the Diaspora.

Before the Holocaust, a paraphrase of the well-known Biblical saying was common here, our forefathers would say, with much pride, I must admit, “Me Saloniki Tetse Torah” - From Thessaloniki, there shall be given the Law”.

At that time, Thessaloniki and its Jewish Community, was not only a major economic centre, a breeding ground for arts and ideas, a model of social solidarity and good intercommunal relations, but also the Community of the Law. Perhaps, this is why the city was honoured with the title: “The Second Jerusalem”.

Eminent jurists lived here, teaching as well as learning from the city’s tradition. Their opinions were law. Communities from all the Diaspora resorted to them for enlightenment. And even today the Israeli courts consult their writings. This wonderful line of Thessaloniki jurists continued unbroken until the Holocaust. Names that brought distinction to Sephardic Jewry made their reputation here: from the old teachers of the Halacha and writers of the famous responsa, such as Samuel di Medina, Solomon Taitasak, Aaron Afia and Moses Almosnino, to the distinguished lawyers of the new renaissance towards the end of the 19th century, such as Emmanuel Karasso and Emmanuel Salem. And from the eminent lawyers of the period between the wars, such as Aser Moses and Yomtov Yiakoel, to our own Sam Nachmias and Raphael Cohen, our own unforgettable legal advisors, whose memory is still fresh in our minds. All of these bestowed honour to the legal world of Thessaloniki. They bestowed distinction on our Community and magnified its fame.

It is not, of course, my intention to go into historical issues. This is the task of the worthy speakers who will follow me. I merely mentioned the illustrious history of our city, in order to point out what a wise choice it was to hold the conference here.

I am confident that thanks to the tireless efforts of the organizers, especially of Mrs. Manon Maisa, the conference will enjoy complete success. I wish you every success in your work and a pleasant stay in Thessaloniki.

Mayor of Jerusalem, Ehud Olmert

During our celebrations in Jerusalem of the 50th anniversary of the founding of the State of Israel, we remember the six million Jews, men, women and children, who perished in the Holocaust.

While commemorating the Jewish community of Thessaloniki, which was almost totally destroyed during the Holocaust, you are holding a special event in celebration of 50 years of the Jewish State.

Jerusalem, capital of the State of Israel, joins you in commemorating the memory of the Jews of Salonika, whose graveyards were Auschwitz, Treblinka and other liquidation camps. In remembering Salonika and the Jews of the city, who made such an important contribution to the intellectual and religious life of the Jewish Diaspora over many centuries, I would like to take this opportunity to convey my warmest greetings to the city of Salonika, to our Greek friends, and to the present day Jewish community of Salonika.

I would have liked to have greeted you in person, on behalf of the citizens of Jerusalem and to have participated in your event celebrating the 50th anniversary of the State of Israel. Due to prior commitments I have asked Mr. Itzhak Nener, the First Deputy President of the IAJLJ to convey my message to you.

My warm regards to you all.

Mayor of Thessaloniki, Dimitris Dimitriadis

The Jewish people and the city of Thessaloniki are linked by unbreakable ties going back to ancient times and continuing in an uninterrupted line until today and this relationship has been of great importance for both peoples.

As Mayor of Thessaloniki I feel enormous satisfaction to be addressing a speech of welcome to your conference, and to thank
the organizers who chose our city for their first conference, a choice which honours the people of our historic city.

May I say that Thessaloniki was rightfully chosen, because, as I said earlier, the city has special links with the Jewish people who have made their mark on the city’s history with their rare culture, their long traditions and also with a very large contribution to the social, cultural and business life of Thessaloniki, which was once called the “Jerusalem of the Balkans” by reason of the large number of Jews living here and the active role they played in the city’s life.

The older people amongst us lived through the tragedy of the Holocaust in 1943 and 1944, when the greater part of the Jewish population was deported to the Nazi concentration camps to die, depriving the city of Thessaloniki of their significant presence in the arts, letters and trade.

Today, of course, there remains the traditional distinguished Jewish presence in our city with its highly organized community with benevolent institutions, with the museum of the Jews of Greece, the very important Greek-Israeli Friendship League and many other activities involving our brother Jews, Greek citizens, that, we live and cooperate with daily, on every social and professional level.

Dear participants welcome to our city, the capital of eternal Greek Macedonia, I wish you every success in your conference, and wish you to know that in this city, Thessalonikans have embraced with love the Jewish population; we have lived alongside each other peacefully for many years, and will continue to do so in the future.

President of the Greek Section of the Association, Manon Maissa

As President of the Greek Chapter of our Association, I would like to welcome you to Thessaloniki which was chosen, not only because it was the most important Jewish city between the 15th and 20th centuries, where prominent lawyers and jurists lived and bequeathed their teachings and their important “responsas”, but also because it is my native city.

Mr. Theodore Kassimis, Member of Parliament, sends you his greetings for a successful conference on behalf of Mr. Karamanlis, leader of the New Democracy Party.

Mr. George Ignatiadis, President of the Thessaloniki Bar, accompanied by three members of the Bar Association, are also present and address their warm welcome to all participants.

I would like to express my sincere pleasure in your presence here and hope that you have an interesting and successful conference.
The Jews of Thessaloniki
March through Time

Alberto Nar

For more than twenty centuries Thessaloniki was the shelter for the persecuted Jews of Europe. Historical centers of Diaspora were transplanted in this city, creating a large and vibrant Jewish Community, perhaps one of the most important in the world, especially during the period 1492 to 1943.

We do not have precise indications of when the first settlement of Jews occurred in Thessaloniki. We presume that they arrived from Alexandria, Egypt, in about 140 B.C.E.

The ancient Jewish Community of Thessaloniki was a typical example of a Judaic population in the Mediterranean area of the Hellenistic and Roman years and its members were called Romaniotes. They adopted the Greek language, retaining also many elements of Hebrew and Aramaic, as well as Jewish scripture. Apostle Paul visited this organized Jewish Community of the city during the early years of Christianity, and most probably preached in the most ancient synagogue called “Etz Hahaim” [Tree of Life], situated near the port, which was destroyed in 1917 during the big fire.

Jews of Thessaloniki enjoyed wide autonomy until the division of the Roman State into its western and eastern parts, when certain Byzantine Emperors imposed special taxation and restrictive measures on the Jews in relation to worship and religion. A few attempts at Christianising took place but without much success, since even the ecumenical synods of the Church stated that Jews had the right to live in freedom and according to the laws and traditions of their religion.

By the middle of the 12th Century, despite wars and battles, as well as the successive raids of the Slavs and Bulgarians, the total population of Thessaloniki exceeded 100,000 inhabitants.

At about the same time, Rabbi Benjamin of Tudella departed from Saragossa, Spain, for a long journey that would last more than 13 years. Arriving in Thessaloniki he noted:

“At a two day sea voyage, we arrived at Thessaloniki, a big coastal town that King Selefkos built. He was one of the four heirs of Alexander the Great. 500 (five hundred) Jews live here. Rabbi Samuel and his sons, well known for their education, lead this Community. Besides him, Rabbi Sabetai, Elias and Michael live there as well as other exiled Jews who are specialised artisans”.

During the years that followed, the city suffered many misfortunes:

Its siege and destruction by the Normans in the 12th Century; its conquest and seizure by the Francs during the Fourth Crusade in the 13th Century, and its subsequent seizure first by the Epirus Domain and then by the Empire of Nikea.

Raids by Serbs, Bulgarians and Catalans followed as well as the rebellion of the Zealots and its first conquest by the Turks in 1397.

It was during the 14th Century that the first Ashkenazi Jews came to Thessaloniki, having suffered persecution in Hungary and Germany. These arrivals continued during the entire 15th

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Century. On 26 March 1430, the army of Sultan Mourat appeared in front of the city gates and Thessaloniki fell after a three day siege. A general massacre of the inhabitants followed the entrance of the Turks.

This was the background of the Jewish presence in the city up to the 15th Century, before the Sefaradim came to Thessaloniki.

In 1492, the year of destiny for the Spanish Jews arrived. Persecution by the Catholic Kings Ferdinand and Isabella and the Inquisition led more than 250,000 Jews to leave Spain and take the road to exile, settling in all the large cities of the Ottoman Empire. Of these, some 20,000 people preferred Thessaloniki, perhaps attracted to the city because of its location as a key port in the Eastern Mediterranean.

With their arrival, the deserted city woke up and again became a first class financial center as it had been during the Roman and Byzantine years. The Sefaradim gave commerce a new impetus; they exploited the mines at the Galikos River and in Sidirokapsa and they established the first print shop in about the 16th Century.

This was also the golden era of the intellect. Thessaloniki became an important centre of theological studies; the city attracted students from around the world and enabled personalities of high reputation, such as Rabbis, poets and physicians to flourish. Their reputation spread across the whole Europe and it was during this period in the 16th Century that Thessaloniki was honoured with the title of “Mother of Israel” by Samuel Uskoue, a Jewish poet from Ferrara.

The fame of the Jewish community of Thessaloniki attracted other persecuted Jews, who found shelter in this caring community. Jews from Italy and Sicily, also persecuted by Ferdinand and Isabella, followed the first Sefaradim.

Emmanuel, King of Portugal imitated Ferdinand and Isabella a few years later. He ordered the Jews of Portugal to either convert to Christianity or leave. The exodus of the Portuguese Jews began at the end of October 1497 and a large number arrived in Thessaloniki.

However, even the ones who stayed behind, the superficially Christianised, so-called Conversos or Maranos, were later forced into exile in the period from the end of the 16th to the beginning of the 17th Century, victims of the “purity of blood” (limpieza de sangre) ideology.

New waves of refugees arrived during the 16th century, coming from Provence, Poland, Italy, Hungary, and Northern Africa. Until the end of the 17th century, it was very rare for a ship to arrive at the city port without disembarking a few Jews, wrote Joseph Nehama.

Thus, Jews prevailed in numbers. In the 16th Century, according to Turkish records, 15,715 Jews lived in Thessaloniki, compared to 6,870 Muslims and 6,635 Christians.

The Jews occupied the desolate and deserted neighbourhoods, in the area below Egnatia Street, from the Vardar area to the current Diagonios (cross road of Tsimiski and Pavlou Mela). Ottoman files record 16 Jewish neighbourhoods from the beginning of 16th century, separated into autonomous communities according to their place and origin.

The centre for each community was the synagogue, which was not only a cultural and administrative centre, but also an indication of the tendency of the Jews to be autonomous.

Nevertheless, the fluidity of the dividing lines between the communities, as well as the business activities, especially in textile manufacturing, at the beginning of the 16th century, gave rise to intense political quarrels, which were particularly evident at such times as at the election of the Rabbi or other administrative personnel, or when some notable sought to impose his own opinion on the communities.

The fact that various communities had to deal with the Turkish authorities together with the increase in business activities led to a growing need for a wider common approach. Thus, the seeds of the union of independent synagogues-communities into one federation were planted. A product of this unification of communities was the establishment of the common synagogue-school - “Talmud Torah Hagadol” in 1520.

Texts from this period inform us that “artisanry” was the main occupation of the majority of the Jewish population of Thessaloniki. The Jewish immigrants brought with them techniques and methods of production and fabrication unknown at the time. The most advanced small crafts industry during that period was textile manufacturing.

Since then (16th century) the Ottoman public sector covered almost all its textile needs with products from Thessaloniki. Jewish textile manufacturers, and accepted that the synagogues-communities pay their head tax “in kind”. The textile were used for Turkish army uniforms. Slowly, the synagogues themselves became producers and employed their poor as salaried workers. They allocated the profits for the maintenance of their benevolent, charitable and educational institutions.

During the same period, a Community delegation, led by Moshe Almosnino, travelled to Constantinople. There, it
extracted a new edict from the Sultan making official all the privileges acquired by the Jews - initially granted by the Sultan Souleiman the Magnificent. The Jewish Community of Thessaloniki was recognised as “Musslenik”, i.e., an autonomous administrative unit directly under the Sultan. It also became able to acquire raw materials at prices lower than those available in the open market.

Thus, the Jews of Thessaloniki enjoyed a period of high growth until the beginning of the 17th century, when their economic and cultural decline started, with the discovery of new sea routes, the economic recession of Venice and the involvement of the Ottoman Empire in a series of lost wars.

It was during this period that Biblical studies were reduced; in contrast, the study of the Cabala, and its main book, the Zohar, reached new heights, especially in so far as concerned mysticism and the occult.

In this mystic climate, Sabetai Sevy of Ismir appeared in Thessaloniki, declaring that he was the expected Messiah, King of Israel, and the saviour of the Jewish people. The Turkish authorities arrested him and condemned him to death. Sabetai Sevy converted to Islam in order to save himself. Unfortunately, the Jews of Thessaloniki were already divided between those who believed in Sevy and those who considered him a crook or crazy. Among those who believed him were some 300 families who followed him and became Muslim, creating the peculiar society of “Jews-Muslims” that came to be known as “Domneh” [defectors].

This group of Domneh created huge problems. Hundreds of families were divided and it was impossible for either the independent communities-synagogues separately, or, the federate bodies collectively, to confront and cope with the situation despite the abilities or prestige of their leaders.

Towards the end of the 17th century, the small independent communities united into a single organisation governed by three Rabbis and a council of seven seculars persons. Nevertheless, even in this period of a real “Middle Age”, the Jews managed to maintain their communal organization, despite the stagnation in promoting and cultivating letters and the exchange of ideas, ensuing from the division of the community, the economic crisis and the presence of the Yanitsars.

Renaissance in the middle of the 19th century!

The European industrial revolution and the neo-colonial campaign in the East brought about a change of direction towards Western standards, accompanied by economic well-being. The new trends and ideas took shape in the “Hascala” movement among the Jews. “Hascala” reflected a move away from the intellectual confines of Biblical and post Biblical tradition, towards the study and cultivation of prevailing secular thought and art.

In particular, some new socio-political conditions were created in the East (and in Thessaloniki) as Ottoman despotism tried to transform its face. Yanitsars were wiped out, and some civil rights were granted to the non Muslim nationalities of the Empire through the famous Firmans, Hatî Houmayoun and Giouhane.

Extensive imports of Western industrial products also helped transform Thessaloniki into a city and contributed to its modernisation and expansion. The fires of 1890, 1896 and 1898 offered an opportunity for urban reformation. The widening of narrow streets, running water, electricity, the street car and the railroad that connected Thessaloniki to Constantinople, were some of the modern measures taken by the Ottoman Empire. New works started at the port; modern institutions opened for business and the first modern industrial complex was created: the flour mill of Italian Jews, called Allatini. Jews now owned 38 out of the 54 commercial enterprises in the city and they constituted the overwhelming majority of its work force. Even though Thessaloniki retained its multination structure, the population and financial superiority of the Jewish Community was one of its more distinct singularities.

Social welfare was provided through charitable institutions such as:
* “Matanoth Laevionim” which supported pupil lunches.
* “Torah Umlaha” which provided financial support to the poor and to students and took care of their professional rehabilitation.
* The orphan houses “Allatini” and “Aboav”.
* The mental asylum “Lieto Noah”.
* The Hospital “Baron Hirsch”.
* The health care institution “Bikour Holim”.
* The old-age home “Saoul Modiano”.

Education was reformed with the modernisation of district schools and the traditional “Talmud Torah” school, and with the creation of the “Alliance Israelite Universelle” in 1879.

It is interesting to note that the first newspaper to circulate in the city was the Jewish “El Lunar” in 1864! “La Epoca” followed, and later “La Imparcial”, “Le Progress”, “Journal de

In 1908, the neo-Turkish rebellion overthrew Sultan Abdul Hamit. Immediately afterwards, the Zionist movement became openly active with the creation of the “Bnet Zion” club and the athletic association “Makabi”. Simultaneously, in 1909, from the midst of the populous Jewish working class of Thessaloniki, the socialist workers federation was born, better known in Ladino under the name of “Federacion”. The Federacion functioned independently until 1918 when it joined other Greek left-wing organisations to co-found the Socialist Workers Party of Greece. The founder and leader of the Federacion was Avraam Benaroya!

In October 1913 Thessaloniki became Greek again. The Jewish Community Administration was immediately received by King George I who promised full equality for the Jews under the law. Increasingly, the Greek administration won the confidence of local and international Jewry, gaining their open support for the Greek claim in the distribution of the European lands of the Ottoman Empire after the Balkan wars.

Thus, a new period of integration into the Greek State started for the Jews. The first post liberation decade was characterised by national tribulations such as national dissension, the big fire of August 1917 and the Asia Minor Catastrophe in 1922. The Jewish community was cruelly hit by the 1917 fire, with 53,000 members becoming homeless. Almost all the synagogues, schools and charity institutions were destroyed, and a few years later, in 1931, arson committed by extremist circles in the Kambell neighbourhood, forced many Jews to emigrate to Israel.

Nevertheless, in 1940 the Community still numbered more than 50,000 people. Jews lived peacefully alongside their Christian compatriots; they fought bravely for their homeland during the Second World War, and almost 13,000 joined the Armed Forces; they suffered 513 dead and 3,700 wounded.

Thessaloniki’s occupation by the Axis Forces in April 1941 was the beginning of the end. Nazis applied anti-Jewish measures from the first day. They prohibited the admission of Jews to cafes, cinemas etc., they took over the Hirsch Hospital and many Jewish houses, imprisoned members of the Community Council, looted the Community offices, and destroyed its archives and all Jewish libraries. On 11 July, 1942 all male Jews between 18 and 45 years of age were ordered to appear at Eleftherias [Liberty] Square. After incredible humiliations, their names were registered and they were led to labour camps. The Community paid 2,5 billion drachmas ransom to set them free. At the end of the same year, all Jewish businesses were confiscated and the more than 2,000 year old Jewish cemetery was destroyed. In February 1943, Jews were obliged to wear a Yellow Star badge on their breasts and live only in certain ghettos. They were forbidden to work as members of the professions (lawyers, physicians, professors) to use public telephones or means of transportation or to belong to any club or institution.

Nazis, obviously hiding their intentions, claimed through the Chief Rabbi Koretz, who was installed by them as President of the Community, that their goal was the restructuring of the Community into a self administered entity, located in an autonomous area of the city with its own Mayor and Chamber of Commerce. They also created the Jewish Militia and they ordered the Jews to fill out detailed questionnaires about their assets. In March 1943, Nazis prohibited the exit of Jews from the Ghetto confines, while the Baron Hirsch neighbourhood saw the start of the final act of the tragedy as the first train left for the extermination camps of Auschwitz and Birkenau. 18 convoys would follow, carrying almost all the Jews packed in carriages that had been designed for animals.

A very small number managed to escape thanks to the help of Christian friends, or joined the Resistance Forces. These Jews returned to Thessaloniki after the liberation in October 1944 and together with the few survivors from the death camps they managed to start a new life out of the ruins. Of the 46,000 Jews who were transported to extermination camps, only 1,950 returned. After the liberation of the city from the Nazis (in October 1944) the few Jews who had joined the Resistance Forces gathered in the Monastirioton Synagogue, the only one that had been saved from destruction, and elected a Governing Committee. This Committee managed to take back the Community’s property and organize some sort of Community life with the help of the American Joint Distribution Committee and HIAS. In May 1945 those who survived the death camps gradually appeared in Thessaloniki. Most faced health and economic problems. They had no family or property. Those who managed to recover their homes or shops found them empty. They lived in buildings belonging to the Community institutions and were fed by the Community. Many emigrated to the USA and Israel. The rest tried to build a new life.

Today, half a century after the destruction, Thessaloniki’s Jews number no more than 1,200 souls.
Nevertheless, the Community maintains two synagogues, a communal centre with child, youth and adult sections, an elementary school, an old age home, a museum; it organises youth and children camps, and plays an active role in the financial, social and cultural life of the city.

The Community financed on its own the construction and dedication of the “House of Greece” at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. For this, the Community was honoured with an award by the Academy of Athens. In 1986, the Municipality of Thessaloniki rewarded the Community for its long contribution to the city, naming a city square as the “Square of the Jewish victims of the Holocaust” and in 1997 the Greek State established the Holocaust Memorial where the 151 Jewish neighbourhood once existed.

Thus, the Jewry of Thessaloniki, despite its tragic suffering in the Holocaust, has managed to survive and is contributing whatever its reduced size allows, in the process setting an example of vitality, vibrancy and intellectual strength.
From 1492-1908

The presence of Jews in Thessaloniki goes back to its foundation. In 1492, approximately 20,000 Jews established themselves in Thessaloniki, after their expulsion from Spain and Portugal, and they (as well as other communities of SE Europe) developed the trade of the city. Thessaloniki at that time had a mere 2000 inhabitants.\(^1\)

Those Jews of *Sephardic* extraction, founded some 30 communities according to their place of origin. Initially, the communities were governed by Rabbis and were autonomous. Each community issued *Hascamot* (agreements), that is to say laws that concerned their internal organization and administration. The religious leader of each synagogue was called *Haham Salem*. His functions encompassed the adjudication of disputes among members of the community because, according to the *Halacha*, it was forbidden for Jews to have recourse to local (gentile) authorities for the resolution of questions which concerned inheritance or marriage contracts (*Ketubot*).

