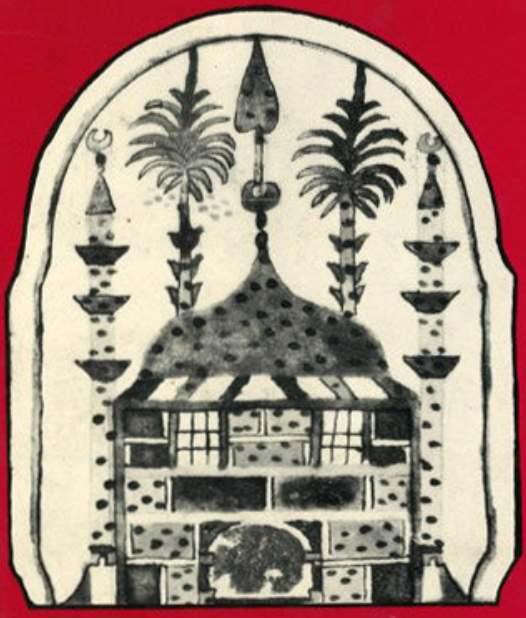
Marc D. Angel

The Jews of Rhodes



The History of a Sephardic Community



THE JEWS OF RHODES
The History of a Sephardic Community
by Marc D. Angel

Foreword by
the Haham, Rev. Dr. Solomon Gaon

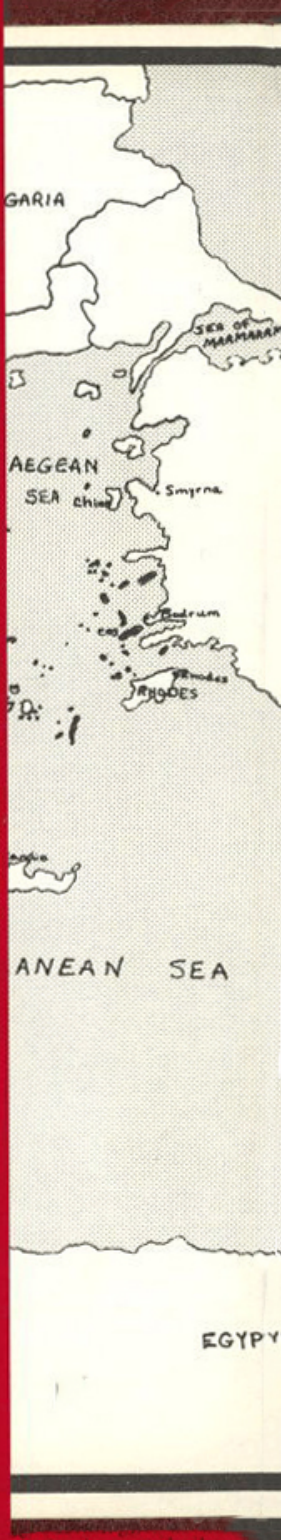
The Sephardic community of Rhodes was established in 1523 by victims and children of victims of the expulsion of Jews from Spain. It was destroyed by the Nazis in 1944. Although relatively small, the Rhodian Jewish community was important far out of proportion to its size, due to the considerable influence of its rabbis and scholars.

This is a comprehensive study of the Rhodian Jewish community, tracing not only its history but also its economic and cultural life, customs and traditions, its rabbis and scholars, its folklore and literature.

Although unique in many respects, the Sephardic community of Rhodes may be viewed as a microcosm of Sephardic life throughout the Ottoman Empire, and thus this study provides a basis for understanding the history and culture of the Judeo-Spanish-speaking Sephardim in general.

Dr. Angel, Minister of the historic Congregation Shearith Israel, the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue of New York City, and Managing Editor of *Tradition* magazine, has set out to search for his own family background in Rhodes. Through painstaking research and thorough perusal of both printed sources and archival material he has succeeded not only in finding his own roots but also in creating a model of local historiography which will, hopefully, serve as an inspiration to others in the Sephardic world similarly to commemorate their own ancestral communities.

With maps, photos, facsimiles.



THE JEWS OF RHODES

The History of a Sephardic Community

by

Marc D. Angel

Foreword by

The Haham Rev. Dr. Solomon Gaon

SEPHER-HERMON PRESS, INC.

and

The Union of Sephardic Congregations

NEW YORK 1978

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Foreword

Over twenty-five years ago, I was asked to visit the Sephardic congregation of Salisbury, Rhodesia. The great majority of that congregation originate from the Island of Rhodes in the Mediterranean and are scions of an ancient community who from its early days have been closely connected with the Land of Israel. I was pleasantly surprised to discover that the Sephardim of Salisbury tenaciously adhered to the traditions of Rhodes, once called "small Jerusalem" because of the many prominent sages and rabbis who dwelt and labored on that island. The rabbinic and religious influence of the Jewish community of this Mediterranean island on the destinies of World Jewry and in the field of Halakhah has been far beyond the limit which their number and their economic and social position could have justified.

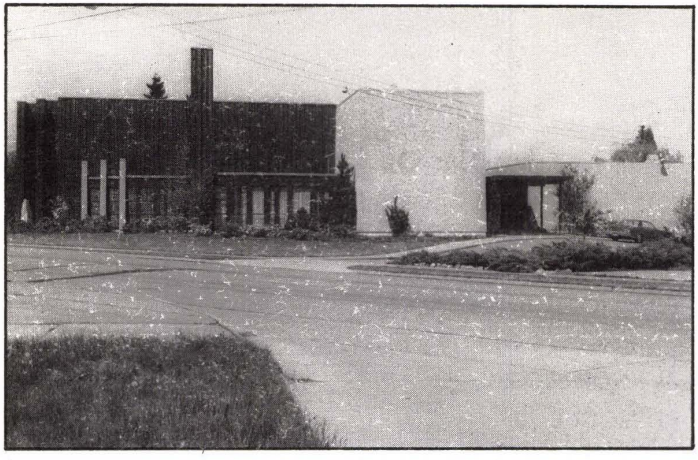
Rabbi Dr. Marc D. Angel is to be congratulated on having written such an informative and penetrating account of the historic development of the Jews of Rhodes. He has used rabbinic sources as well as available historic documents in the United States, France and Israel for his research.

This volume is the first comprehensive work on the history and culture of our people on the Island of Rhodes, and besides containing a fascinating story, it will also encourage further research into the great and inspiring past of the Sephardim of the Ottoman Empire in general.

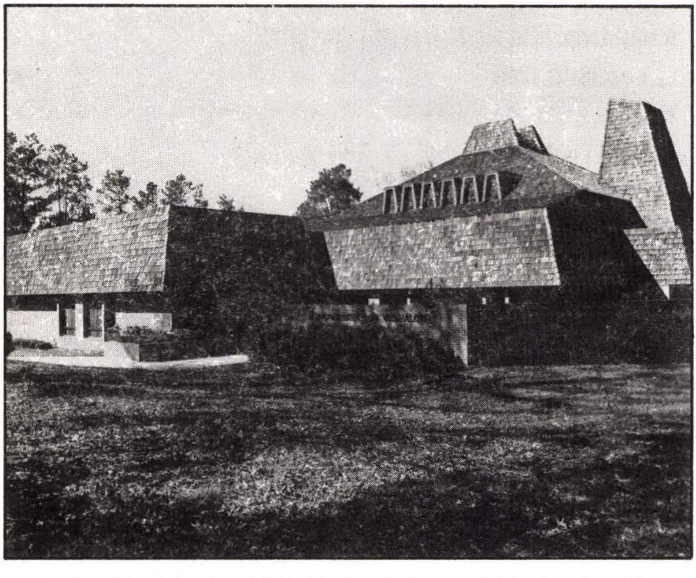
The Haham, Rev. Dr. Solomon Gaon

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CONGREGATION EZRA BESSAROTH, SEATTLE, WASHINGTON



CONGREGATION OR VE SHALOM, ATLANTA, GEORGIA

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The original research for this book was done in connection with my doctoral dissertation at the Bernard Revel Graduate School of Yeshiva University. I express my sincere gratitude to Dr. Hayyim Cohen, Dr. Moshe Carmilly and Dr. Meyer Feldblum for their guidance in this project. I also thank Dr. Marcus Breger and the Haham, Rev. Dr. Solomon Gaon who have been helpful to me from the beginning of my work on the history of the Jews of Rhodes. I gratefully acknowledge the encouragement and advice of Professor Maír José Benardete.

I extend my appreciation to the staffs of the Jewish Division of the New York Public Library; the Library of the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion; the Mendel Gottesman Library of Yeshiva University; the Alliance Israélite Universelle in Paris; the Ben Zvi Institute in Jerusalem; and the Sephardic Community of Jerusalem.

The Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture provided a grant which aided me in my research of this subject. I also express my deepest appreciation to two anonymous donors who made funds available for me to travel abroad in the summer of 1974 to pursue my research.

I am pleased to thank the Haham, Rev. Dr. Solomon Gaon, Mr. Alvin Deutsch, Mr. Victor Tarry and Mr. Robert Salomon of the Union of Sephardic Congregations for their cooperation. I also thank Mr. Samuel Gross of the Sepher-Hermon Press.

A special word of thanks must go to my parents, Mr. and Mrs. Victor Angel, who are the best parents anyone could have. To the many relatives and friends who have provided me with information about the Jews of Rhodes, I acknowledge my debt of gratitude. I am particularly grateful to Reverend David J. Behar of Seattle, Washington, who had been involved in the religious leadership of

Congregation Ezra Bessaroth for over half a century.

Ms. Deborah Ishlon provided invaluable editorial advice in preparing this manuscript for publication. Mr. Louis N. Levy, of the Foundation for the Advancement of Sephardic Studies and Culture, has helped me locate books authored by rabbis of Rhodes, and has generally been a great friend and source of encouragement.

To the Trustees of Congregation Shearith Israel and to the entire Congregation I owe heartfelt thanks for the understanding, friendship and cooperation shown me. The present-day membership of Shearith Israel does honor to its historic Congregation, and it is a singular privilege for me to be associated with the Congregation.

Last but not least, I express my profoundest thanks to my wife, Gilda, without whose incredible assistance this work could never have been accomplished. To her and to our children, Jeffrey, Ronda and Elana, this work is dedicated.

PROLOGUE

My father's parents emigrated from the Island of Rhodes early in the 20th century, and settled in Seattle, Washington. They died before I was born. They had helped to create a community of Jews of Rhodes origin in Seattle which numbered several hundred families by the time I was born in 1945. As I grew up in Congregation Ezra Bessaroth, I could not help but feel that I had roots on that distant Mediterranean island. I was born in Seattle, my parents were born in Seattle; and yet we were shaped and influenced by the history of the Jews in Rhodes. The desire to search out my grandparents' past—indeed my own past—lingered in my mind for many years.

When I finally began this voyage into history as a doctoral student at Yeshiva University's Bernard Revel Graduate School, I found very few lights to guide me. The community was relatively small, even if it was important out of proportion to its size. Few scholars had dealt with the Jews of Rhodes.

The works of Solomon Rosanes on the history of the Jews in Turkey served as an important starting point. The writings of Abraham Galante and Simon Markus on the history of the Jews of Rhodes were invaluable. Yet, these works had their specific limitations and still were not able to provide a thorough picture of the history and culture of the Jews of Rhodes.

The primary sources for history are, of course, those contemporary with the period under study. They help one to view events from the eyes of someone who was there, who participated in and reacted to the events and whose life was influenced by them. Fortunately, there are numerous books authored by rabbis and authors of Rhodes over the past four centuries. Their responsa, sermons, poems and other writings are the basic materials from which one can construct an image of Jewish life in the city.

Moreover, many travelers, pilgrims and adventurers had visited Rhodes, leaving colorful travel descriptions. These travel accounts provide interesting insight into the life of the Jews of Rhodes.

During the summer of 1974, I was fortunate to be able to travel abroad in search of archival materials relating to the Jews of Rhodes. The Ben Zvi Institute in Jerusalem has a small file on the Jews of Rhodes, including various letters, receipts of contributions and such things. It also possesses a manuscript, in Italian, of a history of Jews of Rhodes written by Isaiah Sonne. Although the Institute would not allow me to read Sonne's manuscript, I was permitted to read the notebooks from which he wrote his history. Sonne had copied many tombstone inscriptions in Rhodes as well as various community records dealing with contributions and other financial details. The Sephardic Community of Jerusalem also has a file on the Jews of Rhodes containing letters from Rhodian Jews to the Jerusalem community on such matters as contributions and plans to migrate to Erets Israel.

The archives of the Alliance Israélite Universelle in Paris are an especially valuable source of information. Three large portfolios contain files of the teachers and directors of the two Alliance schools in Rhodes. These letters are extremely revealing of conditions in the city, not only in matters of education, but also of culture, social life and economics. The Alliance records are without doubt the most important documents dealing with the Jews of Rhodes in the first 25 years of the 20th century.

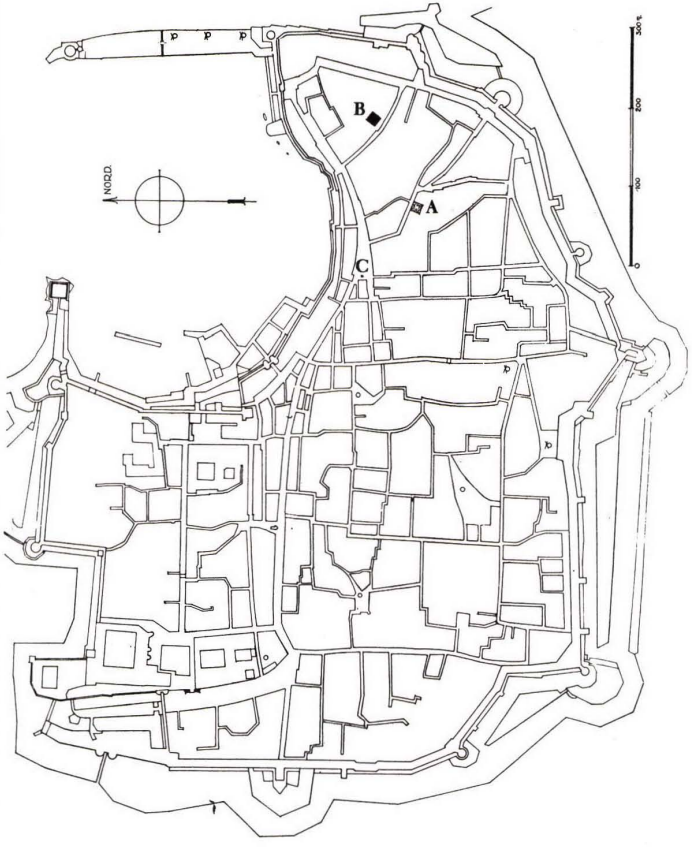
During my trip in the summer of 1974, I visited the city of Rhodes for the first time in my life. This was the climax of my research. There are no archives, no documents, no books to speak of. There are hardly any Jews left, since the Nazis had destroyed the community in 1944. As I walked through the winding narrow streets of the old Jewish quarter, I could not help but think that these were the same streets, the same drab buildings, the same shocks of green vines dangling over the gray walls, the same blue sea seen through the openings in the great walls which surround the old city, the same air, odors and colors that were experienced over the centuries by the Jews of Rhodes. In a certain way, I had found the past, my past.

Affixed to the wall at the entrance of the Kahal Shalom Synagogue is a plaque with the family names of all the Jews of Rhodes who had been destroyed by the Nazis. My eye caught the

name "Angel" immediately, instinctively. An uncle, an aunt, maybe some cousins I could never have known—their lives were aborted and converted into a name on a plaque.

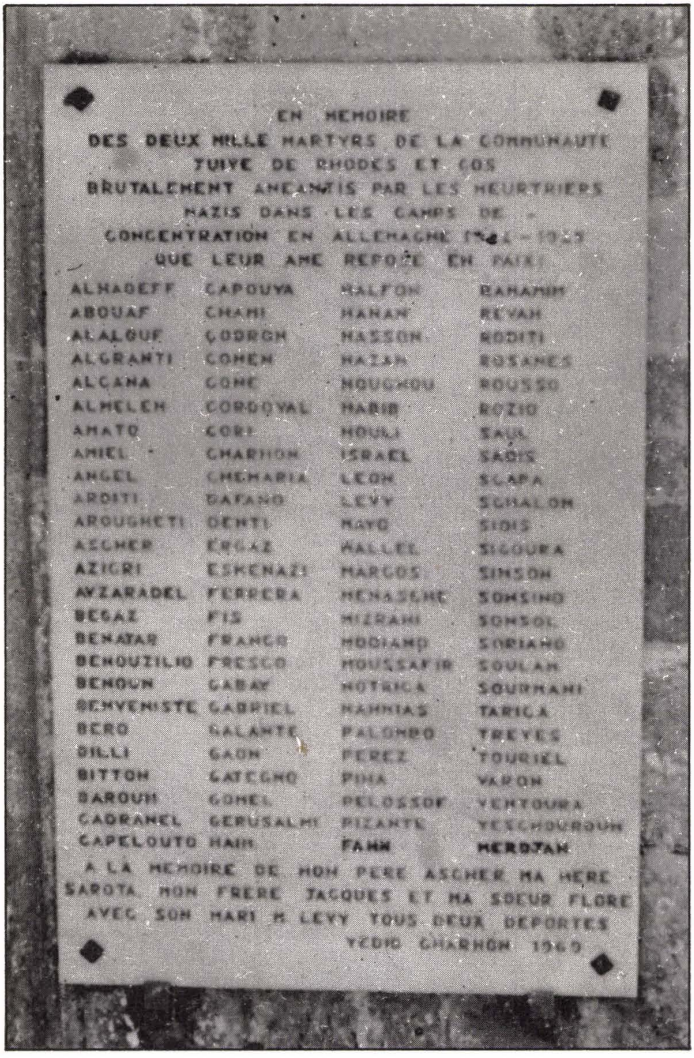
As I boarded the plane leaving Rhodes, I realized that I found what I had come to find. The cycle of the history of the Jews of Rhodes had been completed. But traveling to Israel and then back to the United States, I realized clearly that the Jewish people has its own way of continuing to live.

Based on the available sources, I have tried to present as thorough a picture of the life of the Jews of Rhodes as is possible. This book represents one step forward in the understanding of the Sephardim of Rhodes, and, indeed, of the Ottoman Empire. Much more work in this area remains to be done. In presenting this book to the public, I have relied on the saying of Rabbi Tarfon: "It is not incumbent upon you to complete the work, but neither are you free to evade it."



A—Kahal Shalom
B—Kahal Gadol
C—The "Calle Ancha"

MAP OF THE CITY OF RHODES
(from Albert Gabriel, La Cite de Rhodes, MCCX-MDXII, Paris, 1923)



MEMORIAL PLAQUE AFFIXED TO KAHAL SHALOM IN RHODES, LISTING FAMILY NAMES OF THOSE MURDERED BY THE NAZIS
(Courtesy of Victor Tarry)

CHAPTER ONE

Historical Background

This is the story of the Sephardic community of Rhodes. It was born in 1523 when the forces of the Ottoman Empire conquered the island and encouraged settlement of Jews there. The immigrants of that time were victims and children of victims of the expulsion of Jews from Spain in 1492. Rhodian Jews continued to live under Turkish domination until 1912, when the Italians occupied the island during the Turco-Italian War and held it until 1944. At that time, the Nazis took Rhodes and deported nearly all its Jews, reducing them to ashes in concentration camps. Today, only a handful of Jews live on the island.

Although the community has vanished, like so many other Jewish communities, the Sephardim of Rhodes merit study for several reasons. Their community was important far out of proportion to its size. Their rabbis and scholars exerted considerable influence throughout the Sephardic diaspora. Their masses maintained a deep faith in God and Judaism and wove a culture of considerable grace, idealism and pride. Even though most of them lived in poverty and generally miserable conditions over the centuries, the Jews of Rhodes managed to sing of faith, love, beauty. As the community was relatively small (around 5,000 souls at its height), many individuals were related by blood or marriage. Thus the community's members had strong feelings of belonging and an unusual loyalty to each other. The Jews of Rhodes are known in Judeo-Spanish as "Rhodeslies" (Jews from Rhodes), but the term carries with it a recognition of the uniqueness of the community. The Rhodeslies, as we shall see, indeed formed a distinctive society of their own.

But the history of the Rhodian Sephardim has another major value for the student of Jewish life. Although the Rhodeslies were distinctive in many ways, yet they were also part of the general

cultural milieu of the Sephardim of the Ottoman Empire who developed their communities following the Spanish expulsion. The Sephardic community of Rhodes can fairly be seen as a microcosm of Sephardic life throughout the cities and towns of the Empire. By focusing on the history and culture of this community, one may understand more clearly the general history and culture of the Judeo-Spanish-speaking Sephardim.[1]

To study the past of the Sephardim of Rhodes, we must seek numerous levels of awareness. Our task demands more than the compilation of facts and figures, dates, names and major events. As Marcel Proust has commented in his Prologue to *On Art and Literature:* "what intellect restores to us under the name of the past is not the past". If one is to penetrate and share the soul of a people, to feel its enthusiasms and despairs, one must go beyond the accumulation and organization of historical details. One must also attune his senses to the people's inner life, to make its past experiences his own personal memories. Moreover, one must try to catch the spirit of the masses as well as to record the achievements of the elite.

Rhodes, The Island

The Aegean Sea, like the rest of the Mediterranean, is dotted with numerous islands. Lying about twelve miles off the southwestern coast of Asia Minor, Rhodes is about 600 miles from Istanbul, 360 miles from Alexandria, 270 miles from Athens, 300 miles from Famagusta (Cyprus), 200 miles from Candia (Crete) and 1,400 miles from Marseilles.

Its excellent location made the island the target of many battles and wars over the centuries. In the 16th century, Comte de Brèves remarked that the power which controlled Rhodes would have "domination over all the other islands and the admiralty of the whole Mediterranean."[2] Alphonse de Lamartine, who passed through Rhodes in 1832 on his way to the Holy Land, summarized its advantages as follows: "Any European power who was master of [Rhodes] would hold at once the key of the Archipelago, of Greece, of Smyrna, of the Dardannelles, and of the Seas of Egypt and Syria. I do not know in the world a better maritime military position, a finer climate, or a more prolific soil."[3]

At its extremes, the island of Rhodes is 20 miles wide and 45 miles long. From northeast to southwest, it is traversed by a

wooded mountain range whose highest point is Mount Anavero (just under 4,000 feet). Its well-forested hills, fertile valleys, numerous mountain streams, and its mild and salubrious climate have made Rhodes a scenic and productive island since antiquity. In their orchards, farms and vineyards, Rhodians cultivated wheat, barley, cotton, tobacco, vegetables, as well as figs, grapes, olives, oranges, lemons and pomegranates. After describing various Mediterranean islands, the Roman historian, Pliny (b.23 C.E.), added, *"Sed pulcherimma est libera Rhodes,"* ("but the most beautiful is free Rhodes").[4] Canon Pietro Casola, on his pilgrimage to Jerusalem in 1494, passed through Rhodes and was amazed by the longevity of its inhabitants, some aged even 120 years and in excellent health and spirit. Casola remarked: "I was told by persons worthy of credence that the air of Rhodes is so good that anyone who knew how to regulate his manner of living would have difficulty dying."[5] A 17th-century Karaite traveler, Samuel ben David, marvelled at the abundance of fruits available at low prices in Rhodes. "In a word," he wrote, "this place is a kind of paradise."[6]

Several small towns and villages are scattered along the island's coasts. Situated on the northernmost tip of the island is its largest and most important city, Rhodes, since antiquity the Capitol, major seaport, commercial and cultural center of the island.

For centuries, the city of Rhodes served as a stopping-off point for European pilgrims on their way to the Holy Land. It was host to many foreign merchants engaged in international trade. Exposed in this way both to Levantine and European cultures, the city dwellers became quite cosmopolitan. Frequent contact with foreign visitors broadened their intellectual horizons. But Rhodians living elsewhere on the island were comparatively free from foreign influences. Unlike the city dwellers, they tended to maintain their old customs and traditions intact. The "opposite poles of archaism and innovation"[7] characteristic of island populations were thus evidenced in Rhodes. The Jews of Rhodes, as we shall see, lived almost exclusively in the city, a fact of major cultural significance.

Rhodes, before 1522

Various traditions and legends describe the origin of human civilization on Rhodes. Whether Hellenic or Judaic, they all reflect the antiquity of its population.

According to Biblical tradition, the inhabitants of Rhodes derived

from Rodanim, son of Javan, son of Japheth, son of Noah, who lived in the second generation after the great deluge.[8] The Greek poet Pindar (born c. 516 B.C.E.) reported a tradition that the island's first inhabitants were the children of the sun, descended from the union of the sun god, Helios, with the nymph Rhodon, whose name was given to the island. One of her seven sons became the father of Camiros, Ialysos and Lindos, who gave their names to cities of the island. At some unknown point, a group known as the Telchines came from Crete to settle in Rhodes and eventually gained control of it. Famed for their wisdom, these early inhabitants of Rhodes are said to have divided the year into seasons and invented the science of navigation.[9]

Historical information becomes more precise at about 1000 B.C.E., when Dorian Greeks invaded the island and inhabited Camiros, Ialysos and Lindos. These cities, together with Cos, Cnidus and Halicarnassus, formed a religious confederacy with a common shrine, the Temple of Triopian Appolo near Cnidus. Since the sun god was the favorite deity of the Rhodians, another tradition has it that the island's name was derived from "Rhodos," the Greek word for the rose, which was one of Helios' emblems.[10]

By 700 B.C.E., the Rhodians were engaged in active commerce and had sent a number of colonists to centers throughout the Mediterranean Basin. From about 540 to 470 B.C.E., the island lost its independence intermittently to Persia. Rhodes then joined Athens' Delian Confederacy but broke away in 412 B.C.E. to link itself with Sparta's Peloponnesian League. Around the year 408 B.C.E., citizens of the island's three main cities united to establish the city of Rhodes. Hippodamus of Miletus, architect of the new city, reportedly designed it in the shape of a theater, with three ports opening to all the markets of the Aegean.

During the fourth century B.C.E., Rhodes was occupied and controlled at various times by Athenians, Spartans, Carians, Persians and Macedonians. Regaining independence in 323 B.C.E., the island embarked on its period of greatest glory, power and cultural achievement. Its academies attracted students and scholars of wide repute from throughout the Mediterranean world. Rhodes became a center for artists as well as philosophers and rhetoricians. Symbolizing the island's achievements in the arts and commerce was the Colossus of Rhodes, known as one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. It supposedly was built during the third century

B.C.E., and stood astride one of the ports of Rhodes. The statue was so large that ships could sail into the port between its legs.

During this period, the ships of Rhodes policed the seas against pirates. The maritime rules governing the Mediterranean were called "Rhodian Law". Rhodes became the richest Greek city-state during the third century B.C.E., and its naval superiority played no small role in that prosperity.

But in 225 B.C.E., an earthquake destroyed the city and the Colossus. The Rhodians rebuilt their city—without the Colossus—in a short time. Soon, however, the growing power of Rome began to threaten the island's maritime supremacy and independence. In 164 B.C.E., the island recognized the necessity of giving in to Rome. Accepted as an ally with local autonomy, Rhodes became part of the Roman Empire. When the Empire was divided in 395 C.E., the island was assigned to the Eastern Roman or Byzantine Empire. The expanding forces of Islam took control of Rhodes (c. 773 C.E.). At that time, according to an often repeated tradition, the remains of the Colossus were sold to a Syrian Jew who used nine hundred camels to remove them. But the Rhodian outpost proved too difficult to protect, and the Moslems withdrew after about eight years.[11]

During subsequent centuries, the island was ruled by various local lords, some faithful to and some independent of the Byzantine Empire. The Genoese held Rhodes for several years in the mid-13th century. By 1261 it fell under Byzantine rule again. In 1307, the Byzantine government gave the island to the Knights of St. John of Jerusalem to defend against potential attack by the Turks.

The Knights of St. John, also known as the Hospitallers, were a religious military Order founded in the 11th century. They began as a religious fraternity which operated a hospital for sick pilgrims in Jerusalem. After the Crusaders conquered Jerusalem in 1099, the hospital expanded its work there, and founded hostels in Provençal and Italian cities on the route to the Holy Land. With the fall of Acre to the Moslems in 1291, however, the Crusader principalities came to an end. Leaving Jerusalem, the Hospitallers re-established themselves on Cyprus. By 1309 they had acquired Rhodes where they remained until the Turks drove them out in 1523.

When the Hospitallers arrived in Rhodes, they had to battle the local Byzantine authorities who resisted the Order's takeover of the island. Although the Order was victorious and its possession of

Rhodes was confirmed by Pope Clement V, the City did not surrender to the Grand Master of the Order, Fulk de Villaret, until August, 1309.[12]

To this day, the walled city of Rhodes reflects the Knights' two-century occupation of the island. Its extraordinary fortifications, the Citadel of the Knights, the great Hospital (now a museum), the reconstructed Palace of the Grand Master, the medieval buildings and streets are still visible reminders of the Order's rule.

Traces of Jewish Life

Although Jews may have lived in Rhodes in antiquity, we have no precise information concerning their first settlement there. The earliest indication of a Jewish community on the island is found in the First Book of Maccabees (15:22).[13] Simon, son of Mattathias, chosen by the Jews as High Priest and Governor (c. 142 B.C.E.), sent a delegation to Rome to affirm an alliance. In accepting this friendship, Lucius, Consul of the Romans, sent a letter to King Ptolemy in which he stated: "We have decided, therefore, to write to the kings and to the countries, not to do any harm to them [the Jews], nor to make war on them nor their cities nor their country, nor to make an alliance with those who fight against them (15:19)." The missive added that if any Jews opposing the Hasmonean rule in Judea sought refuge in their territories, the governments should extradite the rebels to Judea. As the message of this letter was sent to Rhodes, among other places, the implication is that the island was concerned in some way with Jews. It may have had a Jewish community, and/or served as a place of refuge for Jewish rebels. But we have no information about the size or condition of such a community.

Another indication of a Jewish community in Rhodes dates to the first quarter of the first century B.C.E. when Apollonius Molon taught philosophy and rhetoric there. One of the famous rhetoricians of his time, he numbered Marcus Cicero and Julius Caesar among his students. Molon has the dubious distinction of being the first known writer of a work devoted entirely to attacking the Jews.[14] In his tract, Molon repeated many of the charges lodged by earlier maligners of the Jewish people, notably Hecataeus of Abdera (a Greek historian of the early third century B.C.E.). He was, moreover, influenced by Poseidonius (c. 135-50 B.C.E.), a stoic philosopher and historian who also taught in Rhodes and wrote

derogatory comments about Jews.[15]

Molon asserted, for example, that the Jews were atheistic, antagonistic to strangers and superstitious. He attacked Jewish law as lacking truth and justice. Jews, he insisted, were characterized by temerity, ineptitude and inutility.

Judging from the fact that both Poseidonius and Molon inveighed against Jews, it appears that the cultural battle between Hellenism and Hebraism was also waged in Rhodes. The Hellenists, who wished to impose Greek culture on all people, were annoyed by the "separatism" of the Jews. By discrediting the Jewish people, they could vent their frustrations against those who would not give up their own culture in favor of Hellenism. They could also hope to shame Jews into Hellenizing. But it is not clear whether these authors were directing their remarks against Jews in Rhodes or were merely following the literary and historical traditions established by previous writers without reference to actual conditions on the island.[16]

One of the major literary champions of the Jews and their defender against anti-Jewish propaganda was Flavius Josephus, the famous Jewish historian of the first century C.E. In his work, *Against Apion*, Josephus took occasion to refute not only Apion, the fiercest antagonist of Jews among Greco-Oriental writers—but those who preceded him as well. Josephus referred to Apollonius Molon as "one of these foolish and proud men." In dismissing Molon's charges, Josephus noted that the Greeks themselves were much stricter in opposing people of different beliefs and customs than were the Jews.[17]

During the following centuries we find only vague and limited references to Jewish life in Rhodes. Herod, the governor of Judea, landed in Rhodes around 43 C.E. on his way from Alexandria to Rome.[18] Paul passed through the city on his way from Miletus to Jerusalem (Acts 21:1). Jewish merchants were in Rhodes during the seventh century.[19]

The first specific information about the Rhodian Jewish community dates from the second half of the 12th century, when Benjamin of Tudela, Spain, the most famous medieval Jewish traveler, journeyed throughout the Mediterranean world. Benjamin wrote a concise and lucid description of his observations, including a comment about his visit to Rhodes, where he found a community of about 400 Jews led by Rabbis Hananel and Eliah.[20]

Our knowledge of Jewish life under the rule of the Knights of St. John is more extensive. When the Knights planned the city's layout, they designated a quarter for the Jews which extended from the southeast angle of the wall surrounding the city to the port reserved for merchant vessels. It is probable, of course, that Jews had lived in their own quarter even prior to the arrival of the Knights. Jewish law would have dictated such an arrangement since Jews had to live within walking distance of their synagogue. It is not known whether the Knights simply confirmed an older Jewish section or established a completely new site. But under the Order's rule, Jews were restricted to living in their own special quarter. This section remained the core of the Jewish quarter through modern times.

Like their coreligionists in other Christian domains, Rhodian Jews were subject to other forms of discrimination. For example, if a Jew touched an article in the market place, he was compelled to buy it, because Christians considered an object contaminated once an infidel even touched it.[21] But in general, the Knights seem to have treated the Jews fairly well. An Italian Jewish merchant who traveled through Rhodes in 1481 could say that the Jews of the city "live there in perfect tranquility".[22]

The Knights of St. John were an enterprising group. In addition to their considerable efforts to fortify and build up the city, they also stimulated the island's economic life. They became excellent seamen, engaging in piracy as well as trade. The 16th-century Italian historian, Francesco Guicciardini, praised his contemporary Knights of Rhodes as a "bulwark of the Christian religion in those seas". He then added that the Knights had become notorious for the fact that they spent "all their days in piracy against the ships of the infidels," and sometimes also plundered Christian vessels.[23] In international commerce, the Knights were eager to find foreign markets for Rhodes' surplus goods. They established a quasi-banking system, whereby traders could obtain loans and credit in order to expedite business ventures.[24]

With their diverse origins, the Knights helped to enhance Rhodes' cosmopolitan qualities. The Knights were drawn from eight different national groups: Auvergne, Provence, France, Aragon, Castile, England, Germany and Italy. Each language group was given responsibility for the defense of a particular section of the city. The citizens of Rhodes were thus in constant contact with

Knights of various lands and languages, thereby enriching their cultural life.

Undoubtedly, these economic and cultural factors also affected the Jews of the island. Although there is little evidence concerning Jewish occupations during this period, it is reasonable to assume that Jews participated in the economic vitality and trade of Rhodes. When the English traveler, C. T. Newton visited Rhodes in the mid-19th century, he saw in the Jewish quarter a house dating from the days of the Knights and described it as "probably the residence of some wealthy merchant, as it still contains a large room with a richly-carved ceiling."[25] Prior to 1480 only one traveler has left first-hand information about the Jews in Rhodes under the Knights. An anonymous pilgrim from Cologne passed through the city in 1472 and praised the beauty of its Jewesses as well as their skill in making articles of silk.[26]

With respect to religious life, the Jews had a synagogue near the wall of the city and presumably also provided classes for their children. There is evidence of a high level of Jewish scholarship in Rhodes. Rabbi Michael Balbo (b. 1411) of Candia (Crete) was a scholar and poet. He wrote a poem in honor of Rabbi Ezra of Rhodes when the latter went to Venice. Balbo also engaged in philosophic debates with learned individuals and corresponded with Rabbi Yedidiah, son of Yosef Rak of Rhodes on the subject of the voices of the universe.[27] Although we have no information about the lives and activities of these scholars of Rhodes, it is fair to assume that they exerted considerable influence on their small community.

Like Jews throughout the Byzantine Empire, the Jewish residents of Rhodes when the Order took the island were Greek-speaking and generally had Greek family names. Their customs and liturgy were part of the Romaniot tradition which had developed among the Jews of the Eastern Roman Empire. Their liturgy was embodied in the *Mahzor Romania*, or Romaniot Prayerbook, which differed in many ways from the liturgies of the Sephardim and Ashkenazim.

Rhodes Jews of a later period believed that Sephardim as well as Romaniots may have been living on the island when the Knights took possession of it. The French colonel, Bernard Rottiers came to Rhodes in the early 19th century to study the island's historical monuments. He employed a Jew named Boghore (Bohor) as an assistant and even attended the circumcision ceremony of his son.

At the ceremony, he heard a rabbi of the city lecture on the instability of human life and the vicissitudes of the Jews of Rhodes. The rabbi claimed that a number of Jews had fled Spanish persecutions in Tarragona and came to Rhodes in 1280.[28]

The War of 1480 and its Aftermath

It was said that Mehmet II, ruler of the mighty Ottoman Empire, set for himself two great tasks upon becoming Sultan: the conquest of Constantinople and the destruction of the Order of Rhodes.[29] The Order was a source of great irritation to the Turks. Maintaining Rhodes as a Christian stronghold, the Knights engaged in bold maritime activities and challenged Ottoman hegemony in the Eastern Mediterranean.

The hostility between the Turks and Knights often led to cruelty and bloodshed. In June, 1458, for example, a galley belonging to the Knights had captured three Turkish ships and brought the captives to Rhodes. Robert of San Severino, then in Rhodes, recounted:

> And as soon as they arrived, the captured Turks, two hundred and fifty in number, were to be cut to pieces or impaled, as is the custom to do to them when they are taken by the Knights of Rhodes. Because they do the same and worse to the Knights when they happen to get hold of them.[30]

In 1453, the Sultan succeeded in taking Constantinople. But only in 1480 did he finally prepare to attack Rhodes. Spies informed him that the Knights could be defeated, that their defenses were not as strong as generally believed. Massive Turkish forces launched their siege in May, 1480. Early in the battle the Turks directed their heaviest attack against the southern perimeter of Rhodes. This section, enclosing the Jewish quarter, was the most lightly fortified area of the city. For five weeks the Turks bombarded the Jewish quarter, pouring in thousands of stones and cannon balls. The continuous barrage opened large breaches in the Rhodians' defense. Materials from demolished Jewish homes were used to fortify the walls.

A travel account by Meshullam of Volterra provides first-hand information about the Jews of Rhodes in this troubled time. The son of a wealthy gem dealer in Florence, Italy, Meshullam traveled to the Orient in connection with his father's gem trade, passing through Egypt, Jerusalem, Damascus, Crete as well as Rhodes.

Meshullam arrived in Rhodes for the first time on May 30, 1481, less than a year after the Turkish siege of the city had ended. Describing the effects of the Turkish attacks, he noted:

> And I saw how the Turks destroyed [the city] completely and especially the Jewish quarter and the left side, for that was the site of the battle. They cast down all the houses of Messer Leon of Rhodes and of Rabbi Azariah the doctor and other houses, and the wall near the synagogue fell.[31]

In 1487, Rabbi Obadiah of Bertinoro noted that the Turks had destroyed "all the houses of the Jews".[32]

In spite of the Turks' greater numbers and their relentless attacks, the Rhodians withstood the siege. Although the invaders managed to fight their way into the Jewish quarter, they were defeated decisively. Soon after a frantic retreat from the Jewish quarter, the Turks left the island altogether. Throughout the siege of 1480, all the residents of Rhodes, including Jews, fought valiantly. Indeed, the Grand Master of the Knights commended the Jewish contribution to the victory. Jewish women as well as men were praised for their efforts in the war. [33]

The Rhodians believed that their victory over the Turks was a miraculous event reflecting Divine intervention: just as they had appeared ready to vanquish the Rhodians, the Turks fled in terror. Jews as well as Christians shared the feeling that the victory was an act of God. Meshullam reported the Jewish version of the battle:

> And one day, according to their words, more than ten thousand Turks climbed the wall and cast the Grand Master from the wall. God confused them so that they struck their own brothers and relatives. Their hearts became faint. And God was an aid for [the Rhodians]. . . . They built two churches in the low parts of the said wall, one on either side of the synagogue, where the miracle had occurred for them. The Greeks wanted the Grand Master to remove the said synagogue, but he paid them no heed, because the Guardian of Israel neither sleeps nor slumbers.[34]

Rabbi Obadiah of Bertinoro left an account which differs in certain details:

> The Jews told me that the Turks entered the city and began to attack the people, and the land was defeated before them. They reached the entrance of the synagogue and there did God

> confound them. And wonder of wonders they saw in this. They rushed away of their own accord, and fled and ran, and would kill one another by sword. They stumbled but no one was chasing them. And since this miracle occurred at the synagogue the Grand Master seized it in these times and built upon it a large church as a memorial; and to the Jews he gave another building in its place. And when I was in Rhodes he designated for them one hundred ducats from the city's revenues to build and decorate the new synagogue.[35]

It is probable that at the time of Meshullam's visit, the Grand Master had allowed the Jews to keep their original place of worship. But at some point before Obadiah's arrival six years later, the Grand Master was apparently persuaded to convert the synagogue into a church. Having made that decision, he tried to assuage the Jews by giving them another building together with funds to repair and beautify it.[36]

In the aftermath of the war of 1480 all Rhodians, Jews and non-Jews alike, suffered serious hardships. Felix Fabri, a Christian pilgrim, visited Rhodes shortly after the Turkish withdrawal from the island. He commented that the city had been severely damaged, streets were full of stones and cannon balls. Merchandise in stores was expensive because Turkish plundering had caused supply shortages. Difficult conditions on the island led some of the inhabitants to seek other places to live. When Fabri's ship left Rhodes, its passengers included some of the Knights of St. John as well as "some Jews who had fought bravely during the siege."[37]

Postwar life in Rhodes is described in the travel account of Rabbi Obadiah of Bertinoro, who visited the island for six weeks en route to the Holy Land, where he became the Chief Rabbi of Palestinian Jewry. Arriving in Rhodes on November 17, 1487, Obadiah was given a warm reception by the "notables of the Jewish community of Rhodes". One of his fellow passengers aboard ship was the brother of Nathan, the doctor, a leading member of the Rhodes' Jewish community. The Jews of Rhodes were generous in providing good accommodations for Obadiah and his coreligionists on the ship.[38]

Describing the Jewish quarter, Obadiah noted that its houses were still in poor condition due to the war of 1480. Countless stones from the Turkish bombardment still cluttered the streets. But impressed by the strength of the city's construction, Obadiah

wrote: "Whoever has not seen Rhodes and its high walls, fortresses and tortuous paths has not seen a fortress in his life."[39]

Obadiah found only twenty-two Jewish families living in Rhodes, all poor. The Jews consumed no meat or wine, since they had no *shehitah* (ritual slaughter) and they did not make their own wine. Their scrupulous religious observance led them to abstain from all wine produced by non-Jews.

But despite their poverty, the Jews of Rhodes constituted a noble group. Obadiah remarked that he had never seen their equals anywhere. He found them handsome, intelligent, cultured and well-mannered people who honored their fellow humans. They were humble and gentle with their language. Even the hard-working laborers dressed neatly. All were clean and appeared as children of a king. Obadiah added that there were no women in all the earth more beautiful than the women of Rhodes. Moreover, their beauty was matched by their industry.[40] He made mention of Jewish tanners, and indicated that Jewish women did handiwork for the Knights to help support their families. "The nobles of the land hold the Jews in high esteem, often coming to their houses to chat with the women who are working there."

A non-Jewish traveler, Canon Pietro Casola, passed through Rhodes in 1494 and observed that "there are many and rich Jews, and they carry on the silk industry."[41] Whether the number of Jews in Rhodes increased substantially from the time of Obadiah's visit or Casola exaggerated their number cannot be definitely ascertained. But it is possible that exiles from the Spanish expulsion of 1492 did find their way to Rhodes so that by the time of Casola's observation, the Jewish community may have been larger than at the time of Obadiah's stay.

Expulsion of Jews from Spain

The expulsion of Jews from Spain was to have a major impact on the island's tiny community. Spanish Jewry was the most numerous, influential and cultured Jewry of the Middle Ages. Their achievements while living in Islamic and Christian Spain (beginning particularly in the 10th century) have rarely been matched by any Jewry before or since. Their contributions to Biblical and Talmudic studies, Hebrew grammar, poetry, Jewish philosophy and literature are well-recognized. Their involvement in medicine, astronomy and the sciences in general was noteworthy. Their prosperity and

social position, their influential relationships with the nobles and rulers of the land were a source of pride and self-esteem.[42] Because the Spanish Jews had risen so high, their fall was particularly shocking and painful.

The expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492 marked the culmination of a steady process of erosion in Jewish-Christian relations. In 1391, Christian religious fanaticism fueled a series of anti-Jewish outbreaks in Spain. Many Jews were forced to convert to Christianity or face death. Beginning in 1481, the Spanish Inquisition prosecuted Christians who were suspected of "Judaizing", observing Jewish practices. While the Inquisition had no authority over faithful Jews, it persecuted those who had accepted Christianity under pressure (New Christians). Faithful Jews were perceived as a corruptive influence on Christians, especially on New Christians of Jewish origin. The reign of religious terror, therefore, led to the expulsion of Jews as part of an effort to de-Judaize Spanish Christians.[43]

On March 31, 1492, King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella issued the decree of expulsion. The Jews were granted only three months to settle their affairs and leave. Their attempts to have the decree rescinded proved futile. The majority of the exiles went to neighboring Portugal. But in 1497, all Jewry in Portugal was subject to forced baptism, and official Jewish life there was also terminated. Meanwhile, other groups of Sephardim had gone to North Africa, the Middle East, the Ottoman Empire and Western Europe. The exilic experience changed not only the demography of Sephardic Jewry but its spiritual and psychological make-up as well.

It was not easy for the exiles to resolve their seeming abandonment by God. Sephardic intellectuals developed varying interpretations of their situation. Don Yitzhak Abravanel, the leading figure of Spanish Jewry at the time of the expulsion, wrote a messianic trilogy in which he explained that the sufferings of his people signalled the beginning of the messianic era. He predicted the arrival of the Messiah for 1503 and justified his speculation with the argument that the exiles, crushed by despair, needed to know when their salvation could be expected.[44]

Interestingly, an author writing in Rhodes in 1495, used a similar approach to explain the horrible chain of persecutions which Jews had been suffering in Christian lands. Rabbi Joseph Shaltiel, son of

Mosheh Hacohen, towards the end of his book, *Sefer Hapeliah*, interpreted the events as follows:

> I think that the sufferings which the Jews have found in all the kingdoms of Edom [Christianity] from 5250-5255 [1490-95] constitute a period of sorrow for Jacob from which he will be saved; these are the pains which will usher in the Messiah.[45]

The Sephardic exiles were also receptive to mysticism. During the years following the expulsion, mystical schools flourished in Safed, Salonika and elsewhere. Lurianic Kabbalah, in particular, made a deep impression on the Sephardim. It taught that the sufferings of the Jews were in some way related to the suffering of God, that the scattered exiles were part of a cosmic process of revealing holiness, that their ordeals were part of a spiritual task to redeem the world from unholy influences.[46]

Sephardic historians attempted to describe all the various calamities which had plagued the Jewish people throughout their history in exile. Viewed in this perspective, the expulsion from Spain was only one in a long series of persecutions dating back at least to the time of the destruction of the First and Second Temples in Jerusalem (586 B.C.E., 70 C.E.) Therefore, the Spanish expulsion did not reflect God's abandonment of the Jewish people. On the contrary, Jewish history was seen to demonstrate God's providential care of the Jews. Although God has chastised His chosen people, He has also always restored them to safety. He has always seen to it that the Jews could withstand any sufferings. According to this line of thinking, the Spanish exiles could be confident of God's providential care and their ultimate redemption.[47]

If the spiritual crisis created by the expulsion was intense and long-lasting, the physical crisis was even more pressing. Thousands of refugees had to find new homes in a very short time. Many perished before they could reestablish themselves in a new land. The ships transporting the Jews from Spain were overcrowded. Plagues broke out, hunger and fatigue took lives. Ruthless ship captains took their Jewish passengers to sea, cast them overboard, and returned to take new loads of passengers to a similar fate. Solomon Ibn Verga, a 16th-century Sephardic author, recorded the heroic behavior of one exile who had been cast off a ship in a deserted place with his family and fellow passengers. Most of these

victims, including the man's wife and sons, died of starvation. In his sorrow, the exile said:

> Master of the Universe; You are doing much so that I should abandon my faith. But You should know with certainty that in spite of the intentions of those who dwell in the heavens, I am a Jew and I will remain a Jew, and all that You have brought down upon me and will bring down upon me will not help.[48]

At this time, the Ottoman Empire offered the most encouraging and satisfactory haven to the exiles. Turkish Jews had enjoyed prosperity and freedom since the early 15th century. Writing at about the time of the fall of Constantinople in 1453, a Turkish rabbi urged his coreligionists in Central Europe to migrate to Turkey. Two German rabbis traveling through Turkey at the time agreed that "without any doubt, if the Jews who live in Germany knew a tenth of the blessings which God has bestowed on His people of Israel in this land, neither snow nor rain, neither day or night would be of consequence until they had journeyed here."[49] The Ottoman Empire was happy to attract the culture, talent, business acumen and tax revenues which the Sephardic exiles could provide. Bayezid II, Sultan at the time of the Spanish expulsion, welcomed the Jews to Turkey.[50] The news spread quickly that the Ottoman Empire would receive the refugees with open arms.