When the communities addressed common problems, they issued *takkanot*, which were enforceable only if they were accepted by each community separately. The *takkanot* were directives which were drafted in accordance with rabbinical interpretations of Mosaic Law. They referred mostly to the rights of women, moral issues and religious concerns.\(^2\)

Thessalonikan Jews were employed mainly in the commercial sector. From the beginning, they established trade activities with their countries of origin in the West. They also appointed representatives who were called “consolo”. The study of the *Torah* also flourished. Many students from all over Greece and other places came to study at the famous *yeshivot* and academies at Thessaloniki.

Often, other communities of the Diaspora submitted questions with a view to seeking the advice of specialists in Thessaloniki. The judgments of the rabbis were known as *responsa*, *i.e.* answers. Such *responsa* constituted case law. They reflected Jewish life at the time at which they were written. They referred primarily to questions of taxation, various customs, trade matters and contracts, but also to social problems.

From the study of the *responsa* we can recreate not only the family and communal life of the Jews of Thessaloniki but also the general framework of the commercial life of the city from the arrival of the *Sepharadic* Jews until a few years prior to the liberation of the city in 1912.

When the rabbis were asked why they had to base their answers regarding legal matters on *responsa*, they answered that they based them on *responsa* because these decisions were based on practice though their thought was deeply influenced by the Jewish Law of the *Torah*.\(^3\)

In 1514, the leading triumvirate of the Salonika rabbis issued a special *Hascama* by which it recognized the *Marranos*, as genuine Jews. In 1558, the *Sephardic* rabbis of Salonika issued a *takkana* directed against those who denounced Jews. These

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takkanot were read in the synagogues on the last Saturday of the month. They severely punished transgressors. The rabbis of Constantinople ratified this Hascama and demanded that transgressors be brought to the capital and punished there.

After the arrest by the Inquisition of several Marrano Jews in August 1555, and the confiscation of their property, Joseph Hanasi or Joseph of Naxos (1505-79) played a major role in negotiations between the Ottoman Empire on the one hand and the European powers on the other, with support from Sultan Selim. Led by the community of Thessaloniki, they boycotted the port of Ancona, sending their merchandise thereafter through Pesaro.

In 1568, by decree of the Sultan, the community was granted the privilege of paying capital tax in kind; specifically, they paid it with fabric for the uniforms of the Ottoman Army. The Salonika Rabbi Juda Kovo led the Jewish delegation in 1636, which took this capital tax in kind to the Ottoman authorities. These authorities, however, did not find the quality adequate and condemned the rabbi to death. The other members of the delegation were imprisoned.

In 1569, the Salonika Rabbi Almoslino Moshe ben Baruch (1515-1580) presented himself to Sultan Selim II and obtained the continuation of the right to self-government which Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent had granted to the community.

The most important rabbis who were authors of responsa in Thessaloniki were the following:4


19th century: Raphael Jacob b. Abraham Manasseh (Responsa Be’er Mayim, Salonika 1735), Raphael Asher b. Jacob Covo (Responsa Saar Aser, 2 pts. 1877-79), Hayyim Benveniste, Istroumsa Haim (Responsa Yereh Avraam, Salonika 1815, Responsa Ben Avraam, Salonika 1826), Gatenio Avraam ben Benveniste (Responsa Shel Hakesef, Thessaloniki 1872), Samuel Raphael Arditi (Responsa Divrei Shemuel, Salonika 1891).

Joseph Caro (1488-1575)

After his expulsion from Spain (1492), Joseph Caro came to Salonika where he started writing Bet Joseph. In 1567, the first edition of the Shulhan Aruch was published. It represented a code of Jewish Law. Its chapter called Hosen Mishpat deals with matters of money and civil law. The responsa of Eben-a-Ezer was published in Salonika in 1598. The responsa Avkat Rachel in the three other sections of the Shulhan Aruch was published in Salonika in 1791. In 1536, Joseph Caro travelled to the Holy Land and established himself in Sephad, Israel.

Samuel di Medina (1506-1589)

He was a rabbi and a major teacher of law from Salonika. He wrote at least 1000 responsa. The first compilation was published in Salonika in 1585-87; the second in Salonika, in 1594-98; the third in Mantua, in 1622. The responsa related to economic and social problems and to the communal organization of Jews who had been expelled from Spain and had established themselves in Salonika. Samuel di Medina also resolved a number of contentious issues among Jewish communities.

Samuel di Medina objected to the imposition of the customs of one community on another. On one occasion, he was asked whether the majority could obligate the minority to comply with its wishes. When a merchant was allowed to buy wool at a higher price although this was forbidden, other merchants insisted that the merchant be punished and be made to pay a penalty. Samuel di Medina opined that no trader could be exempted unless all the others agreed and that this was for the benefit of the community as a whole. In this manner, everyone was protected from unfair competition.5
Adarbi Isaac ben Samuel (1510-1584)

Adarbi Isaac ben Samuel was a Salonika rabbi who tried to unite the 30 communities into one. He wrote the Responsum Divrei Shalom (Thessaloniki, 1580) and Divrei Ribot (Thessaloniki 1581; 2nd edition in Venice 1587).

In 1680, the 30 communities were finally united. The united community was governed by a council composed of three rabbis and seven elders. The first triumvirate consisted of Rabbis Moshe ben Haim Shabatei, Avram di Botton and Eliya Covo.

The rabbinical councils were entrusted with the following responsibilities: a) questions of marriage and marital relationships; b) questions relating to property, possession and leasing thereof (Hazakoth) and c) questions relating to religion and liturgy (ishur ve heter).

Rabbis were famous for their justice. Indeed, several Greeks and Muslims preferred to have recourse to Jews in the settlement of disputes than to submit the disputes for adjudication to Ottoman courts.

Amarillo Aaron ben Solomon (1700-1772)

Aaron ben Solomon was a rabbi in Salonika during the economic crisis of 1756. He proposed the remission of all debts, leading to the improvement of the economic situation in the community. He wrote the Responsum Penei Aaron (Thessaloniki 1796). His brother was Rabbi Amarillo Haim Moshe ben Solomon (1695-1748) who wrote the Responsum Devar Moshe (Thessaloniki 1742, 1743 and 1750). He also wrote laws concerning divorce (Simhat Mose (Leghorn 1868)).

An Archeological site at Pella, Greece.
In 1887 the institution of the triumvirate was abolished, and Rabbi Yakov Covo was appointed Chief Rabbi (Haham Bashi).

**From the Young Turks Movement to the Liberation of the City by the Greek Army**

The Young Turks movement (1908) ushered a new golden age for the Jews of Salonika. Already in 1873 the School of the *Alliance Israelite Universelle* had been established. The Bank of Salonika was founded in 1886. With the upsurge of liberalism, professional associations and trade unions were created, as well as Zionist movements. The authorities consulted prominent Jews. Reference in this connection should be made to the work of Emmanuel Salem and Emmanuel Carasso.

**Emmanuel Salem (1859-1940)**

Emmanuel Salem was born in Salonika in 1859. He played a major role both in the Near East and in the Balkans. He was renowned for his intelligence and phenomenal memory. He specialized in International Law and Capitulations. He became the legal advisor of foreign consuls and offered his opinion whenever differences arose between diplomats and the Ottoman authorities. He was invited by the Young Turks to Constantinople in 1908 in order to assist in addressing the public debt and organizing the major banks and railways. He was also appointed member of the council on legislative reform of the Young Turks in 1909. His works on the conditions for capitulations and on foreign nationals were published in the “*Journal de Droit International Prive*” of Paris during 1888-1901. He resolved contentious issues of international law and took part in the Treaty of Lausanne in 1922. Pope Leo III availed himself of his juridical skills and conferred on him the order of the Holy See of Pius IX, for his services to the Catholic authorities in resolving differences with Turkey. Likewise, the Italian Government conferred on him the honour “la croce del Cavaliere della Corrona d’Italia” for his services regarding the disputed issue on conditions of capitulations. Ribot, a jurist in France, made reference to his studies on the Law on Extradition after the dismissal from Sophia of Philippe Chadourne, special representative of the Agence Havas. He was also honoured for his knowledge of law and jurisprudence. Distinctions awarded to him included: *Commander of the Legion of Honour, Commander of the Order of Leopold II of Belgium, of the Order of Francois Joseph of Austria, Officer of the Royal Order of the Saviour of Greece, of Civil Merit of Bulgaria, of the Order of Saint Sylvestre, and Grand Officer of the Order of the Osmanie, of Medjidie, of Turkey.*

Emmanuel Salem also rendered services to the public and private sectors. He laid the foundations for public enterprises in Thessaloniki, notably for the company which provided water, gas, railways and electricity. He wrote the founding charters of several industrial companies, banks and trading concerns. He was the legal adviser of the Allatini family and founded several benevolent organizations in Thessaloniki, including the Allatini Orphanage. In the private sector he was recognized because he tried to find solutions without taking cases to court where possible, saving the time and money of his clients.

During the last years of his life, he settled in Paris, where he became President of the *Sephardic* Jewish Council and the Central Council of the *Alliance Israelite Universelle*.

**Emmanuel Carasso (1862-1934)**

Emmanuel Carasso was born in Thessaloniki. He was a lawyer and a statesman. He taught criminal law at the University of Thessaloniki. He took part in the Young Turks movement and was elected deputy for Thessaloniki in 1908. The Parliament had 240 members of whom six representatives were elected from Salonika. When asked to participate in the Government, he refused. He was member of the Committee which informed Abdul Hamid of his dethronement in 1909. In 1910 he was asked to direct the Ministry of Commerce and Public Affairs, but again he refused. He was a member of the Committee which negotiated the Peace Treaty between Italy and Turkey at the end of the 1912 War. In return for his services he was granted permission to make exports to Germany to his considerable benefit. He was on the committee planning to internationalize the City of Thessaloniki. He fell from grace after the rise to power of Kemal Ataturk in 1923. He took refuge in Italy and died in Trieste.

**From the Liberation of the City by the Greek Army in 1912**

In 1912, Thessaloniki was liberated. King George I declared that Jews, as well as the other minorities, would enjoy the same rights as the Greek population. Especially noteworthy for their legal contribution to the process of adaptation of the Jewish community to the Hellenic State were Yomtov Yakoel and Asher Moissi.
Yomtov Yakoel (1899-1944)

Yomtov Yakoel was born in Trikkala in 1899. In 1916, he joined his friend and fellow student Asher Moissi in founding the association “Eretz Zion” in Trikkala. In 1917, they published the monthly Zionist review “Israel”.

Yakoel studied law in Athens. In 1923, he settled in Thessaloniki where, with his fellow lawyer Moissi, he opened a law office on Hermou Street. They were extremely knowledgeable in Greek legislation and, therefore, had numerous clients during those years of adaptation of the Jewish Community to the Hellenic State. Yomtov Yakoel was also President of the Lodge of Bnei Brith, a progressive organization, whose chapter in Thessaloniki sponsored educational courses and lectures and offered fellowships to students. Its rich library played an important role in the life of the Jewish community of the city.

Many events occurred after Yakoel’s move to Thessaloniki, which followed the Near East disaster and the arrival of hundreds of thousands of refugees, many of whom were resettled in Thessaloniki. In 1926, the government imposed compulsory rest on Sunday, contrary to past practice whereby the port and shops were closed on Saturday on account of the large number of Jews who were employed in commerce. In 1931, many Jews emigrated to Palestine following the anti-Semitic outbursts and the burning of the neighbourhood of Campbell by E.E.E. (National Union of Greece, an extreme right-wing organization).

Together with many other Jewish leaders, Yomtov Yakoel was arrested by the Germans soon after their invasion of Greece in 1941. However, he was released. As a legal adviser of the Jewish community of Thessaloniki, Yakoel tried hard to improve the lot of the Jews who suffered in many ways and on a daily basis especially in the winter of 1942 through March 1943. He proposed the establishment of a Central Committee for Social Welfare Coordination; worked out a draft agreement between the Military Administration for Thessaloniki-Aegean led by Max Merten on the one hand and the Jewish Community on the other; and drafted the organizational plan for the operation of the office. He was proposed for the Presidency of the Jewish Community of Thessaloniki. Yakoel was also requested to prepare a plan for submission to the German Governor of Thessaloniki-Aegean. However, Rabbi Dr. Koretz objected to the signing and dispatch of this document. Yakoel tried to convince the Central Committee to approach the Greek Government and request its intervention in order to avoid worse ills befalling the community. He requested his friend Professor Louvaris in Athens to ask Prime Minister Logothetopoulos to issue a demarche in order to forestall tougher anti-Semitic measures by the German occupying forces. Yakoel was also requested by the Jewish community of Thessaloniki to prepare a charter establishing special Jewish organizations, corporations and funds, which, after their approval by the German occupation authorities, would have an exclusively Jewish membership having regard to the fact that, since February 1943, all Jews had been barred from membership in public organizations and a census of Jewish properties had been ordered from the Community.

Specifically, in the winter of 1942 he proposed the establishment of the ‘Central Committee for Coordination of Social Welfare Actions’ with a view to giving guidance to the various benevolent organizations and institutions of the Community. After the compulsory gathering of all Jewish males aged 18-45 at Liberty Square on 12 July 1942 and their registration by the Municipality under Gestapo supervisors, the German occupation authorities started sending groups for compulsory work on the construction of roads for the Germans in Sedes, Olympus, Lianokladi and other parts of Greece. According to his Memoires, Yomtov Yakoel, on 20th August 1942, was asked by the President of the Jewish Community, S. Saltiel, to prepare a draft agreement (protocol) between the Jewish Community and the German Military Command. This had been requested by I. Miller the German franchisee of the road construction project. After two meetings between Yakoel, the Jewish Community President and Mr. Miller, agreement was reached and the protocol was signed on 29th August 1942 by Dr. Merten. It was put into force immediately. The conditions of the protocol were as follows: 1) A liaison office was established, composed of four Jews to coordinate the work between the Military Command Thessaloniki-Aegean and the Jewish Community to organize the remittance of Jewish males and supervise work conditions and health services. 2) The Committee of four Jews was empowered to decide on the exemption of certain categories of candidates from compulsory work. 3) It was allowed in principle to buy out compulsory labour with the agreement of the Committee. 4) At the meetings of the Committee, the presence and participation of the contractor responsible for the road construction projects, Mr. I. Miller was required and the Committee’s decisions had to be approved by the Military Command for Thessaloniki-Aegean. Later, Mr. Yomtov Yakoel, as the legal adviser of the
Community, was requested to develop the structure and operational guidelines for the Office. The Office, in the meantime had collected 300 million drachmas from individuals asking to be exempted from forced labour. It is noted, in this connection, that conditions at the work sites were very poor. There were long hours of work, malaria, terrible housing and very little food.

The President of the Jewish Community did not like the fact that a decision of the Executive Committee was required before money could be used out of the collected fund for the exemption of individuals from forced labour. For this reason, he complained to Merten concerning the other members of the committee, stating that they were failing to cooperate and that they were violating the protocol.

In the meantime, TOD, the Technical Branch of the German Army made an appearance on the scene. It sent additional Jewish workers to Halkidiki where work conditions and the treatment by the contractors were inhuman. Many workers attempted to escape. Some were shot dead, while others were arrested and imprisoned.

On 1st October 1942, Yomtov Yakoel, as a representative of the Executive Committee visited the work sites at Gida, Lianoveri, Methoni and St. Demitrios, in the company of Miller and General Lavrano. They witnessed the harsh conditions and the suffering of the workers. At a subsequent meeting held on 13th October at the offices of Mathanot Laevionim (a philanthropic institution of the Jewish Community of Thessaloniki, which during the German occupation was giving food to the poor), in the presence of Committee members, Merten and with Chief Rabbi Koretz presiding, Merten proposed that the Jewish workers be replaced by specialists, on condition that the community undertake to cover the expense of 3-5 billion drachmas. Yomtov Yakoel argued that it would be possible to reduce this amount to 2 billion drachmas. On 15 October, Merten returned to the offices of Mathanot, where the Chief Rabbi and Yakoel announced the Committee’s decision to reduce the amount to 2 billion. Dr. Merten counter-proposed that the 2 billion drachmas be paid in cash and that against the balance of 1.5 billion drachmas, the community surrender all claims on the Jewish cemeteries, which would then be turned to military purposes. On 17 October, the necessary protocol was signed. All Jews assigned to sites outside the Thessaloniki region and working on military strassenbahn projects, were exempted from forced labour against a ransom amounting to 2 billion drachmas. This amount had to be paid by 15 December 1942, to the German Military Command for Thessaloniki-Aegean, by the Jewish Community of Thessaloniki. The Central Committee of the Community spared no effort to collect this amount.

Yomtov Yakoel was invited by Dr. Elias, friend of Dr. Kalmes, also German Gestapo Commander in Thessaloniki, to undertake the Presidency of the Jewish Community. However, Yakoel declined. Two days later the same invitation was addressed to Chief Rabbi Koretz, in spite of the Central Committee’s advice not to accept, and recommendation instead of the Community official Mitrany, who was considered honourable and serious minded.

On 8 February 1943, at the Committee’s offices, Chief Rabbi Koretz announced to the Central Committee for the Coordination of Social Welfare Activities that he had been ordered to appear before two SS German officers who had just arrived in Thessaloniki. They were Wisliceni and Bruner. He was bluntly told that, in future, he would only obey their orders. Furthermore, he was handed a document of the Military Command for Thessaloniki-Aegean addressed to the Community and containing the following orders issued directly from Berlin: a) Jews were forbidden to use any type of vehicle or to depart from Thessaloniki; if caught they would be shot; b) Jews were subject to curfew after 5 p.m. and were forbidden to use certain central thoroughfares; c) Jews older than 6 were obliged to wear a special badge; and d) Jews were obliged to move to a special section of the city to which they would be confined (ghetto).

Dr. Koretz was terrified. Discussions were terminated and the faithful execution of the German orders began.

Yomtov Yakoel and other Committee members met to explore ways to address this situation. Yakoel was requested to draft a memorandum to the German Military Commander for Thessaloniki-Aegean. This was discussed by the Central Committee and the Community Council. The memorandum requested deferment of the above measures for a few months. However, if that was unacceptable, it asked that the Community be granted: a) a longer lead time for compliance with the measures, including the census of the Jews, wearing of the badges and movement to the ghetto; b) exemption from the need to form a corps of Jewish guards; and c) exemption of all persons under the age of 14 from wearing the badge.

Dr. Koretz rejected the memorandum in principle and disagreed with its contents. He refused to sign it. Despite the
Committee’s insistence that decisions should be taken on the broad parameters of the Community’s policy, Dr. Koretz retorted that he had no need for guidance, but for work.\textsuperscript{11} “Work meant blind obedience to the German service; execution of their orders without any objection or discussion”.

Yomtov Yakoel escaped to Athens with his family in June 1943. Deportation of the Jews to the concentration camps in Poland had already started on March 15th. Until September 1943, when the Italians capitulated, the Yakoels were not in danger. He had a false identity card under the name of Aristotle Georgiades. However, he was betrayed by the Quisling collaborator Ino Recanati. Arrested on 22nd December 1943, he was tortured at the notorious Merlin Street Prison and then transferred to a camp in Chaidari. On 2 April 1944, he was deported to Auschwitz, with all his family. He worked in the group of Sonder commando at the crematoria. Later, he was executed.

Asher Moissis (1899-1975)

Asher Moissis was born in Trikkala in 1899. In 1916, when he was only 17 he founded the Society “Eretz Zion” with his friend and fellow-student Yomtov Yakoel. Together, a year later they published the monthly Zionist journal “Israel”. When he completed his secondary school studies, Asher Moissis enrolled in the Faculty of Law of Athens University.