But with the influx of Spanish Jews into Turkey came numerous changes in the fabric of local Jewish life there. Greek-speaking Romaniot Jews, the original Jewish inhabitants of the main centers of the Ottoman Empire, viewed the newcomers with mixed feelings. On the one hand, they respected and honored the Sephardim and helped them to adjust to their new society. On the other hand, they considered the Sephardim too aggressive and feared they would eventually dominate all Jewish life in the country. The early history of the Sephardim in Turkey is replete with clashes between the immigrants and the native Romaniot Jews on matters of Jewish law and practice.[51] Differences in language, liturgy, certain rituals and customs made the early contacts between these two groups of Jews fairly tense.

Further complicating the adjustment of Sephardim to their new communities was the diversity among the exiles themselves. Far from being a monolithic group, they tended to form congregations on the basis of their cities of origin in Spain and Portugal. Large

Sephardic centers such as Constantinople and Salonika had numerous Sephardic synagogues, many of them stemming from specific locations in the Iberian Peninsula.[52] In addition, several small congregations of Ashkenazic Jews also lived in Turkey, adding to the diversity of its Jewish life.

But despite the initial disruption caused by the Sephardic immigration, the Jewish communities of Turkey soon developed into relatively harmonious entities. In most places the Spanish language was eventually adopted by Romaniots and Ashkenazim. Sephardic customs also came to predominate in the religious and social spheres. Over the course of several generations, the initial divergences among Jews of different origins tended to fade, generally giving way to slightly modified Sephardic modes.[53] Where the Sephardim settled in significant numbers, they raised the level of Jewish scholarship. Constantinople and Salonika, for example, became outstanding centers of creative rabbinic learning with first-rate scholars and authors.[54]

Unlike locations under Ottoman rule, Rhodes may not have experienced a large Sephardic influx following the expulsion. As a Christian stronghold, the island could hardly have seemed to offer advantages comparable with those evident in the Ottoman Empire.

Expulsion From Rhodes

During the first few years of the 16th century, the wave of Christian intolerance as seen in Spain and Portugal spread to Rhodes. The Grand Master, Pierre d'Aubusson, called for the expulsion of the Jews from the domains of the Knights of St. John. This decree probably surprised the Jews of Rhodes, as they had been treated fairly well by the Knights heretofore. The Grand Master now lodged a host of charges against the Jews of the city. He argued that they led scandalous lives and that their bad example had led others to sin. He told the Council of Rhodes that the Jews might cause many evils among the faithful Christians. The Council unanimously agreed that the Jews were to be expelled from the island and all territories of the Order within 50 days. They were given 40 days to sell their property. Furthermore, they were forbidden to settle in Turkey lest they serve as spies against the Knights.[55]

However, the edict stipulated that all Jews who accepted baptism could remain in Rhodes. It also stated that all Jewish children would

be forcibly baptized, regardless of their parents' decisions. The Grand Master then proceeded to have Jewish children baptized and brought up at the public charge.[56] Some Rhodian Jews converted under these pressures. Others who could leave Rhodes were put on a ship to Nice, France.[57] A number were tortured and killed.

The doctor and author, Elijah Capsali (c. 1483-1555) of Candia, wrote a vivid description of the Jewish response to the Grand Master's decree. When the Jews learned of the edict, they turned their clothes inside out, covered themselves with ashes and screamed in anguish throughout the streets. They went to the court of the Grand Master and pleaded for mercy, but d'Aubusson ignored their cries. Those who did not convert were cast into a pit, becoming ill and weak in the course of days. But they maintained their faith. They strengthened their resolves and encouraged each other to hold fast to their religion. They proclaimed the *Shema Yisrael* and with this declaration of faith these Jewish men and women met their deaths.[58]

Official Jewish life in Rhodes thus came to a halt. But in the period following the expulsion decree, the Knights brought captives, including many Jews, to Rhodes as slaves. In 1507, for example, they captured a ship carrying several hundred Jewish passengers from a North African port. As a result of such kidnappings, a fairly large colony of Jewish captives existed in Rhodes. An eye-witness estimated that there were between two and three thousand Jews in Rhodes—this after the Jews had been expelled from the island.[59]

Jewish communities in the proximity of Rhodes were aware of the plight of the island's Jews and attempted to assist them. The process of raising funds for the ransom of Jewish captives in Rhodes continued virtually until the Turkish conquest of the island at the end of 1522.[60]

The War of 1522 and its Aftermath

In June 1522, Sultan Suleyman mobilized once again Ottoman forces against the Knights of Rhodes. According to the 16th-century Sephardic historian, Joseph Hacohen, the Turks had 400 ships and 200,000 soldiers as well as an enormous quantity of weapons. Exaggerated as these figures may be, the Turkish attack was undoubtedly a massive one.[61]

This time the Knights were unable to turn back the Turkish

forces. The Sultan's spies were able to convey crucial information from Rhodes to the Turkish troops. On September 19, 1522, the defenders of Rhodes discovered a doctor, a Jewish apostate named John Battista (formerly Jacob Cominto), who had attached a letter to an arrow which he was about to shoot into the Turkish camp. He was condemned to death.[62] On October 27, 1522, a Portuguese New Christian, Blasco Diaz, was also apprehended as a spy, and was later executed.[63] Rabbi Raphael Yitzhak Israel (d. 1902) of Rhodes reported the tradition that a certain Jewish artisan had advised Sultan Suleyman the Magnificent how to defeat the Knights.[64]

The fighting went badly for the Knights. By December 24, Suleyman offered to allow them to leave Rhodes unharmed if they would surrender. On January 1, 1523, the Grand Master L'Isle D'Adam and his followers sailed for Candia in defeat.[65] As Alphonse de Lamartine noted several centuries later, "an Order that could allow itself to be driven from such a magnificent possession must have received its death-blow."[66] Eventually, the Order re-established itself in Malta, but its rule in Rhodes had come to an end.

Elijah Capsali of Candia believed that the Turkish conquest of Rhodes was part of the messianic drama leading to redemption. To him, the Sultan seemed a messianic figure. In a poem written in honor of the Turkish victory, Capsali described the event as a marriage between Rhodes, the bride, and Suleyman, the groom.[67] Of Suleyman he wrote: "Your descendants shall inherit the cities of their enemies with joy and happiness. And your name in Israel will be known as Groom and Bride."[68]

The Jews in Rhodes rejoiced in the Turkish victory and the Order's departure. They rushed to the synagogue and prayed there openly for the first time since d'Aubusson had decreed conversion or expulsion from the island. Capsali described the liberation as follows:

> On that day all the Turkish slaves in Rhodes were liberated, for the Sultan had so stipulated with the Rhodians that they not be killed. Also, many Jews were in Rhodes as slaves, and they escaped with God's mercy. Moreover, all the Jews who had been converted at the time of the expulsion from Rhodes—whether by force or from free will—all returned to their original faith. They opened the synagogue which the gentiles had closed. . . .[69]

Apparently, a number of Jews as well as non-Jews left the island with the Knights. Among the Jews there may have been former captives who wished to return to their own homes. Perhaps some Jews were still loyal to the Order for some reason. In addition, many of the Greek Christians, who constituted the majority of the city's population, chose to leave Rhodes. Unwilling to live under Turkish Moslem rule, they preferred to find new homes elsewhere.[70]

The Turkish conquest of Rhodes marked a crucial turning point in the history of Jewish life on the island. As Sephardic exiles and children of exiles made their way to this island in the Aegean Sea, a new and important Sephardic community began to develop.

CHAPTER TWO

The Establishment of a Sephardic Community

The Sultan encouraged Jewish settlement in Rhodes. The historian, Abraham Galante, recorded a tradition passed down through generations of Rhodeslies that Suleyman issued a firman (official decree) which offered special privileges to Jews settling in Rhodes.

These included: (1) exemption from taxes for a period of one hundred years; (2) enjoyment of the profits of sulfur mines in Rhodes; (3) the right to bury and mourn their dead, to have funeral processions to the cemetery and even to pass through Moslem quarters during such processions; (4) the privilege of buying *kasher* meat at the same price and under the same conditions as meat sold to Moslems; (5) the right of each family to a house given to it freely by the Ottoman government.[1] With such incentives, Rhodes attracted a sizable number of Jewish settlers, almost all of them Sephardim from other parts of the Ottoman Empire. Rabbi Raphael Yitzhak Israel stated that the early Jewish arrivals were from Salonika, Smyrna, Constantinople, Jerusalem and other cities.[2] The 16th-century Sephardic historian, Joseph Hacohen, described the period following the Turkish conquest of Rhodes: "In those days Suleyman the Turk sent many Jews to live in Rhodes and they reside there securely to this day."[3]

Two travel accounts of non-Jewish writers, dating 1552 and 1579, went so far as to claim that the Jews constituted the majority of the city's population.[4] Although these accounts may be exaggerated (no subsequent observers claimed that the Jews were the majority of the city's inhabitants), they do point to a noticeable Jewish presence in Rhodes. At the end of the 16th century, Giovanni Botero estimated 500 Jews in Rhodes.[5]

As was the case in other Ottoman Empire communities where Sephardim arrived in relatively large numbers, the community in Rhodes experienced some tension between Sephardim and the native Jews of Romaniot background. The native group included those who had lived in Rhodes under the Knights and who had openly returned to Judaism following the Turkish conquest. There may also have been some Jews who had been captured and enslaved by the Knights, but chose to remain in Rhodes rather than return to their original lands.

Romaniots and Sephardim differed with respect to language, liturgy, religious customs and practices. As each group was eager to have its own cultural characteristics prevail, some controversy was inevitable. One major point of contention in Rhodes involved the procedure of ritual slaughter of animals (*shehitah*). Sephardim and Romaniots differed in certain technical details of *shehitah*. As a result, members of one group might not be permitted to eat meat slaughtered by members of the other group; nor might members of one group eat meat at the homes of those in the other group. That this issue was the source of heated debate is evidenced by the fact that Rabbi Shemuel de Medina, a leading rabbinic authority in Salonika, had sent several responsa to Rhodes attempting to resolve the problem.[6]

The situation in Rhodes can be better understood by considering the similar circumstances in Candia. Rabbi Mosheh Capsali of Constantinople, himself a Romaniot, urged his Candian coreligionists to resist the efforts of the newly-arrived Sephardim to change the customs of the native community. He noted that Candia's Jews had long followed the legal rulings of the Talmud as interpreted by the Franco-German *Tosafists* (commentators and scholars), particularly of Rabbeinu Jacob Tam, an outstanding French rabbinic authority (1100-1171). The Sephardic newcomers preferred the interpretations and rulings of the Spanish rabbis, in whose tradition they followed.[7] The major differences in interpretation between the Franco-German and the Spanish rabbis led to the legal controversies between Sephardim and Romaniots.

On the island of Rhodes, the two groups apparently reached a compromise concerning the authorities to be followed. In the early 16th century, soon after the arrival of Sephardim, the community's rabbinic leaders agreed to follow the rulings of Maimonides in monetary matters and the decisions of Rabbeinu Asher in cases

involving ritual prohibitions.[8] Maimonides was, of course, one of the leading Sephardic authorities of the middle ages. Rabbeinu Asher, though he had spent many years teaching in Spain, represented the German method of learning and was regarded as one of the leading Ashkenazic authorities. In later years, though, the Sephardic population of Rhodes increased steadily in numbers and influence so that Sephardic practices came to prevail in all phases of Jewish law and custom. There was no more need for compromise.

Even the Spanish language was adopted by the native Rhodian Jews. Within thirteen years of the Turkish conquest of Rhodes, a communal decree (*haskamah*, or agreement), dealing with the important local wine industry was published in Spanish.[9] Presumably, everyone could understand it since it affected all Jews of Rhodes regardless of their origin. Even if the non-Spanish Jews did not at that period use Spanish as their daily language of communication, yet within a generation or two, Spanish was certainly the universal language of the Jews in Rhodes.

In time, the community of Rhodes organized itself along the lines of other Sephardic communities in the Ottoman Empire. As we shall see, the community's system of self-government was a powerful force in the maintenance of a stable Jewish society.

Community Officials

The Jewish communities of the Ottoman Empire had two types of officials: (1) those who served as mediators between the Jews and the government; (2) those who governed the internal affairs of the Jewish community itself. Sometimes, as could be expected, the same individuals were involved in both capacities.

It was common practice for Jewish communities to appoint one individual who alone was authorized to deal with the Ottoman officials. He was known as the *kahya*, or "lord of the house", a term used to describe various types of office-holders in the Ottoman Empire.[10] The *kahya* held a uniquely powerful position: no other Jew was permitted to deal directly with the government without his express approval. Thus, the government authorities always knew whom to contact when they wished to communicate with the Jewish community. From the Jewish viewpoint, having a *kahya* limited the possibility of dissident Jews bringing their feuds and problems directly to the government.

On the other hand, because so much power was vested in one person, controversies and abuses were inevitable. The *kahya* might become too haughty and incur public jealousy and wrath; he might negotiate with the Ottoman officials without first consulting the Jewish community which he represented; he also might antagonize some Jews if he did not fulfill their particular wishes and demands.

As a result of these and related problems, a *kahya* was sometimes ousted from office. For example, when Rabbi Eliyahu Mizrahi (c. 1450-1526) was the leading rabbi in Constantinople, R. Shaltiel was serving as *kahya*. But by the year 1518, the Jews of the community wished to remove him because they felt he had too much power and was acting without properly respecting their wishes. After they had succeeded in removing him from his position, the community members enacted a strict *haskamah* never to allow R. Shaltiel or his sons to serve as *kahya*. But some time later, R. Shaltiel pleaded with leaders of the community to reappoint him as *kahya*, promising to consult them and respect their opinions. His sincerity and eloquence persuaded his coreligionists to return him to his former post. In an impressive ceremony, Rabbi Eliyahu Mizrahi absolved the community of its previous *haskamah* and charged R. Shaltiel to behave humbly and honorably as *kahya*.[11]

The Jewish community of Rhodes also had a problem with its *kahya* during the 16th century. He had behaved in a high-handed and irresponsible fashion, causing damage to the community as a whole and to some individuals in particular. As a result, the community issued a *haskamah* "with great strictnesses" that henceforth no Jew could serve as *kahya*, neither over the entire community nor over part of it. In place of a *kahya*, three individuals were appointed to serve as *parnassim*, leaders. They were authorized to handle the affairs of the Jewish community vis-a-vis the government. But this arrangement did not work out as planned. Within three months after the appointment of the three *parnassim*, one asserted himself to such an extent that he alone handled all the community's affairs. In effect the community had another *kahya*. The Moslem officials of Rhodes so referred to him as did the non-Jewish masses. The Jews called him *parnas*. The community wanted to know if the present arrangement was in violation of its *haskamah* which forbade the institution of *kahya*. The question was sent to Rabbi David Ibn Zimra, an outstanding rabbinic authority in Egypt, who answered that if the members of the community fully trusted

the individual who had undertaken the duties of *kahya*, they could continue with the present arrangement, i.e., one man carrying the duties of a *kahya*. But if there was reason to suspect that he would harm the community, as the previous *kahya* had done, then this *parnas* must be removed.[12]

The internal affairs of the community were administered by *parnassim*, who were entrusted with considerable authority.[13] It was their responsibility to: (1) see that the institutions within the Jewish community were functioning properly and were adequately financed; (2) see that taxes levied on the Jewish community were duly assessed and collected; (3) punish Jews who did not abide by communal laws. In their delegated areas of authority, the rulings of the *parnassim* were binding on all the members of the Jewish community.[14] In some Sephardic communities *parnassim* even served in judicial capacities, although litigants always had the option of taking their cases directly to rabbinic courts.[15] But in Rhodes, the *parnassim* apparently did not have wide judicial powers and deferred to rabbinic authorities in matters of Jewish law.[16]

Normally, Sephardic communities in the Ottoman Empire would appoint a religious leader known as the *Hakham* (sage) or *Marbits Torah* (disseminator of Torah), who served as the rabbinic authority for the community.[17] This was true for the Jews of Rhodes as well.

Communal Ordinances: The Haskamah

As part of their self-government system, Sephardic communities legislated rulings and ordinances applicable to their specific needs. Known as *haskamoth* (agreements), these rules were sometimes intended to be effective only for a limited period of time; in other instances, they were considered effective in perpetuity.

A *haskamah* was instituted at the request of the leaders of the community or individuals within the community. The *Hakham's* approval was required to validate a *haskamah*.[18] Once accepted, a *haskamah* was binding on all members of the community until such time as it was rescinded by action of the entire community. A *haskamah* was considered on a par with the religious law prescribed by the Torah.[19]

In its general form, a *haskamah* described the problem it intended to solve, presented the proposed resolution, and provided a threat of excommunication or heavenly retribution for any who violated it. It was customarily signed by the *Hakham* and *parnassim*.

One of the persistent and complex problems associated with *haskamoth* was the question of whether the majority had the right to pass an ordinance over the objection of a dissenting minority of the community. Does the majority rule, or is unanimity imperative? Over the centuries this question evoked considerable rabbinic discussion.

It seems that the Jews of Rhodes resolved this dilemma by distinguishing between different types of *haskamoth*. In matters involving an improvement that was needed for the general community, a majority was sufficient to enact a *haskamah*. But in matters involving taxation, a unanimous decision was required in order to protect individuals from a barrage of levies imposed on them by the majority of the community.[20] In the final analysis, the situation surrounding each *haskamah* had to be carefully evaluated before determining whether a majority or unanimity was required for its adoption.

Rabbinic law allowed for the institution of *herem*, excommunication, in order to give communities power to enforce their laws.[21] Yet, *herem* was more a threat than an actual procedure. Writing in the 13th century, the great rabbinic authority Shelomo ben Adreth of Barcelona indicated that he had never learned why communities did *not* excommunicate those individuals who violated rulings which carried that penalty.[22] Apparently people's own religious consciences were the final source of punishment. Indeed, the responsa literature of the 16th through 20th centuries reveals very few examples of *herem* in Rhodes.

The foundations of self-government established by the Jews of Rhodes in the 16th century were to serve the community well during the ensuing centuries. The autonomous nature of the community and the supremacy of religious law in all matters of life were basic ingredients of Jewish life in Rhodes. We turn now to a consideration of the Jewish community's legal status and its relationship with non-Jewish neighbors.

CHAPTER THREE

Jews and the Non-Jewish Society

Legal Status of Jews under Islamic Rule

Islamic law allowed full civil rights and privileges only to Moslems. Non-Moslems were viewed as belonging to two categories. Idolaters—those who did not possess divinely revealed Scriptures—were forced to accept Islam or face death. People of Scriptures—e.g. Jews and Christians—were tolerated as infidels and were termed *dhimmis*, or protected people. Although there were times when *dhimmis* were subjected to forced conversion to Islam, their religious autonomy was generally accepted and protected. In order to understand the history of the Jews of Rhodes (and indeed that of all Jewish communities under Islamic rule), it is necessary to understand the status of *dhimmis*.[1]

"Protected" people legally had no rights in the State at all, but were permitted to exist only on the payment of a special tribute.[2] The Koran states: "Fight against such of those to whom the Scriptures were given as believe neither in Allah nor the Last Day, who do not forbid what Allah and his apostle have forbidden, and do not embrace the true faith, until they pay tribute out of hand and are utterly subdued (9:29)." Once they paid this tribute, however, they were to be protected from harm. A document dating to the second century of Islam, and ascribed to the Caliph Omar indicates that Moslems should "do battle to guard them (*dhimmis*) and put no burden on them greater than they can bear, provided they pay what is due from them to the Moslems. . . ."[3]

During the early period of Moslem rule over its newly conquered countries (seventh and eighth centuries C.E.), the ruling dynasty was tolerant of the groups which came under its domain. But by the third century of the Moslem era (ninth century C.E.), when Moslems had become the majority in the conquered lands and had

developed an extensive literature of religious law, various humiliating restrictions were placed on Jews and Christians, some going back to Byzantine anti-Jewish legislation.[4]

In practical terms, *dhimmis* were granted certain basic freedoms. They could own property, and could practice their religion freely, although they were not permitted to build new houses of worship. This restriction was often disregarded by Moslem rulers, and yet it always constituted a menace for *dhimmis*, since an intolerant ruler or a fanatical mob might destroy the buildings in a moment of religious passion.[5]

They were subject to various legal disabilities. For example, the evidence of a *dhimmi* was not accepted against the evidence of a Moslem. A Moslem could not be put to death for murdering a *dhimmi*. *Dhimmis* were not allowed to ride horseback or to carry weapons. Even their right to travel freely was periodically restricted. For instance, the 16th century traveler, Carlier de Pinon, noted his ship was delayed in its departure from Rhodes because the Rhodian Jews on board had to be examined to determine whether they had proper exit permits.[6] Non-Moslems were also restricted from holding government posts, although exceptions were made depending on local situations and attitudes.

Another annoying restriction was the requirement that non-Moslems wear distinctive clothing. The requirements varied in different places and periods. Professor S. D. Goitein has noted: "The yellow badge for Jews was known in Muslim countries many centuries before it was introduced into Christian Europe."[7] A 17th-century observer remarked:

> The Jews in Turkey dress like the Turks except that they may not wear green, nor a white turban, nor a red jacket. They are usually dressed in violet but they are obliged to wear a violet bonnet made in the shape of and the same height as a hat and those who have the means to own a turban wear it round the base of their bonnet. They must also wear socks and violet slippers.[8]

In general, these official discriminatory policies were designed to isolate and humiliate non-Moslems, to remind them constantly that their lives depended on the mercy of the Moslem rulers. Although the Ottoman Empire was generally tolerant, even benevolent to non-Moslems, yet there could be no question concerning the *dhimmis* inferior status.

The Millet

In general, the Ottoman government dealt directly with communities of *dhimmis* rather than with individuals. Each such community was known as a *millet*, and was allowed to function with a considerable degree of internal autonomy.

The *millet* system offered definite advantages to the Jews. They could organize themselves according to their own religious laws and customs, and could operate their own educational and judicial systems. They could use Judeo-Spanish and Hebrew, rather than Turkish, thereby maintaining their own cultural and linguistic identity. A member of a Jewish community would normally have little or no direct contact with the government. He paid taxes to the Jewish community; he sent his children to the Jewish schools; he took his disputes to Jewish courts; he participated in the selection of Jewish officials who would serve the Jewish community. In short, his life was governed almost completely by the rules of the Jews, not by the Moslem government.

But the *millet* system also produced certain disadvantages for the Jews. Loyal as they were to the Ottoman Empire, they could not help but consider themselves an alien group on Turkish soil. They were relatively isolated from the intellectual life of Turkey, many not being fluent in the language of the land until the late 19th or early 20th centuries—and many not even then.[9] Although the Ottoman Ministry of Education in 1867 did accept the principle that non-Moslems could attend State Secondary Schools, new regulations were enacted only two years later which stated that *millets* should use their own languages in instructing their youth.[10] The various discriminatory policies and the *millet* system tended to impress the *dhimmis* that they were *in* the Empire but not *of* it.

Although the Jews lived in their own quarters and according to their own rules, the general influences of Ottoman society were pervasive. Many Sephardic customs and beliefs were adopted from those prevailing among the Turks. Jewish cuisine, music, clothing and superstitious beliefs all reflected the Ottoman milieu.[11]

Even some Jewish occupations were specifically influenced by Islamic society. For example, since Islam forbade its faithful to drink alcoholic beverages, most taverns were owned by Christians or Jews, many of them located in Jewish quarters. It was considered inappropriate for Moslems to operate taverns; yet many Turks frequented them![12]

Islamic law also prohibited Moslems from taking any compensation for work they might do as silver or goldsmiths. A Moslem was not allowed to charge more for gold and silver articles than the value of the material itself; anything more was regarded as usury. Therefore, Moslems tended to avoid those trades, leaving occupations associated with gold- and silver-working to non-Moslems.[13]

Non-Jewish Jurisdiction

As has been indicated, the Jewish *millets* were able to operate their own judicial systems. The rabbinic courts were utilized for all types of cases—ritual, business, even criminal. The community of Rhodes followed this pattern and was quite insistent that Jews use *only* Jewish courts and not resort to non-Jewish jurisdiction. Even deeds of sale were written by scribes who followed the technicalities of Jewish law in drawing up the documents and in having them signed by proper witnesses. In the 16th century, we find an instance of a Rhodian Jew who sold half of his vineyard to a coreligionist but had the transaction validated in a non-Jewish court. The seller died shortly thereafter and the buyer came to the heirs to claim ownership of half the vineyard; but, among other arguments, the heirs denied the validity of a contract made in a non-Jewish court.

In dealing with this case, Rabbi David Ibn Zimra (d. 1573) judged that the Jews of Rhodes could not legally defend their stringent requirement that all deeds be drawn up only in Jewish courts in order to be valid. Talmudic law itself had the principle that "the law of the Kingdom is law" in land transactions. Thus, if Jews were to use non-Jewish courts for such cases, the transactions would be valid. Rabbi Ibn Zimra noted, however, that the Jews could encourage the practice of utilizing their own courts for drawing up deeds of land sale.[14]

Aside from the religious considerations involved in employing Jewish courts, Jews also had a practical concern: they mistrusted the non-Jewish courts, and with good reason. The author of the question to Rabbi David Ibn Zimra just discussed stated flatly that the non-Jewish courts in Rhodes were definitely unreliable and their judges were accustomed to accepting bribes. An unscrupulous Jew could bribe the non-Jewish judges to rule in his favor against an innocent coreligionist.[15]

A number of cases discussed in responsa shed light on the

inequities arising from relationships between the Jewish community and the non-Jewish authorities of Rhodes over the centuries.

One such example occurred in the 16th century. There was a disagreement between a Jew, Yehudah Apomado, and the Jewish tax assessors of Rhodes' community. The latter turned Apomado over to the government where he was brutalized. On that night when Apomado had been apprehended by the government, the tax assessors recognized the gravity of their crime in turning a coreligionist over to the non-Jewish authorities. Three of them went to the *parnas*, Abraham Mir, and demanded that he not put them in *herem* as punishment for their action. They threatened that if he did invoke the *herem* they would make life difficult for him. Later, two witnesses signed a document testifying that Apomado had been right and the tax assessors wrong in their dispute. Thus, not only were they guilty of turning a Jew over to the non-Jewish authorities, but they did so when the victim had actually been innocent. When Apomado was finally released by the government, it was learned that he had been tortured. How were the tax assessors to compensate Apomado for his sufferings? Rabbi David Ibn Zimra wrote to Rhodes stating that they must pay reparations for Apomado's pain and for any losses and expenses he incurred due to his incarceration. If they did not comply with these terms, they would be placed in *herem* until Apomado agreed to forgive them.[16]

This case demonstrates the severity of the crime of turning a fellow Jew over to non-Jewish authorities. It also shows that these authorities utilized torture on their victims.

An incident in 1669 reflects the discriminating practices of the non-Jewish authorities whereby the entire Jewish community was held responsible for misdeeds of an individual member. A Rhodian Jew owned three adjoining structures, renting one as a tavern and one as a storehouse, while the third, which remained vacant, housed an open, unfenced water well. The owner was warned repeatedly that he should protect this potentially hazardous well, but he did not heed the warnings. When a plague broke out in the city, many people including the Jewish owner of these structures, fled to the countryside. In his absence, a Turkish patron of the tavern became intoxicated, wandered into the building housing the unfenced well, fell in and was drowned. Technically, the Jewish owner was not really responsible for the man's death; the well was not in a public thoroughfare, but in a private domain, where the

Turk had no right to be in the first place. Nevertheless, the government of Rhodes held the *entire* Jewish community responsible for the man's death and exacted a fine from the community. The Jewish community, in turn, compelled the owner of the well to pay part of the fine inasmuch as he had been negligent and unheeding of his neighbors' numerous warnings.[17]

During a later period, Rabbi Mosheh ben Eliyahu Israel (d. 1782) was confronted with two major cases which also reflect relationships between the Jews and non-Jewish authorities. One of the cases unfolded as follows:[18]

While selling their wares in the gentile district outside the city of Rhodes, two Jewish merchants witnessed a group of non-Jewish men and women as they were leaving the scene of a social gathering, playing drums and trumpets. Among the group were two Jewish women, who were singing and rejoicing along with the others. The two merchants reported the incident to the Chief Rabbi who, in turn, summoned the women to a meeting at which he warned them about the impropriety of their conduct. The women replied that while they did indeed go to gentile parties, they did so solely in a professional capacity, not to socialize with the non-Jews, but to sing for pay. Moreover, they assured the rabbi, they were guilty of no wrong-doing, as they did not eat gentile's food or even drink their water. Despite these assurances, the rabbi told the women that their conduct was improper and they must discontinue working in such a capacity.

A day later, one of the women publicly cursed one of the witnesses whose report had led to the rabbi's chastisement. On learning of her comments, the merchant cursed the woman in return. A month later, the woman's grandson—a strong, brutish person—went to the merchant's store to defend his grandmother's honor. Entering the store with a knife in his hand, he attempted to stab the merchant but was restrained by several bystanders who tried to appease the would-be murderer. But his anger persisted. On still another occasion, he tried to kill the merchant, but was again thwarted by customers in the store. At this point the merchant's friends persuaded him to notify the Rhodian city officials about these attempts on his life. The merchant did so and shortly thereafter the police apprehended the culprit. But as they prepared to beat him, he suddenly announced his conversion to Islam. As a Moslem, he could not be held culpable for actions he had

committed against Jews. Once he was accepted as a Moslem, the young man sought to have the merchant murdered by non-Jews. He claimed that the merchant had tried to re-convert him to Judaism, a crime punishable by death. The Jewish storekeeper was then obliged to pay bribes to the non-Jewish hired assassins, as well as to city officials, to spare his life.

Despite the threats against his life, the merchant felt some religious qualms about his treatment of a coreligionist. He asked the Chief Rabbi if it had been wrong to report his would-be murderer to the gentile authorities. The rabbi answered that his action had been proper, although normally no Jew should report alleged wrongdoing by a fellow Jew to non-Jewish authorities. But in these circumstances, the rabbi too thought that drastic action had been necessary. The merchant also wanted to know if reimbursement for the bribes he had been forced to pay could be drawn from community funds; he himself was an official of the community and might have been murdered if he had not paid the bribes, thereby worsening the general condition of Rhodes' Jews. In practical effect, the government's belief that one Jewish official was attempting to convert a Moslem to Judaism would have dangerous ramifications for all the Jews of the city. In this case, Rabbi Israel ruled that the community was obliged to compensate the merchant for his financial losses incurred by payment of bribes.

Another case of the same period involved a certain Rhodian Jew, who was symbolically named Zimri.[19] A notorious gossip, Zimri trumped up charges that two Jewish men and a woman had been involved in an adulterous affair. He threatened to report them to the government to receive punishment of five hundred lashes and fines of more than one thousand gold pieces. The charges were denied. One of the accused men was particularly concerned to silence Zimri. He prevailed on the Chief Rabbi to meet with Zimri and warn him in strong terms to desist from further talk of this case and to refrain from threatening to report it to non-Jewish officials. Zimri consented to remain silent. The rabbi announced publicly that any community member repeating Zimri's malicious fabrication would be placed in *herem*.

But only a few days after his meeting with the Chief Rabbi, Zimri attended a wedding celebration where he ate, drank and became boisterously loose-tongued. One of the city officials, said Zimri, had learned of a Jewish burial which had been performed without prior

government permission, as Rhodian law required. Zimri told the crowd that the Governor would call the Jews to task for this as well as other crimes, probably demanding a fine of at least five hundred *arayot*, a considerable sum of money. Zimri then offered to mediate on behalf of the Jews, as he was confident that he could negotiate a smaller fine.

Late that night, the Governor of Rhodes sent for the *parnas*, the lay head of the Jewish community. Just as Zimri had predicted, the official wanted to know why the Jews had buried a young child at dusk without first obtaining the required permission, even insinuating that the Jews themselves had murdered the child. At the same time, the official told the *parnas* that he had heard of a case of adultery within the Jewish community and asked why such a major crime had not been reported to him. The *parnas* replied that the Jews had buried the child quickly because he had been burned to death in a fire, and the parents were suffering enough without having to keep the child's badly burned body in their home overnight. Moreover, the Jews had never been required to obtain permission for burials of children. In response to the charges of adultery, the *parnas* assured the official that no wrong-doing of this sort had ever occurred among the Jews. But despite his reasonable arguments, the *parnas* was locked in prison.

Government police were sent into the Jewish quarter to arrest and imprison those individuals who had participated in the burial. The Governor then demanded a ransom of five hundred *arayot*, precisely the amount mentioned by Zimri at the wedding celebration. The Jewish community apparently paid the ransom; but there was wide suspicion that Zimri was at the root of this crisis. No one had any substantive evidence of his guilt, but all agreed that some action must be taken.

Some time later, the Chief Rabbi delivered a sermon condemning informers who brought trouble to the Jewish people, and then placed Zimri in *herem*. The Governor promptly called the *parnas* and asked why the Chief Rabbi had delivered a sermon in which he had not only condemned the Jewish informer but the Governor as well. The *parnas* assured the official that the rabbi had not cursed him; indeed the Jews of Rhodes offered a prayer on his behalf each Sabbath in their synagogues.

Within a few days the Governor again called the *parnas* to complain about the adulterous affair within the Jewish community

which should have been reported to him. Once again, the *parnas* was imprisoned, together with an adultery suspect. But following an investigation of the case, the Governor recognized that the Jews were innocent of the charges. He admitted that the source of his false information had been none other than Zimri.

Because of the widespread hatred of Zimri among the Jews, the Chief Rabbi would not allow him to read the prophetic portion (haftarah) on a certain Sabbath, although it had been Zimri's custom to do so for many years. Enraged, Zimri now told the Governor that the Jews were persecuting him. Once again the official summoned the *parnas*, who again denied the charges. But now Zimri began to threaten the Governor himself, charging that if he could get no satisfaction from him, he would take his complaint to the higher authorities in Constantinople, who would come to Rhodes and uphold his cause.

Some time after this incident, Zimri became fatally ill. His coreligionists, concerned as ever with Jewish legal requirements, wanted to know whether or not Zimri should be treated as an informer inasmuch as the evidence against him was mainly hearsay and speculation. At this point, no Jewish witnesses could be found to testify that Zimri had actually told the Rhodian officials anything detrimental to the Jewish community. This question was not merely academic. If Zimri died as an informer, he would not be entitled to an honorable religious burial, nor would the laws of mourning apply to his family. He would be considered a renegade and outcast. In his response to the question, Rabbi Hayyim Tarsa of Rhodes stated that Zimri should definitely be treated as an informer who deserved no sympathy at all from his coreligionists. The general information available was enough to establish his guilt.

This rather lengthy case confirms a number of important points concerning the Jews' relationship with the non-Jewish authorities. It is apparent that Jews were subject to fines and imprisonment on the basis of hearsay. The *parnas* was held personally responsible for community "crimes" e.g., burial without permission. From the above examples, it should not be surprising that the Jews preferred to live under their own jurisdiction rather than that of the government. Each crisis which brought Jews into direct contact with the non-Jewish authorities only confirmed their belief that the latter were arbitrary, unjust and even cruel.

Relations with the Non-Jewish Population

In general, the Jews of Rhodes were careful not to cause the non-Jews any trouble or confusion. They tried never to leave themselves open to criticism by non-Jews. Thus, Rabbi Mosheh Israel, in a sermon in 1719, insisted the Jews be scrupulously honest in their business dealings with non-Jews.[20] The slightest dishonesty would not only be morally wrong, but would discredit the Jewish people and religion. In the early 19th century, Rabbi Michael Yaacob Israel preached a sermon in which he chastised Jews who did not fast on the minor fast days and who even ate in public where all could see them violating the fast. Such behavior constituted a profanation of God's law, as the non-Jews would be led to think that the Jews have two laws rather than only one. If there was only one law, all Jews would be fasting.[21]

In yet another example of this way of thinking, Rabbi Rahamim Hayyim Yehudah Israel, during the latter part of the 19th century, insisted that the Jews remain silent and dignified in their synagogues on Shabbat Zahor and Purim. Customarily, these days had been occasions for congregants to clap and stamp their feet in the synagogue in symbolic eradication of Amalek, the eternal enemy of Israel. Rabbi Israel's arguments included the notion that the non-Jews would receive a bad impression of the Jewish people if they heard much commotion and noise emanating from the synagogue.[22]

This defensive and frightened approach of the Jews was a result of their inferior legal status, their perception of their own political and physical weakness as a tolerated minority group. Moreover, the Jews could not help but be aware of the hostility of the non-Jewish population. The common Moslem epithet for Jew was *tchifut*—i.e., mean, avaricious. Moslems often treated Jews with contempt, making scornful gestures or remarks. The Greek Christians' disdain for Jews was even more pronounced. A Greek would preface the very reference to a Jew with an apology for even mentioning a member of that religious group.[23] Surrounded by a hostile, sometimes violent population, the Jews tried to be as cautious and inconspicuous as possible.

A 19th-century French traveler, Victor Guerin, noted that the Jews of Rhodes "... fashioned by long centuries of servitude, bend themselves under their yoke with supple and docile faces."[24] Indeed, the curse of living without real political security or the goodwill of

the non-Jewish population weighed heavily on the Jews. They came to accept this curse as a given ingredient in their lives, and indeed even blamed their unhappy situation on their own sins. A dramatic illustration of this attitude occurred in the winter of 1739. Some non-Jewish ruffians broke into a Jewish school in Rhodes and killed a number of the young men who studied there. Among the victims was the son of Rabbi Yedidiah Shemuel Tarica, a leading scholar in Rhodes who ultimately became the community's Chief Rabbi. The incident terrified the Jewish population. A year after the event, Rabbi Tarica delivered a speech in which he attempted to explain why the tragedy had occurred. He concluded that it represented the withdrawal of God's presence because of the Jews' own sins. Not indicating any desire for retaliation against the murderers, Rabbi Tarica instead submitted to the will of God.[25]

Another element of the Jewish way of thinking was the yearning for the arrival of the Messiah. Although the Jews were oppressed and maligned, they at least could look forward to messianic redemption when their sufferings would come to an end and their religious faithfulness be rewarded. In the meanwhile, they were content to accept passively whatever tribulations came their way.[26]

The Purim of Rhodes

The Jews of Rhodes were victims of sporadic acts of violence and vandalism throughout the centuries. But the major crisis in the community's history was the nightmarish blood libel of 1840. This anti-Jewish excuse for persecution became popular in the Middle Ages, when Jews were frequently charged with the murder of a Christian in order to use his blood for the Passover service. These demonstrably absurd charges cost the lives of many Jews over the centuries. The blood libel in Rhodes followed the medieval prototypes.[27]

A Jewish merchant from Smyrna sent a broker to Rhodes to deal in sponges. Viewing the Jew as a dangerous competitor, Rhodian Greeks tried to destroy him as well as his coreligionists. Resorting to the classical blood libel, they accused a poor Jewish peddler of having kidnapped a ten-year-old Christian child. The police imprisoned the peddler and forced him to implicate other Jews in the community as participants in the crime. On Purim eve, the police entered the Jewish quarter and arrested ten Jewish leaders, including their rabbi, Michael Yaacob Israel. The victims were

imprisoned in separate cells and were tortured. Thronging their synagogues, the Jews prayed to God to free the prisoners and spare the community any further anguish. But the Bey (governor) of Rhodes, Youssouf Pacha, ordered draconian measures against the Jewish population of the city in order to wring confessions of guilt from them. The Jewish quarter was blockaded, and no food was allowed into the area for three days. An attempt was made to smuggle a dead body into the Jewish quarter, but the Jews' own vigilance thwarted this plot. Aggravating the Jews' dire situation was a statement by two converts from Judaism that the Jews had indeed killed the Christian boy. Although the Jewish quarter was searched, no body was discovered.

Simultaneously and ominously, there was a blood libel against the Jews of Damascus. Jewish communities in Europe and the United States were infuriated by these charges and began to seek aid for the Rhodian and Syrian Jews. In London, the noted Jewish philanthropist and leader, Moses Montefiore, agitated for freedom of persecuted Jews in both cities. He called a meeting of leading London Jews at his house, with Adolphe Cremieux, the French leader, also present. The group managed to win a promise of support from Lord Palmerston, Great Britain's Foreign Secretary. But when they saw no progress in negotiations to free the Jews, the Jewish leaders formed their own mission, headed by Montefiore, to the Middle East. In the summer of 1840, Montefiore, his wife, Cremieux and several others left England. After a number of detours, Montefiore was ultimately received by Sultan Abdul Medjid in Constantinople on October 28, 1840. He was promised that the Jews would be protected and was given a firman declaring the innocence of the Jews of Damascus and Rhodes. According to the firman, a thorough examination of the Jewish religious literature by competent authorities had found that not only are Jews forbidden to eat human blood, they are forbidden to eat animal blood. Therefore, the Turkish government asserted, it could not allow its Jewish subjects to be tormented by such false accusations. Jewish subjects were to be defended and protected.

Apparently, however, the Jewish captives of Rhodes were released prior to Montefiore's receipt of the firman. Sent to Constantinople shortly after their arrest, the ten prisoners were declared innocent. One of the captives, Rabbi Michael Yaacob Israel, is known to have preached a sermon to the community on the

Sabbath before Passover in 1840, indicating that he had been freed less than a month after his imprisonment and trial in Constantinople. On the last day of Passover, the officials in Rhodes received an order from the Turkish government to protect the Jews. This led to great rejoicing and prayers of thanksgiving in the synagogues. Songs were composed in honor of the "Purim of Rhodes."[28]

In his sermon for *Shabbat Hagadol*, Rabbi Israel discussed the recent horrifying events. Expressing bitterness that the Rhodian officials had given any credence to the blood libel, he then proceeded to give his congregation words of *musar*—i.e., religious chastisement. Everything that happened to the Jews was for their own good, he claimed, even if the good was not immediately apparent. The community had been guilty of sins, such as pride, querulousness, disrespect for fellow men, pettiness, and therefore God had meted out His punishment. Rabbi Israel called for repentance and humility, concluding his sermon in the classical style which blames man's own sins for the sufferings which engulf him.[29]

Thus ended one of the most tragic episodes in the history of the Jews of Rhodes. In spite of their general freedom and enjoyment of many advantages, the Jews were never allowed to forget their alien status. To the Moslem rulers, they were *dhimmis*, members of a tolerated minority religious group. To the Greek Christians, they were the enemies of Christ. Even after centuries of Jewish life on Rhodes the Jews were not completely secure or free. A poem of a 19th-century rabbi of Rhodes laments that while the gentiles were elevated and honored, the residents of the *juderia* were humiliated and debased.[30]

Under Italian Rule

After nearly four centuries of Turkish dominion, the Island of Rhodes was occupied by Italian forces in May, 1912, during the Turco-Italian war. The occupation lasted until July, 1923, when the Treaty of Lausanne officially turned Rhodes over to Italy.[31]

The Jews of Rhodes now enjoyed the rights and privileges of the Jews of Italy. Whereas no less than nine Jews had been decorated by the Turkish Sultans, the Italian King knighted sixteen Jews of Rhodes by 1935.[32]

The Jews tried to demonstrate their loyalty to Italy whenever possible. When the princess of Italy was married in 1925, Eliyahu

Soriano, president of the Jewish community of Rhodes, sent a telegram of congratulations on behalf of the community. He expressed the hope that the newly-weds would do much for the "grandeur of our Italy." He received courteous replies from several Italian dignitaries.[33]

From the above discussion, it becomes clear that the Jews of Rhodes enjoyed basic autonomy and freedom. Although they suffered from a generally inferior legal and social status, and although they were victimized by non-Jews from time to time, their overall situation was relatively peaceful.

CHAPTER FOUR

Economic Life

Development of Economic Security

The Jewish community of Rhodes began to develop as the Ottoman Empire was nearing the peak of its expansion. The Turks had conquered Egypt in 1517. Sea routes were opened and protected by the powerful Ottoman navy. In general, economic conditions throughout the Empire were favorable during the first half of the 16th century, and opportunities abounded for enterprising merchants and traders.

Rhodes, with its strategic geographical position, was an important commercial port. It was assured "domination over all the other islands and the admiralty of the whole Mediterranean."[1] Aside from its proximity to the Turkish mainland, Rhodes was linked to Alexandria by a sea route which offered "a swift crossing with a favorable wind."[2]

To be sure, the majority of the people of the Island of Rhodes were engaged in agriculture as farmers and peasants. But in the city of Rhodes, businessmen were involved in manufacture of textiles, import and export, as well as other local occupations. The Jews, who lived exclusively in the city, engaged in all aspects of the city's commerce. By and large, the Jewish community seems to have been prosperous during its first decades in Rhodes. Sixteenth-century responsa literature refers to a number of wealthy Jews in Rhodes, including Shelomo ben Yakar, who was also a noted scholar and philanthropist.[3] Several responsa deal with large inheritances left by Rhodes Jews.[4] Indeed, the general picture which emerges from the responsa of this period shows Rhodes Jews to have been relatively affluent. Although the synagogues in Rhodes did have a special fund to provide assistance for the poor Jews, and although there were no doubt some needy individuals, the overall situation

was good. The Jews of the city clearly benefited from the city's prosperity.

The observations of a French visitor to Rhodes in 1552 confirm the indications of the responsa. Thevet d'Angoulême noted that the Jews of Rhodes were in charge of collecting seaport custom taxes. They did not own vineyards or lands, but rather their wealth consisted of money. By the end of each year, the Jews had accumulated "an amazing pile of money," (*merveilleux amaz de deniers*).[5] (It should be stated that, contrary to the above travel account, Jews *did* own vineyards and land, as we shall soon see. However, it is true that land was not a major source of investment for them.) Though Thevet's remark about Jewish wealth may be exaggerated, it seems to reflect accurately the general condition.

Textile Industry

The Jews who were expelled from Spain in 1492 brought their skills in the textile industry to the Ottoman Empire.[6] They are credited with importing the industry to Constantinople and Salonika and with being the backbone of the industry in Safed.[7] They were not only involved in the manufacture of textiles, including precious fabrics, but also were engaged in export and import as well as local retail trade.

The Jews of Rhodes were also very much involved in all aspects of the textile industry. There were two water-mill factories in Rhodes used for the manufacture of material. Owned by the Sultan, these mills were rented to Jews. Whoever had rented them was considered among the Jews as the actual proprietor so that he could sell the ownership of the lease to others. These were the only two textile factories in Rhodes, and the Jews made every effort to keep them in Jewish hands, warding off attempts of Turkish individuals to buy the lease. Members of the Jewish community had made certain agreements among themselves concerning use of the factories and payment of fees. One *haskamah* ruled that no Jew had the right to open another factory in Rhodes. When one Jewish person did indeed plan to build a factory in a different location from the others, he was forbidden to do so by the leaders of the community. A responsum from Rabbi Shemuel de Medina of Salonika indicated that no new factories should be allowed to be constructed. From this responsum, it appears that Jews were involved in manufacturing clothing, blankets as well as cloth.[8]

Towards the end of the 16th century, a number of textile-workers from Salonika migrated to Rhodes. The production of woolen cloth in Salonika had reached its peak in 1564, after which time the industry had suffered serious setbacks. An economic slump and inflation choked the industry so that by 1584 many salaried employees found it necessary to leave Salonika in search of work elsewhere. The precipitous decline in textile manufacture was paralleled in Safed, where the industry collapsed by the end of the century. In the 1580's cloth from England was being shipped to the Levant and Italian industry was also on the rise.[9] The general monetary crisis also aggravated the situation (inflation in the Ottoman Empire during this period did much to undermine business in general). It seems, though, that Rhodes was able to weather the storm well enough to absorb the influx of workers from Salonika.

Rhodian Jews were engaged in the export and import as well as the production of textile goods. Various responsa of the period describe textile trade of Jews from Rhodes with others from such places as Alexandria, Safed and Constantinople.[10] Jewish store-keepers in Rhodes sold textile goods to the local population. All in all, this industry was an important one for Rhodian Jews.

Wines

The good climate and soil of Rhodes made wine-growing an important industry there for centuries. Upon their arrival in the early 16th century, the Jews became active in the island's wine industry too. Religious as well as economic motivations drew Jews to this business. Jewish law forbade the drinking of wine produced or even touched by non-Jews. Thus, if Jews wanted wine (and they needed it for many religious ceremonies) they had either to produce their own or to import it from other Jewish communities. Since wine production was easily available in Rhodes, Jews engaged in the industry.

In 1537, a Jewish communal ordinance was enacted to control aspects of wine production by the island's Jews.[11] Normally, Jewish workers had prepared wine outside the city and then engaged non-Jews to bring it in containers to the city. Many problems arose in this connection, since the possibility of having non-Jews touch the wine or unsealed containers of wine was great. To avoid mistakes, the community agreed to be quite careful in wine production and

transport, so that only Jews should be involved in the entire process. The wine of anyone who violated this ordinance, either intentionally or accidentally, could neither be drunk by nor sold to Jews. The ordinance prohibited importation of wine from outside Rhodes—e.g., from other islands such as Crete, Chios and Cyprus, unless it was known to have been produced in strict adherence to the ordinance's requirements.