In 1923, he established himself in Thessaloniki, where he opened a law office with his friend Yomtov Yakoel. They also worked closely with the notary public S. Papadimas. Characteristically, S. Papadimas noted in his autobiography: “In Thessaloniki, in those days, a compatriot from Trikkala and fellow student practiced law. A Jew, he was related to me by close friendship. His legal practice was active from the start, because he was the first Jewish law graduate from the University of Athens to practice in Thessaloniki. An extremely industrious and energetic person, he was also very knowledgeable in law. He had a talent for journalism, foreign languages and many other qualities for which his race is known”.\textsuperscript{12}

Further, Papadimas notes “Until 1926, all marriage contracts (\textit{Ketubot}) were written in accordance with Jewish law in the presence of the functionaries of the Jewish Community, because all matters relating to marriage and divorce, as well as marital relations, were subject to the jurisdiction of the religious courts (\textit{Beth Din}). They were not taxed like the marriage contracts of the Greeks. However, under Law 23/2/1926, holders of \textit{Ketubot} were obliged to submit them in due form to a notary public. Failure to comply would render such contract invalid and unenforceable both by Jewish and Greek courts. Considering that this legal provision had retroactive effect, it entailed considerable work (for notaries public), since all married Jews were obliged to submit their marriage contracts for confirmation”.\textsuperscript{13}

Asher Moissis offered valuable services to the Jewish Community of Thessaloniki and became its President between 1934 and 1936. He also served as President of \textit{Keren Kayemeth le Israel} from 1930 to 1938. He took part in several Zionist Congresses as representative of Greece sharing this distinction with David Florentin and Asher Mallah. In 1936-1938 he also became President of the Zionist Confederation, to which all Zionist organizations of Greece belonged.

During the German occupation of Greece, Asher Moissis took refuge in Athens. There, he fought on behalf of his compatriots and co-religionists. At a general meeting of 100 Jews in Athens on 12 November 1944 at the Synagogue, the meeting elected a 12-member Central Executive Jewish Board for Advice and Coordination. He was elected President. He laboured for the rehabilitation of the Jews who returned from the concentration camps where they had been deported during the Nazi occupation. Law 846 of 22 January 1949, declared in its single article that the Hellenic State renounced all claims to Jewish property and remitted such property to the Jewish Community, so that it might be used for the benefit of the survivors of the racist persecution and Holocaust.

In 1947, he published the newspaper “\textit{Evraiki Estia}” [Hebrew Hearth]. In 1948, he was appointed first diplomatic representative of the State of Israel in Athens.

Asher Moissis was one of the witnesses in the prosecution of Merten during the trial which started in Athens on 11th February 1959. The charges were as follows: arbitrary execution of 680 Greek Orthodox citizens and countless Jewish citizens who were picked arbitrarily in prison; rounding up of 9,000 adults Jews, who were sent for forced labour and the majority of whom died in their places of work; imposition of a ransom in the amount of 2.5 million drachmas supposedly in order to exempt Jews from forced labour; and under the Nuremberg laws, commission of innumerable acts of looting of Jewish property, desecration of the Jewish cemetery, confinement of 56,000 Jews\textsuperscript{14} in the ghetto and their transportation outside of Greece to death camps etc.

Asher Moissis’s deposition made a tremendous impression by reason of its structure, methodical nature and accuracy.\textsuperscript{15}

Asher Moissis published several books on Jewish subjects and
Greek-Jewish relations. His principle works are the following:

1) **15 Days in Jewish Palestine** (Thessaloniki 1933);
2) **Introduction to the Family Law of the Jews of Greece** (Thessaloniki 1934); 
3) **Greek-Jewish Friendship through the Ages** (Athens 1953); 
4) **Greco-Jewish Studies** (Athens 1959); 
5) **Which Hellenism the Maccabeans Combatted** (Athens 1962); 
6) **History and Myths regarding the Wailing Wall** (Athens 1969); 
7) **The Names of the Jews of Greece** (Athens 1973); 
8) **The History of the Zionist Movement in Greece** (In Hebrew in the compendium entitled Zikaron Thessaloniki, Tel Aviv 1971).

He translated into Greek:

1) The prayer book for the Day of Atonement. Hebrew text and parallel translation page by page into Greek (Athens 1969); 
2) **Haggadah for Pesach** - The story of Passover: Hebrew text and Greek translation in verse, Athens 1971; 

Analyzing and assessing the contribution of prominent personalities, one may observe that they influenced not only the history and life of their native lands but also of other nations that either asked for their advice or used their wisdom.

The high standards of education, religion and economic activity of the Jews of Thessaloniki exerted a profound impact on the city where they lived and which they made their own, but also on the other cities and countries of the region and beyond. This influence continues to be felt to-day. It can be said, accordingly, that the Jewish contribution to Thessaloniki, over the centuries, has been tremendous. It deserves continued study, exploration and analysis.

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1 It has been said that “at the end of the 15th century new inhabitants come to fill the blanks that were created by the elimination of the Greek element by the Turks, and that continued to come till the end of the 19th century. They are the Jews that were expelled from Spain, Portugal, Sicily and Apulia and changed radically the nature and composition of Thessaloniki. With their racial characteristics and Spanish language they gave to their new country the character of a Jewish and Spanish city inside the Greek peninsula”. See A. Letsas, (Pea elateria othisan ton Kassandro na idrisi tin Thessaloniki - What made Kassander found Thessaloniki), in Chronika Zihronot, edited by the Central Jewish Board of Greece, Sept 1984, page 26.
2 a) **Takkanot by halakhic scholars on: assault, children’s maintenance, custom, debtor’s property, dina de-malkhuta, endowment witnesses, halizah, hazzakah, herem bet din, herem ha-yishuv, imprisonment for debt, inheritance, loans, penal law, rape, takkanot ha-shuk, widow, wills; and** b) **takkanot ha-kehal** on communal regulations.
3 See Maharil, Jacob Moellin, Responsa Divre Poskim.
4 See also in Encyclopaedia Judaica, Responsa.
6 His father was Rabbi Raphael Salem. He practised law at the office of his relative Yodajon Yeni, which at that time taught many of the future lawyers in Thessaloniki. Other practitioners in this office were: Vitali Faratzi, Yosef Nar, Raphael Modiano, Duout Levy, Nadir Abravanel and Emmanuel Carasso. Yodajon Yeni chose Emmanuel Salem because he knew Greek and French. He gave him important duties. He read all the books in the library and knew them by heart. He became the assistant in the Secretariat of the Italian lawyer Graci, Consul of Holland in Thessaloniki; translated for him and was responsible for the commercial department. At that time he learned Italian. In 1879, a new law forbidding the practice of law without a diploma, led him to go to Constantinople where he obtained a University law degree. He opened his own law office on his return to Thessaloniki.

7 He presented to the representatives of the Great Powers in Thessaloniki, a plan signed by 6 representatives and suggested the autonomy of the Muslims, Jews and Koutsovalaques of Thessaloniki and its surrounding in a national base. (See K. Skordyles, “Reactions Juives à l’annexion de Salonique”, in *The Jewish Communities of Southeastern Europe*, edited by Institute for Balkan Studies, Thessaloniki 1997.) The Jewish Community was in favor of the Greek Authority. (See Rena Molho, “The Uncertainty of the Greek Authority in Thessaloniki after 1912: Foreign Propaganda and Jewish Community”, in *SynchronaThemata*), July-December 1994, Athens.
10 Yomtov Yakoel, op. cit. p. 115.
11 Yomtov Yakoel, op. cit. p.110.
13 S. Papadima, op. cit., p.327.
14 Of the 56,000 Jews who were deported to concentration camps only 2,000 survived.
15 In Memoriam, edited by Michael Molho, Rabbi of the Jewish Community of Thessaloniki, Thessaloniki 1974, p. 327.
Family Law of Greek Jews: Transition from Jewish Law to the Greek Civil Code

Theofano Papazissi

Jews did not come to Greece en bloc, either at the same time or from the same place. The first group, the Romaniot, came from Palestine and settled in Greece before the birth of Christ. The second group, the Sephardim, came from Spain after the edict of 1492 ordering them to convert to Christianity. The third group, numbering a few Ashkenazim, came from Northern Europe, spurred also by the Inquisition. Various ethnic groups governed the region of Greece during this time, and the law which has been applied to the domestic relations of the Jews of Greece from antiquity to the present day has varied according to the group governing the region at any specific time.

The Application of Jewish Law Prior to the Establishment of the New Greek State

Four historical periods can be identified between the time of the arrival of the Jewish population in the Greek territory and the creation of the new Greek State. During these periods different ethnic groups with different ideologies, principles and religions applied different systems of law.

Hellenistic Period

In the first and most liberal historical period, the Hellenistic period, the Jewish population in Greece acquired the right to continue to apply Jewish law to their personal relationships, without any restrictions or obligations.

Roman Period

Roman law applied only to Roman citizens. Thus, in this period, the Jews continued to have the right to resolve their domestic disputes according to Jewish law. Until the third century the Roman emperors accepted that the Jews should enjoy this exceptional legal status under the jus gentium. After the Constitutio Antonina of Karakalas, Jewish people in the Roman Empire were subject to the civitas romana and they could continue to apply Jewish law as a matter of course.

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1 They came in order to escape persecution at the hands of the Romans and it was in this Jewish community that Saint Paul spoke when he came to Greece.
2 The Sephardim influenced the local Jews and developed a single unified culture on Greek territory. By the time the Sephardim arrived in Greece, the Romaniots had become completely Hellenised. Many had Greek names, and it was only their religion and customs that reminded them that they were different.
3 Very few of the Ashkenazim stayed. In contrast to the influence of the Sephardim on the Romaniots, neither the language nor the culture of Ashkenazim had any influence on the other groups.
4 At the same time, the Romans subjected Jewish Roman citizens to certain regulations of family law which they did not regard as being of a purely religious nature, for example, the tutelage of minors. See Asir Moysis, Introduction to the Family Law of the Jews in Greece, Thessaloniki, 1934, p. 21, n.2.

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of jus singulare,\(^5\) at first unconditionally and later on payment of a special tax, the fiscus judaicus.\(^6\) This special status ended in the fourth century under the influence of Christianity.

**Byzantine Empire**

By 398 the Byzantine Empire required that Byzantine law be applied uniformly and allowed its Jewish subjects no scope for autonomy. All the Jews' affairs, including domestic matters,\(^7\) but excluding financial ones,\(^8\) came under the jurisdiction of the ordinary courts. This was consistent with the need to apply the law uniformly over an enormous empire that included a variety of peoples and ethnic groups.\(^9\) In practice, however, these stipulations fell into abeyance, because the Jews simply continued to apply Jewish law to their domestic affairs.\(^10\)

**Ottoman Empire**

The Ottoman Empire allowed its non-Muslim subjects to have their domestic disputes resolved by their various religious leaders, as the Koran could be applied only by believers. Consequently, the Jews settled their domestic disputes in their own religious courts, the Bathei Din.\(^11\)

**The History of Jewish Family Law in the Greek State**

The history of Jewish family law in the modern Greek State may conveniently be divided into four periods, marked by the promulgation of four important laws. These were:
1. Decree of 23 February 1835;
2. Law No 147/1914;
3. Law No 2456/1920;
4. Legislative Decree No 1/10.5.1946, restoring the Civil Code.

**First Period: From the Birth of the Modern Greek State to the End of the Balkan War**

The modern Greek State instituted no special regulations for the Jews. The decree of 23 February 1835, introduced the Roman and Byzantine laws established by the Byzantine Emperors as civil law. It also restored the specific stipulations which prohibited the Jews from applying their religious law to their domestic affairs, the Justinian Code 1 (9.7) and Basilican Code 1 (1.39).\(^12\) However, by the Byzantine era the contrary custom was already well established. Consequently, these stipulations of statute law had been annulled through the creation of a contrary abrogating custom, which, under the 1835 decree, overrode the written Byzantine law.\(^13\)

Thus, by custom, the Jews maintained a status of juridical autonomy,\(^14\) with no need for any special regulations, since there were so few Jewish communities.

**Second Period: The Annexation of the “New Lands” (Macedonian, Thrace) Law 147/1914**

After the annexation of the ‘new lands’ - Macedonia and Thrace - after the Balkan War of 1912-1913, which comprised a number of peoples having other religions,\(^15\) Law No 147/1914 was promulgated in compliance with Article 11 of the Treaty of Athens of 1/14 November 1913, stating that Greece undertook to respect the religious beliefs and customs of the inhabitants of the ‘new lands’.\(^16\)

Article 4 of Law No 147/1914 of the above law stipulated that “the marital affairs of those belonging to the Moslem or the Jewish faith, which is to say those matters

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5 Nevertheless on same legal matters Roman law applied even to Jews, like Lex Julia de adulteriiis, see Moysis, ibid., p. 21 and n.2.
6 Idem, ibid., p. 21 and n.2 and p. 22 n.2, for an analysis of specific cases.
7 JC 1 (9.7) brought the Jews under the common legislation and forbade polygamy, BC 1 (1.39) “the Jews shall marry according to the civil laws” ibid., p. 22; Charalambos Frangistas, Erminia Astikou Kodikos, Vol. VII, Introductory Law, Athens 1963, Art. 6, no. 5.
8 JC 1 (9.8), BC 1 (1.40). See Moysis, ibid., and n. 1, Frangistas, ibid.
9 Justinian Code 1(9.7), Basilica 1(1.39).
10 See Moysis, ibid., and the Preamble to Emergency Law No 1029 28.2/2.3. 1946, (Law Code) 1926.115. Polygamy, for instance, was not abolished until the eleventh century, by the Council of Warsaw, although it had been forbidden in Byzantium since Justinian’s time, Moysis, ibid.
11 Moysis, ibid., p. 22 and n.4 for developments in other European countries; Frangistas, ibid., No 6. It was at this time (the early sixteenth century) that Josef Karo, drew up the code known as Shulhan Aruch, Anastasia Grammaticaki-Alexiou, “Mixed Jurisdiction”, paper read at the XII Congress International de Droit Compare, Sydney and Melbourne, 1986, RHellDI (1985-6), pp. 315ff.
12 According to Justinian’s Code, 1 (1.39), “nemo judaeorum morem suum in conjunctionibus retinebit nec juxta legem suam nupias sortiatur, nec in diversa sub uno tempore conjugia conveniat” [no Jew is permitted to observe his marriage customs, nor to contract marriages according to his own law, nor to enter into several marriages at one time]. It was the first time that the principle of monogamy had been applied to the Jews.
13 Moysis, ibid., p. 23.
15 Frangistas, ibid., No 7. Preamble to Emergency Law No 1029, ibid. (10).
16 Moysis, ibid., p. 28.
concerning the lawful contracting and dissolution of marriage and the personal relations between the spouses comprised therein, as also matters relating to the bonds of kinship, are regulated by their own sacred law and judged thereby. An interpretation of this article concluded that “the lawful contracting of marriage” meant the preconditions for contracting a valid marriage i.e. the formalities and the impediments; “dissolution” referred to the grounds for divorce and the formalities of dissolution; and “bonds of kinship” meant the degrees of kinship.

According to one view, the law also covered betrothal as an inseparable element of marriage. Other aspects of family law—the spouses’ property rights, paternal authority, tutelage of minors, etc.—were governed by Greek civil law. The stipulation concerned substantive law, so many matters were to be settled in the ordinary law courts.

This particular arrangement, which applied only to the ‘new lands’, created a different legislative status for Jews of the old and the new Greek State. However, the difference was of little practical significance, as the force of custom applied the Jewish law to the old lands which Law No. 147/1914 applied to the new.

Third Period: From the End of the First World War to the Second World War, Law No. 2456/1920

In 1920, Law No 2456, concerning the Jewish communities, was promulgated. It continues to apply today, with modification, to the Jewish communities’ organizational and other affairs. This Law unified the exceptional laws applying to the Jews and also included special provisions for domestic relations, in order to restrict the implementation of Jewish law to the sphere of substantive law. Chapter 3 of the Law regulated the functions of the rabbinical authority. According to Article 11, every Jewish community had to have its own rabbinical council, headed by the Chief Rabbi and be responsible for resolving all religious matters.

Article 12 established the Beth Din and its powers. It stipulated that a religious court with the title of Beth Din, appointed by the rabbinical council, would adjudicate the cases specified in Article 4 of Law No. 147/1914 (contracting and dissolution of marriage between Jews, personal relations between the spouses during the marriage, degrees of kinship) as well as maintenance and support of the wife and children and restoration of the marriage portion and related property after divorce, provided that the claims emanated from Jewish law. The cases specified by the Law were so few that it was not possible to apply the provision to other areas by extrapolation. Other matters (such as paternal authority and tutelage) came under civil law and the regular courts. Accordingly, the Beth Din could hear the cases which, under Law No. 147/1914, had fallen within the province of the ordinary law courts.

The Beth Din was also responsible for attempting to effect a reconciliation (a prerequisite for divorce proceedings), for the spiritual dissolution of the marriage (get), and the lifting of the husband’s brother’s authority over the wife (halitsa); in other words, all the process and ritual entailed, according to Jewish law, in a divorce. The Beth Din remains competent in respect of get and halitsa proceedings.

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18 Idem, ibid., p. 29.
19 Idem, ibid., p. 24. According to Frangistas, ibid., No 8, it in fact applied to the whole of Greece, since it merely preserved the legal status quo.
20 Idem, ibid., ACA 1009/1935, ibid., and Frangista’s comment p. 380. A comparable dual legal status also existed in other countries with similar problems, such as Poland and Yugoslavia, where civil law applied to the Jews from Germany and Austro-Hungary and Jewish law to those from Russia and the old Kingdom of Serbia; see Moysis, ibid., p. 22 n. 4. For the legislation of Friedrich II with regard to the Jews see Hans Schlosser, Die Juden in der Gesetzgebung Friedrich II. Ein Problem der Toleranz? Federico II Legislatore del Regno di Sicilia nell’ Europa del Duecento, Atti di Convegni 1, Edizioni de Luca 1994, 143.
21 Important laws were Law 4837/1930, Legislative Decree 23/26.2.1926 covering marriage contracts, and Emergency Law 1029/1946.
22 The Chief Rabbi, who headed the Community by virtue of Article 9 of the Law, had to be Greek citizen.
23 The meaning of this last clause has been interpreted in various ways. According to one view, civil law could be applied in areas not covered by Jewish law: Thessaloniki Court of Appeal (henceforth TCA) 45/1926 Themis 38/1927 p. 418, TCA 133/1927 Themis 40/1929 p. 117. According to another view, only disagreements arising out of Jewish law came under the provinces of the Beth Din: TCA 179/1922 Themis 34/1924 p. 6. A more correct interpretation is that the clause in question was an oversight on the part of the legislator: see Moysis, ibid., pp. 26-7, 33; Frangistas, comment to ACA 1009/1935 Themis 47/1936 p. 381.
26 Idem, ibid., p. 29. It may have been no coincidence that Law No. 2456/1920 was promulgated only a month after General Law No. 2228/1920 “on divorce” which excluded only Moslems (Article 20), and therefore included Jews under its regulations.
Fourth Period: The Introduction of the Civil Code

The jurisdiction of the Beth Din over the domestic affairs of Greek Jews ended with the introduction of the Civil Code. Article 6 of theIntroductory Law of the Civil Code abolished the religious authorities’ and religious courts’ jurisdiction over matters covered by Articles 12 and 13 of Law No. 2456/1920, i.e. domestic affairs. However, one small chapter in the history of the introduction of the Civil Code was Emergency Law No. 1029/1946, Article 6 of which restored the Beth Din to the legislative framework of the short-lived Greek Civil Code of 1945. Nevertheless, it was of little practical significance to the legislative framework of the short-lived Greek Civil Code of 1945.

The Beth Din did not consider themselves to have been abolished. Their jurisdiction still applied to Jewish citizens of other countries, whose lex patriae permitted the implementation of Jewish law. Their opinion was strengthened by Emergency Law 1029/1946, which was deemed to have been repealed only with respect to the power of the Beth Din, because it was repealed, even before it came into force, by Article 2 of Legislative Decree 7/10 May 1946 “on the restoration of the Civil Code and its Introductory Law”, which annulled without exceptions any decree that conflicted with the Civil Code and its Introductory Law, Article 6 of the Introductory Law was thus restored, and the Jews of Greece were henceforth subject to civil law.

The Beth Din did not consider themselves to have been abolished. Their jurisdiction still applied to Jewish citizens of other countries, whose lex patriae permitted the implementation of Jewish law. Their opinion was strengthened by Emergency Law 1029/1946, which was deemed to have been repealed only with respect to the power of the Beth Din. The rabbinical authorities continued to perform procedural actions, such as attempting to effect the get and halitsa process.

The purpose of the adjustment was to achieve the juridical equality of all Greek citizens. The Greek Jews thus underwent the transition from Jewish law to civil law and then, after the inter-war period, to the Civil Code.

Beth Din: Law Courts with Extraordinary Competence

The Beth Din were three-member courts of first instance, organized according to Law No. 2456/1920. A Rabbi presided; the other members had to fulfill the conditions set out in Article 13 (2)(iv) of the Law.

The competence of the Beth Din was specified by Article 1282 of Law No. 2456/1920 and extended only to the members of the Jewish community. According to one view, their competence was connected to the litigants’ status as members of the community.