A question sent to Rabbi David Ibn Zimra of Egypt—dating from the early years of the community's establishment under Ottoman rule—notes in a matter-of-fact way that Jews owned vineyards in Rhodes. "Reuben had a vineyard and sold half to Simeon for one hundred gold pieces. The custom of [the Jews of] the city was to have the sale validated by a document drawn according to Jewish law by a scribe."[12] The problem in this case was that the sale had been transacted in the non-Jewish court, and the questioner wondered if this particular sale was to be considered valid. But from the nature of the question, it seems clear that land transactions were not uncommon and that the community even had its own procedure in such matters. It is reasonable to assume that Jews did own vineyards since the wine industry was important for them.

Other Local Industries

A number of Rhodian Jews were active in the labdanum trade, a lucrative local industry related to the production of perfume. Non-Jewish workers collected the labdanum, a soft, dark, oleoresin secretion of several species of the rock rose. Jewish merchants purchased their containers of labdanum and sold them locally or abroad.

That this industry was lucrative is evidenced by the fact that the community sought to increase its revenues by imposing additional taxes on labdanum merchants in the belief that they could afford to pay higher levies. The problems which ensued are described in a letter sent to Rabbi Yehiel Bassan, originally from Rhodes, who was then serving the community of Constantinople. The letter notes that the majority of the members of the community in Rhodes wanted to initiate a new *haskamah* requiring labdanum dealers to pay an additional 10,000 *levanim* in communal taxes. Not surprisingly, the labdanum dealers protested the proposed *haskamah*. Hence the question: can the majority of the community impose its will upon the minority?

Rabbi Bassan ruled that the majority could not pass a *haskamah* against a minority, even though the minority consisted of only one person.[13] But the community continued to press the labdanum merchants for added revenues.

Towards the end of the 16th or beginning of the 17th century, the two synagogues in Rhodes took control of the *hazakah* of the labdanum industry. A *hazakah*, an important principle of economic life in Jewish law, was a means of acquiring the presumption of ownership or control whereby no other Jew could legally compete for possession. The *hazakah* served to curtail bitter competition among Jews. Thus, by taking control of the *hazakah* of the labdanum trade, the synagogues effectively took ownership of the right to engage in that business. Anyone who wished to deal in labdanum had first to buy the *hazakah* from the synagogues. A new source of revenue had been opened at the expense of labdanum merchants.

As interpreted by K.K.Gadol, the larger synagogue, the agreement required that the two synagogues sell the *hazakah* jointly and share the revenues, with 75% allocated to it and 25% allocated to K.K.Shalom, the smaller synagogue. The *hazakah* was sold for one-year periods to the highest bidders. Initially, community revenues rose. But eventually the labdanum dealers formed a coalition and agreed to limit the amount to be bid for purchase of the *hazakah*.

As the community's income decreased, the two synagogues became uneasy. K.K.Shalom decided to withdraw from the arrangement of auctioning the *hazakah* jointly with K.K.Gadol, preferring instead to sell its 25% share of the *hazakah* independently. Thus, a prospective purchaser of a *hazakah* would have to buy the *hazakah* in segments, 75% from K.K. Gadol and 25% from K.K. Shalom.

K.K.Gadol objected to this plan as a departure from the original *haskamah* which required joint sale. However, this interpretation of the *haskamah* was repudiated by the very scribe who had written it. He testified that the *haskamah* had never intended to require the two congregations to sell the *hazakah* jointly. K.K.Gadol protested that all concerned would sustain losses if the sale of the *hazakah* was divided. The merchants who had to purchase a *hazakah* each year would be unwilling to buy it piecemeal, preferring instead to buy the right in toto, or not at all. Inasmuch as labdanum was available cheaply in other places, these merchants could easily find alternate

sources of supply, and the community would lose all revenues from this trade.

Despite K.K.Gadol's arguments, the rabbinic authorities to whom the community turned ruled in favor of K.K.Shalom.[14] The underlying principle was that a partner may terminate a business relationship when it causes him to lose money. K.K.Shalom, therefore, had the right to sell its 25% of the *hazakah* independently, since it felt it was losing money under the joint arrangement.

Jews of Rhodes were also involved in mining sulfur. A *haskamah* dating to the late 16th or early 17th century declared that anyone who worked a mine for three months automatically acquired a *hazakah* over it. Various misunderstandings arose; as a result, a second *haskamah* was issued, giving the *hazakah* of the sulfur industry to the two congregations. Thus, any Jew who wished to work a mine had first to receive permission from the synagogues and pay the required sum. The congregations agreed to use the revenues derived from the sale of the *hazakah* for holy purposes.

After this *haskamah* was issued, one Rhodian Jew took over a sulfur mine without obtaining a *hazakah* from the synagogues. K.K.Gadol and K.K.Shalom claimed that the encroacher should pay them the value of the *hazakah* for the mine. If he failed to do so, they threatened to allow another Jew to obtain the *hazakah* and to oust him from the mine. But the encroacher argued that inasmuch as he had been working the mine for three months, he was the legal owner of the *hazakah* in accord with the original *haskamah*. In dealing with this case, Rabbi Yosef Trani expressed amazement that someone who had violated the law by seizing the mine should now invoke the law to defend his criminal act. He ruled that the community leaders could force the encroacher to pay for the *hazakah*, as he was not entitled to benefit from his illegal act.[15]

Import-Export

The Jews of Rhodes had wide ranging business dealings with their coreligionists on nearby islands and on the Turkish mainland as well as in Palestine and Egypt. In some cases, a merchant would travel abroad while his partner remained in Rhodes to supply him with saleable merchandise. The traveling partner also sent goods back to Rhodes for local sale. Some Jewish merchants served as

agents, investing their coreligionists' funds abroad and receiving a commission for such services.[16]

Cases drawn from the responsa literature of the 16th century shed light on some aspects of the Rhodian Jews' involvement in sea trade. For example, in 1559 two Jews of Rhodes entered a partnership whereby one would go to Egypt to buy merchandise. Upon his return to Rhodes the other partner was to take the goods to Salonika to sell them there.[17] Another case describes how one Rhodian Jew purchased a large quantity of wax from an agent and immediately had it shipped to Chios for sale there.[18]

Rabbi David Ibn Zimra was questioned by Rabbi Shemuel Ibn Verga of Rhodes concerning a practice common among the Jewish merchants of Rhodes. It was customary for Jews to lend each other money at a fixed rate of interest, whether or not the borrower profited from the investment for which the funds had been borrowed. The lender, however, agreed to bear the loss if the ship carrying the borrower's goods was destroyed or plundered by pirates. Under such an arrangement, the lender and the borrower reasoned that they were not really charging or paying interest, but were rather acting as partners in a business venture. Rabbi Ibn Zimra disapproved strongly of this practice, since it was in violation of the Biblical prohibition of charging interest on loans. He lamented that the subterfuge practiced by the Rhodian Jewish merchants had actually originated among the Jews of Turkey, particularly those of Salonika. He ruled that this type of arrangement could be construed only as interest-charging, inasmuch as a loan was made at a fixed rate. Moreover, the lender accepted only partial responsibility for losses and was, therefore, not really a partner at all. Even if the borrower lost the money in the normal conduct of his business, he would be obligated to repay the loan with interest. Thus, the practice was held to be a violation of Jewish law.[19]

During the 16th century, navigation was largely confined to coastlines and several main sea routes.[20] Ships were like floating bazaars, with merchants buying and selling merchandise at the coastal cities where the ships would stop. Rhodes was an important port for Mediterranean trade, and the Jewish merchants of the city benefited from this fact.

Some insight into the importance of Rhodes in trade routes may

be drawn from a question sent to Rabbi Yomtob Zahalon (1599-1638) of Safed. The case involved an individual who had leased a ship, presumably in Constantinople or Salonika. He then charged travelers for their own passage as well as for transporting the goods they brought aboard ship with them. En route to Sidon, the ship arrived in the port of Rhodes and "rested there as was the custom all the years, and [the individuals on the ship] entered Rhodes as was customary." The ship's leaseholder met a Rhodian Jewish merchant who arranged to transport a certain quantity of wool to his partner. A problem arose because half of the wool was ultimately lost before it had been delivered to the partner.[21] The details of the case reveal that Rhodes was a normal stopping point for merchant ships and that Rhodian Jews did business with the traveling merchants.

Investments

A number of Jews in Rhodes owned buildings for investment purposes. They rented them out for businesses or dwellings. A document from Rhodes dated 1546 indicates that one Shelomo Ashkenazi, a Jew of the city, had purchased some buildings from another Jew, and then sold them to yet another Jew.[22] One Rhodian Jew, Sasson Perah, owned extensive real estate in the city. In listing the possessions which he planned to leave to his heirs, he included various buildings purchased from Turks and from another Jew, as well as a number of stores and fields.[23]

Jews of Rhodes invested their money in interest-bearing loans to non-Jews. They also gave money to other Jewish businessmen with the agreement that they would share in the profits of the latters' business ventures. It seems that they invested their available money in profit-reaping ways and did not merely keep it safely in their homes. In one case, a dying individual left word that his money should be given to others "to invest as is customary."[24] Investment of funds was apparently a widespread practice among the Jews of Rhodes.

Other Occupations

Jews of Rhodes also worked in local stores, selling a variety of goods. Some peddled their wares in the villages outside the city. A question sent to Rabbi David Ibn Zimra noted that there were Jewish spice dealers in Rhodes.[25]

As was true in every Jewish community, certain occupations were linked to religious life. Rabbis, *hazzanim* (chanters of synagogue services), ritual slaughterers and kasher butchers, and scribes were among the needed religious functionaries.

From the above discussion, it is clear that the Jews of the city engaged in a wide variety of businesses and were a relatively prosperous group. However, by the 17th century, their economic security had begun to weaken. Their decline is directly linked to the general decline of the Ottoman Empire.

Economic Decline

During the reign of Suleyman the Magnificent (1522-1566), the financial condition of the Ottoman Empire was excellent. But various factors then contributed to a weakening of the Empire's economy. By 1584 there was a serious currency crisis leading to a substantial devaluation. With the debasement of the currency, Turkey experienced inflation which was difficult to control. The crisis was to last through the middle of the 17th century. Fernand Braudel notes that these devaluations of currency had "a prodigious effect on the economic health of the empire."[26]

During this period, there was a general and prolonged stagnation in Ottoman trade. Since most of the Empire's merchants were Christians and Jews, these groups suffered directly from the decline in commerce. Moreover, Ottoman military setbacks were proving not only humiliating but expensive. In 1565 the Turks had failed to take Malta after a lengthy siege. Various military and political defeats plagued them throughout the 17th and 18th centuries adding to the economic strain on the Empire.

The deterioration in the economy was correlated to a general deterioration in government. The historian, Bernard Lewis, made an interesting observation concerning the Turkish archives. In the 16th century the archives reflect meticulous, conscientious and efficient management. In the 17th century there was growing neglect. By the 18th century the system of the archives had collapsed.[27]

As conditions worsened in the Levant, European nations were making significant economic advances. The Atlantic Ocean began to grow in commercial importance while the Mediterranean's importance declined. With the discovery of new sea routes, and the

establishment of colonies in the New World, European powers eclipsed the Ottoman Empire.

The economic deterioration was evident also in Rhodes. When a traveler, Claude Savary, passed through Rhodes in the late 18th century, he lamented that the greatness which Rhodes had known in antiquity was gone. He blamed Turkish despotism and misadministration for the decline. "The people... in despair are everywhere ripe for rebellion, and shake the throne with violent concussions."[28] Another traveler, C. Sonnini, visited Rhodes at the turn of the 19th century and also painted a bleak picture. He criticized the inefficient and dishonest workers who were employed in the dockyards.[29] Although both of these travelers were European Christians and were hardly sympathetic to the Turks, yet their observations reflect the economic problems of Rhodes.

By the time of the Chief Rabbinate of Ezra Malki (d. 1768), poverty had become widespread among the Jews of Rhodes. The community's funds no longer sufficed to provide adequately for its native poor and for poor Jewish visitors in Rhodes.

A letter to Rabbi Malki noted:

> The screaming has increased in the markets and on the streets, and anyone who hears the words of the visiting poor and the curses which they curse and the screams which they scream, the hair on his head will stand up on end.[30]

The 19th century found economic conditions in Rhodes miserable. A French traveler, Alphonse de Lamartine, observed in 1832: "The Turks have stamped that air of indolence on [Rhodes] which they carry everywhere."[31] This opinion was shared by two other travelers, M. Michaud and M. Poujalat, who traveled through Rhodes at about the same time.[32] Yet another traveler, Charles Newton, visited Rhodes in 1853 and he too condemned the failings of the Turkish administration. Newton commented that an earthquake had destroyed a tower in Rhodes in 1852, tumbling its ruins into a main street. But despite the obvious danger and nuisance, not a stone had been removed a year later.[33]

Concerning the Jews of Rhodes during the 19th century, we find a statement in a question to Rabbi Michael Yaacob Israel: "Poverty has increased in our city and the Jews have become very poor. They scream for food and livelihood and they are not answered."[34] Economic stagnation was also reflected in a statement by Rabbi

Hizkiah Shemtob Kodron. Urging the Jews of Rhodes to devote time to study and repentance during the Ten Days of Repentance, Kodron noted that they had nothing better to do with their time anyway. "And what with the fact that in our city there is not so much business, [the storekeepers] sit in the store idly."[35] Further evidence of the continued impoverishment is found in a statement of Rabbi Michael Yaacob Israel in 1849.[36] The rabbi noted that the community of Rhodes had borrowed a considerable sum of money from a Jew of Tiberias. When a collector came to Rhodes to receive payment for the loan, he found that the community treasury had not the funds to repay its debt. Rabbi Israel himself had to guarantee that the debt would be repaid within a year and a half. Presumably the debt was repaid.

One view of Jewish commercial life, albeit a viciously anti-Jewish one, was presented by Charles Cottu, who traveled through Rhodes in the early 1840's.[37] He noted that the Jews were engaged in selling a variety of goods, including antiques, perfumes, cloth materials. Whenever a ship landed in Rhodes, Jewish merchants offered a wide variety of merchandise to the sailors and cabin-boys. Cottu remarked snidely, *"Demandez l'impossible, vous l'obtiendrez."* Ask the Jews for the impossible and you will get it.

According to Cottu, the Jews controlled Rhodes' wine industry. They also worked in the bazaars as salesmen of candies, Turkish slippers and other items. Cottu believed that the Jews were more competitive than the Greeks, and had amassed fortunes in their business dealings. He claimed that, except for a few wealthy men well-known to the Turkish government, the Jews hid their riches and feigned poverty. Their houses looked poor on the outside but, Cottu was convinced, they were full of gold and silver on the inside. Had Cottu gone into one of the poor Jewish homes, however, he would certainly not have found gold or silver treasures; he would have found real poverty.

Cottu's observation that Jews provided a variety of services was also evidenced in the experiences of Colonel B. Rottiers who arrived in Rhodes in 1828. Colonel Rottiers was researching a book on the monuments of Rhodes. He employed a Rhodian Jew to arrange for the provision of food and other necessary items.[38] Rottiers also noted that Greeks and Jews were the only ones to own taverns in Rhodes. They were, however, not allowed to sell alcoholic beverages to Turkish soldiers or sailors.[39]

A mid-19th century occupational profile of Rhodian Jews was detailed by Rabbi Raphael Yitzhak Israel, who traveled through Europe to raise funds for the community of Rhodes, after many Jewish homes and buildings had been severely damaged by several earthquakes and fires. While in Vienna, he met Ludwig Frankl, a leading Jew, who recorded his meeting with the rabbi from Rhodes in his book *Yerushalaymah*.[40] Rabbi Israel noted that half of Rhodes' three hundred Jewish families were extremely poor. Sixty individuals worked as messengers or carriers of burdens. There were ten shoemakers, six tailors, three barbers and a perfume maker. Rhodes' only Ashkenazic Jew was a producer of calendars. Two Jews were employed as translators at foreign consulates in Rhodes. Some Jewish businessmen were wealthy and engaged in large-scale commercial ventures.

Describing the general economic situation of Rhodes as he saw it in the mid-19th century, the traveler C. T. Newton noted that most of the farm land was owned by Greek peasants. The main crop was wheat. They also produced such lucrative items as silk, olive oil, wine and tobacco, although not in large enough quantities to create a class of wealthy land-owners. These commodities were either consumed in the villages or exchanged for coffee and sugar which were imported by Jewish and European merchants of the city of Rhodes.[41] The responsa literature of the period also indicates that Jews were involved in the coffee trade. They sold coffee in their stores in the city of Rhodes as well as in villages and other towns on the island.[42]

Among other occupations of Jews during this period were money-lending and dealing in wheat.[43] Jews also remained active in import-export trade.[44]

The most significant Jewish business venture in 19th-century-Rhodes was the establishment of a banking house by Bohor Alhadeff in 1819. The House of Alhadeff, later known as Salomon Alhadeff's Sons, grew into one of the most powerful financial institutions in the Levant. Other businesses which were involved in banking, investments and trade were established by a number of Rhodian Jews including Joseph Notrica, Jacob Surmani, Uriel Hasson, Isaac Touriel and the Menashe brothers. These institutions were important for the economic life of Rhodian Jewry not only because their owners prospered, but because they employed Jewish workers.[45]

The Beginning of the 20th Century

The leaders of the Jewish community of Rhodes sent a report to the Alliance Israélite Universelle office in Paris dated February 21, 1900. This report was sent in order to give the officials of the Alliance a good picture of the economic and educational situation in Rhodes, with the intention of planning the establishment of an Alliance school in the city. The report was stamped with the seal of Chief Rabbi Mosheh Franco and signed by Mr. E. Soriano, President of the community and Mr. Alhadeff, President of the Talmud Torah. This report gives a vivid, first-hand account of the community's condition.[46]

The report notes that among the Jews of Rhodes were 13 businessmen, two or three of whom were described as relatively prosperous. There were 30 heads-of-household of "modest situation" earning their livelihoods as small merchants and grocers. Another 77 Jews were engaged in manual labor; among them were 40 shoemakers, 5 cabinet-makers, 4 tailors, 6 tin men, 7 bakers, 8 butchers, 4 winemakers, 1 factory worker, 1 goldsmith and 1 gardener; 20 Jews were employees in various businesses, earning at most 60 francs per month. The largest number of families—280—lived in poor conditions. Among their wage-earners were 180 street porters, 50 boatmen and 50 domestic laborers.

Writing almost two years later, Leon Semach, the first Director of the Alliance Israélite Universelle school for boys in Rhodes, reported little change in the economic condition of the Jewish community.[47] Poverty was widespread. In a letter dated August 13, 1903, Semach informed the Alliance office in Paris: "*Presque tous les Rhodiens sont dans la gêne ou dans la misère.*" Nearly all Rhodians were in pain or misery. Semach's letters described the horrible poverty: some boys attended school without shoes, dressed in rags; a large number of students required full tuition scholarships; many were so poor that their daily lunch consisted of one piece of dry bread.[48]

As will be noted in Chapter Twelve, the early 20th century witnessed a significant migration of Jews from Rhodes to the United States, Africa and elsewhere. The departure of Rhodeslies left an impact on the remaining Jews in the community. On a communal level, there was a steady decrease in Jewish taxpayers and a consequent reduction in community revenues. Moreover,

many heads-of-household migrated, leaving their wives and children in Rhodes. Such families depended on the money sent to them by their men who worked in far-off lands, so that any delay in the mail caused hardship. During World War I, the poverty in these families intensified due to the difficulty of transporting mail from the United States to Rhodes. Ms. Sarah Graziani, head of the Alliance school for girls in Rhodes, commented in January, 1918: "the heads of a great number of families are in America and the mails are so rare."[49]

Migration, though, also served to improve the economic situation of some Jewish families in Rhodes. Children who had migrated sent as much money as they could spare to their families in Rhodes. Sons felt a filial obligation to ease their parents' financial burdens.

It should also be noted that children in Rhodes were receiving good educations in the Alliance and Communal schools and were being motivated to advance themselves educationally and economically. They were no longer satisfied with maintaining the status quo, but were anxious to improve their situations either in Rhodes or in places to which they migrated. Some young Jews began to study abroad, becoming doctors or skilled craftsmen. Upon their return to Rhodes, they occupied important positions in the community both socially and economically. The advent of Italian rule (July, 1923), led to a further drive to improve economic conditions in Rhodes. The Italian government was anxious to clean and modernize the city and to raise its economic status. The Jews of the city benefited from improved conditions.[50] However, this economic improvement under the Italians was short-lived. By the end of 1936, following the Italian alignment with Germany, the situation of the Jews in Rhodes deteriorated seriously.

Taxation

Moslem law required that tolerated minorities, *dhimmis*, pay a special tax known as *kharaj*. They also were subject to a poll-tax in lieu of military service and as a sign of humiliation. The *kharaj* was calculated by the government on the basis of the population of each community of *dhimmis*, and each community was responsible to raise the specified amount from among its own members. The tax load was generally carried by the wealthy and middle-class individuals for the most part and seems to have been burdensome.[51]

The Jews of Rhodes, aside from their obligation to pay the *kharaj* to the Ottoman government, were also compelled to meet certain financial obligations to the city government.[52] Added to these external taxes were assessments made by the community for its own internal needs.

The Jews of Rhodes had a community chest known as the *kolel*, as well as the treasuries of the synagogues. These funds were under separate administrations. The money of the *kolel* was used to pay the salary of the Chief Rabbi; to make gifts to the messengers from Erets Israel; to dispense welfare payments in cases where the synagogues' funds were insufficient. The synagogue treasuries financed the salaries of synagogue officials, the upkeep of the synagogue buildings, and the financial subsidies for needy congregants.[53]

All of the above funds were collected by Jewish officials known as *maarikhim*, assessors. During the course of the 16th century the community had a committee of *maarikhim* numbering five individuals.[54] These men were appointed by the *parnassim* and were required to take oaths that they would do their work in complete honesty. After being sworn into office they proceeded to estimate the financial status of all the Jewish heads of household in Rhodes. Those whose net worth was under a certain figure were exempt from taxes, due to poverty. The assessors would post the names of the taxable individuals and their estimated assets on the synagogue doors for fifty days. Anyone who disagreed with the estimate was entitled to protest and have his estate re-evaluated. Following this period, each individual was taxed an amount in proportion to his established wealth. This procedure of evaluation would take place every three years, usually after the Passover holiday.[55]

The system seems to have held up well over the centuries. However, in the early 19th century, a crisis erupted which threatened to undermine it. The payment of the *kharaj* had always been drawn from the funds of the *kolel*, the communal treasury. It had long been based on a population of 105 male heads of household, even though the actual population had increased over the years well beyond that number. In determining taxable individuals, the *kolel* could not tax Jewish men of foreign nationalities, since foreigners were not subject to Turkish taxes. Thus, the two Jews employed by foreign consuls in Rhodes—one in the French consulate and one in the British consulate—were

exempt. As more foreign consulates were established in Rhodes, though, an increasing number of Jewish employees arrived with them. When the community wanted to tax these people, the latter objected. The problem was brought to the court of the Chief Rabbi of Rhodes, Abraham Halevi, who negotiated a compromise. The foreign Jews were to pay one-half of the *kharaj* and *kapitanlik* (head tax).[56]

In the course of time, other Jews of foreign nationality lived in Rhodes aside from those in the employ of the consulates. Indeed, nearly half of the Jewish population of Rhodes had been able to obtain credentials of foreign nationals. The tax income of the community sank rapidly.

In the year 1840, the Sultan sent an official to Rhodes to take a census of the population. He counted the Jews and wrote their names into a ledger book. The list included native Rhodes Jews as well as those with foreign nationalities. This official then proceeded to collect the *kharaj* from each individual Jew rather than from the *kolel*. The Jews who worked for foreign consuls complained to the Turkish government and they were subsequently exempted from the *kharaj*. The exemption extended to all Jews of foreign nationality. This arrangement continued for about ten yers after which the Sultan returned to the old method of collecting directly from the *kolel* rather than from each individual.

However, the Sultan expected the *kharaj* to be paid on the basis of the names of Jews his official had included in the ledger book in 1840. This list contained the names of all Jews, native and foreign. Therefore, the *kolel* was made responsible for taxes for the foreign nationals. When the *kolel* tried to collect taxes from them, they refused to pay. Rabbi Michael Yaacob Israel ruled that they had to pay their shares along with all the other Jews of the city. He was particularly annoyed with those Rhodian Jews who had become foreign nationals in order to avoid paying their rightful taxes to the *kolel*. This type of selfishness tended to undermine the strength and unity of the community.[57]

Later in the century, the Sultan imposed a tax on every Jewish male aged fifty days old and above. The *kolel* of Rhodes was unable to pay this tax because there were so many poor Jews who could not afford to pay for themselves. The entire tax load fell on the shoulders of the middle-class and rich Jews who were already overburdened with taxes. Some of the members of the community

felt that the rabbis and their sons should pay their own ways in regard to this tax, although rabbis had traditionally been exempt from taxes. Rabbi Rahamim Hayyim Yehudah Israel felt that the rabbis must pay for their sons. Rabbi Raphael Yitzhak Israel decided that the community should pay for its rabbis, but conceded that the rabbis should pay for their sons.[58]

During this period, several individuals sought to place many of the financial responsibilities which had been in the domain of the *kolel* into the domain of the synagogue treasuries.[59] The purpose of this plan was to lessen the amount of communal taxes which each person had to pay to the *kolel*. Thus, if an individual decided not to belong to or support either synagogue, he might be able to escape payment of a sizeable tax bill. Although this idea seemed clever and should have found many adherents among those looking for tax relief, the vast majority of the Jewish population of Rhodes rejected this plan. They realized that it could only do damage to the community in the long run and would work against the poor and needy who were dependent on the funds of the *kolel*.

The trouble makers, however, were not to be discouraged by their lack of followers. They devised other methods to reduce their tax load. For example, the Jews of Rhodes had the custom of collecting money regularly for a synagogue in Jerusalem, Beth El. The new suggestion was to use half of the funds of this collection for the needs of the poor in Rhodes. There was also another collection which the Jews made for the poor of their own community. The new suggestion was to use these funds—not for the poor of Rhodes—but for the needs of Jews who traveled to and from Rhodes. The point of this last suggestion was that Jewish travelers who needed assistance were paid from the *kolel*, and that if they were now paid from this collection, the *kolel* would need less money, i.e., less taxes. These suggestions were also rejected by the vast majority of the community.

Undaunted, the dissidents devised yet another plan. The incomes of the Jews were taxed at a rate of 15% for the *kolel*; the plan was to reduce the rate to 10%. In order to compensate for the loss of revenue, they suggested that the community pawn silver ritual objects used in the synagogues. But the community found this idea unsatisfactory. The dissidents then suggested that the *kapitanlik* tax, which went to the city of Rhodes, should be paid by the rich and middle class Jews at a fixed percentage rather than on a graduated

scale as at present. This would mean that one who earned 10,000 *arayot* would pay the same amount as one who earned 50,000 *arayot*: 150 *arayot*. But the majority of the community defended the system of graduated taxes.

Realizing that their attempts to have the taxes reduced had failed, the dissidents seceded from the community. They established their own synagogue in a room of one of their houses. They also tried to convince other Jews of the community to join them.

Once the communal leaders saw that the group had succeeded in winning over some Jews, they and the rest of the community made a *haskamah* which forbade anyone from leaving his own synagogue to join that of the dissidents. With the establishment of the new synagogue the community was faced with numerous quarrels. Some disagreements led to court cases, but the dissidents would use the civil courts rather than the rabbinic court of Rhodes. This fact apparently amused some non-Jews who thought it strange for Jews to go to a civil court rather than to their own Chief Rabbi and his court.[60] It seems that this dissident group did not maintain its separate synagogue for too long a time, since we find no reference to it in any subsequent literature dealing with the community.

Other Taxes

Aside from the income tax, the community raised other revenue through the sale of *hazakoth*.[61] It also placed a sales tax, known as *gabela*, on certain items such as meat, wine and cheese.[62] During the 18th century, a sales tax was instituted on ethrogim. An inheritance tax was also established.[63] But other sources of income were still needed.

The community attempted to institute a new tax on property worth more than 500 *grushim* which was owned in Rhodes by a Jew who had migrated from the city. Previously, such property was not taxable, the assumption being that the owner paid taxes on it in his new city of residence. This tax was not instituted, though, since one individual objected to it, claiming that it had been aimed specifically against his parents.[64]

The community also tried to tax individuals who lived in Rhodes but who owned property elsewhere. Even if they paid taxes on that property in the city where it was, the Rhodes community wanted to tax it also. But rabbinical opinion rejected this plan and it was presumably not implemented.[65]

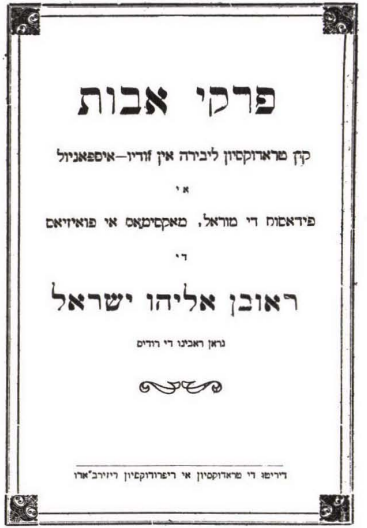
During the 18th century, the tax load was extremely burdensome and new sources of revenue were needed. The following description is found in a question sent to Rabbi Ezra Malki: The Jews of Rhodes are in

> a small city with little population. On them is a heavy yoke of taxes for the king and princes and the other needs of the city. The majority of the taxpayers have emigrated, leaving all the heavy tax burden on the remaining group; and they have not the strength to endure the suffering... All of the taxpayers have established a *haskamah* among themselves that anyone who buys grapes in order to make wine will have to pay a tax (*gabela*) which will go for the support of the Talmud Torah and the poor Jews whether they be visitors or natives of the city.[66]

Some of the wine dealers objected to this *haskamah*, since it would affect them adversely. The classic question was thus raised: can the majority force a dissenting minority to comply with the terms of the *haskamah*?

When this problem was submitted to Rabbis Shelomo Amarillo and Yosef Kovo of Salonika, they ruled that the majority was not entitled to force a minority to accept such a *haskamah*.[67] However, Rabbi Malki, who was directly confronted with the dire situation of the poor Jews in Rhodes, decided that the majority can indeed prevail over the minority, especially when a *haskamah* related to the support of the poor.[68]

The tax problems that plagued the Jews of Rhodes during the 18th and 19th centuries were directly correlated to the poor condition of their economic status. Widespread poverty undermined the possibility of a strong communal treasury. However, in spite of their economic problems, the members of the community strove to meet the basic needs of the *kahal* and to provide assistance for all who required it.



פרקי אבות

קין מראדוקסיון ליבירה אין זמירן—איספאניול

א י

פיראזום די מוראל, מאקסימאס אי פואיזיאס

ר י

ראובן אליהו ישראל

נראן ראביגו די רודים

דיריגיד די מראדוקסיון אי ריפורדוקסיון ריזירב'אדו

TITLE PAGE OF *PIRKEI ABOT*
BY RABBI REUBEN ELIYAHU ISRAEL
(Smyrna, 1924)



ספר

משאת משה

נרפס פה

קושטאנדינה

TITLE PAGE OF *MASAT MOSHEH*
BY RABBI MOSHE ISRAEL
(Constantinople, 1734)

CHAPTER FIVE

Rabbis and Scholars

Operating as self-governing *millets*, the Jewish communities of the Ottoman Empire organized and conducted their communal life according to the teachings of Jewish tradition. Virtually every aspect of their personal lives reflected their meticulous adherence to the Bible, Talmud and rabbinic rulings. Because they were so totally involved with Jewish law and custom, it was necessary for them to have teachers and scholars who could interpret and clarify the requirements of these laws. Consequently, rabbinic authorities were held in high regard. They had both the privilege and obligation to keep the Jewish people on the proper path of religious observance.

From its inception in the 16th century, the small Sephardic community in Rhodes was fortunate in having in its midst a number of scholars and authors.[1] Rabbi Yehudah Ibn Verga, for example, was a friend of the illustrious Rabbi Joseph Karo. The latter referred to the Rhodian scholar in quite laudatory and friendly terms.[2] Ibn Verga's son, Shemuel, corresponded regularly with Rabbi David Ibn Zimra, one of the outstanding rabbinic authorities of the time, as well as with Rabbi Joseph Karo.[3] Another rabbinic figure in 16th-century Rhodes was Hayyim Bassan, author of a number of responsa. His son, Yehiel, became a leading rabbi in Constantinople and authored a volume of responsa.[4] Yehiel Bassan studied in Rhodes under his father and Rabbi Hayyim Alfoal. Alfoal was described as one of the great Jewish scholars of his time.[5] David Ibn Zimra addressed him with the courteous title, *hakham venabon*, scholar and sage.[6]

Through the efforts of its rabbis and dedicated laymen, the Sephardic community of Rhodes provided religious instruction for its young. Since Rhodes was the home of significant rabbinic scholars at that period, the young men of the city had the

opportunity of achieving a high level of education.

An interesting insight into the intellectual life of the city during the 16th century can be gained from the work of the Hebrew poet, Yehudah Zarco, "a man of Rhodes."[7] In his chief work, *Lehem Yehudah*, published in 1560, he reveals that he had been befriended by a patron of another city, (perhaps Salonika or Constantinople). He left Rhodes to join a group of young Sephardic intellectuals and literati who discussed literature and philosophy. Like others in the group, Zarco was plagued by religious doubts and inner turmoil.

After going through a period when he all but lost his faith, Zarco returned to his original religious convictions. Indeed, *Lehem Yehudah* is an elaborate allegorical tale in which he demonstrates that reason should control emotion. He warns the reader against being fooled by the trickery of the evil inclination and falling into the hands of desire.

Yehudah Zarco and his circle of friends studied and discussed general intellectual topics, not only those restricted to rabbinic Judaism. It seems that during the first several generations following the Jewish expulsion from Spain in 1492, members of the Sephardic diaspora in the Ottoman Empire continued their tradition of intellectual curiosity and continued speculation in areas other than rabbinical literature. However, as time went on, their intellectual horizons contracted due to their cultural isolation, and their scholarly energies became devoted almost entirely to Bible, Talmud, and rabbinic sources.

The Chief Rabbinate

It is not known who served as the official Chief Rabbi (*Hakham*) of Rhodes during the 16th century. But by 1570, there was certainly a recognized *Hakham* in the community. A letter dated Iyar 23, 5330 (1570) refers to a *haskamah* in Rhodes which had been signed by the *Hakham hakahal* (Chief Rabbi of the community) and the *parnassim*.[8] We find the first reference by name to a specific Chief Rabbi in Rhodes in the early 17th century. By 1614, the city's two congregations had decided to cooperate in obtaining the services of a religious leader to head the entire community.[9] They appointed Rabbi Mosheh Hacohen to the post for a term of ten years.[10] He was expected to devote his time to study and to be a judge in all matters of Jewish law. The *Hakham* was assured that his legal decisions

would be regarded as binding, and no one could overrule or disobey him. Those who disobeyed his decisions would be punished. As compensation for his services, the *Hakham* was to receive the considerable sum of 12,000 *levanim* annually.

Rabbi Mosheh Hacohen was a good choice with respect to his scholarly abilities. Originally from Salonika, he had earned a worthy reputation for Talmudic learning. Rabbi Yehiel Bassan lauded him as one of the most distinguished scholars of his day.[11] David Conforte (c. 1617-1690), who studied under Hacohen at a later period in Egypt, called his teacher an expert rabbi and judge of law.[12]

However, for all his erudition, Rabbi Mosheh Hacohen failed to establish his authority in Rhodes. After only a few years as Chief Rabbi, he was challenged by several members of the community who declared themselves unwilling to accept his rulings without question. Instead, they wanted the rabbi to present his legal decisions, together with his reasoning and his proofs, in writing so that they could be shown to other rabbinic authorities for corroboration or refutation. Only if the consulted rabbis agreed with Rabbi Mosheh Hacohen, would this dissenting group accept his decision. Obviously, this request violated the terms of the agreement under which the Chief Rabbi was guaranteed absolute authority in questions of Jewish law. Acceptance of such demands would be tantamount to abdicating his position as Chief Rabbi.

The dissidents included another Rhodian rabbi, Mosheh Amato; he sent details of the problem to Rabbi Yehoshua Benveniste, intimating that the community of Rhodes was considering termination of its agreement with Mosheh Hacohen. Rabbi Benveniste was asked if the community was obligated to pay the Chief Rabbi the compensation due him for the full ten-year period, or if it need pay him only for years which he had actually served.

In his response, Rabbi Benveniste stated that the dissidents were obliged to obey the rulings of the Chief Rabbi as everyone had originally agreed to do. Moreover, the community was responsible for the Chief Rabbi's full ten-year compensation, even if he were to be dismissed earlier.[13]

Rabbi Mosheh Hacohen seems to have overcome this challenge to his authority. But another communal crisis indicated that his position was weak. He was asked to rule in a difficult matter involving the estate of a Rhodian Jew named Meshullam Halevy,

who was survived by a wife and two sons. His widow died subsequently without ever having sworn that she was entitled to collect the sum promised to her in her *ketubbah*, marriage contract. A widow was required by Jewish law to swear that she had neither received nor forfeited the *ketubbah* debt. After taking this oath, she was allowed to collect the sum from her late husband's heirs. If, however, she did not take the required oath, it could be presumed that she had already collected or forfeited the *ketubbah* sum.

Meshullam Halevy had a creditor, Shemuel Burgos, who possessed a document stating that Halevy owed him money and guaranteeing that the debt would be paid either by him or his heirs. But Halevy was quite poor when he died, leaving only one house of too little value to pay either his wife's *ketubbah* sum or Burgos' debt. The question was posed to the Chief Rabbi: who was entitled to Halevy's property—his heirs or his creditor, Burgos? Burgos had a valid document. But if the widow had still been alive, her claim would have been given precedence over that of a creditor. Could it be assumed that she would have been entitled to collect her *ketubbah* debt and, therefore she already had a lien on her husband's property at the time of his death? If so, after her death the sons inherited the property from *her*, not from their late father. Burgos could have no claim against Meshullam Halevy's estate because such an estate no longer existed.

Rabbi Mosheh Hacohen ruled in favor of the sons and against Burgos. The decision was furiously contested. Burgos was supported in his position by another Rhodian rabbi, Yitzhak Eresa. Unable to suppress the bitter feud that ensued, the Chief Rabbi wrote to Rabbi Yehiel Bassan of Constantinople, asking for his opinion and advice. Agreeing fully with Hacohen, Bassan wrote to Eresa asking that he calm himself and accept Hacohen's decision. Then Eresa, once a close friend of Bassan, turned against him and further aroused the community against Hacohen.[14] Unable to maintain his authority, Hacohen finally left Rhodes some time after 1618/19. He went to Damascus and then to Egypt, where he died at a very old age.[15]

Some time after Hacohen's departure, Rabbi Mosheh de Vushal was appointed *Hakham* of Rhodes.[16] Born in Sidon, he was a scion of a notable family. His father, Shelomo, was a rabbi and kabbalist. His grandfather, after whom he was named, had been a pious and influential person.[17] When de Vushal was twelve years old, his

family moved to Safed, where the young boy was raised among rabbinic scholars. When de Vushal was twenty-five years old, Safed was the scene of anti-Jewish outbreaks. He left for Rhodes and soon thereafter became that community's Chief Rabbi. In the introduction to his book, *Yismah Mosheh*, de Vushal noted that he had found flourishing yeshivot with numerous students in Rhodes. Indeed, his position as *marbits torah*, or teacher and halakhic authority, kept him so busy that he did not have time to write out his lectures in full but only in outline form.[18] Only later in his career did he find time to write out some of his *derashot* (sermons) in full. These constituted a volume of 141 folio pages which was financed by Nissim Amato, a wealthy Rhodian Jew. At the close of his introduction to the book, Rabbi de Vushal prayed that God might grant him the opportunity of publishing other works. But this hope was not to be fulfilled.

During his tenure in Rhodes, his community, along with much of the Jewish world, was shaken by the Sabbatai Sevi movement. Sabbatai Sevi, born in Smyrna in 1626, was a mystical personality who had come to think of himself as the messiah. His pretensions were supported by the faith of many followers, particularly Nathan of Gaza, who was the prophet of the movement. A large segment of world Jewry was caught up in this messianic hysteria. Repentance and asceticism were on the upswing. Thinking that salvation was at hand, people ignored such mundane things as business. They married off children who had scarcely reached puberty. Sabbatai Sevi declared that his claim to be the messiah would be vindicated in 1666. As the people waited for the great moment to arrive, the atmosphere in Smyrna and certainly in nearby communities such as Rhodes was electric. And then the hoax was revealed. Sabbatai Sevi and some of his followers converted to Islam, leaving the Jewish world to ponder about what had happened. The spiritual explosion left much of Levantine Jewry in a state of shock. The after effects of this hoax were felt for decades.[19]

As Rhodes was not far from Smyrna, Jews from the island probably traveled to the pseudo-Messiah's native city. Rabbi Hoshea Nantua, an avid believer in Sabbatai Sevi, referred to the Sabbatean prophecy that was "in Smyrna, Chios, Rhodes, Germany, Morea (Greece) and Morocco."[20]

Even Rabbi Mosheh de Vushal's son Shelomo became an ardent follower of Sabbatai Sevi. Shelomo testified that Sevi stopped in Rhodes in 1662 en route from Smyrna to Jerusalem. He stayed at

the home of Chief Rabbi de Vushal for a month, studying the *Zohar*, a classic work of Jewish mysticism, with some Rhodian scholars. At one of these classes, twelve men were present. Sabbatai Sevi reportedly wrote their names on twelve small sticks. Then he drilled a hole at the top of each stick, tied them together with a string, and then commanded the sticks to stand up on the center of the table. They did. Next he ordered each stick to go to the person whose name appeared on it. The sticks struggled, broke the string that bound them, and each went to the right person. After the students witnessed this extraordinary demonstration, Sabbatai Sevi made them take a strict oath not to reveal what he proposed to tell them. He then related a dream he had while in Smyrna: he was destined to redeem Israel. But before he could fulfill his mission, he had to journey to the Holy Land and remain there for some time. Then, after several years (1666), he would be revealed as the messiah.

Shelomo de Vushal pledged to meet Sevi in three years in Constantinople at a private conference. He reported that the pseudo-messiah revealed to him a number of things that would happen in the future.[21]

When in September, 1666, Sabbatai Sevi converted to Islam under threat of death by the Turkish authorities, the messianic bubble exploded. Chaos, despair, confusion and anger were widespread. Among Sevi's followers who also converted to Islam, was Shelomo de Vushal. However, it is possible that de Vushal returned to Judaism some years later in Italy.[22]

In attempting to readjust to an unredeemed world, the Jews of Rhodes seem to have tried to forget the entire messianic episode. They apparently discouraged any further discussion of Sevi or his movement. One searches in vain for references to Sabbateanism in works published by Rhodes rabbis in the late 17th and early 18th centuries. The episode seems to have been suppressed as much as possible.[23]

Rabbi Mosheh de Vushal served his community faithfully until his death in the latter half of the 17th century. To honor his memory, the Jews of Rhodes established the tradition of reciting a memorial prayer for him yearly on the holy day of Yom Kippur. This custom, begun in memory of de Vushal, was extended to include all subsequent Chief Rabbis of Rhodes upon their deaths.[24]

Rabbi de Vushal's immediate successors had to struggle to

maintain the authority of their office. A responsum of Rabbi Hayyim Algazi (died prior to 1712), who had served as the community's Chief Rabbi for several years, described a problem which faced two Chief Rabbis who succeeded de Vushal.[25]

A *shohet* and *bodek* (ritual slaughterer and meat examiner) named Mosheh Valensi had received his certification in these skills in Smyrna. He then came to Rhodes, showed his credentials to the presiding Chief Rabbi, David Lahmi,[26] and was accepted as a *shohet* for the community. But it was stipulated that he would perform ritual slaughter only in the presence of Rabbi Shemuel Eresa, who was regarded as a trusted expert by all Rhodian Jews. Soon thereafter, Eresa left Rhodes to settle in Erets Israel. Valensi was then informed that he could continue to serve as a *shohet* but was not authorized to examine the lungs of the slaughtered animals for flaws which might render the animals non-kasher. Anyone who ate meat of animals which had been slaughtered and examined solely by Valensi would be considered to have eaten forbidden food.

Feuds and petty quarrels surrounded Valensi's tenure as *shohet*. Finally, Rabbi Yosef Amato, a leading figure in Rhodes, refused to eat any meat slaughtered by Valensi, equating such action with the grave offense of eating pork. In taking this position, Amato was followed by a majority of the Jews in Rhodes, who vowed they would not eat meat from Valensi's slaughtering. But despite widespread doubts concerning his competence, Valensi continued to act as *shohet*. Meanwhile, the community appointed Rabbi Shemuel Zadok to serve as *bodek* (examiner), a position he was to hold for many years. In working with Valensi, Zadok found the *shohet* lacking adequate knowledge of the laws of *terefah* (blemishes which rendered an animal non-kasher). On several occasions, in fact, Valensi had made major errors in approving meat which should have been forbidden. As a result, Zadok ordered Valensi removed completely from any type of *shehitah* or *bedikah*.

But once Valensi was deposed, a group within the community came to his defense. Many of those who had previously joined Rabbi Yosef Amato in foreswearing Valensi's *shehitah* now expressed confidence in him. In doing so, they rejected the opinion of Rabbi Shemuel Zadok, who was by that time the official Chief Rabbi of Rhodes.

As if things were not already complicated enough, a visiting rabbi, Hayyim Ashkenazi, gave Valensi a certificate of competence

for *bedikah*. Ashkenazi, though, had no practical experience in these matters but only theoretical knowledge. Nevertheless, Rabbi Yosef Amato accepted this certification and told the Rhodian Jews that they could now eat meat of animals slaughtered by Valensi.

In analyzing the problems involved in this long drawn out case, Algazi noted that the community had agreed to accept Rabbi Shemuel Zadok as their judge in all matters, ritual as well as monetary. His word was final. Therefore, if he had ruled Valensi's *shehitah* invalid, then the Jews of Rhodes were simply not permitted to eat such meat. But sensing that many in the community were actively supporting Valensi, Algazi suggested that the *shohet* should return to Smyrna and submit to careful testing by the experts there. Once he received final accreditation (*kabbalah*) in the skills of *bedikah*, he could return to Rhodes to serve as *shohet* and *bodek*. Those who had foresworn his *shehitah* would then need to have their vows annulled.

But this solution was not accepted. Rabbi Yosef Amato continued to wage his battle in defense of Valensi and against Zadok. Rabbi Algazi expressed his deep regret and anger that the small community of Rhodes continued to engage in this feud. He was particularly critical of Rabbi Amato, who should have behaved better since he was a "sage whose name is widely known for its Torah and fear of sin."[27] It is not known whether Amato finally yielded. But the authority of the Chief Rabbi in Rhodes was sorely tried by this crisis.

Rabbi Mosheh Israel

The history of the Jewish community of Rhodes reached an important turning point with the appointment of Mosheh Israel as Chief Rabbi in 1714.[28] During his twelve-year tenure, the island became an important Torah center in the Sephardic diaspora. Israel was born c. 1670, probably in Jerusalem. We know little about his family background but it seems that he descended from a rabbinic family. Israel's wife, Hannah, was the daughter of Mosheh ben Shelomo Habib, head of the rabbinical court in Jerusalem.

Israel studied under great scholars in the Holy Land. One of his principal teachers was Rabbi Abraham Yitzhaki, author of a book of responsa, *Zera Abraham*.[29] Israel became a *shaliah*, or emissary, of the communities of Erets Israel, traveling throughout North Africa, the Middle East and Europe in search of funds. Because of his vast

erudition and genuine piety, he made favorable impressions on the communities he visited.

During the course of his travels, he was frequently asked to deal with questions of Jewish law. He also taught and lectured. In 1710, a student in Morocco compiled notes of Israel's lectures and circulated them in manuscript form. Israel's erudition and insight into Jewish law won him a place among the important scholars of his generation. His legal decisions were quoted by his contemporaries as well as by subsequent generations of scholars.[30]

Israel's three volumes of responsa reflect his thorough knowledge of the sources of Jewish law, as well as his efforts to bring peace between feuding parties. The following case, involving Rhodian Jews, illustrates his peace-loving approach.