As long as the Thessaloniki Beth Din was the only one in Greece, its jurisdiction extended not only to the members of the Thessaloniki community, but to the Jews of Greece as a whole.

When the Beth Din increased in number, the question was posed whether their jurisdiction had to be restricted to their own locality. The matter was resolved by Law No. 5549/1933, which modified Article 13 of Law No. 2456/1920 and stipulated that the competence of each Beth Din extended to the residents of any nearby community that had no Beth Din of its own, even if they did not belong to any community. In the absence of a nearby Beth Din, the one in Thessaloniki was competent.

After the Second World War, the shrinking of the Jewish community of Thessaloniki led to the Athens Beth Din taking over. The same applied to the five-member Religious Court of Appeal, the Beth Din Hagadol.

27 See Frangistas, Erminia, Nos. 12, 15; idem, Armenopoulos 5/1951 p. 526.
28 This Law, which was incorporated in the Greek Civil Code of 1945, restored the power of the Beth Din only for betrothal, the marriage contract, the impediments, and the dissolution of marriage and the brother-in-law’s authority over the wife. It was promulgated after Legislative Decree 7/10.5.1946 had come into force and in actual fact the provision which conflicted with the Civil Code and the Introductory Law to the Civil Code were repealed before they came into effect. The others remained valid, however. See Frangistas, Erminia, No. 15; Balis, Legal opinion, Nomikon Vima (henceforth NoB) 1/1953 p. 325.
29 Except for the Moslems. Owing to international agreements, their domestic disputes were still resolved according to Islamic law, even though this was meaningless for those of Turkish descent, because Islamic law had been suspended decades earlier in Turkey by modern legislation based on the Swiss Civil Code.
30 As far as Greek law was concerned (a) they had to be Greek citizens, (b) who had never been tried under Sections 22 and 23 of the Penal Code; and (c) possessing the qualifications demanded by Jewish law.
32 See Moysis, ibid., p. 29; Frangistas, Legal Opinion, Themis 47/1936 p. 382.
33 French Court of Cassation 5.7.1926, Dalloc hebd. 1926, p. 401 or Themis 38/1927 p. 22, which denied the jurisdiction of the Thessaloniki Beth Din over a Jew who was not resident in Thessaloniki; ACA 1009/1935 Themis 47/1936 p.379.
34 Fragistas’, comment to the ACA 1009/1935, Themis 47/1936 p. 382.
35 See Art. 1382 of Law No. 2456/1920 as amended by Law No. 5549/1933. See also Moysis, ibid., p. 30.
36 Art. 382 of Emergency Law No. 1029/1946.
37 To quote from the Preamble to Emergency Law No. 1029/1946 p.117: “This court of appeal existed under the previous legislation in
The jurisdiction of the Greek Beth Din also became an issue for the Greek Jews who lived outside Greece. It was suggested, indeed, that it extended to Greek Jews all over the world. The Athens Court of Appeal concluded in 1935 that the authority of the Greek Beth Din extended only to Greek Jews living in Greece; those living outside Greece should apply to the Consular Court, of which course would implement Jewish law. In 1926, the French Cour de Cassation held that the Beth Din in Greece had no jurisdiction over Greek Jews living abroad. It further held that the regular courts and not the religious courts were competent to deal with the case, and applied Greek substantive law, denying the competence of the Jewish Religious Court.

Owing to the religious nature of the communities, the competence of the Greek Beth Din was deemed to extend to non-Greek Jews living within their area of jurisdiction, provided that the foreigners in question accepted this voluntarily and that the requirements of international jurisdiction were fulfilled according to their own lex patriae.

The competence of the Religious Courts was, of course, exclusive; but it was not absolute. Thus, prorogation was possible, that is to say, that the District Court could legally deal with a case which came within the competence of the Religious Court, provided that no plea in bar or trial had been made during the first stage of the trial.

The family law cases tried by the Beth Din were open to appeal (Article 1381, Law No. 2456/1920). An appeal against a Beth Din decision could be lodged up to a month after the decision had been announced by the Beth Din Hagadol. This period of time was the same as the period of appeal in Greek civil law. In other words, the rules of procedure that governed the ordinary civil courts also applied here.

The Rabbinical Courts of Appeal were not permanent. The President of the Court which delivered the disputed decision set up the Court of Appeal whenever an appeal was lodged.

The decisions of the Beth Din had to be declared enforceable in order to be recognized and have the force of final judgment (Article 1481 Law No. 2456/1920 and Article 5§1 Law No. 1029/1946). This was done by the President of the First Instance Court by means of arbitration awards (Article 119, Civil Procedure) at a litigants’ request or, upon his refusal, by the First Instance Court. The President or the Court confined themselves to examining the competence of the Beth Din.

Finally, a major problem concerned the enforceability of a decision which dissolved a marriage. A precondition for the dissolution of a marriage was that the husband should pronounce the get (repudium) to the wife, i.e., that the divorce certificate should have been drawn up and delivered. A court decision alone (whether by the Beth Din or by the First Instance Court), without the formal process of repudiation in the presence of the religious authorities, did not terminate a marriage.

The problem of the husband’s refusal to cooperate was an ever-present one in Jewish law and was resolved on occasion by recourse to the executive means provided by the legal system in force at the time. In the inter-war period, when the Civil Procedure was in force, a court, having accepted the request for legal proceedings and having ordered the Respondent to perform the act of repudiation, could sentence the Respondent to imprisonment and a fine, but not force him to make a declaration of will (i.e. to grant the get).
Conflicts between Jewish and Greek Law

The Ketuba

Marriage in Jewish law is carried out by an oath and by the man giving the woman a golden article weighing two grains of wheat. It is always accompanied by the signing of the Ketuba. The Ketuba, or marriage contract, is drawn up by Rabbinical authorities; it contains clauses concerning the personal and property relationship between the couple and is signed by the bridegroom after the marriage ceremony. Failing a Ketuba the marriage is not valid but is equivalent to concubinage. In the official opinion of the Greek State Attorney, loss of the Ketuba resulted in the marriage being deemed never to have existed, and therefore problems for a woman seeking to implement a legacy. \^{50} In contrast, the Christian orthodox marriage is a sacrament, it is performed by a cleric and does not require a contract to be valid.

According to Greek civil law at this time, a marriage contract, namely, a dowry contract, which referred only to the giving of property, had to be drafted by a public notary and was taxed, according to Article 44 of the new tax law of the time in Greece. Because of this law a discussion arose regarding the legal nature of the Ketuba. A Decree resolved the question in favour of the State. In order to be legally valid, the Ketuba had to be made by notary contract (Article 1§1, Decree 1926).

Nevertheless, according to Jesus Samouilidis, advocate and legal adviser to the Jewish Community of Thessaloniki, the Ketuba was not equivalent to a Greek dowry contract and therefore was valid without a notary contract. This opinion was accepted not only by Greek Jewish lawyers, such as Asher Moysis, \^{51} but even by Greek Christian lawyers too, such as the editors of the Greek law periodical “Themis”. \^{52} An opposing opinion, held by Professor George Balis, demanded a notary contract for the Ketuba to be a valid legal act according to Article 48 of Tax Law; the Court of Appeal of Colmar (19. Nov. 1839) thought the same. \^{53}

The meaning of the marriage contract also differed in Jewish and civil law. In Jewish law, a contract was essential for a marriage to be valid (nessessaria negotii). \^{54} The drafting of a Ketuba was important, because it contained all the agreements, rights and obligations of the husband and wife in their personal, property and hereditary relations. \^{55} Today, equal rights mean that these agreements do not have the same meaning.

Under the Greek Civil Code, the establishment of the dowry and the marriage contracts were related accidental contracts (accidentalia negotii) with exclusively property content, the non-existence of which did not negate the validity of the marriage. Following Law No. 1329 of 1983, the dowry was forbidden in Greek Civil Code.

It is well-known that many marriages, which took place in a hurry after the German occupation and before the Jews were deported to concentration camps, were performed without a Ketuba. Marriages of orthodox Christians did not face legal problems of validity by reason of the absence of Ketuba. However, those between Jews were declared invalid after the War because of the non-existence of the Ketuba.

Alimony

An essential difference between Jewish religious law and Greek civil law referred to the obligation to pay alimony. The obligation to pay alimony between husband and wife is described in Jewish religious law as alimony in natura (Chapter 73, Shulhan Aruch) and is recognized only in cases where the wife is unreasonable forced to break up married life and abandon home (Article 12, Chapter 70 Shulhan Aruch). \^{56}

Even before the Civil Code, Greek civil law recognized a claim to alimony by a separated or divorced wife. Thus, Jewish women chose this way to demand alimony before or after the divorce. \^{57} The Greek Civil Courts of Appeal upheld these claims because of the non-existence of the right of the women under traditional law. \^{58}

Josef Karo’s Code, which stipulates that the Rabbinical Court may call upon the State to intervene and legally compel the husband to hand over the divorce certificate without the resulting divorce being regarded as having been achieved by force.

\^{50} Georges Mourikis, Themis 31/1921 p. 80. After the First World War the books of the Rabbinical Council were lost, so in cases of a death the woman had difficulties proving the existence of the marriage.

\^{51} Introduction to the Greek Jews’ Family Law, p. 25.

\^{52} ‘Themis’ 31/1921 p. 524 and Themis 31/1921 p. 558.


\^{54} Jesus Samouilidis, Legal Opinion, Themis, 31/1921 p. 524, Comment at the redaction of Themis 31/1921 p. 525 and 558, Mourikis, ibid.

\^{55} Samouilidis, ibid.


\^{58} TCA ibid.
Jewish Marriage and Conflict with the Greek Public

Basic differences between Jewish religious law and Greek civil law in relation to the validity of a marriage concerned:

a) monogamy,
b) impediments by reason of parentage,
c) the new marriage of the widow, and
d) the divorce.

Principles and Form of Marriage

Marriage in Jewish law is a typical legal act, fulfilled by the giving of a symbol and the declaration of one’s will to the other party (Shulhan Aruch). The writing of the Ketuba is necessary and contains all the agreements and conditions of the conjugal symbioses. Jewish religious law does not forbid polygamy. In Europe, monogamy was introduced into Jewish law as a public order institution, by Rabbi Gersom at the beginning of the 11th century at the Worms Convention. The second marriage by a man was forbidden on penalty of invalidity, so long as the first wife was still alive; the condition was included in the Ketuba. According to this condition, all Jewish authorities were to forbid the second marriage.

In contrast, Greek civil law was inspired by the principles of Christianity. Marriage was seen as a sacrament strictly based on monogamy. Marriage was forbidden, so long as the previous marriage was not dissolved or annulled (Article 1354 AK).

Levira - Impediment to Marriage

Another peculiarity of Jewish religious law is levira, the obligation of the husband’s brother to marry the widow in the event of his death. Levira was not applied in the civil law before the Greek Civil Code of 1946, nor after it.

According to Greek civil law, parentage through marriage was always an impediment to marriage and remained so after the dissolution or annulment of the marriage (Article 1464 b AK). Levira is against the marriage impediment arising out of parentage, which appears in Hellenic law and is a breach of the public order. The obligation to enforce a promise on the part of a married brother was in breach of the public order because it could lead him to commit bigamy, which as a matter of Hellenic law was reason for holding the second marriage to be null and a criminal offence.

Halitsa

Halitsa, the discharge of the legal relationship between the widow and the family of her deceased husband, was a procedure unknown in Greek civil law. One question which arose was whether the halitsa was an element of the dissolution of the previous marriage or a condition for the valid establishment of a new marriage by the widow with a third person according to Jewish religious law. In the view of Professor Balis, expressed at the beginning of the enforcement of the Civil Code in Greece and apparently accepted even today, halitsa does not constitute an element of the commitment of the new marriage of the widow but a condition for the spiritual dissolution of the previous marriage.

If the second marriage of the widow (religious or civil) is carried out without the permission of a Rabbi due to the absence of halitsa, this does not automatically void the marriage, because it does not conflict with the prohibition and penalties set out in Article 18 of the Law 2456/1920, which is in force even today.

Dissolution of marriage

In Jewish religious law the right to divorce is afforded only to the husband who may dissolve a marriage even without the consent of his wife, and without giving specific reasons. Specific reasons are required in order to give rise to the right of the wife to demand a divorce (Chapter 154, Shulhan Aruch). The consent of the couple enables the dissolution of their marriage and is usually a condition of the Ketuba. Given that the right to divorce belongs to the husband, in reality, the relative right of the wife ends with her ability to start the procedure.

In Greek law the possibility of dissolving the marriage is always recognized in respect of both husband and wife, for the causes set out in the law, even if the other party opposes the same.

After the abolition of the Jewish law and competence of the Beth Din, the marriages of Greek Jews was dissolved by the common civil courts according to Greek civil law. Before Law No 1329/1983, which changed family law, the petition to

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60 The Civil Code was applied even during the German occupation in Greece by the Consular Court outside occupied Greece, because the Court did not recognized that government as legal, Con. Court of Alexandria 214/1945 Themis 56/1945.317.
divorce required an effort at reconciliation by the Rabbinical Court, in the same procedure as that applied by the Bishop for the Christians. This obligation ended after Law 1329/1983.

The dissolution of a marriage in Jewish law requires the grant of a divorce certificate by the husband to the wife and the pronouncement of the phrase “This is the document of your divorce” (Chapter 136, Article 1). Article 13§3 of Law 2456/1920 includes penalties of common Penal Law (Article 199) against a husband who refuses to cooperate in the spiritual dissolution of the marriage (get or halitsa), but does not force him to make a declaration of will.

Today, this is possible because of the provisions of the Code of Civil Procedure. In any event, both matters are today contrary to basic principles of the Constitution of 1975, such as equal rights (Article 4§2), respect for the person (Article 5) and respect for human values (Article 2).

The Effect of these Differences on Jewish Legal Practice

From the promulgation of Law No 147/1914 until the introduction of the Civil Code, family law cases were handled partly according to Jewish law and partly according to Greek family law. Obviously, then, some cases came under the jurisdiction of the Beth Din and others, such as maintenance after divorce or disputes connected with paternal authority, were tried in the ordinary courts. The regular Greek courts frequently had to deal with family law cases involving Greek Jews, particularly when the plaintiff (usually the woman) considered that Jewish law did not give her adequate protection (especially in alimony cases).

Whether the rationale behind these decisions was right or wrong, the fact remains that between 1920 and 1946 the Greek Jews’ family law cases were dealt with partly according to Jewish law and partly under civil law. It was during this period that the Jewish population began to be properly integrated into the Greek State. Despite the special favorable legislation that applied to them even in certain matters of civil law, they began to fall into line with the Greek legal system even in matters of family law. In this way, it could be said, the Jews started to gradually move away from the traditional closed way of life - the most powerful weapon of which is always the law, particularly family law - until, with the introduction of the Civil Code just after the Second World War, they were fully assimilated into Greek society.

The Introductory Law of the Civil Code stipulated that Greek Jews would be governed by Civil Law (Article 6), thus rendering the provisions of Jewish family law invalid. Under Articles 1366 and 1462 of the Civil Code of 1940, provisions covering the fundamental prerequisites of marriage and divorce and marital relations in general applied irrespective of the religious beliefs of those concerned, in the absence of any provisions to the contrary, as in the case of the Greek Jews. Similarly, Articles 1416 and 1446 of the Civil Code stipulated that the provisions of the Civil Code apply to the whole population, in the case of personal and property relations between spouses (Article 1416) and with respect to the dissolution of marriage (Article 1446), irrespective of religion or type of marriage, in the absence of specific provisions to the contrary (which applied to the Moslems of Thrace).

Thus, the Jews in Greece underwent the transition from Jewish religious law to modern civil law in the space of just over thirty years (1914-46), which, in view of what has been said above, may be regarded as a period of adaptation, especially for the population of Macedonia and Thrace.

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61 Th CA 84/1949 EEN 16/1949 p. 688.
62 TCA 152/1939 ibid.
63 TCA 179/1922, ibid.; TCA 45/1926, ibid.; TCA 133/1927, ibid.
64 The rationale by which TCA 133/1927, ibid., applies Jewish law and tries the maintenance case itself is erroneous; but there is a clear intention to recognize the wife’s right to maintenance where she has been dismissed from the state of marital cohabitation in defiance of the requirements of Jewish law.
65 See Art. 25, 26, Law No 2456/1920.
66 TCA 84/1949 EEN 16/1949 p. 687.
June 29, 1998

**Fight over Holocaust denial**

*Jewish legal experts demand governments outlaw revisionist movement.*

Thessaloniki (AP) - Governments must outlaw Holocaust revisionism in order to fight a high-tech, well financed movement that denies the Holocaust ever occurred, a group of Jewish legal experts said Saturday.

An international conference of Jewish jurists warned that the international revisionist movement, using the Internet and an orchestrated propaganda campaign, could warp the historical memory of younger generations.

“The denial movement has a historical institute which is reviewing history and whose real aim is to deny the Holocaust”, said Itzhak Nener, an Israeli who is Deputy President of the International Association of Jewish Lawyers and Jurists. “They have tremendous sums of money”, he added.

The legal experts gathered in Thessaloniki, the northern Greek port city once known as the “Mother of Israel”. The Nazis murdered 50,000 of Thessaloniki’s Jews during the Holocaust, destroying the once thriving community. Today, about 1,000 Jews live in the city.

During World War II, Nazi Germany rounded up about six million Jews and killed them at death camps.

One aim of the conference is to convince more countries to pass legislation outlawing Holocaust denial. Several European countries, including Germany, Austria, Switzerland, France and Luxembourg already have such legislation.

But Nener and his colleagues said the sentences are too lenient, and more countries should crack down on people claiming the Nazi slaughter of Jews never took place.

Holocaust revisionists have been consistently active in America and Canada, where they have aired their views on the Internet.

“This growing group is using web sites to make amazingly ridiculous claims, like that they measured the gas chambers and found they were not big enough for people”, said Isidor Wolfe, a lawyer from Vancouver, Canada.

No one should have to prove that the Holocaust took place, the legal experts say.

“We have evidence so strong it’s ridiculous”, Wolfe said: “But they target people who are young, who do not have a sense of history, and they seem to be able to get some of these skinhead types”.

A surge in neo-Nazi activity in Europe and America provides a dangerous channel for misinformation about the Holocaust.

One organization in the U.S. regularly mails “information packets” to college newspapers and takes out advertisements for videos and books that claim Allied soldiers faked evidence of the Holocaust.

Such historical manipulation has been going on for more than a decade, the legal experts said. It’s even more dangerous because the target audience is historically ignorant, Nener said. He pointed to a 1997 U.S. poll that showed about one-fourth of the population had no knowledge of the Holocaust.

The International Association of Jewish Lawyers and Jurists will hold conferences in more than 20 other European nations to lobby for more anti-revisionism laws.

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**What the Papers Say**

The Salonika Conference enjoyed widespread coverage in the Greek and international media. Here are some of the many clips.

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Kathimerini June 19, 1998

**Memorandum: Remember Salonika**

“Remember Salonika” an invitation and also a command, to participate in the International Congress dedicated to the memory of the Jewish Community of Salonika, which was almost totally extinguished in the Holocaust.

A hundred and eighty lawyers and jurists from the U.S.A., England, Germany, France, Canada, Australia, Argentina, Belgium, Switzerland, Bulgaria, and Sweden together with numerous Greek colleagues will participate in the International Conference organized in Salonika by the International Association of Jewish lawyers and Jurists, with the aim of
honouring the Jewish history of the city, and the contribution of Jewish jurists and intellectuals in the formation of Greek legislation”. The Congress is organized in the framework of a series of congresses which will be held in various European cities, to commemorate the numerous Jewish lawyers, jurists and intellectuals who died during the Holocaust in the Second World War, starting with Salonika. The Congress will be held from Thursday June 25th up to Sunday June 28th, at the beautiful “Macedonia Palace”.

The blue and white prospectus is simple but elegant, describing every detail of the Congress programme, the cover depicting the White Tower of Salonika with the Greek flag, the Macedonian Studies Building, and the Thermaikos bay. The Congress was prepared with great feeling, love and effort, and its success will confirm the fact that the Jewish brothers of Northern Greece do not “forget Salonika”, but neither their own people who died.

Makedonia June 26, 1998

Don’t Forget the Holocaust

Jewish judges, lawyers and jurists from all over the world, will discuss Holocaust denial and the phenomenon of anti-Semitism, during their congress in Salonika.

This is the first international meeting of the members of the International Association of Jewish Jurists and Lawyers, which opened yesterday in a central hotel of the city, and will be concluded on 28 June.