A man, Y. Sasson, died, leaving a minor as his heir. The Jewish court appointed a trustee to manage the estate until the heir was old enough to take control of the property himself. However, Sasson's nephew, Akiba Tarica, claimed that he was entitled to one-half of his uncle's estate. Tarica's late father had been a business partner of Sasson's. Tarica produced a document which stated that his father and Sasson were partners and equal owners of all their property. In considering Tarica's claim, Mosheh Israel ruled that this document did not entitle him to any of Sasson's household goods and possessions. Moreover, the document did not give him legal right to demand money from an heir, as there was no way of determining whether its terms had been rejected during the lifetimes of the two partners. But even though the law was technically on the side of the heir, Israel recommended that his trustee negotiate a compromise agreement with Akiba Tarica. He argued: "Although it is not the law, it is an ad hoc decision necessary for the moment". In order to avoid a probable dispute, Israel noted, one may forego a right and work out a compromise that will insure peace.[31]

Israel's philosophy of Jewish law is also well-reflected in another responsum. A popular dish among peoples of the Mediterranean area was (and still is) *yaprakes*, cooked grape leaves stuffed with rice and/or meat. Some Jews had protested that eating *yaprakes* should be forbidden under Jewish law because grape leaves available in the area were infested with bugs. These pietists argued that it was impossible to clean the leaves thoroughly enough to remove all the tiny insects. Therefore, anyone who ate *yaprakes* would be violating the Biblical prohibition against eating bugs. One rabbi, Mahari Zin,

wrote a responsum in which he sought to permit the eating of *yaprakes,* reasoning that even if this food were forbidden, people would eat it anyway. The Jewish masses were already accustomed to this dish as their parents had been before them. Zin tried to find legal sources and arguments to refute the pietists. Mosheh Israel agreed with Zin's intention, but disagreed with the proofs he had cited. Israel noted: "It is incumbent upon us to seek the benefit of the public." He therefore wrote a lengthy responsum, adducing numerous arguments in defense of *yaprakes.*[32]

Israel, of course, recognized the authority of the great rabbis of the past and showed utmost respect for their opinions. But his own halakhic creativity was not totally suppressed by the weight of their decisions. For example, in answer to one question, he opened his responsum with a statement that earlier rabbinic authorities had already issued rulings in similar cases. But inasmuch as each case contains its own variation of conditions, this question could be examined anew.[33]

When Israel first came to Rhodes as a *shaliah* for the Holy Land, the Rhodian Jewish community was quite impressed with him. He was persuaded to take an oath to become the community's Chief Rabbi, never to leave Rhodes. But in 1727, after having served twelve years as Chief Rabbi of Rhodes, Mosheh Israel decided to leave the community. He wrote to the leading rabbis in Constantinople, pleading with them to annul his earlier oath that he would never leave Rhodes. It was unreasonable, he stated, for the community to expect that he would not leave Rhodes either to perform a *mitzvah* or to take a respite from the demands of communal life. His basic argument for annulment was that his vow had been taken under false pretenses. He had believed that the community would obey Jewish law and the decisions of its Chief Rabbi. Unfortunately, this had not proved to be the case.

A particular cause of concern was the increase of dissension among the Jews of Rhodes during his twelve-year tenure. Respect for the law had diminished. Public desecration of the Sabbath had occurred, some Jews entering and leaving ships on that sacred day despite communal ordinances forbidding these practices. Israel complained that when he first came to Rhodes, everyone had obeyed his halakhic decisions. Now each person followed his own opinions. The rabbi felt powerless to protect the halakhah. Jews could violate a communal *haskamah* without being punished as the

Hakham demanded. One Rhodian Jew began a public fight in the presence of the Chief Rabbi because he had lost his case in court; the man used vulgar language and showed flagrant disrespect to the Chief Rabbi. Israel demanded punishment for Jews who had gone aboard a ship on the Sabbath, but his order was not obeyed. One man spread derogatory rumors about the Chief Rabbi because he had declared that a certain *mikvah*, ritual bath, required repairs. When he had sworn to remain in Rhodes, Israel said, he had not envisioned such distressing occurances.[34]

The rabbis of Constantinople permitted the annulment of Israel's vow. Shortly thereafter, he left Rhodes to resume his work as a messenger for the Holy Land.

Although Israel's description of the deterioration of religious life among Rhodes' Jews is bleak, we need not conclude that the entire community had abandoned its faith and despised the Chief Rabbi. The contrary is true. For one thing, Israel may have exaggerated the Jews' religious laxity in order to have his vow annulled. Moreover, Israel's major problem in having his vow set aside was that it had been made with the mutual agreement of the community. A vow so made may not ordinarily be rescinded unless the two parties agreed to it: the party who took the oath, and the party with whose consent the oath was taken. Thus, Israel would have easily been able to have his oath absolved if the community had consented to it. In fact, the community was eager to retain its Chief Rabbi.

Perhaps the real explanation of Israel's desire to leave Rhodes had less to do with the problems within the community than with the problems within his own soul. As his wide-ranging travels indicate, he was by nature a wanderer. He had a deep-seated desire to be a messenger for the Holy Land, to move from city to city in order to raise funds for the Jewish settlements there. To have been tied to one community for twelve years must have been painful for him. Viewed in this light, Israel's departure from Rhodes was perhaps inevitable.

The community gained much from his stay in Rhodes. Israel taught many students in the yeshivot of the city. Rabbinic scholarship flourished. His sons and his son-in-law were noteworthy scholars in their own right, enhancing the intellectual life in Rhodes and later serving as rabbis there and in other Jewish communities.[35]

After Rabbi Mosheh Israel

With the departure of Rabbi Mosheh Israel, the community appointed Rabbi Ezra Malki to the post of *Hakham*. A native of Safed, son of the scholarly and prominent Raphael Malki, Ezra Malki had also served as an emissary to collect funds for the communities of Erets Israel. His brother, Mosheh, was a rabbi and emissary for the Holy Land. His brothers-in-law, Rabbis Mosheh Hagiz and Hizkiah de Silva, were both noted scholars.[36]

Rabbi Ezra Malki served in Rhodes until his death in 1768.[37] During his tenure, he was respected and well treated. In an introduction to Malki's volume of responsa, his devoted student Raphael Yaacob de Mayo praised the Jews of Rhodes for all the kindnesses they showered on their rabbi.[38]

Following the death of Ezra Malki, the community appointed Rabbi Shaul Almani to serve as *Hakham*. He was succeeded in 1773 by Rabbi Mosheh ben Eliyahu Israel (henceforth Mosheh Israel II), a grandson of Rabbi Mosheh Israel. Mosheh Israel II was born in Jerusalem c. 1747/48. Serving first as a *hazzan* (reader) and *dayyan* (judge) in Rhodes, he was appointed Chief Rabbi while still a young man. He died in 1782 at the age of thirty-four.[39]

Like other Chief Rabbis before him, the young Mosheh Israel II struggled to maintain the authority and prestige of his office. One major crisis early in his career indicates aspects of this struggle. Prior to his appointment as Chief Rabbi, two *shohetim* were functioning in Rhodes. Rabbi Eliyahu Israel, Mosheh's father, was then living in Rhodes. He had been eating meat of animals slaughtered by one of these *shohetim*. But he learned from two reliable witnesses that his *shohet* lacked the ability to examine properly the blade of a slaughtering knife for flaws. Rabbi Israel then ceased eating meat, but did not publicly denounce the *shohet*. When asked why he did not eat meat, he explained that it was a temporary abstention for health reasons. His justification for silence was his wish to keep peace in the community. Had he spoken publicly of the *shohet's* failing, the community would have been beset with feuding and confusion. Rabbi Eliyahu Israel judged that silence and peace were the most desirable objectives in this situation.[40]

But after six months of his abstention from eating meat, people began to suspect that something was amiss. The facts were finally revealed and the community did, indeed, split into contending

factions. When Mosheh Israel II became Chief Rabbi of Rhodes, he was required to deal with this crisis.

The incompetent *shohet* was known to have been prone to drink too much alcoholic beverage when he had served as slaughterer in Istankui (Cos). But his defenders insisted that he was trustworthy. Two rabbis from Hebron happened to pass through Rhodes during this period and were asked to rule on the suspected *shohet's* ability to examine slaughtering knives. They found him incompetent and decreed that he should desist from slaughtering. But the *shohet* did not heed this warning. His supporters sent him to Smyrna to obtain a certificate of competence from the authorities there. When the *shohet* returned with a certificate attesting to his ability to examine knives, the Rhodian community agreed to let him resume slaughtering.

But the Chief Rabbi was not satisfied as to the *shohet's* competence, and he would not eat meat of animals slaughtered by him. Antagonized by the Rabbi's position, the *shohet* and his followers argued that Israel was sinning by not eating such meat. They contended that if the authorities in Smyrna had accredited the *shohet*, the rabbi of Rhodes was wrong to oppose their decision.

Israel wrote a responsum presenting his reasons for opposing the *shohet's* reappointment. It reflects his struggle to maintain the independent authority of Rhodes' Chief Rabbi. The Jews of Rhodes, he stated, were obligated to listen to him regardless of the Smyrna rabbis' decision. Each community must follow its own rabbi, and if he declared that something was forbidden, the community had to accept it as forbidden.[41]

Seeking to reconcile Mosheh Israel II with the opposing faction, his father, Rabbi Eliyahu Israel, sent his advice in the matter. He wrote that the *shohet* could be reinstated if he swore that he would never work while drunk. But if he demonstrated incompetence in the future, he could then be removed.[42] If Mosheh Israel II conceded this point to the community, his father implied, there could be peace. Apparently, the son took his father's advice and the crisis was smoothed over.

Following the untimely death of Mosheh Israel II, Rabbi Yedidiah Shemuel Tarica became the community's religious leader. Tarica's family originated in Candia. His wealthy father had supported him for many years so that he could devote full time to his studies. Yedidiah Tarica served as head of the Beth Din in Rhodes for many

years without pay, because his father had provided him with adequate funds. An excellent scholar, Rabbi Tarica authored a number of rabbinic books.[43] He was succeeded by Rabbi Hayyim Tarsa (d. 1799), a student of Mosheh Israel II, and author of a volume of responsa, *Hayyim Shenayim*.[44]

During the latter half of the 18th century, there are indications of widespread learning, not only among Rhodes' leading rabbis, but among the community members as a whole. For example, one Rhodian Jew bequeathed a sum of money from his estate to scholars then living in Rhodes or who would move into the city in the future. The money was to be distributed on condition that these scholars would learn Torah in the man's house one day a week. As trustees of his estate, he appointed a local scholar and his son-in-law.[45] A problem developed when the trustee sought to take a larger share of the bequest than was given to other scholars. He claimed that the benefactor had authorized him to do so; but the other scholars argued that the benefactor's documentation of his wishes did not mention that the trustee should receive more than the others. They also questioned the trustee scholar's assertion that he was authorized to prevent other scholars from attending the study sessions at the benefactor's house.

These questions were submitted to Rabbi Eliyahu Moseri who ruled that the trustee scholar was not entitled to a larger share than the others unless he could prove that the benefactor had specifically authorized this provision after the document had been drawn. Moseri also stated that the trustee could not prevent another scholar from coming to study and from collecting his share of the fund. This responsum implies that there was a group, perhaps a sizeable group, of Torah scholars in Rhodes at that time.

It appears that even the average layman in Rhodes devoted time to study. Groups of men would meet together to study in the evening. This was certainly so when there was a *meldado*, a learning session in memory of a departed relative. On this occasion, study of rabbinical lore played a central role. The men would meet in one room, and the women would listen to the discussion in another room.[46] The erudite printed sermons of Rabbis Mosheh Israel, Ezra Malki, Mosheh Israel II and Yedidiah Shemuel Tarica indicate that their 18th-century Rhodian audiences were quite learned. Their listeners evidently maintained a reasonably high level of Jewish learning.

The Chief Rabbis who served Rhodes in the early years of the 19th century were Mosheh Tarica and Abraham Halevi.[47] Rabbi Hayyim Yehudah Israel (c. 1768-1829) became Chief Rabbi of the community when Rabbi Halevi went to settle in Jerusalem in 1815. He served in Rhodes until 1820, when he too emigrated to Jerusalem.[48] Rabbi Abraham Mosafir also served for a period as Chief Rabbi during the first half of the 19th century.[49]

The most important rabbinic figure in Rhodes during the first half of the century was Rabbi Michael Yaacob Israel (1790-1856). Born and raised in the city, he was the son of Chief Rabbi Hayyim Yehudah Israel. A prolific author, Rabbi Michael Yaacob Israel worked with great devotion to maintain and improve Jewish religious life in Rhodes.

Another rabbinic figure of the period was Rabbi Hizkiah Shemuel Tarica. He authored a book of Biblical commentaries, *Shutah Deyenukah*, as well as a pamphlet of Judeo-Spanish poems to be sung on various occasions.[50]

Rabbi Raphael Yitzhak Israel (1808-1902) was born and raised in Rhodes. In 1856, after an earthquake had seriously damaged the city of Rhodes, he traveled to Jewish communities in Europe in order to raise funds for the Jews of his community. He also authored several works.[51]

Rabbi Rahamim Hayyim Yehudah Israel (1815-1892), the son of Rabbi Michael Yaacob Israel, served the community of Rhodes for many years, becoming its Chief Rabbi in 1882. It was in that year that Raphael Yitzhak Israel, who had been Chief Rabbi until then, emigrated to Jerusalem.[52] He authored a volume, *Ben Yamin*, which included novellae, responsa and several sermons.[53]

Another significant rabbi in Rhodes during this period was Rahamim Franco. He was born in the city in 1835. In 1868, he moved to Jerusalem and was eventually appointed to serve on the Beth-Din of the well-known Rabbi Yaacob Shaul Elyachar. In 1878, he became the Chief Rabbi of Hebron, in which capacity he served until his death in 1900. He authored a book of responsa, *Shaarei Rahamim*, as well as other works.[54]

Rabbi Sabbatai Levy became the Chief Rabbi of Rhodes in 1892, following the death of Rabbi Rahamim Israel. He was the first Chief Rabbi of Rhodes to be officially recognized by the Sultan. Until his time, the *Hakham* of Smyrna was technically considered to be the authority for the community of Rhodes by the government.[55]

When Rabbi Levy left his post in 1893, a feud erupted in the community over the appointment of the next Chief Rabbi.

The candidates for the post were Rabbi Mosheh Israel and Rabbi Chilibi Kodron. The wealthy Alhadeff family supported Israel, while the influential Menashe family preferred Kodron. The power struggle lasted for two years. Inasmuch as many members of the community were related through marriage, this struggle led to dissension within families. Where a husband was from one of the contending families and the wife was from the other, the situation was particularly explosive. The feuding became so intense that people engaged in fist fights in the street. The problem was finally resolved when the Jews settled on a Chief Rabbi who was then serving in Milas, Rabbi Yehudah Mosheh Franco. Everyone accepted him and he was recognized by the Turkish government. Rabbis Mosheh Israel and Chilibi Kodron were given positions on the community's rabbinic court in order to assuage the feelings of the contending parties. The intensity of the feud was such that it left a marked impression on subsequent generations of Rhodes Jews.[56]

When Rabbi Franco left Rhodes in 1909 to settle in Jerusalem, the community appointed Rabbi Nissim Dannon of Beirut, who served only from 1911-1912, and then went to Smyrna. From 1912 to 1921, the Jews of Rhodes had no Chief Rabbi. In 1922, Rabbi Reuben Eliyahu Israel, who had been serving in Craiova, Roumania, was appointed to the post in Rhodes. When he died in 1932, the office of Chief Rabbi remained vacant.[57]

It is clear, then, that the community in Rhodes was blessed with a significant number of rabbis, scholars and authors during the course of its history. It is not surprising, therefore, that the Jews of Rhodes would refer to their city as *"chico Yerushalayim,"* little Jerusalem.[58]

CHAPTER SIX

Education in a Time of Transition

As we have seen, the major thrust of education for the Jews of Rhodes was in the area of religion. Secular education, certainly after the 17th century, was hardly available to the young people of the city. This situation was true not only in Rhodes but in many other communities as well. The *millet* system tended to isolate Jews in their own society, effectively cutting them off from the intellectual life of the Empire in general. They had their own schools and used their own language of instruction (Judeo-Spanish). There were no external stimuli to encourage the study of subjects outside the realm of Judaism, except for such basic subjects as arithmetic, which would be needed in business.

The yeshivot of Rhodes flourished through the 18th century under the leadership of erudite Chief Rabbis and scholars. However, as economic conditions deteriorated by the 19th century, educational conditions also worsened.

Children had to leave school in order to earn money to help support their families. Faced with poverty, parents were not anxious to encourage their children to devote too many years to schooling. Hence, the early 19th century witnessed a decline in the educational conditions of the Jews of Rhodes.

When the French traveler, Victor Guerin, visited Rhodes in the 1850's, he found three schools.[1] They had a total of one hundred and twenty students, all boys. Pupils usually graduated at age twelve, sometimes earlier. They learned to read, write, do some arithmetic, and became familiar with the principles of Judaism. The students would recite their lesson together in a loud voice and quick cadence. They would squat on the ground around the teacher, who was himself sitting down on a mat with legs crossed. Usually, the teacher would be armed with a long, flexible wand which served as a perpetual threat to troublesome students. There was no school for

girls. (Nor had there been one before then.) Jewish women, like their non-Jewish counterparts, could seldom read or write.

Towards the end of the 19th century, attempts were made to establish schools of a "modern" nature. In 1880, Rabbi Nissim Behar Michael from Constantinople came to Rhodes and founded a primary school, which taught both Hebrew and Turkish. It failed after only a few months. The same was the fate of a private school founded by another rabbi from Constantinople in 1893.[2]

In 1882, Mosheh Franco had initiated a primary school named Progress. This school taught Hebrew, Turkish and French. Its directors and teachers—Fortunato Danon of Smyrna, Jacques Abravaya of Dardanelles, Bohor Ojalvo and Daniel Gaon—sought to employ modern techniques in education. The rabbis of Rhodes opposed the Progress school from its inception. Some of the more fanatical traditionalists broke into the school one night and destroyed student records and caused other damage. The Progress ran for five years before it, too, closed.[3]

Abravaya continued in his efforts to establish a progressive school in Rhodes. On May 30, 1888, he wrote a letter to the main office of the Alliance Israélite Universelle in Paris in which he stated he was attempting to obtain books for a school library.[4] The list of books sought included mostly works of French authors, as well as classics such as Homer, Goethe, Dante and others. On the particular list he sent to Paris, not even one book on a Jewish subject appeared. This may have been because Jewish books were already available in Rhodes. However, it is clear that Abravaya's stress was on expanding the horizons of his students, especially in western culture.

But the time was not yet ripe for a western school to succeed in the Jewish community of Rhodes. On July 4, 1890, Abravaya wrote a letter to the Alliance applying for a job in an Alliance school. He was "discouraged to see the constantly increasing hostility of the Jews of Rhodes" towards modern education, and he no longer felt willing to fight the community.[5]

One of the men most responsible for the ultimate victory of modern education in Rhodes was Abraham Galante. Born in Budrum in 1873, Galante was sent to Rhodes at the age of nine in order to continue his studies. In 1883, his family moved to Rhodes. He attended the Progress school. After his primary education was completed, he studied in the yeshivot of Rhodes where he became

versed in Talmud and the codes of Jewish law. He mastered a number of modern and ancient languages including Hebrew, Greek, French, German, Spanish, Turkish and Armenian. During the course of his life, he became one of the leading Sephardic intellectuals in the world.[6]

Galante was eminently fitted to be an educator in Rhodes. He himself was a product of a modern primary school and the classical yeshivot of the city. He had thus sampled both worlds. He was a trained and competent teacher, having taught French and mathematics in the High School in Rhodes. His administrative talents were refined in his work as the general overseer of the schools of the Archipelago Islands. Moreover, he had a genuine sense of responsibility for the education of the Jewish children of Rhodes. In his history of the Jews of Rhodes, Galante noted with pride: "*Les enfants juifs de Rhodes sont excessivement intelligents.*" (The Jewish children of Rhodes are extremely intelligent.) Galante saw his task as bringing education to these children.[7]

In 1895, Galante founded a grammar school in Rhodes called Tiferet Israel. He himself taught Hebrew and Turkish. French was also part of the curriculum. The general community, however, was not yet ready to support such a school and the venture failed after two years.

But Galante's work helped lay the foundation for a school that would succeed. In 1899, Galante met with several progressive Sephardic educators with the aim of establishing a modern school in Rhodes. As they had no building of their own to house a school they held classes in cramped and inadequate rooms. They then occupied the building formerly used as the community Talmud Torah building. An additional section was added to the structure in 1901 at which time the school became affiliated with the Alliance Israélite Universelle.[8]

As the school was limited to boys, the need was soon felt to create a school for girls. Aside from the positive reasons for establishing such a school, there was also an element of fear which prompted the decision. The School of Sisters in Rhodes had managed to enroll 60 Jewish girls and charged them no tuition. The school encouraged its students to attend church. One Jewish girl, aged fifteen, had already converted to Catholicism.[9] Alarmed by this event, Jewish leaders were anxious to prevent any further loss of Jewish girls from the community. A school for girls was opened in 1902 and

enrolled 100 students, 40 who paid and 60 who were admitted without charge due to poverty.[10]

The facilities of the two schools were inadequate to meet the growing demand. Due to the general poverty in the community, it was difficult to raise the funds necessary for the construction of a new building. Fortunately, Baron and Baroness Edmond de Rothschild visited Rhodes in August, 1903. Seeing the plight of the community, they donated 15,000 francs for the construction of an Alliance school in Rhodes. The Baroness donated 100 francs to the student organization which raised funds to aid poor students.[11] The building was completed towards the end of 1904.

The extent of education among Jewish children in Rhodes prior to the advent of the Alliance schools was lamentable. According to a community report to the Alliance office in Paris, dated February 21, 1900, 92 students attended the Talmud Torah; 400 attended *meldars*, the poorly run schools which taught only the rudiments of reading and writing; 150 attended no school at all. Of the 92 students in the Talmud Torah, 48 attended without charge due to poverty. Classes were thirty-nine hours per week, plus two hours of reading Psalms on Saturday afternoons.[12]

Leon Semach, director of the School for boys, reported the following information in a letter to the Alliance office in Paris on November 27, 1901: 600 boys and girls were enrolled in the various *hevrot* of Rhodes; 60 girls attended the School of Sisters; 90 boys were in the Alliance school; 100 children did not attend any school.[13] Considering the poor educational quality of the *hevrot*, relatively few Jewish children were receiving proper Jewish or general educations. The Alliance schools, as they continued to grow in enrollment, provided the young people in Rhodes with better educational opportunities.[14]

Because of their superior methods of instruction, the Alliance schools attracted not only Jewish children but also some non-Jewish students. For example, of 110 students in the school for boys in 1906, six were Turkish, sons of high functionaries in Rhodes.[15]

The advent of the Alliance schools significantly improved the educational opportunities for the Jewish children of Rhodes. Even the Communal School, now that it had to compete with the Alliance for students, modernized its methods and enriched its curriculum. Indeed, it was the Communal School that first introduced the study of English language; the Alliance schools followed this lead. It

became rare to find a school-age child who was not attending school.

Under Italian Rule

The advent of Italian control posed certain problems for the Jewish schools of Rhodes, particularly the Alliance schools.[16] The latter had used French as the language of instruction and had included the Turkish language in their programs. By 1915, the instruction of Turkish was attacked on two fronts. Many parents wanted English to replace it since it was not uncommon for their children to plan to emigrate to the United States.[17] English was, therefore, much more practical than Turkish. Also, a faction was demanding that Italian replace Turkish since Rhodes was no longer under Turkish dominion but Italian. By 1916, Turkish was indeed eliminated and the Italian language was added to the curriculum.[18]

In order to encourage the instruction of the Italian language, the B'nai B'rith organization of Rhodes offered a grant of 100 francs to the Alliance school for boys. On August 31, 1916, Leon Mehrez, director of the school, organized a small celebration in honor of the students who excelled in their Italian studies. He awarded twenty-three prizes which he had purchased with the gift of the B'nai B'rith. This seemingly unimportant event received wide publicity not only within the Jewish community but among all the Italian-speaking people of Rhodes. The Italian government, eager for the Italian language to spread, showered praise on any group which fostered Italian. The Italian newspaper of Rhodes, *Il Messagero di Rodi*, printed an article on September 2, 1916, which lauded the "brilliant results" obtained in the Italian classes of the Alliance schools.

During the spring of 1917, the French consul in Rhodes visited the Alliance school for boys. The local Italian authorities were infuriated by this apparently harmless gesture. They insisted that the French diplomat had no right to visit the school and had no status as an inspector of students. The objections were made so forcefully and with so much publicity that the French consul thereafter avoided visiting the schools.[19] The cause of the French language was thus served another setback.

In discussing the increased militance on the part of the Italian government in insisting on the hegemony of the Italian language,

Leon Mehrez lamented that the Italian authorities were seeking "to turn to the profit of the Italian language a part of the activity which our students devote to the study of French."[20] The advocates of the French language had been forced into the defensive.

In June, 1917, the government decreed that all schools in Rhodes—Turkish, Greek and Jewish—would henceforth be under the control of an Italian inspector-general. His duties were to oversee the curriculums of the schools, especially their teaching of languages. Mehrez observed that the authorities have become "fanatics for everything which concerns the Italian language."[21] The Italian officials made frequent visits to the schools, testing the students on questions of Italian geography, proverbs and general Italian culture.