“Incredibly, after 50 years the Jewish Holocaust is still disputed. More than 200 publications in various countries deny the Holocaust, stating that the Jews ‘invented’ the gas-chambers in order to succeed in obtaining a state of their own”. This was stressed by the President of the International Association of Jewish Jurists and Lawyers, Hadassa Ben-Itto, during yesterday’s press conference on the presentation of the congress programme, in which the Deputy President of the Association Itzhak Nener, the President of the Greek Section, Ms. Manon Maissa, and the Chairman of the Jewish Community of Salonika, were also present.

The congress, in which 200 Jewish jurists from 16 countries will participate, will commemorate the work and contribution of their Greek-Jewish colleagues who died before or during the Holocaust. The participants will also examine the phenomenon of anti-Semitism, and will discuss their views on Holocaust denial as it appears at the approach of the 21st century.

Thessaloniki June 29, 1998

Anti-Semitism Decreases in Germany.

Anti-Semitism in Germany at present stands at 20%, and is decreasing steadily as time goes by. This was announced during the first International Congress of Jewish Lawyers and Jurists, by German University Professor Michael Brocke. As he underlined, current legislation in his country according to which supporters of anti-Semitism are persecuted ex-officio, has contributed largely to the decrease of the phenomenon.

During the congress, which took place in a central hotel of Salonika with the participation of 200 Jewish lawyers and jurists from 16 countries, cases of anti-Semitism and Holocaust denial towards the 21st century were thoroughly discussed.

During the first session of the congress, participants commemorated their Greek colleagues who lost their lives during the Holocaust, with extensive references to their work and contribution to the formation of Greek legislation.

The conclusions of the congress will be elaborated by a group of experts, who will proceed with recommendations to the governments of various countries and the United Nations. Similar meetings have been planned in 20 European cities.

Avriani June 24th, 1998

Commemoration of Salonika’s Jewish History

The International Congress organized by the International Association of Jewish Lawyers and Jurists, will commence continued on p. 60
The annexation of Macedonia and Epirus to Greece after the Balkan Wars of 1912 and 1913 brought compact Jewish and Muslim populations into the Greek realm. They did not know Greek and Greek legislation was totally foreign to them. Law 147 of the year 1914 extended Greece’s legislation and the Greek administrative and judicial systems to the New Countries, as they were called at the time. Article 4 of this Law provided that disputes between people of the Jewish faith, concerning marriage, divorce, personal relations between married couples and family bonds, were to be settled according to Jewish religious law. The application, however, of this religious law was assigned to the common civil courts.

Up to this time, the issue of organizing the Jewish Communities in Greece in a cohesive manner had not arisen and the Jewish Communities existed de facto. Nevertheless, over the course of time, the need to regulate Jewish religious education and Jewish religious and family life in a uniform manner throughout Greece, as well as the need to regulate the financial situation of the existing Communities which, according to Ottoman law, did not own their real estate property, due to the fact that Ottoman law ignored moral personality, and in the main the need to regulate the administration of justice in Jewish family relations, a matter which required specialized knowledge that the common courts did not possess, became more pressing. These demands were met by Law 2456 of 1920 “on the Jewish Communities”. The Jewish Communities, and, as far as I know, this is a unique case worldwide, are recognized as moral entities under public law, constituting part of the Greek State’s administrative structure. They have total administrative and financial independence, being supervised by the Department of Education on matters concerning their religious, educational and philanthropic activities, and by the Department of Finance on matters concerning their financial administration. This supervision, however, is restricted to the legality of their actions and cannot be extended to the utility or the profitability of such activities. The Jewish Communities are founded by decree in any city, town or village in Greece where more than 20 Jews reside and where a synagogue exists. Only one Community may be founded in each city, town or village. This law recognizes every Community’s full ownership of its existing property as well as of any property which may be acquired in the future.

All people of the Jewish faith, permanently residing inside the territorial limits of the Community, are members by right, independently of sex, age and nationality.

The Communities derive their income from private donations; dues collected for conducting religious services; dues for the issue of certificates and the allotment of graves in their cemeteries; the taxation imposed by each Community on its members; the “gabelles” which according to ancient Jewish customs are imposed by the Communities on Kosher foodstuffs such as sugar, matzoth, Passover flour etc.; State and City subsidies; and from income received from exploiting their private property. The Communities have the right, under certain conditions, to receive their dues from recalcitrant members through the Internal Revenue Service.

Telis Nahmias, Advocate at the Supreme Court and Member of the Thessaloniki Bar, is the legal advisor of the Jewish Community of Thessaloniki and its institutions.
The Communities have the right to found schools for their members’ children. The curriculum of these schools, determined by each Community, must be in accordance with State laws, conform to generally established educational principles and provide a sufficient knowledge of the Greek language. History, geography, physics and mathematics must always be taught in Greek. The remaining subjects may be taught in any language determined by the Community. The Community schools are subject to government inspection and their graduates have the same qualifications and rights as their counterparts in State schools of the same grade, provided that their school’s curriculum has been submitted to and approved by the Department of Education.

The supreme authority of each Community is its General Assembly. The latter consists of a number of Community members who are elected by universal secret ballot, independently of sex. All members of the Community who have completed their twenty first year of age have the right to vote. In order to be elected a member of the Assembly, one must be a Greek citizen. The details of the election, the number of each Assembly’s members and the qualifications required of them are regulated by the particular statute of each Community.

Each Community is administered by a Board of Directors elected by its General Assembly in a secret ballot between those of its members who are over twenty five years old. The Board of Directors manages all the Community’s affairs, financial and other, and decides on the acquisition and sale of the Community’s assets. The Board of Directors works under the supervision of the Community’s Assembly which has the right to repudiate its actions and deny it its confidence, thus obliging the Directors to submit their resignations. The Community is represented before the authorities by the Chief Rabbi, elected by the Community’s General Assembly and, in case of absence or impediment, by the President of the Board of Directors. The President of the Board of Directors represents the Community in court. In case of his absence or impediment the Vice-President replaces him.

A Rabbinical Council presided over by the Chief Rabbi sits in each Community and rules on all religious matters. A three Judge Rabbinical Court, the “Beth Din”, whose members are selected by the Rabbinical Council rules on disputes concerning marriage, divorce, restitution of dowry and, in general, on family cases. The “Beth Din” Rabbinical Court of Appeals rules on appeals against the rulings of the first instance courts. It is appointed by the President of the first instance “Beth Din”, and is constituted of five Judges. Not more than two of the Judges who ruled in the first instance may participate in the “Beth Din” of Appeals. The Rabbi Judges must be Greek citizens, they must not have been convicted of dishonorable actions, and they must have the qualifications required by Jewish religious law. The “Beth Din’s” decisions are rendered executable by the President of the High Court and are executed in the same way as all other State Civil Court decisions. The President of the High Court may only examine whether the decision issued by the “Beth Din”, conforms with the terms of Law 2465 of 1920 and nothing further. He does not have the right to examine the case per se.

In the event that the “Beth Din” of any Community is not in session, Thessaloniki’s “Beth Din”, becomes the competent Court for all cases which would normally fall within that “Beth Din’s” jurisdiction.

Each Community must draw up its own statute which will regulate matters pertaining to the Community’s administration, the duties and rights of the Community’s General Assembly, its Board of Directors, the Chief Rabbi, the Rabbis, the method of imposing and collecting the Community’s taxes and dues, the election of the Community’s Assembly and Board of Directors, the number of members of each body, etc. This statute, validated by decree and published in the Official Gazette, is equivalent to a State law.

The Jewish Communities have been granted total exemption from import taxes for articles indispensable to religious rites, the Passover matzoth, sugar and articles necessary for teaching at Community schools.

Jews have the right to keep their commercial books in either Greek, French or Ladino. They have the right to observe the Sabbath instead of Sunday holiday, and administrative and judicial authorities do not have the right to summon Jews on Saturdays and on the days of their religious holidays, except in cases of extreme urgency.

This Law, which is still valid, efficiently regulated the functioning of the Greek Jewish Communities prior to the Holocaust and since then has continued to regulate it.

The only “Beth Din” that operated before the Holocaust was seated in Thessaloniki. It met with little success, mainly because its members were not granted the major security of irremovability.

Following the Holocaust a new state of affairs developed:
1) The population of the Communities was dramatically reduced and many Communities have ceased to exist.

2) The “Bathei Din” were abolished with the introduction of the Civil Code and jurisdiction over family disputes between Jews has been given to the State Courts which, on matters concerning the validity of marriage between Jews, must apply Jewish religious law. Considerations of re-establishing the “Beth Din” religious courts were abandoned due to the lack of the minimum number of Rabbis and Rabbinical Judges required. The “Bathei Din” operate to day with provisional members, exclusively for granting the “get” and “halitsa”.

3) There is no Chief Rabbi in any Greek Community and the number of Rabbis is very small. Thus, the Communities are actually represented before the authorities by the Presidents of their Boards of Directors.

4) After the War, and in order to meet the need for a coordinating organization during the difficult period of reconstituting the Communities, the Central Jewish Council for Coordination and Counsel was created, at first as a temporary solution. It became a permanent institution in the form of a moral entity under public law. It is elected by the Congress of the Greek Jewish Communities and deals with relations between the Communities and the State and between the Communities and international Jewish or non-Jewish organizations. It fulfills its purpose quite successfully.

An issue that presented itself in the aftermath of the Second World War, was that of the abandoned Jewish assets. During the German occupation of Greece, German authorities established a special administration to which, in theory, all Jewish movable and immovable property was to be surrendered before its owners were transferred to the concentration camps. Its purpose was, on one hand, to administer the property surrendered, and, on the other hand, to collect the property which departing Jews entrusted to their non-Jewish friends, partners or associates for safekeeping. In practice, however, things developed very differently. Immovable assets were surrendered to this administration, as they could neither be concealed nor plundered. The movable property of great value was taken over by the German officials and their collaborators. The merchandise belonging to large commercial enterprises was surrendered to collaborators of the Germans, officially in order to keep the enterprises in operation, actually so that they would sell everything and collect the profit in exchange for whatever services they had rendered to the enemy.

When the extent of the Jewish tragedy was realized, a decision had to be made as to the fate of this property, which was mainly immovable and belonged to persons exterminated in the concentration camps and who had died without leaving heirs or whose heirs had died with them. According to Greek law, the estate of a person who dies without leaving a last will and testament and who has no relatives up to the 4th degree, devolves to the State. The Greek State, not wishing to profit from the misfortune that hit its subjects, relinquished its right to this inheritance in 1946, by Law No. 846. In 1949, the Organization for the Relief and Rehabilitation of Greek Jews was founded, as a moral entity under public law, to which all the assets of Greek Jews who did not return from the Holocaust were relinquished. The purpose of this Organization was to restore the assets to the beneficiaries or their heirs, to administer the remaining assets whose beneficiaries did not present themselves within a certain time-limit, and to rehabilitate financially the surviving Jews who had been living permanently in Greece before 1st September 1939. This Organization is administered by a 9 member Board of Directors elected every three years by the Greek Jewish Communities’ Congress, and is composed of Greek Jews who are over 30 years of age.

The Jewish Communities that have survived in Greece following the storm of the Second World War are currently functioning within this legal framework. Adapting to the new, prevailing conditions was neither easy nor painless. The operation of many Jewish Community institutions is impossible, due to the dramatic decrease of their populations. The Communities, however, have shown admirable adaptability. Jewish life in Greece continues to thrive and the messages we receive cannot be considered as pessimistic.
The revival of Thessaloniki after the Ottoman conquest and the repopulation of the city were characterised by demographic discontinuities and heterogeneous population inputs, including the settlement of Jewish refugees. Various cultural groups, each having a common origin, language and culture settled in Thessaloniki during the 15th and 16th centuries. Each group gradually developed into a mahale, with specific spatial and cultural characteristics.

The question which arises is how did each mahale retain the same geographical form for four centuries? How realistic is the assumption that all the Muslim cemaats, Jewish communities and Christian parishes, purchased their land and kept it for hundreds of years solely by virtue of land market forces or mechanisms?

The answers may be found in non-commercial factors, or, at the most, a combination of commercial and non-commercial factors which interrupted the continuity of market conditions.

One relevant legal form during the 15th and 16th centuries was hazakah [occupation/possession]. However, an invisible method for resolving bankruptcy obligations was also developed in the beginning of the 20th century.

Hazakah

It is well known that Hazakah proper, generally applied to tenant protection, in terms of which no Jew was permitted to rent a house from a gentile owner, which was occupied by another Jewish tenant without the latter’s consent, a right the latter usually acquired after three years of occupancy.

The first relevant hascama [agreement] issued in Thessaloniki in 1494 reiterated the above rule, with the distinction that it not only required the tenant’s consent but also payment of compensation to him. This property right was transferable after the tenant’s death.

In following years, Jews started to buy properties from gentiles. In 1500, a new hascama was issued, prohibiting any Jew from possessing more than one residence and one shop concurrently. We do not know whether this new hascama was applied in practice. It could have resulted in the reduction of land purchases, obliging Jews to invest in money, merchandise and jewels. Moreover, the new hascama failed to provide a solution to the problem of Jewish tenants who used land belonging to Jewish owners. In the latter circumstances, the 1493 edict no longer protected the Jewish tenants.

In 1512, a third hascama provided that if any Jew purchased real estate from a...
Muslim owner, he had to compensate the Jewish tenant. This hascama revived an old ordinance, issued by the conference of Candia (1238) stating that even houses owned by Jews were included in the restrictions that protected the Jewish tenant. At a meeting of elders in Ferrara in 1554 it was resolved that “though the Christian owner sells his house, the right of the Jewish tenant to retain possession is unchanged”.

A fourth, rather severe hascama issued in Thessaloniki in 1520 points out that no real protection of the Jewish tenants was achieved. The hascama stated that no Muslim property rented by a Jew could be bought by another Jew, even if the Jewish tenant was given compensation.

In fact, hascama restricted the trend practised by wealthy Jews of purchasing all the land in the original Jewish quarters. At first, Sephardim settled in the southern sites of Thessaloniki near the harbour. The four hascamot sequence reflects the fact that the tenant problem remained open for a quarter of the century. These hascamot proved that all Jews gathered within the limits of a specific site. Had the huge land demand been left to be resolved by market forces, the southern blocs of Thessaloniki would have passed into the possession of the richest Jews. Poor elements would have had to move to other blocs in the city. But to the contrary, the hazakah hascama obliged Jews to rent or buy land all around the original site. This geographical development did not take the form of social division or spatial dispersal, both of which would have had a destructuring effect on the kehalim system. Indeed, the hascama as a whole resulted in a shift in the demand for urban land around the original Jewish site and established an equilibrium between demand and supply in the land market.

What happened during the following centuries? Were there legal structures producing the spatial divisions and preventing the dispersal normally brought about by market mechanisms?

Bankruptcies

The Jewish bankers of Ottoman Thessaloniki were an almost unique phenomenon.

These bankers worked in a money market. They bought and sold bills of exchange, relying on their excellent knowledge of the financial situation of the Jewish traders and their degree of creditability. As stop of payments due to commercial crises were frequent in Thessaloniki, these bankers accumulated great fortunes in land; as mortgagees often taking possession of bankrupted mortgagors’ properties.

The credit relations and the relevant bankruptcy procedures reproduced very old Rabbinical equities, resulting in the land being kept as either private or communal Jewish property.

Illustrative of this is the bankruptcy of the trader Semtov Israel, in 1906.

Semtov’s liabilities, amounting to 16,5 LT, were owed to 46 creditors.

The Director of Bank Orient reported that Semtov’s assets amounted to 5,800, covering only 35% of his liabilities. The Director also reported that the Bank, which had lent Semtov LT 695, was secured as follows:

* LT 140 in bills maturing in two months, accepted by R. Haim Covo and guaranteed by Maitre Salem, the famous solicitor.

* LT 278 in bills maturing in a year, accepted by Semtov and also endorsed by the merchant Moses Aellion.

Thus, the total value of the bills was LT 418; the Director proudly announced to his administration that Orient Bank was 60% secured, compared to 35% in respect of other creditors. He also implied that the difference was to be explained by his diplomacy.

This, of course, was not an accurate statement. Only the two-months bills were real money, the rest were high-risk notes. The reporting Director, Kleon Hadzilazaros, was a very experienced and rich banker, an old Thessalonian with very good connections to the Jewish community. Even a beginner in banking could understand that the deal was not perfect, let alone Hadzilazaros!

For me, this deal was a question mark, until I came across the method by which the old Rabbis approached bankruptcy.

According to the old Rabbis, the distribution of a fund was not made in proportion to the demands, but according to the number of creditors, none of whom, of course, was to be paid more than the full amount of his claim. If there were five creditors, and the smallest claim was less than one-fifth of the fund, it was divided in full; the rest of the fund being divided, on the same principle, among the other four creditors.

Applying the Rabbinical method to Semtov’s data, the first thirty-one creditors of the list should have taken LT 140, the thirty-third LT 115 and the last fifteen LT 100.

Now, we have to recognise that Orient Bank was given only LT 140 in secured bills.

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7 Ibid.
8 Encyclopedia Judaica, op. cit.
10 Nehama, op. cit.
11 Macedonian Historical Archives, Orient Bank, 2693/263.
Was the number 140 a coincidence? I think not.

First, the bills given to Orient Bank were accepted by R. Haim Covo. That meant that Semtov would have claims against him. This was impossible, because Covo came second in the list of Semtov’s creditors, with a substantial claim of LT 1380. Even if he was covered to the extent of 35%, why would he accept even an accommodation note?

Second, what about the Semtov’s real property? Under the banking customs of early twentieth century Thessaloniki, it was impossible for a Greek bank to lend considerable sums of money, unless the borrower possessed estates or interests in land of greater value. The Orient Bank claim was equivalent to the value of a comfortable house with gardens. Why did Hadjilazaros not ask for a share in the Semtov’s estate?

Third, Maitre Salem was a well-known solicitor, an advisor of European governments on serious matters. His intervention in the above case may be explained only if he was acting on behalf of the Jewish community.

I presume that Covo’s claims were secured by a mortgage over Semtov’s land. Under this condition, he would cover a proportion of the other claims against his mortgagor. Someone had to buy Semtov’s secured assets and compensate the other creditors. In this way, the latter were given bills and the land was kept by Jews. In this case, it is possible that Covo acted not as an independent creditor, but on behalf of the community.

Salem’s intervention resulted in the gentle creditors being kept out of the deal. His prestige was an additional guarantee to gentiles, besides Covo’s signature. This was exactly the role he played in the case of Modiano, five years after Semtov’s bankruptcy.

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Avraam Benaroya and the Impossible Reform

Spyros Marketos

Introduction

I am going to speak about Avraam Benaroya, Socialist extraordinaire, lawyer manque and protagonist of the workers’ movement in Greece. After a rapid sketch of the historical background and some biographical information, I am going to present the creation of the international Socialist movement of Salonika, its opinions on the national question, and Benaroya’s activity - initially in the Federacion and in the Communist Party that he founded, and then in cooperation with Socialist reformers. I will also mention the law, imposed by the latter when they governed Greece in 1924, against national and religious discrimination, and finally I will trace the development, after their defeat, of the powerful authoritarian and anti-Semitic discourse that came to dominate public life.

Actually law and constitution, not to speak of constitutional law, were considered rather less sacred than one might wish in Greece early in our century. The central rump of the country, i.e. Old Greece, by the way one of the first European States to accord legal equality to Jews, boasted exemplary political stability and freedom since the 1860s, notwithstanding the impoverishment of the common people. Modernity encroached, however, and the constitutional reform of 1911, implemented after a successful pronunciamento of the military, included both a redefinition of property rights that opened the way for the most embracing agrarian reform in Europe, and provisions for the substitution of the droit d’exception, of military law and the state of siege, for normal rights. From now on the State would actively intervene, by legal and not-so-legal means, both in the distribution of property and in the play of social and intellectual forces - a tradition proudly upheld to this day.

At that time, however, Avraam Benaroya was still a young misfit, living in the European part of the vast, multi-religious, multi-ethnic and multinational Ottoman Empire that stretched from Istambul, as the capital city was called by the dominant Turks, to the Adriatic. At the intellectual and commercial center of these provinces the flourishing port of Salonika was to be found, and at its lowest and poorest part, which extended then behind the quay, the Palia Paralia of today, one might encounter this lean figure: piercing eyes, mustachio, swarthy complexion and minuscule body - a prospective lawyer turned teacher turned printer but actually a professional revolutionary of the Bulgarian version of the Bolsheviks, the Tesniaki.

Avraam Benaroya and the Creation of the Federacion

Benaroya, born in this old center of the Balkans, Salonika, and speaking six languages fluently, soon came to know the peninsula from east to west and from north to south. Notwithstanding his special qualities, we may well see him as an archetypal

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Balkan revolutionary and as a representative figure of many Jews and Socialists in this part of the world. He grew up in Lundt, Bulgaria, in a Sephardic family of small merchants; studied law in Belgrade but did not graduate; instead he became a teacher in Plovdiv, Bulgaria, where he published, in Bulgarian, *The Jewish Question and Social Democracy*. He then returned as a Socialist organizer to Salonika immediately after the Young Turk revolution of 1908.¹

Idealistic and pragmatic at the same time, in Salonika he played a leading role in the creation, in 1909, of the mainly Jewish *Federacion Socialiste Ouvriere*, or simply, in Ladino, *Federacion*. The organization took this name because, built on the federal model of the Austrian Social Democratic Party, it was conceived as a federation of separate sections, each representing an ethnic element of Macedonia - Jewish, Bulgarian, Greek and Muslim. It initially published its propaganda in four languages: Ladino, Bulgarian, Greek and Turkish, but in practice the two latter sections were under-represented if not non-existent. The democratically organized *Federacion* soon became, under Benaroya’s leadership, the strongest Socialist party in the Ottoman Empire, created combative trade unions, attracted important intellectuals and gained a solid base of support among Macedonian workers; it also cultivated strong links with the Socialist International.² In 1910-1911 Benaroya managed its influential newspaper, the *Solidaridad Obradera*, printed in Ladino. Following the war of 1912, however, Salonika was incorporated in Greece, and Socialists faced unexpected dilemmas. A new world was now being shaped by merciless struggles among competing political and economic powers. Nationalism and capitalism, inaugurating a century of incessant strife, created through blood and iron national States in the place of the multi-ethnic Ottoman Empire. The material, human and moral cost was, of course, unimaginable.

The *Federacion* and the Labour Movement in Greece

Balkan military adventures started long before and finished long after the Great War. In September 1912 the conflagration between the Ottomans and the so-called Christian Balkan Powers broke out. Some months later, after the Sultan’s armies had abandoned the lands north and west of Adrianople, an even crueler blitzkrieg erupted in which Greece and Serbia took from Bulgaria most of her spoils. The Treaty of Bucharest, signed in the summer of 1913, did not bring peace to Greece. Tension persisted, resulting in violent ethnic cleansing of hundreds of thousands of Jews, Christians and Muslims alike, in Macedonia, Thrace and Asia Minor. Atrocities against defenceless populations became common currency all over the Balkans,³ preparing vicious wars that separated ethnic units with rivers of blood, strengthened their economic, political and cultural dependence, gave to the military a prime role in the State and to the State unprecedented power upon society, and, finally, cemented the translation of social conflicts into national terms. Anti-militarism, a staple of social-democratic propaganda and always cherished by the *Federacion*, now became a priority for many, Socialists and others.

In Greece itself chaos reigned in the New Provinces, where central authority was either unable or unwilling to protect the so-called “foreigners” from spoliation and persecution. Salonika was more prominent in the eyes of the world, and also more controllable, but Benaroya and friends passed many difficult hours. Venislos, the wily Liberal Prime Minister, opted for conciliation with its Jews; his enlightened ideals actually promised good prospects for capital and relative protection to labour. The policy of divide et impera, however, was an almost unavoidable option for the ruling elite, in view of the critical situation it faced in the New Provinces, extending from Mount Olympus to the present day northern borders of Greece, an area in which Hellenes faced strong national antagonists plus the anti-nationalist Socialism of the *Federacion*. Official treatment of “enemy races” as subhuman was even prepared by decades of obscurantist rhetoric, and it reflected racist doctrines long cultivated by prominent intellectuals with the support, among others, of the Court. Equally indebted, then, to the Panhellenism of the Megali Idea were the alternative policies between which the State was poised, on national purity on the one hand and of selective integration of “foreign elements” on the other.⁴

In the light of the new situation Socialist leaders, like Benaroya, had to address national oppression as well as economic exploitation, phenomena in some cases converging and in others divergent. As wars brought about huge replacements of power and property, official or unofficial expropriation of the “foreigners” became a clear way to defuse social tensions, to increase pressure on unwanted groups, and to create a cheap labour force. Jewish tobacco workers, for example, might be both exploited and oppressed as non-Greek elements, while Greek Orthodox poor of Salonika might refuse to pay rent to a Bulgarian proprietor, or even occupy houses of Donmes who had
found refuge in Constantinople. Jewish peddlers who were prohibited from plying their trade had few options except finding dependent and badly paid employment. Slav speaking peasants might side with the new regime, in which case they could easily divide Muslim estates where they had worked previously as little better than serfs, or support, for example, the Bulgarian cause and be expelled beyond the borders. In Old Greece the most prominent of them followed Venizelos, while the Federacion, adhering to its internationalist ideals, mobilized for neutrality, which also happened to be favoured by King Constantine and his militaristic entourage. Many organizations of Southern Greece actually approached the Federacion over this issue, while it lost the support of certain Greek Socialists in Macedonia.

From 1915 onwards, Federacion was buoyed by the popular reaction to the war. Both monarchist and Veniselist policy actually assisted the emancipation and the radicalization of the left, and Benaroya, keeping equal distance from both, established political groups, was quick to turn the situation to advantage. In the 1915 general elections, Federacion sent two deputies representing Salonika to the Greek Parliament, while it lost for a few votes a third seat. It already had strong links with internationalist groups and organizations all over Greece and abroad; from them the Socialist Workers Party was to spring up in due time. An interventionist Socialist tendency, however, headed by the future Prime Minister Alexandre Papanastassiou, and siding with Venizelos in foreign affairs, also elected deputies at the time.

Actually the national question more than any other kept the Greek left divided until the German occupation of the country, in the 1940s. Papanastassiou and other reform-minded Socialists practically collided with Venizelos’ liberal brand of nationalism. Benaroya and the Federacion, on the other hand, were influenced by the Austro-Marxists who, sensitive to matters national, searched for ways to utilize Socialism as a cohesive force in the decrepit Habsburg Monarchy; they elaborated the principle of personal autonomy, according to which national consciousness should be depoliticized and become a personal matter. Modern States should be based on free association and allow self-definition and self-organization of ethnic groups in cultural affairs, while a mixed parliament, proportionally representing all nations of the realm, should decide on economic and political questions. The Federacion traced the origins of its federative position to Balkan authors of the Enlightenment like Rhigas Veleslinis, and stressed that the forthcoming peace should exclude any change of borders or transfer of populations. The Socialist Workers Party, that was created on Benaroya’s initiative towards the end of the European War, followed closely

The Rupture between National and International Socialism

Old Greece Socialists, badly organized and in the main friendly to Venizelos, tried not to rock the boat and some even played the race card. They could not stomach that a non Hellenic and emphatically internationalist troupe, as they perceived Federacion, happened to be the strongest mass organization on Greek soil, and might even become the nucleus of the emergent Socialist party. Benaroya, however, achieved exactly that.

Through the incessant projection of Socialist critique, and the adroit handling of workers’ strikes the likes of which Greece had never seen,6 Benaroya broke the national barrier just after the normalization which came by the end of 1913. Internationalism and antimilitarism could well express the feelings and the experiences of many people who saw their families and their properties devastated by the war, while young and old, Greek and Muslim, Jew and Slav intellectuals, workingmen and working women, rallied to the concrete demands of the Federacion and gained important concessions and reforms. Benaroya himself though, together with another Jewish Socialist, was exiled for two and a half years at the island of Naxos, not exactly a tourist destination at that time. The Great War soon followed.

Initially Greece did not participate in it. The Court opted to give support to Kaiser Wilhelm, Queen Sophia’s brother, while the Prime Minister identified with the Entente, and gradually they polarized the body politic.7 The Socialists were equally divided.
Benaroya Approaches the Democratic Union

Benaroya’s tactical abilities which so amply contributed to the creation of the Federacion allowed, after an historic meeting with Veniselos, the building of the Socialist Workers Party and the General Confederation of Labour, which united the bulk of mobilized workers and Socialists of Greece and immediately became strong political players. His main achievement, however, lay beyond day to day tactics. He was much more than a simple translator of ideas: his hectic activity was guided by refined and original mental qualities that helped him analyze Balkan realities through the dominant Social Democratic codification of Marxism, and arrive at practical conclusions. Uncommon powers of mental abstraction helped him define, and when necessary redefine, strategic goals and orientations for the Socialist movement, while his also extremely effective persuasion imposed these strategic orientations on the left - that is, until 1923.

His choices proved so successful that the rise of the Socialist Workers Party and of the workers’ movement disturbed the government. Persecution followed, leading to a general strike in 1919. Subsequently, social and political polarization, as well as the prestige of the newborn Soviet Union, strengthened the radicals, and before long the party was affiliated to the Leninist Third International. The Labour Center of Salonika, another creation of Benaroya’s subtle vision, uniting more than twelve thousand workers of all nationalities, a good part of them Jews, became a focus of radical Socialism. The fall of Veniselos’ Government and the war in Asia Minor fuelled even more dissent, leading to antirat wars. In the wake of these developments Benaroya, thrown into prison again, as well as most of the leading lights of the party, were marginalized by the radicals. On the other hand, moderate Socialists under Papanastassiou started preparing their own revolution: their primary aim was now to overthrow the throne.

In 1922 the Greek army was defeated by the Kemalists and a military revolution ensued, which deposed King Constantine. It undertook many reforms, notably the distribution of big estates to peasants, but after a general strike it bloodily suppressed the workers. A little later, in December 1923, Benaroya, who preferred Social Democratic organizational models and opposed Bolshevisation, was expelled from the Communist Party and he was obliged to quit the management of its Salonika daily Avanti. Afterwards he focused his action on the Jewish community of Salonika, and participated in a splinter group that, with help from Papanastassiou, now Prime Minister, tried unsuccessfully to split the Communist Party. At that time he agreed with the new Prime Minister both on the need for reforms and not revolution, and on the priority of abolishing the monarchy. An equally urgent imperative, though, was combatting the racism and anti-Semitism which were often cultivated by the State authorities themselves.

Papanastassiou immediately passed the temporary Legislative Decree “On the Defence of the Republican Regime”, which imposed penalties on press attacks against the Republic and the minorities. It provided for at least three months’ imprisonment of anybody that “systematically distinguishes, through the press, for political objectives and disdainfully, the inhabitants of the country between natives and newcomers, Christian Orthodox or followers of other religions, speakers of Greek or of other languages, and the like, or ascribes to them scornfully any qualities or habits”. Even praising such practices was punished with imprisonment.

Resisting discrimination, then, was an essential part of the Socialist programs of both Papanastassiou and Benaroya. Mainstream political forces, however, Conservatives and Liberals alike, were angered by this decree. The reactionary judiciary prevented its implementation, and the military dictator Pangalos soon abolished it. We should not surmise from this, though, that all these abhorred the restrictions on free expression envisaged by the Socialists; quite the contrary.

A pertinent analysis of inter war liberal political thought was made by Charles Roig.8 According to Roig, this thought assimilated the experience of the Great War by developing two complementary terminologies: one of them focused on the irrational and pathological face of the war, while the other rationalized it and presented it as a normal state of things. It created new political grammars called wartime right, droit d’exception, or exceptional right, necessarily based on a “superior right”, on so called “principles”, “fundamental laws” and the like, by definition different from right but so imperative.
that they justified the abandonment of common legality. This process was completed in Europe before 1939, by which time “political-legal symbolism, as well as the current language of liberal democracies, had totally integrated verbal calculations of illegality, a transformation in which the notion of positive right contributed decisively. Fascism and Nazism constituted another process of transformation of political symbolism, while a third interrelated process was Bolshevism”.

The same phenomenon appeared in Greece during the wars of 1912-1922, was intensified in the Entreguerre and reached its apex in the 1940s, when the borders between liberal and fascist discourse were practically abolished. In fact, Greek politicians acted according to these “verbal calculations of illegality” even before they turned them into positive law, and perhaps even before they had organized them in a distinct discourse. Benaroya and the Democratic Socialists, on the other hand, were marginalized precisely because they would not follow any of these dominant transformations of political symbolism which led to authoritarianism.

After Papanastassiou’s fall, in the summer of 1924, the continuity between the oppression of “foreigners” and the persecution of Socialists became evident, and it crystallized in the development of republican varieties of fascism. The permanent eclipse of the rule of law in Northern Greece, or rather the State’s refusal to replace Ottoman oppression of these provinces with any form of Rechtsstaat, signified the convergence of the so-called Liberals with totalitarianism. Simple fascist recipes, however, did not fare well and proved unable to crush the left. Soon a part of the ruling elite turned to the Nazi model, systematically cultivating anti-Semitism as a means to divide the subalterns. The Jewish origins of Bolshevism, as well as the spectre of internationalism, were among the preferred slogans of this powerful current. As democracy waned, and repression of the minorities and of the left was entrenched, Democratic Socialism, of the kind envisaged by Benaroya, became more and more an impossibility.¹⁰

Epilogue

The defeat of Democratic Socialism - and let us note in passing that, as Benaroya’s example itself shows, Democratic Socialism did not always contradict revolutionary Socialism - meant the marginalization of its protagonists. Benaroya remained politically active after 1924 but as he stayed outside the principal political formations of the left, the communists and Papanastassiou’s Socialists, his capacity for action was increasingly restricted. In Salonika he had a difficult life, especially after the Liberals’ anti-Semitic turn, by the end of the 1920s, and the repeated coups d’état of 1935 that destroyed the Republic as well as the hopes of the democratic left. In the 1940s he lost a son in the war against Mussolini, survived the German concentration camps, and led a small Socialist party after his return to Greece. Disgusted by the dominant obscurantism, he emigrated to the promised land of Israel in 1953; he was then installed in Holon where he died in 1979, aged ninety two, in utter poverty but indomitable in spirit.

Strolling around Salonika one comes across many streets named in honour of fascist dictators, anti-Semitic army and police officers, bigoted third rate politicians and many many well meaning but otherwise unexceptional doctors, teachers and priests. Avraam Benaroya, in contrast, an extraordinary child of this city, who championed social justice and contributed more than most in the democratization of the political system, is absent. One can only guess whether his bigger crime was being a Jew or a Socialist, but there can be no doubt that his memory has been systematically suppressed.

His ideals, however, have all but become irrelevant. Economic exploitation, state oppression and nationalist conflict still create, in South Eastern Europe and in the Middle East perhaps more than elsewhere in this unstable because unjust world, tensions whose resolution is not in sight. Economic and political democracy, as well as the depoliticization of religious, ethnic and national difference, in other words the goals in pursuit of which Avraam Benaroya spent his tumultuous life, seem today more imperative than ever. One has not to be an extreme pessimist to predict that the contempt into which they are currently being held may presage new catastrophes, of a scale comparable to the Shoah.

1 On Benaroya see my article - “Federacion and the Roots of Greek Socialism”.
2 On Federacion see my article cited above, as well as George B.Leon, The Greek Socialist Movement in the First World War, 1973; and Antonis Liakos, The Socialist Workers Federation of Salonika and the Socialist Youth. Their Charters. Salonika.
4 On the alternative policies towards the minorities open to the Greek State in 1912-1914, see Spyros Marchetos, “The Integration of Sephardic Salonika in Greece and its Context, 1912-1914”, Athens, 1981.


9 On the period, see Spyros Marchetos, Alexandre Papanastassiou and his Time, Antimonies of Socialist Reform, Athens 1981, Ch. 10.

10 Certain articles of Benaroya have been published, e.g. Hopes and Deceptions, 1989. He also penned, in Greek, a history of the Greek workers’ movement with interesting autobiographical elements - The First Career of the Greek Proletariat.
Round Table: “Anti-Semitism and Holocaust Denial towards the 21st Century”

The Round Table commenced with the opening remarks of the Chairperson, Adv. Itzhak Nener, First Deputy President of the Association, Israel, followed by lectures given by Mr. Per Ahlamrkg, former Deputy Prime Minister of Sweden, Prof. Dr. Michael Brocke, Professor of Jewish Studies, University of Duisberg. Dr. George Margaritis, Professor of History and Archaeology, University of Crete, Greece, and Judge Hadassa Ben-Itto, President of the Association. Adv. Itzhak Nener, First Deputy President of the Association introduced the members of the Round Table Panel and initiated the discussion with a quotation from an eyewitness account of the transportation of Salonika’s Jews and a warning about the dangers of Holocaust denial.

ost of the Jews from Salonika were transported to Auschwitz and gassed there. A few transports were sent to Treblinka and to other extermination camps. A Holocaust survivor, Shmuel Wilenberg witnessed such a transport and described it thus:

“During those days of March 1943, a train’s whistle signaled the arrival of a new transport. This time, a most strange crowd issued forth from the cars. The new arrivals, with tanned faces and jet black, curly hair, spoke among themselves in an unrecognizable language. The baggage they took with them from the cars was tagged ‘Salonika’. Among the arrivals were intellectuals, people of high station, a few professors and university lecturers. While they had come all this way in freight cars, the strangest thing was that the cars had not been locked and sealed. Everyone was well-dressed and carried lots of baggage. Amazed, we eyed marvelous oriental carpets. We couldn’t take our eyes off the enormous reserves of food, the Salonika Jews took along a reserve of clothing. They all disembarked from the freight cars in perfect order. Attractive, well-dressed women, children as pretty as dolls, gentlemen, tidying up their lapels. Three German-speaking Greeks appointed as translators moved about with armbands embellished with the Greek colours. Not a single one of the new arrivals had grasped where he was and what his fate was to be. The truth only penetrated when they were being led naked, supposedly to the baths, and suddenly the first blows began to fall. When we looked at a man like that, we didn’t want to believe that only twenty minutes later he would end his life in the gas chamber.

A small quantity of gas was introduced into the chambers, and the process went on all night. They suffered for a long time until they breathed their last. They also suffered terribly before entering the chambers. The hangmen were jealous of the victims’ fine appearance and maltreated them much more.”

Today, fifty-five years after 6 million Jews perished in the Holocaust, there are
some who deny that the Holocaust ever occurred; there are some who deny that there were ever gas chambers, and there are also quite a few, in many countries, who have never heard about the Holocaust.

On the eve of a new century, is there a chance that we are approaching a new era, free of anti-Semitism, hatred and racial prejudice? Is there any chance that the three lies which have done special harm to the Jewish people: ritual murders, the Protocols of the Elders of Zion and that the Holocaust never took place - will die? Are there any grounds for the fear that the Holocaust in this or another form, will occur again? Have the people and States learned their lesson that hatred has no borders and suppress in time the recurrence of neo-Nazism and anti-Semitism?

There are some very disturbing signs.

Under the cover of democracy, freedom of speech and freedom of organization, the anti-Semites are again growing in strength.

The period between 1991 and 1996 was marked by a rise in expressions of anti-Semitism, resulting mainly from the collapse of the Communist block in discussions at the conference: (left) former President of the Supreme Court of Israel, Justice Moshe Landau; (bottom) participants at the Remember Salonika Conference.
Europe and the reunification of Germany.

In the last few months there has been another wave of anti-Semitism in some countries, because Jewish survivors asked for restitution of their property and assets robbed during the World War. Militant anti-Semitism has become a growing threat to Jews and anti-Semitism from Islamic sources has increased. A few months ago, the representative of the PLO on the Human Rights Commission in Geneva, supported by representatives of some other States, accused Israel of having caused 300 Arab children to become infected with AIDS. As no Arab children suffered from AIDS this lie did not last, although in the few months that it was spread it caused great hatred and anti-Semitic feeling.

While in recent years, anti-Semitism in various countries has taken a less violent form, neo-Nazi and anti-Semitic parties and organizations have spread, or, where already in existence - have increased their strength and impact on the political life of their respective countries, including countries where no Jews live.

What are the most effective means of combatting anti-Semitism? There are those who say that no means are effective as anti-Semitism is chronic and cannot be remedied. The war is lost. I hope this view is not accepted but that all possible ways are used to fight this disease and diminish its disastrous consequences.

Eli Wiesel, the Nobel Prize Winner and well-known writer, made the following pessimistic comment a short time ago:

“Anti-Semitism will remain. I think that in the year 2000 or sometime thereafter, there will be a change of awareness with regard to the Holocaust. There will be a day when good friends of ours will come and say: listen, you, we are with you. But it is enough. It is the year 2000 - the century is over, the millennium is over. Once a year we will come and cry with you on the Yom Hashoah.”

I hope that Eli Wiesel is mistaken. The memory of the Holocaust must remain not only as a tribute to the 6 million - a third of our nation, men, women and children who were burned, murdered, gassed, but also as a reminder - a danger sign of which people should be aware, the danger of anti-Semitism and its implications.

It is of special importance that the Vatican has changed its basic attitude and recognized the terrible injustice done to Jews over many centuries. While the Vatican’s recent statement on the Holocaust falls short of recognizing the Church’s direct link to the persecution and murder of Jews, it is an important tool for combatting anti-Semitism.

There are Holocaust Museums, books, special teaching programmes in some countries; yet it seems that all this is not enough. The anti-Semites, neo-Nazis groups and especially the Holocaust deniers have unlimited funds at their disposal; they have succeeded in activating a number of intellectuals, not only in Europe but also in the USA and other countries. They have no museums, but they do have so-called historical institutes, they have published many books, periodicals and even some pseudo-scientific studies.

Another way of fighting anti-Semitism and the denial of the Holocaust, which is part of anti-Semitic propaganda, is by legislation prohibiting expressions of anti-Semitic, xenophobia and denial of the Holocaust. There are few countries which have passed such legislation, those which have include Belgium, France, Germany, Austria, Switzerland and Spain. However, even in those countries which have adopted some legislation, a problem exists of leniency in the application of the law against offenders and, in some cases, inability or reluctance of the authorities to persecute.

Another problem we are currently facing, is the racist and anti-Semitic propaganda spread through the computer and electronic networks by various hate groups, including deniers of the Holocaust. The Internet, in particular, is used by them to disseminate lies. One such person is Garaudy, a French convert to Islam and hater of Jews, who has also visited Greece in a mission to persuade his listeners that the Holocaust is a lie and that the Greek Jews were not wiped out.

To date no legal method has been found to prevent hate propaganda on the Internet. Until such a way is found, the Internet must also be used as a means of countering the messages of hate. Unfortunately, in some countries, freedom of speech and organization are regarded as overriding the necessity to fight against racism, anti-Semitism, xenophobia and hate. These countries have forgotten what misuse of unrestricted freedom of speech and organization brought to Germany: Nazism and Hitler, and disaster to many States and peoples.
Let me confess how foolish I was when first told about the denial of the Holocaust. It happened more than twenty years ago when I first met Elie Wiesel in New York City. Elie was warning me of the growing danger from those who pretend that the Holocaust never occurred. This is just the beginning, he said, this theme will become a centerpiece of a new Nazi movement.

My reaction was incredibly naive. Could this really be dangerous? I asked. It is like denying that Japan attacked America at Pearl Harbor or claiming that the Battle of Britain never took place. This is a joke!

No, it was not a joke at all. On the contrary, it has become the nucleus of neo-Nazi agitation. Wiesel was right when, in the 1970s, he saw what was coming.

In the 1980s, this became even more evident. Anti-Semitic agitation has renewed its evil message in at least two ways:

First, anti-Zionism has become very similar to anti-Semitism. Old stereotypes directed against the Jews have returned, now often directed against the Jewish State. This is especially obvious when it comes to phrases and images about the so-called “Jewish power” and the “Jewish urge to dominate the world”. Anti-Zionists often also exploit words which have been connected to Jewish suffering and are now using them against Israelis and Jews. Thus, the War in Lebanon in 1982 was a “Holocaust”; West Beirut was the “new Warsaw ghetto”; the struggle against the PLO - “genocide”; Israel aims at the “extermination” of the Palestinians, while the Star of David has been reshaped into the Swastika.

The purpose of these expressions is to make the Israelis look like the Nazis, or, in the blunt language of anti-Semites - the Israelis are the new Nazis. This is both a trivialization of Nazi-Germany and a demonization of Israel. It was once the nucleus of Soviet anti-Semitism and has since spread to some Western countries as well as to the Arab world.

Second, there is the allegation that the Holocaust is a Jewish invention. There were no gas chambers, deniers of the Holocaust say; the Nazis never tried to exterminate the Jewish people.

From one perspective, the two themes read together, are illogical. First, the terrible Israelis behave like the terrible Nazis; secondly, the Nazis were not so terrible at all.

But logic has never protected us from anti-Semitic demagoguery, and on another level these two propaganda lines are not incompatible. The comparison between the Israelis and the Nazis is intended to indicate that Nazi-Germany was a sort of “normal” regime. The deniers also pretend that the Nazis did not commit the crimes of which they are accused, and consequently again that the Third Reich was more or less normal.

Of course we understand that those who lie about the crimes of the Nazis are those most likely to repeat them. They
deny the Holocaust for the reason that they themselves are inclined to complete what Hitler did not have time to carry out.

The perversion here is obvious. The deniers claim: these Jews were never killed. But they are evidently not alive. Thus, six million European Jews were never here on our planet - the ultimate annihilation.

I founded the Swedish Committee Against Anti-Semitism fifteen years ago. The denial of the Holocaust immediately became our most important field of study and resistance. What struck us then was how seldom well-known personalities made statements in order to warn and defend the world against the deniers.

In 1990, Elie Wiesel took the initiative to a big international conference in Oslo, under the title The Anatomy of Hate. I drafted a resolution condemning the denial of the Holocaust, which read in part:

“By lying about the Holocaust, the Jew-haters try to destroy memory. The purpose is to clear Nazism from its criminal stigma and rehabilitate anti-Semitism.

By accusing the Jews of having invented the Holocaust in order to make non-Jews feel guilty, they transform the crime into an allegation against the victims. First the anti-Semites take Jewish lives; a few decades later they take their deaths from them too.”

Among those who signed were President Havel; Nobel Laureates Nadine Gordimer and Elie Wiesel; Shlomo Avineri, Conor Cruise O’Brien, Harlem Desir, Günter Grass, György Konrad and Adam Michnik; the present Prime Minister of Norway Kjell Magne Bondevik; the present head of the WHO Gro Harlem Bruntland; the present Foreign Minister of Poland Bronislaw Geremek, the former French Minister of Culture Jack Lang; and Ida Nudel, Abe Rosenthal, the late Eli Kedouri and others. But some people refused to sign, and I will never forget the reaction of the US economist, Professor John Kenneth Galbraith, who loudly condemned our efforts and declared that “We make fools of ourselves by protesting against this nonsense.”

Today, this incident would be unthinkable. Even among shallow diplomats, politicians and journalists it has now become fairly well-known that worldwide Nazi groups regard Faurisson and Irving, Zündel and Leuchter, as their teachers and idols.

We are facing several risks here. The Holocaust is now being transformed from Memory to History. If we fail here, anti-Semitism might again explode in some of our countries. Of course, education about hatred of Jews is not enough, but without efficient teaching we are all in danger.
A decade ago, a radio station called Radio Islam appeared in Stockholm. It had nothing to do with Islamic studies. Professor Yehuda Bauer, then at the Hebrew University, analyzed transcripts of broadcasts and concluded that these were the worst anti-Semitic broadcasts in Europe since World War II. Jewish power is “like a cancer and AIDS” against which we cannot defend ourselves, said Radio Islam. “I welcome, I welcome a new Hitler” proclaimed the editor, Ahmed Rami.

However, the major theme of this radio station was the denial of the Holocaust. The Final Solution was a “hoax” which the Jews want us to believe, said Radio Islam. Rami repeatedly returned to the “gas chamber legend”, the purpose of which, he claimed, was to raise money and attract sympathy for the Jewish people and the Zionist state.

During the first of several trials against Radio Islam, our committee received very little support. Only a few newspapers and politicians were with us. Most remained silent. A number of writers and journalists even defended the broadcasts by saying that they were about “Palestine” or “theology”. Thus, most people in Sweden at the end of the 1980s did not recognize basic Nazi propaganda when they met it.

After Radio Islam was convicted of more than 20 counts of defamation of the Jewish people, public opinion slowly changed. The station was closed; the editor sentenced to six months in prison. Nevertheless, we still did not get support from the head of government. On the contrary, both a Socialist Prime Minister (Ingvar Carlsson) and later a Conservative Prime Minister (Carl Bildt) were indifferent. They were asked to make statements and refused. But we needed the moral and economic backing of the Cabinet itself. We got it only a decade later.

In 1997, a new Prime Minister, Göran Persson, opened his morning paper and read an opinion poll on Swedish grammar and secondary school students and their ignorance about the Holocaust. He was taken aback, brought the newspaper to the Cabinet table and started work on an educational campaign. The scope of it and the ambition are unique.

With the full cooperation of all the ministries, the government will set up a national centre for scholarly research and education about the Holocaust at the Upsala University. A number of other projects regarding Nazism and racism will be conducted at other universities. All Swedish citizens, young and old, are being offered a new book on the Holocaust.

This book, written by Stéphane Bruchfeld and Dr. Paul Levine, “Tell ye your children...” is knowledgeable, balanced and well-written. The title is borrowed from an appeal in the Bible:

“Tell ye your children of it, and let your children tell their children, and their children another generation” (Book of Joel, 1:3).

The Prime Minister, in a letter, offered the book to all households, free of charge. He estimated that about 20-40,000 would respond and that about 100,000 copies altogether would be enough. To date 900,000 books have been printed in the Swedish language and distributed; the numbers are rising and form a significant proportion of our population of less than 9 million people.

In Britain, for example, this would be equivalent to 5 million books, or in the US to 20 million copies. The book may be ordered at post offices, in book shops, on the Internet, through ads in the newspapers, magazines, over the phone and by fax. A first edition has also just been published in English. Before the year is over, the book will also be distributed to immigrants in Sweden who order it. Accordingly, it is now being printed in a number of our major immigrant languages, among them Arabic, Bosnian, Croatian, Serbian, Finnish, Persian, Spanish and Turkish. This will probably be one of the few scholarly accurate books on the Holocaust in Arabic. It has been suggested in our Parliament that part of our aid to the Palestinian Authority in Gaza should be a large number of “Tell ye your children...” in Arabic for Palestinians, in order to allow them to better understand what the Jewish people have gone through in our century.

We have an additional idea for our neighbours in the Baltic States. Some of us have experienced how difficult it is to obtain truthful education about the Holocaust in those three countries. In Latvia, for example, some people in power have admitted that a large number of Latvians collaborated with the Germans in the murder of more than 95% of Latvian Jewry. They have promised to write new history text books telling the truth but have not done so.

Accordingly, we are now considering translating our book into the Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian languages and then printing many thousands of copies as part of our educational assistance to these States. Young people there have
the right to know of the genocide also committed on their own soil and with the consent of some of their own people.

Other projects include establishing a Holocaust Memorial Museum in Stockholm at the beginning of the next decade. Various kinds of materials will be distributed in Swedish school teacher-parent meetings, and discussions will be held on compassion, tolerance, xenophobia and human rights. Schools will be given access to films on anti-Semitism and videos will be made available to teenagers on the destruction of European Jewry.

Teachers all over the country will be given the opportunity to attend seminars on hatred of Jews, White Power music and neo-Nazi organizations. Members of Parliament and heads of public administrations will visit concentration camps in Poland and Germany. Information packages will be made available when teachers and their students go to the death camps. The government has given experts the task of opening a web site on anti-Semitism, aiming at young people and teachers.

Commemoration meetings regarding the Holocaust have been held not only in Parliament but also in most of our municipalities. Inauguration of a monument honouring the victims of the Holocaust is planned for September 1998 in Stockholm. Exhibitions will travel between several museums around the country.

The government has given state grants to the Swedish Committee Against Anti-Semitism in order to organize highly qualified study tours for influential opinion-makers, visiting extermination camps in Poland and Yad Vashem in Israel. Economic support is also being granted to those survivors of the Holocaust who are willing to give testimony at schools and other public institutions.

The Prime Minister has asked Professor Yehuda Bauer to serve as chief advisor for the whole project, a position which he has accepted.

In June this year, representatives from the United Kingdom and the United States were invited to Stockholm to discuss how we could intensify and coordinate educational projects regarding the Holocaust towards the 21st Century. The British, Swedish and US governments have established a task force for international cooperation, again with Professor Bauer as independent advisor. This group will meet in September to work out an action oriented report to be presented to a conference to be held in Washington on November 9, 1998, exactly 60 years after Kristallnacht.

In June this year, Under Secretary of State Stuart Eizenstat issued his latest report on behalf of the US State Department. It is a thorough investigation of U.S. and Allied Efforts to Recover and Restore Gold and Other Assets Stolen or Hidden by Germany during World War II. Its analysis of how neutral countries helped Nazi Germany during the war contains a detailed, accurate and very, very dark description of Swedish foreign policy at the time. But it also recognizes what has been done in the last year - “Certainly no country has recently made a more significant investment in encouraging its people to learn the lessons of history than Sweden.”

Finally, the time may now be ripe for a new effort in Europe. Most Central and East European countries wish to become members of the European Union. Some are almost desperate to join as soon as possible. Among these are countries which have been plagued for centuries by anti-Semitic prejudice.

The EU principles for enlargement have already been adopted. The first principle of the Copenhagen Declaration states: Membership requires that the candidate country “has achieved stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights, and respect for and protection of minorities”.

“Respect for and protection of minorities”: I have urged the Swedish government to interpret these words extensively. A candidate country should have both an efficient legislation against defamation of minorities and an efficient education about anti-Semitism and the Holocaust.

Together with the IAJLJ we could now start trying to convince politicians and diplomats, who will negotiate for the 15 EU - members, that these conditions should be presented explicitly to the candidate countries in East Europe.

For the last 15 years I have made speeches in many countries on anti-Semitism, complaining also about the ignorance and indifference in my own country. But today I am a little proud of Sweden for trying to protect history and fight the deniers.

The reason why this is crucial is clear. Anti-Semitism always starts with the Jews but never stops with the Jews. When anti-Semites attack the Jews, or try to destroy memory, they attack all of us. Let us therefore together fight this old-new anti-Semitism with all our energy and strength.
“Memory Must Unite the Cognitive, Rational and the Effective, Emotional”

Michael Brocke

Let me begin with a somewhat personal statement prompted by being with you for two days in this beautiful Mediterranean city of Salonika, taking part in your commemoration and your testimony, ‘Remember Salonika’. Remember Salonika Hebraica, its glorious past spanning two millennia and its utter destruction by Germany. There is, alas, no more fitting title to your conference than ‘Remember Salonika’, and I am deeply impressed by the manifold ways taken by your Association in order to achieve both commemoration and testimony. Remembrance both in general and in particular vivifying Jewish lawyers and jurists of several centuries, of Jewish and Jewish Greek Salonika. We are also realizing the need to unite those emotional effective aspects with the rational, cognitive side of memory. For memory to endure and to be transmitted, it must comprise both aspects. The cognitive, rational, factual and the effective and emotional, appealing to the senses and to the heart. This must be done by lawyers for lawyers and it must be done in Salonika for Salonika. Doing this the way you do it, building and buttressing memory, is a most important aspect of fighting anti-Semitism, however small and particular it may seem at first glance. Anti-Semitism is the perennial movement seeking to destroy memory. First and foremost, the memory of those whose own memory is concerned, destroying people and taking away or striving to take away their memory. By denying the truthfulness of memory as well as of the facts themselves, the anti-Semites also wish to remove the memories of the perpetrators of the crime and of those standing by: making their memories indifferent and hostile to memory.

Anti-Semitism, as a totally destructive force, also tries to be total in its coverage of human faculties. Much of the denial of the Shoah seems to be rational. The so-called revisionist history deals with facts, numbers and procedures, creating an air of objective appeal to knowledge and logic. We all know, however, that this is doubly deceitful and does not stand up to reason; strong emotions show up at any given moment, hatred is lurking everywhere in secret and openly, anti-Semitism seems to cater for many emotional needs, with its pseudo promise of pseudo redemption from guilt, from shame and from the memories thereof.

I have been able to witness Germany’s fight against German anti-Semitism over the last three or four decades, and I am glad to say that there has been visible success over the years and a tangible improvement. To the best of my knowledge, there is much less anti-Semitism in Germany today than there was 20, 30, or, of course, 60 years ago. I cannot quantify this into statistics, but I would venture to say that about 15-20% of the population is still in the grip of stronger forms of anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism. These are residual forms of anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism, which are both religiously induced and xenophobic or racist. It is well to know, therefore, that the German Penal Law code contains several articles strongly curbing incitement, denigration, xenophobic utterances and the so-called Auschwitz lie, punishing these offences with up to 3 or 5 years imprisonment: Articles 86, 86A, 130, 131, 220 A have all been added over the years for this purpose. This has helped to curb the

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proliferation of oral and written materials of revisionists and denials, and to helped to curb it significantly, in a way which should encourage you as lawyers and jurists to try and achieve the same results in other countries. While helping and showing results, the articles have been implemented too leniently over the years in Germany.

Penal law, of course, is not enough and I am personally glad to witness a strongly positive cultural and cultural-religious development in Germany in the form of an unswerving and on going interest over the last one or two decades, in the past and in all things Jewish. This is an interest which has grown very slowly over the years but is now gaining momentum, to generate broad public attention, and more important it has begun to reach into all venues of life. It has reached nearly all strata of society, through autobiographies, novels, movies, theatre and music, in academia and in the arts. This is important because it individualizes exchange, it individualizes knowledge and it individualizes memory, and it makes memory available in many diverse fields of cultural, intellectual, and religious activities.

I am not stating this in order to flatter Germany or flatter myself, as a witness of this broad movement of learning. The ignorance of many people in connection with Jews and Judaism is, in part, still abysmal. I dare to say this, however, because it has had a new effective and emotional aspect. It is not only rational, cognitive learning of facts and figures as it was in the 60s or 70s; it has gained a new quality by making individual life stories accessible and by painting the much larger and broader canvas of Jewish history, culture and life. I do not wish to exaggerate but it must be said that much if not most of this is due to the existence of the State of Israel, and due to the intense and extensive links created over the decades between Germany and Israel, and between Germans and Israelis. The State of Israel is, I think, particularly important for the younger generation, since they make up much of the positive and genuine interest in Jewish history and life. There is a young intellectual and academic elite today and a growing student body which is most actively concerned with serious learning about Jewish history and life and about the Holocaust. It is not just love of Kleismmer music and the like. Those who know want to know more, and those who do not know do not want to know. So they are learning enthusiastically about the Holocaust and about Jewish history and life in general and are transmitting that knowledge as teachers and political and religious educators. This is good but the battle is far from being won. Anti-Semitism has many ugly faces, and it generates new ones all the time. Anti-Semitism is a strongly provocative feature in today’s democratic societies. Anti-Semitism as a provocation of politically correct people, is attractive to many who loathe democracy; anti-Semitic hatred is a powerful tool of resentful extra-parliamentary opposition; opposition to issues totally unrelated to Jews and Judaism.

Germany does have now, among its very young people, a slowly growing minority of right-wing extremists, beginning with hooligans and skin heads and moving to well-kempt and well-dressed young professionals, bankers and brokers. It is far from being the province only of the jobless, as some politicians like to say, who may not be anti-Semites from the outset but who are prone to fall prey to anti-Semitic propaganda very fast, because these people seem to enjoy violence for the sake of violence. I pick up this aspect only because it is a new phenomenon, with which Germany does not yet know how to deal. We have already had ideological violence, xenophobic violence, neo-Nazi violence, and pseudo-motivated violence of all kinds but now we have violence for its own sake, for the fun of it. It is a deeply cynical world view that is not interested in revisionist history at all, or in Holocaust denial. When it is outspokenly anti-Jewish, it affirms the Holocaust, it openly rejoices in it, and adds other genocidal facts to affirm its stance. Even if this tiny group remains a tiny minority, it is extremely dangerous. I am utterly at a loss to know what to do about this group but perhaps an indirect answer is possible. A recent comparative study of youths of between 14-21 years of age in two lande [2 of the 16 federal states in Germany] in Brandenburg in the east and Westphalia in the west, investigated anti-Jewish and anti-Israeli attitudes. The study had some helpful results. Not surprisingly, the antagonistic feelings were higher in the East, standing at about 9%, compared to 4-5% in the West. But there was one question which generated very interesting results. The youth were asked with whom they would like to speak about these topics - i.e., the history, religion, culture, persecution and Holocaust of the Jews and the State of Israel. In all the samples of every age group and school system, including those who were indifferent to these topics or were even somewhat hostile to being taught these topics, the groups scoring
highest among possible dialogue partners - family, teachers, people from universities, political parties, etc. - were Jews. Jewish dialogue partners scored very high percentages, ranging from 70% down to 25% among those who did not want to learn anything about these issues. This is an expression, I think, of the emotional need to be confronted with authentic memory; the wish to talk to living persons.

I can fully understand that need. Since coming to Israel over 35 years ago, I have been gratified at the human warmth and the life of Jewish memory and commitment to life, and it is my wish that many young people might experience this memory, if only in the course of a lecture in a school room, a meeting, a dialogue, or a confrontation. I am in no position to invite your organization to come to Germany for one of the planned memorial conferences, but I would ask you to consider it, you are very well aware of the manifold contributions of German Jewish Halachists, rabbis, lawyers and jurists to Jewish law, German law and international law systems and thinking. In any case I wish to assure you of the intense cooperation of my colleagues, our students and myself and many others in the battle against anti-Semitism. Let us join our very different memories, let us join them in one enduring testimony.
Anti-Semitism in Greece

George Margaritis

The question I wish to develop in today’s discussion regards Greek anti-Semitism. In particular, it concerns policies, movements, and ideologies with an anti-Semitic tendency which have appeared within Greek territory from the 1821 revolution up to the present. The question is difficult and there are no obvious answers, principally, because it does not require answers. Official and unofficial declarations have specifically stressed that such an issue has never existed in Greece, and consequently the question and any discussion of it is unnecessary. This could be simply a “diplomatic” opinion which, even though contradicting numerous historic events, has its own function - it discourages the manifestation of such events; nevertheless, it complicates the situation, as it presents self-evident facts as radical and subversive.

On the other hand, in historiography, these subjects are so rarely examined, that whoever wishes to develop them further, will never rise above the rank of an amateur. Amateurs who, moreover, navigate in deep waters. This is because it is extremely difficult, when considering the subject of anti-Semitism, which recently reached the absolute horror of the Holocaust, to define causes and dimensions, to specify exactly the measure in such a manner as not to lose perspective, not to cancel pogroms and “final solutions” in a theory of general and absolute anti-Semitism. In other words, to maintain a hierarchy, totally and partially, like in respect of Greek anti-Semitism, even though we might feel that in the end, in its small measure, it still forms a part of the tragic whole.

In the first decades of the State’s existence, the Jewish presence was limited. Massacres and deportation of the Jewish population from the areas of insurrection had limited the Jewish communities to towns which were given to the Greek government under treaties at the end of the revolution (Halkida mainly). Owing to this peculiarity, a reflection of anti-Semitism, more than an actual anti-Semitic movement, appeared in the young Greek State. The anti-Jewish attitude was aggravated by situations and conflicts which took place outside the country’s borders, especially in areas where colonial Hellenism competed with Jewish communities in the open game of economic penetration and prevalence. Rumania, South Russia, the Ottoman towns, and mainly Alexandria, were the schools of Greek anti-Semitism. At the same time, the press attentively observed the relative developments on Greek territory and repeated - in the manner of journalism - practice and theory.

This situation changed in 1864 with the incorporation of the Eptanese and in 1881 with the incorporation of Thessaly and Arta, areas with significant Jewish communities. Greek society, for the first time had to confront a powerful Jewish presence. Reactions were not identical but differed from one area to another, and from decade to decade. The preservation of Moslem populations in Thessaly, for example, and local social flexibility, imposed policies of partnership which reduced conflict. In contrast, on the Ionian islands, the situation was aggravated by the departure of the British authorities. The equal-handed policy of the latter, could hardly be continued by the Greek authorities who were under great pressure from Christians to restrict Jewish rights.

The anti-Semitic explosion commenced in Kerkira, in April 1891. It should be noted that this was the beginning of a decade of particularly intense anti-Semitic activity. The prevailing context

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in Europe was generally favourable for the outburst of riots even though those in Greece preceded several corresponding manifestations in the West. The consequences of the anti-Jewish demonstrations in the 1880s in Egypt, already in turmoil because of the Machiavists, and the active role of the Jewish population there, must have further influenced developments.

The obviously hostile attitude of a wide social range of the Christian population, and of the Greek government and authorities is also a point of interest. The latter were not only particularly slow and hesitant in revealing the obvious plot which started the riots (namely, the discovery of the body of a ritually molested and massacred Jewish girl) but the measures they applied to arrest the riots were worse for the Jewish communities than the riots themselves. The long isolation of the Jewish quarters by the army resulted in hunger and misery, and was also the cause of a predatory black market with the isolated population as victims. The government only became troubled by events when they reached the point of a diplomatic incident, namely, when the warships of the Great Powers arrived in the port of Kerkira to undertake the protection of the Jewish community.

In the 19th century, Greek anti-Semitism had archaic characteristics. The prevailing accusation against Jews was the kidnapping and ritual sacrifice of Christian children, and the consequent fears were widespread at every level of society. With the arrival of the 20th century, the features of anti-Semitism were gradually transformed. In the areas claimed by Greece, particularly Macedonia, the presence of the Jewish population was significant, and resulted in an approach being applied to them which was part of the Great Idea. During the Macedonian War of Independence, the anti-Jewish tendencies of groups and chieftains were checked by the central government which saw no reason to widen the enemy front. However, after 1913, the Jewish presence in Salonika progressively appeared as an obstacle to the national homogeneity of the area.

It is difficult to speak of concentrated anti-Semitism during this period, rather there was a tendency towards antagonism and mistrust of the Jews on the part of the local population and an anti-Jewish policy on the part of the authorities. The re-planning of the Jewish quarters of Salonika, following the 1917 fire, exemplified this policy, which, however, hesitated to go beyond certain limits in such turbulent and threatening times. In the social context, the anti-Jewish attitude strengthened, having been formed mainly after the exchange of populations and the arrival of a great number of refugees into the town. Under the new conditions, the Jewish community appeared to be an anomaly, an island of difference in a rapidly more religiously and racially homogeneous area, while at the same time becoming the target of a great portion of the general discontent felt by the refugee groups.

Anti-Semitism in Salonika became a movement in the beginning of the 1930's. As in 1891, Europe as a whole was on the threshold of seeing a revival of the phenomenon. But once more the Greek manifestation seems to have preceded corresponding European events. Particular coincidences are of course significant. The first symptoms of international and also Greek economic crisis made their appearance, while following the Greek-Turkish treaties of 1930, the refugees lost every hope of returning to the east or of significant indemnities. Thus, at the end of June 1931, there were extensive anti-Semitic riots in Salonika, this time not on the pretext that Christian children had been kidnapped and sacrificed, but that there was a conspiracy against Greek Macedonia.

The social basis of the riots was also significant, with a major portion of the responsibility attributable to the refugees. Numerous nationalist organizations led by the Tria Epsilon (National Union of Greece) guided and supplied the theory behind the riots, while once more, just like in Kerkira forty years before, the reaction of the government was, to say the least, ambiguous. The government reacted only when the matter exceeded national limits, namely, when the country was accused of being a source of anti-Semitic activity. It should be recalled that these events occurred in 1931 and practically no one could suspect the proportions anti-Semitism would reach in the near future. Disturbances in relation to the still nationally sensitive capital of Macedonia, caused apprehension in the government and led to the application of strict measures. Naturally, this did not hinder the transformation of the consequent trials into parodies of justice, nor the periodical incitements of Tria Epsilon by subsequent governments until Metaxas.

The manifestation of anti-Semitic feelings in Greece under the occupation, and the attitude to the Nazi “Final Solution” in our country, closed a chapter. Naturally, the crudeness and extension of the Jewish Holocaust went beyond the intentions, the capacities and the ideology of the Greek population and leaders, the occupation governments and
the members of the public administration. There was no significant anti-Jewish movement in occupied Greece, notwithstanding the revival of *Tria Epsilon* and small organizations of a Nazi nature. On the other hand, there was no extensive movement in support of the Jewish population of the country which was under threat of extinction, even though the future which awaited the Jews was widely known (in the deportations of 1944: Giannena, Kerkira, Rhodes, etc.)

There were some protests, some letters, and a few public manifestations of disapproval on the part of the occupation government, occupation authorities, leading personalities and the church. However, in no case did the reaction to Nazi measures proceed further. For example, there was no resignation of government, public or church officials motivated by the deportation and extinction of Greek citizens of Jewish faith. Furthermore, the silence of the Resistance on the same issue is at least surprising. Even though the Resistance groups rarely denied their support to Jews in hiding, the whole issue was never considered worthy of being included significantly in the list of Nazi atrocities in Greece. This silence was not only directed towards the occupation period. The reaction of Greece to the Holocaust was as anaemic as in other European countries, and that was the reason why the catastrophe reached the same proportions in Greece.

More may be said about the embarrassment of the Greek State towards surviving Jews, in the years immediately after the war: about their mobilization in the civil war; the many ambiguities on the issue of their property; about society’s desire to rapidly close the subject and the questions, in those places where the history of Jewish communities ended violently; about the dismissal of memory, still occurring today, which resulted in the construction of monuments to the Holocaust becoming a political issue.

The rest is a question of terminology. In independent Greece, the method of dealing with Jewish communities by society and the State, is mainly negative, effectively corresponding to the general phenomenon currently defined as anti-Semitism. Certainly the proportions of the phenomenon in this case are subject to historical singularities and coincidences. Certainly also, there were exceptions in Greece as in all other places, reflected by a resistance against general tendencies, and periods of peaceful and creative coexistence.
If I was to name a single document which has done the most harm to Jews in modern times, I would not hesitate to name the Protocols of the Elders of Zion. The myth of a Jewish conspiracy to gain world domination was not born with the Protocols, but in the past it always appeared in works of fiction and thus its appeal was limited to certain fanatical groups. The theory achieved legitimacy in the eyes of the public at large, only when it appeared in the guise of a political document always accompanied by a foreword describing its origin and the occasion of its composition, complete with names, dates and the full story of its discovery - a story which varied from one edition to another, but was always so dramatic that it could compete with any best-selling thriller.

The document first made its appearance in print at the beginning of this century, in the Russian language, in Tsarist Russia; first in 1903, in the Russian newspaper Znamia, published by the well known “Black Hundreds”, and two years later in the form of a book by a Russian religious fanatic, Sergei Nilus, who, to this day is marked in every publication of the Protocols as their first publisher.

Between 1905 and the end of the First World War, the Protocols did not appear in any other language but Russian, and were used in Russia for internal purposes, to incite against Jews and, in the main, to blame them for the revolution, which was presented as part of the Jewish conspiracy. It was only after the revolution that Russian officers of the White Army, who fled Russia, took the Protocols with them and thus launched their international career. Between 1919 and 1921 the Protocols were published in almost every language, and in some languages, such as German, they appeared in numerous editions. They were hailed by politicians and by journalists as an authentic document which explained not only the Russian revolution, which by that time was causing a “red scare” around the world, but also as the reason for the Great War, which had caused the death of so many millions. Surprisingly, the Protocols were used in this sense both by the Allies and by their German enemies, who suddenly found common ground in blaming the Jews. The Times of London wrote on May 8, 1920: “Has the British Empire, by straining every fiber of its national body, escaped a ‘Pax Germanica’ only to fall

Judge Ben-Itto laying the Association’s wreath at the Memorial to Salonika’s Jews.

Judge Hadassa Ben-Itto, President of the Association, is the author of the recently published book on The Protocols of the Elders of Zion, in Hebrew and German (it’s title in English is The Lie that Wouldn’t Die).
into a ‘Pax Judaica’?”. It then went on to say: “The Elders of Zion, as represented in their ‘Protocols’, are by no means kinder taskmasters than William II and his henchmen would have been.”

When The Times correspondent in Istanbul, Philip Graves, dramatically revealed the truth behind the plagiarism and the forgery in three articles which The Times published in August 1921, it was too late. The Protocols were on their way to international fame, causing unprecedented harm to Jews in every country.

We Jews have wrongly ignored this dangerous document for many years, maintaining that it was sheer nonsense. What person in his right mind would believe such a pack of lies? - we used to ask. Save for a small and insignificant group of people who were aware of the real danger of this book, we never even took the trouble to read it, let alone seriously confront it, although it has survived now for an entire century.

This lie has been published and disseminated in millions of copies in almost every language known to men in civilized countries. In some countries it has become a best seller. And time and time again, for many decades, it has been challenged and exposed by honest journalists, by learned historians, by politicians and by diplomats, by religious leaders and by former police agents, by a special committee of the U.S. Senate, and most of all by courageous, responsible and unimpeachable judges in democratic countries. It has also been disproved by the horrible history of this century, which is now drawing to its end.

Until a hundred years ago, the myth of a Jewish plan to dominate the world belonged in the realm of fiction and mystery. It had all the ingredients necessary to inflame the sick minds of bigots and of fanatics, from a holy alliance between Satan and the forces of evil to the fantastic meeting of representatives of the twelve tribes on the stroke of midnight in the old cemetery of Prague to plan the upcoming world-revolution which would make the Jews rulers of the whole world.

Indeed, this fantastic nonsense first appeared in a work of fiction by a well-known German anti-Semitic convicted forger by the name of Herman Goedsche, who wrote novels using the English-sounding pen-name - Sir John Retcliffe. In his novel Biarritz, he describes a scene which was later to become the basis of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion.

But it is one thing to describe a fictional secret meeting of the heads of the twelve Jewish tribes, taking place at the stroke of midnight in a dark cemetery in Prague, to lay plans for Jewish domination in the world, and something else altogether when a document purports to be the authentic minutes of secret meetings held behind the scenes of the first Zionist Congress in Basel in 1897. It is a different story when the document does not speak in an obscure mystic language of dark-clad mysterious figures, but describes modern well known actual leaders speaking in modern terms of politics, finance and media.

It is also a wholly different scenario when the myth is no longer restricted to an obscure work of fiction, but makes its appearance in the form of a book published in a multitude of languages, and taken seriously, sometimes even promoted, by some of the most popular and respected newspapers, newspapers, which not only publish the forgery but give it unprecedented exposure, accompanied by editorials warning the public of this newly discovered danger and ascribing to the Jewish conspirators all the disasters which have befallen the human race including wars, revolutions, economic disasters, plagues - and in our time and age, even the AIDS virus. It is altogether different when world leaders and prominent figures join the witch-hunt and cry wolf.

It becomes scary when one can trace the direct connection of this document and the theory it presents, to actual murders, pogroms and acts of terrorism against Jews. It is a well known fact that the Protocols were used by the Russian Secret Police, the Okhrana, to promote and execute pogroms in which large numbers of Jews were murdered, and their houses destroyed and plundered. It is less known that the Protocols served as a central theme in the Nazi propaganda and as a reason for the extermination of the Jews. As far back as the early 1920s, the murderer of the well known German Minister of Finance of Jewish origin, Walter Rathenau, pleaded in his defense that the murder had been necessary as Rathenau had been one of the Elders of Zion and therefore constituted a danger to the civilized world.

It is also less known that in the second half of this century the Protocols have taken on new meaning, by their transformation into an anti-Zionist weapon, used by the Arab world to discredit the Zionist movement and expose the State of Israel as a faze in the implementation of the Jewish plan of world domination.

The Protocols are quoted in the charter of the Hammas terrorist movement, they appear again and again in Arab news-
papers, they are distributed by Arab propagandists in various countries. In Arab and Muslim countries the Protocols are promoted by governments, taught in schools, prominently displayed in bookstores. Hamas terrorists and suicide bombers have been known to carry copies of the Protocols, along with the explosives.

On 29 November 1993, Khalid Abdul Mohammed, a “Nation of Islam” spokesman, addressed students and faculty, as an invited guest, at the state-run Kean College in New Jersey. In his speech he referred to the “so-called Jew” as “a European strain of people who crawled around on all fours in the caves and hills of Europe, eating juniper roots and eating each other... the slumlords in the black communities, sucking their blood”. He also had the answer for why Hitler exterminated the Jews: “Because the Jews had undermined the very fabric of German society”. “I don’t care who sits in the White House”, he said, “the Jews control that seat, as they control finance and influence policy making... the media, the entertainers and the athletes are in their hip pocket...”.

He was paid $2,650 in student funds. He got cheers and applause.

The silence of the black political and intellectual community was deafening, exactly as it was when the Protocols of the Elders of Zion were openly distributed at the famous Million Men March in Washington. All this happened in the United States of America, not a hundred years ago, but at the end of this century.

Anybody questioning the relevance of the Protocols in our times, could read the article which appeared in July 1992 in the Israeli newspaper Yediot Achronot, written by none other than Michael Gorbachov, following a visit to Israel. There, he revealed for the first time that when he had raised the suggestion in the Politburo that diplomatic relations should be renewed with Israel, some members opposed, quoting as the reason for their opposition, the Masonic-Jewish conspiracy!

The phrase “Elders of Zion” has become a universal code-word to describe various phenomena of Jewish presence and influence on the world scene at best, and the so-called Jewish conspiracy to dominate the world, at worst. It has been used, and is used to this day, not only by racists, but also by unscrupulous politicians. As the Protocols describe a criminal conspiracy planned and executed by a so-called Jewish “World Government”, they can be, and actually are used in countries without Jews, such as Japan, where they are distributed in millions of copies.

The falsity of the Protocols, their being a forgery and a plagiarism, has been proved in a series of dramatic events, including the discovery of unknown documents, the testimony of live witnesses, research done by historians and journalists, committees appointed by various bodies, including the Academia and the U.S. Senate, and a series of dramatic trials in various countries. Yet the public at large, even the Jewish public, is completely unaware of the real story of the Protocols.

In the Coffee Table Book edition of the 1990 British Museum exhibition, entitled “Fake?”, it is stated: “In the musee noir of literary fraud few works have deserved greater notoriety than the Protocols of the Elders of Zion”.

Marking a full century since the creation of this preposterous fabrication, we are justified in noting that no other proven political forgery has survived with such immunity, has enjoyed such world-wide distribution, has been so cynically used for sinister purposes and has done so much damage, as these so-called “Protocols of the Elders of Zion”.

Of all the libels which have served as a means of incitement against Jews and as intellectual justification for anti-Semitism, the myth of a Jewish conspiracy to gain domination of the whole world is probably the most devious and, in the long run, the most dangerous. It is a fact that in spite of all retractions, in spite of extensive academic research exposing the forgery, in spite of judgments of courts of law in various countries, in spite of the findings of a special commission appointed by the Senate of the U.S. - the Protocols have acquired a life of their own and are still being published in many languages around the world and quoted in international forums including the General Assembly of the U.N. They still target the Jews as potential victims of discrimination and hatred. Even for leaders such as the Prime Minister of Malaysia, who has probably met few Jews in his life, Jews provide the most convenient scapegoat to blame for Malaysia’s economic crisis.

Lies do not die by themselves. Unfortunately we have not learned the lesson. Exactly as we ignored the Protocols for many years, we have failed to vigorously confront the preposterous lie denying the Holocaust, probably the best recorded event in history. We now know that it will not go away by itself. We must therefore find ways and means to confront it.
tomorrow in Salonika, commemorating the city's Jewish history and the contribution of Jewish jurists and intellectuals to the formation of Greek legislation.

The Congress, whose duration is until the 28th of the month, numbers among its participants a hundred and eighty eminent lawyers and jurists from the U.S.A., England, Germany, France, Canada, Australia, Argentina, Belgium, Switzerland, Bulgaria, Sweden and also Greece. The Congress which is organized in the framework of a series of congresses to be held in various European cities, commemorates the vast number of Jewish lawyers, jurists and intellectuals who lost their lives in the Holocaust of the World War II. Salonika is to be the first of the series.

Akropolis June 19, 1998

Anti-Semitism as an Issue for Jewish Jurists

An International Congress with the central theme of “Anti-Semitism and Holocaust Denial towards the 21st Century”, is being organized by the International Association of Jewish Lawyers and Jurists, from 25-28 June, in Salonika.

The congress, with more than 200 participants from European countries, Canada, Australia and Argentina, will include the following topics in its programme: “Portraits of Famous Jewish Lawyers and Jurists”, “Family Law of Greek Jews: Transition from Jewish Law to the Greek Civil Code”, “Legal Regime of Jewish Communities in Greece”, “Abraham Ben Aroya and the Socialist Federation of Salonika”.

Avriani Makedonias Thrakis June 26, 1998

Acknowledgement of the Jewish Holocaust

An effort to acknowledge the Jewish Holocaust. An effort to achieve international acknowledgement of the Jewish Holocaust commences in Salonika, is being made by the International Association of Jewish Lawyers and Jurists, which is organizing an International Congress, to be held at the Macedonia Palace hotel.

The Congress, which is the first event of its kind on Greek territory, offers the Association an occasion to commemorate the Jews who lost their lives in Salonika as a result of the German atrocities of the Second World War.

“The Holocaust is not a Jewish issue, but concerns the whole of humanity. If we remember this and avoid it, we will certainly live in a better world”.

In these words, the President of the International Association of Jewish Lawyers and Jurists, Ms. Hadassa Ben-Itto, expressed during yesterday’s press conference, all the pain and suffering of the unjustly sacrificed Jews, as well as the ceaseless efforts of the younger generation.

According to the same source, the Congress, which commences on Saturday and will be concluded the next day, will discuss the refusal of certain countries to acknowledge the Jewish Holocaust, the revival of anti-Semitism, and in general the increase of Nazism and Nazi propaganda which has appeared in recent years.

The Association is particularly apprehensive about the anti-Jewish approach maintained specifically by certain groups, and which is transmitted through the worldwide electronic network of the Internet.

As Ms. Ben-Itto underlined, Jewish lawyers and jurists will do their utmost, within the limits of the law, to fight the Nazi revival, which may still be observed 54 years following its fall, mainly in the countries of central Europe.