Being confronted with an officially appointed Italian inspector-general for the schools, the Turkish, Greek and Jewish communities were compelled to Italianize their schools at a faster pace than previously. The Turkish schools agreed to submit to the government's inspector. The Greeks, though, categorically refused to acknowledge Italian authority over their schools. The Jews agreed to submit to Italian control only on the condition that educational decisions be made with the approval of the Jewish community's own government, rather than be unilaterally imposed on the Jews by the Italian government.[22] This compromise, although it protected Jewish autonomy, represented a crucial step forward in the Italianization of the Jewish schools.

Indeed, progress in Italian in the Jewish schools advanced at a rapid pace. On June 12, 1920, Francesco Saccorotti, the Mayor of Rhodes, noted that the Jewish schools in Rhodes were imcomparably better than any other schools in the city in respect to the instruction of Italian language and culture.[23]

With pressure for Italianization constantly increasing by the government, pressure from within the community also increased. When in July of 1923 Rhodes was officially granted to Italy, the tendency to Italianize intensified. The pro-Italian faction among the Jews felt that the schools should reflect the fact that they existed in Italian territory. To insist on French seemed unpatriotic. The Jews, it was argued, should become part of the mainstream of Italian life in Rhodes rather than remain culturally attached to France. The pro-French faction, on the other hand, pointed to the outstanding contribution of the Alliance schools to

the education of the youth of Rhodes. It was the advent of the French schools that led directly to the cultural advancement of so many of the Jews of the city. This advancement was correlated to French language and culture. To change course now would be disloyal to the Alliance schools' past. The schools were geared to French and that was their strength. To switch to Italian would jeopardize future progress.

The two factions, both having cogent arguments and strong emotional attachments to their causes, contended for community support. The internal strife within the community intensified.[24] However, the ultimate success of Italian was inevitable due to the influence of the Italian government in Rhodes. The external and internal pressures for Italianization grew so powerful that the Alliance schools could not withstand the tide. In the spring of 1925, the Jewish community of Rhodes officially decided to substitute Italian for French in the schools.[25] The Alliance schools were transformed and the era of French domination in the Jewish schools of Rhodes came to an end.

The decision to switch to Italian was not made without due consideration for the Alliance Israélite Universelle. The community recognized and appreciated the Alliance's past contributions to education in Rhodes. Mr. Eliyahu Soriano, President of the Jewish community, and Mr. Hizkiah Franco, Secretary, wrote a letter to the Alliance officials in Paris in which they declared:

> It is not, therefore, without exhausting reflection and long hesitation—which attest to the high value which we attach to the instruction of the Alliance—that, ceding to political necessity, we have decided to conform to the orders of the government, not without having previously obtained assurance that a very important place would be reserved in our future programs for the instruction of the French language.[26]

The change in the language of instruction for the 900 or so children in the Jewish schools of Rhodes was a major undertaking. The transition was preceded, to be sure, by nearly a decade of instruction in Italian language and culture in the schools. Thus, the students could adapt relatively easily to the change. However, most faculty members and most textbooks became obsolete. The directors of the Alliance schools, who had only begun work in Rhodes on April 3, 1924, were dismissed. Textbooks in French were

stored away, and ultimately an attempt was made to sell them at a large reduction in price.[27] The community obtained the services of Aldo Lattes, "a cultivated and great man," formerly Chief Rabbi of Alexandria, Italy, as the Director of the Jewish schools in Rhodes.[28]

One of the leading laymen who was influential in the reorganization of the schools was Hizkiah Franco. Originally from Smyrna, Franco dedicated much effort for the sake of the Rhodes community. He spent more than two months traveling to Italy to obtain official recognition for the Jewish schools. He served on the Community Council of Rhodes for many years and was President of the community for several terms.[29]

The Rabbinical College

In order to bolster Italian influence among the Sephardim of Rhodes and the Mediterranean region, the Italian government sought to establish a rabbinic seminary under its auspices. On December 11, 1928, Mario Lago, the governor of Rhodes, decreed the establishment of the Collegio Rabbinico.[30] The Rabbinical College attracted not only students from Rhodes but also from Turkey, Palestine, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, Egypt and even Ethiopia. Upon receiving diplomas as rabbis, *hazzanim, shohetim,* or teachers, the students of the Rabbinical College went on to serve various Jewish communities. The school in Rhodes quickly acquired an international reputation, much to the satisfaction of the Italian authorities.

The Rabbinical College was founded on a solid scholarly basis. It was divided into three sections of study, each lasting for three years. Those students who completed the first two sections were graduated as Hebrew teachers, *hazzanim* and/or *shohetim*. Rabbinical ordination came only after satisfactory completion of all three sections. Rabbinical students were expected to have a mastery of the Bible and its commentaries, Hebrew language and grammar, Talmud, Codes of Jewish law, Jewish history, Hebrew literature and religious philosophy. Candidates were also given oral examinations and were required to submit a written dissertation. Beyond the requirements in Jewish studies, students were also required to study secular subjects under Italian professors. The Rabbinical College was accredited by the Italian government and had to meet all of the academic requirements of state schools.

The scholars involved in administering and staffing the College included Marcus Breger, Isidore Kahan, Simon Markus, Riccardo Pacifici and Isaiah Sonne, and in 1938, Michel Albagli. In 1932, Dr. Breger was invited by the Italian government to teach in the College and was exclusively empowered to ordain rabbis and to append his signature to the diplomas of the graduates. In 1932, he was also appointed as head of the Jewish court in Rhodes. Decisions of the Beth-din were enforced by the Italian government.

In 1938, the Jewish community received the sad news that the fascist government had ordered the closing of the Rabbinical College. In its relatively short existence, it had become one of the leading rabbinical seminaries among Sephardic communities. Its graduates have played—and continue to play today—significant roles as rabbis and teachers in a number of Jewish communities.[31]

Reuben Eliyahu Israel

The last man to serve as the official Chief Rabbi of the Jewish community of Rhodes was Reuben Eliyahu Israel (1922-32). He was a direct descendant of Rabbi Mosheh Israel, and was a son of Rabbi Rahamim Hayyim Yehudah Israel, who had been Chief Rabbi of the community in the latter part of the 19th century. As a young man, Reuben Eliyahu had served the community as *hazzan* and *shohet*, in which capacities he devoted eighteen years. He then served as Chief Rabbi of the Sephardim of Craiova, Roumania for twenty-four and a half years. In 1922, he was called to his position in Rhodes.

Reuben Eliyahu Israel's life reflected the tensions between tradition and modernism. Although he fought ardently for ancient religious values, he also showed a respect for modern education. Although trained in the classical style of his ancestors, yet he was willing to consider the new thinking and attitudes of his contemporaries. The only Chief Rabbi of Rhodes to have served under Italian rule, Reuben Eliyahu Israel was knighted by King Victor Emanuel.[32]

Israel's writings indicate his desire to bridge tradition and modernism. While serving in Craiova, he had expressed his dissatisfaction with the educational system of that city. He claimed that the Jewish children were like strangers to their religion. The Hebrew School had few boy students and no girl students. The other Jewish children attended Christian schools. Religious

decadence was appalling.[33] The situation in Rhodes, though not nearly so bad, was by no means satisfactory. Israel called for educational reforms. He translated the Psalms and Proverbs into Judeo-Spanish, especially for the use of students in the Jewish schools. He opposed teaching by rote, and insisted that students be taught to understand what they read.

Rabbi Israel was particularly concerned that children should study the history of their people. There had traditionally been a lack of emphasis on this area of education. In one of his sermons given in Rhodes while he was Chief Rabbi, he insisted: *"tenemos un dover sacro de estudiar profundamente nuestra istoria para saver quien somos nosotros."* ("We have a sacred obligation to study profoundly our history in order to know who we are.") In the same sermon, he displayed knowledge and appreciation of ancient Egyptian culture and art, as well as an awareness of the museums of Europe. He, no doubt, had delved more deeply into secular studies than any of his immediate predecessors.[34]

Rabbi Israel believed that in order for Jewish children to know their past, they had to know the Hebrew language. He argued that Hebrew should be taught with the goal of enabling a student to speak the language. In a sermon in Craiova in 1909 he had called for the instruction of conversational Hebrew in the Jewish schools. He was happy that in Palestine Hebrew was enjoying a revival, and he wished that Jews everywhere would begin to speak the language.[35]

Israel had accepted and encouraged a modern approach to Jewish education. He well recognized that the young people were becoming more and more westernized in thought and manner. The "emancipated" Jews longed to mimic the ways of the non-Jewish world. The Jewish quarter had somehow become too confining. A new Jew was emerging.[36] Israel thought that it was the duty of religious leaders not to try to insulate students from modern thought, but to give them an enlightened Jewish education so that they could absorb modernism while still remaining faithful Jews.

But Israel could not watch traditional religious values being flaunted and remain silent. In a number of his sermons, he lashed out at some practices which tended to undermine Judaism. In June, 1924, for example, he forcefully condemned the new style of décolleté dresses that had won adherents among the Jewish women of Rhodes. Some even came to the synagogue for weddings garbed in décolleté dresses. Such immodesty, Israel argued,

represented terrible disrespect and contradicted the idea that Jews were a holy people.[37]

In a sermon in memory of the martyrs of Hebron who had been slaughtered by Arabs in 1929, Israel again criticized the ineffectiveness of the Jewish educational system in Rhodes. Jewish children were not emotionally and intellectually attached enough to their people's past. They socialized too much with non-Jewish children. If things would continue, it would not be long before Jewish young people would convert to other religions.[38] Israel was worried about the problem of intermarriage with non-Jews—a problem which did not have adequate time to reach large proportions.

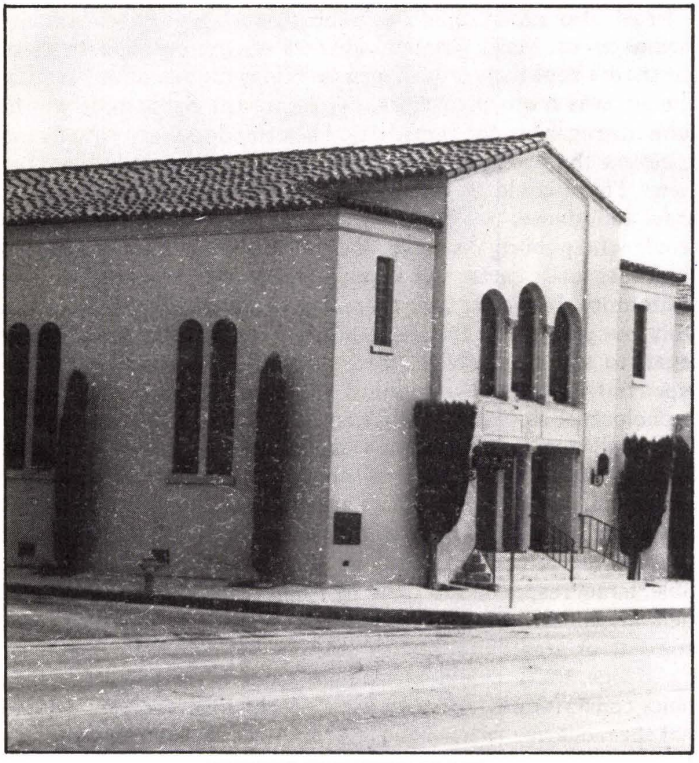
Israel also noted that the Sabbath was being desecrated in various ways. Some women did their sewing on Sabbath. Some merchants kept their stores open on Friday night and/or Saturday. The sin was more than merely violating the Sabbath; it was the public disregard of the sacred day. The offenders were not ashamed to violate the Sabbath even where all Jews and gentiles could see them. There could be no forgiveness for continued brazenness. Israel announced, in a hauntingly prophetic statement, that those people who publicly disobeyed God's law would, Heaven forbid, be the cause of a catastrophe and calamity for the entire Jewish community. Sooner or later there would be punishment from God. Only ten years after this sermon, the position of Jews in Rhodes began to slip seriously. Fifteen years later the community was wiped out. Whatever we might think, Israel would have interpreted the holocaust as God's retribution for Jewish sins.[39]

A challenge to orthodoxy was not merely manifested in the disregard of certain religious precepts, but also in a pseudo-intellectual denial of Scripture's authority. Apparently, some Jews in Rhodes had read enough of Biblical criticism to be able to lodge some of the more hackneyed attacks on the authenticity of the Bible. Israel responded to them by properly noting that they based their arguments on non-Jewish commentaries while they were ignorant of traditional Jewish sources. Armed with incomplete knowledge, these would-be scholars spoke with confidence about topics concerning which they were poorly informed. Israel agreed that the modern epoch obliged Jews not to be parochial but rather to deal with modern thought. This did not mean, however, that tradition should be thoughtlessly cast aside.[40]

It should not be assumed from the above discussion that the Jews

of Rhodes were generally non-observant or heretical. The contrary was true. The dissenters were a minority within a community which was by and large faithful and traditional.[41]

The community was experiencing the influences of westernization and was struggling to bridge the gap between ancient and modern attitudes. Rabbi Reuben Eliyahu Israel, the scholars of the Rabbinical College and other leaders all tried to embrace modernism without losing traditional values. In large measure, they succeeded.



THE FIRST BUILDING OF
SEPHARDIC HEBREW CENTER OF LOS ANGELES

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Role of Women

The Jewish women of Rhodes were concerned almost exclusively with being wives and mothers. Until the 20th century, when their educational opportunities increased significantly, their direct involvement in areas outside of family life was relatively small. They had little say in community government and generally did not engage in commerce. In these respects, they shared the same essential status of women throughout the Moslem world.

Yet, within the framework of their lives, the Jewish women of Rhodes enjoyed a number of rights and privileges which made their lot better than that of non-Jewish women. Most of their advantages stemmed from traditional Jewish law and custom, which in many ways showed profound respect for women's rights and feelings. Even an author who was very unsympathetic to Jews had to admit that the Jewish women of Turkey enjoyed personal and proprietary rights which were "greatly superior to that of the women of the native Christian races, and in some respects to that of the Moslem women."[1] The rights and privileges of Jewish women in Rhodes, though seldom unique to that community, in sum tended to distinguish them not only from the non-Jewish women, but also from Jewish women of other communities. This will become clear throughout this chapter.

Contracting of Marriages

Until the 20th century, marriages were usually arranged by parents rather than by children. It was not uncommon for girls to be promised away at nine or ten years of age. They were normally married between the ages of twelve and sixteen. Girls who remained unmarried beyond this age posed problems for their families. For example, in the latter 18th century a Rhodian Jew

contracted for the marriage of his daughter, who was almost eighteen years old. As her fiancé had to go to Egypt on business, it was agreed that he would return within one-and-a-half years to marry his chosen bride. The proscribed time passed, but the man did not return. The father was enraged, "screaming like a crane saying that his daughter was already an adult and was almost twenty years old." He wanted to marry her off to someone else.[2]

The general procedures of arranging marriages were common throughout the history of the community under Ottoman domain. The first phase in arranging for the marriage of one's daughter was the *shidukhin*, or marriage negotiation. The parents of the girl came to terms with the parents of a prospective bridegroom or with the man himself. They agreed to a limited time period during which the marriage had to take place. In some instances, this period extended over several years or more.[3] It was also agreed that specified fines would be paid in case of breach of contract.

To ensure that the terms of the *shidukhin* would be respected, it was customary in Rhodes, as in some other communities, to conduct these negotiations in public. The terms were announced publicly so that widespread knowledge of their requirements would decrease possibilities of future arguments between the contracting parties.[4] By the days of Rabbi Mosheh Israel in the early 18th century it was customary to conduct the *shidukhin* negotiations in the presence of the Chief Rabbi.[5]

On one occasion, Rabbi Mosheh Israel was asked to consider the case of a young man who had negotiated a marriage in secret. Not only had the young man disregarded the custom of public *shidukhin* negotiations in the presence of the Chief Rabbi, but he had also failed to obtain his father's permission for the marriage. During the secret negotiations, the young man vowed to fulfill the terms of the *shidukhin* under the penalty of paying a fine to the bride's family if he withdrew. When the young man's father learned of the arrangement, however, he became furious and threatened to kill himself because he felt the girl was unworthy of his son; and his son, moreover, had been disrespectful in failing to secure his permission for the marriage. Alarmed by the vehemence of his father's threats and curses, the young man decided to withdraw from the terms of the secret *shidukhin*. The question was then posed to Rabbi Israel: was the young man still obligated to pay the fine to the girl's family, or was his vow during the secret *shidukhin* void since he had made it

on the assumption that his father would eventually agree to the marriage? Rabbi Israel ruled that the young man was absolved from paying the fine, since his vow was made under false pretenses: he had not expected his father to react as violently as he did.[6]

That fathers exerted pressure on their sons in their selection of wives is also evidenced in a responsum of Rabbi Yosef Trani (d. 1639) of Constantinople. A young Rhodian Jew had betrothed an orphan girl against the wishes of his father, who threatened to disinherit his son if the marriage took place. He wrote a legal document in which he bequeathed 500 gold florins to charity, payable from his estate at time of death, if his son married the orphan. The capital was to remain in Rhodes but the interest from the money was to be paid yearly, half to the yeshiva in Rhodes and half to the poor Jews of Safed in the Holy Land. But if the son did not marry the orphan, he himself would inherit the 500 gold florins. Despite the seriousness of his father's threat, the young man married the orphan girl. After the father's death, though, the son refused to release the 500 gold florins according to his father's documented instructions. Rabbi Yosef Trani ruled that the son was required to forfeit his claim to this money because the document was legal and valid.[7]

Following the *shidukhin* in the marriage process was *kiddushin*, or betrothal. At this point the man gave his intended wife something of value, such as a ring, and stated that he was betrothing her according to the laws of Moses and Israel. Once the woman accepted the object of value in the presence of two valid witnesses she was considered the man's wife. But the couple could not live together as man and wife until after the *nisuin* ceremony, which was performed with the pronouncement of seven wedding blessings under a canopy or a prayer shawl. *Kiddushin* and *nisuin* might take place on the same day or at separate times. A responsum of Rabbi Mosheh Israel reports that a daughter of a respected member of the Jewish community had received *kiddushin* from a young man; but the *nisuin* was deferred for twelve months. The question arose: should the bride keep her head covered, as was required of a married woman, or might she leave it uncovered, as unmarried women did? Rabbi Israel ruled that she did not have to keep her hair covered until after the *nisuin* ceremony.[8]

Probably the *kiddushin* as well as the *shidukhin* agreements were concluded in public and in the presence of the Chief Rabbi of

Rhodes. Nearby communities such as Candia and Salonika had ordinances requiring the presence of ten Jews to validate a *kiddushin* ceremony. In 1631, the community of Smyrna passed a *haskamah* that no man could betroth a woman except in the presence of one of the rabbis and one of the communal officers. No marriage blessings could be recited by a cantor until he had ascertained that the *kiddushin* had been properly performed.[9]

It was customary for the couple to exchange gifts during the period between the negotiations and the actual marriage. The legal significance of the gifts the man gave to his fiancée depended on local custom and sometimes gave rise to legal difficulties. In Constantinople, for example, such gifts, known as *sivlonot*, were considered to be *kiddushin*, or tokens of betrothal. If the marriage agreement was not carried out after the women had received such gifts from her fiancé, she was obliged to obtain a Jewish divorce from him. But in Salonika, *sivlonot* were not considered *kiddushin*. Each community had its own way of dealing with the question of *sivlonot*.[10]

It appears that Rhodes followed the custom of Salonika in this matter and did not consider *sivlonot* as *kiddushin*. A case brought before Mosheh Israel illustrates the Rhodian custom. A visitor to the city completed *shidukhin* with a father for his daughter, then stated that he wished to return to his native city but would come back to Rhodes in six months to marry her. When the rabbi asked the young man to bring proof that he was not already married elsewhere, he said he would go to Smyrna where his friends could testify to that effect. Before the prospective groom's departure from Rhodes, the rabbi informed him as well as his father-in-law-to-be that no gifts should be given to the young women until after the *nisuin* ceremony. Any *sivlonot* received would not be considered tokens of betrothal in accord with the custom of the city of the fiancée (Rhodes). Subsequently, the young man was unable to establish proof of his single status in Smyrna. But he claimed that he had sent *sivlonot* and that his fiancée was therefore legally married to him. Both father and daughter denied that such gifts had ever been received. Rabbi Israel declared that the girl was unquestionably not betrothed to the young man as it had been made clear from the outset that *sivlonot* would not be considered as *kiddushin*.[11] In 1794, as further evidence of concern for the welfare of its women, the Jewish community of Rhodes adopted a *haskamah*

that forbade the giving of *sivlonot* at all. Presumably this ordinance removed any cause for question and allowed a Rhodian woman to remain free of marital bonds until such time as she, of her own free will, accepted the token of *kiddushin*.[12]

In selecting partners for marriage, the Jews of Rhodes were extremely loyal to their community. In 1767, while Ezra Malki was Chief Rabbi, the community adopted a *haskamah* that instructed parents to avoid giving their daughters in marriage to foreign Jews.[13] This rule affirmed the community's desire to keep its children in Rhodes even after their marriage, while, at the same time, reflecting a belief that Rhodes men were more reliable and trustworthy husbands than men of other places. An intense desire to marry within the Rhodes community was evident throughout the community's history, persisting even among its members who emigrated to other countries. Jews of non-Rhodian origin were considered "foreigners".[14]

Fathers often attempted to make their potential sons-in-law swear to remain living in Rhodes after marriage. The 16th-century rabbi, Hayyim Shabbethai, considered the case of a Rhodian Jew who wanted his prospective son-in-law to agree to live in Rhodes for twenty years after his marriage.[15] Rabbi Michael Yaacob Israel in the 19th century reported a case where a woman stipulated that she would marry a Rhodes-born man only if he agreed to leave his new home on a nearby island and resettle in Rhodes.[16] In another instance, a father presented gifts to his daughter and new son-in-law which necessitated their living in Rhodes. He gave the newlyweds a domicile and a store, stipulating that they must use the properties themselves and had no right to sell or rent them to anyone else.[17]

In general the men of Rhodes treated their wives with respect and affection. It was the fashion among residents of the Ottoman Empire who could afford it, for men to give their wives jewelry, particularly gold bracelets, as public evidence of their devotion. Thus, it was a point of pride for women to wear as many gold bracelets as possible, and the Jewish women of Rhodes were especially taken by this fashion. (This custom, interestingly, carried into the 20th century. It is still possible to see elderly Jewish women of Rhodes origin laden with numerous gold bracelets, especially at public gatherings and parties.)

That Jewish women of Rhodes received valuable gifts from their

husbands is indicated by several communal ordinances which attempted to restrict the wearing of jewels and luxurious clothing. There was a general desire among the Jews of the city to avoid arousing jealousy among non-Jewish neighbors by ostentatious displays of jewelry. Thus, a *haskamah* of 1797 forbade Jewish women from going to the public bath dressed in jewels and diamonds.[18] The community was also anxious not to create disharmony among its own members so that another 18th-century *haskamah* stipulated that no Rhodes man was allowed to have clothes made for his wife which were woven with gold threads. Such costly garments would tend to arouse jealousy among the poorer Jews of the community.[19]

The Ketubbah

From ancient times, Jewish law required a man to give a *ketubbah* to his wife prior to the *nisuin*, the final ceremony of marriage. The *ketubbah*, a legal document signed by two witnesses, stated the husband's financial obligations to his wife. It provided women with financial security in case of divorce or death of the husband, at which time she could collect the sum stated on the *ketubbah* from her husband's estate. The *ketubbah* generally consisted of a standard Aramaic text, with additional clauses of financial obligations added according to the negotiations of each case. The *ketubbah* was not only a source of financial security for women, but it also discouraged husbands from issuing divorces rashly since they would then be required to pay the sum specified on the *ketubbah*.

In Islamic law, women received a dowry, *mahr*, though it might be only of a very moderate value. Moreover, the *mahr* was often paid in segments—a large part before the consummation of marriage, the remainder soon after. In some cases the balance of the *mahr* was paid to the wife if her husband died or divorced her.[20] The *mahr*, thus, did not generally serve the same purpose as the *ketubbah* which was specifically intended to provide for women in the event of divorce or death of the husband. Moreover, even the minimum requirement of Jewish law demanded the *ketubbah* to guarantee a reasonably large sum—at least enough to support the woman for one year. Usually, the terms of the *ketubbah* promised much more than this minimum.

The community of Rhodes issued *haskamot* relating to the *ketubbah* during the 18th and 19th centuries. They related to questions of inheritance in the event that one of the spouses died without surviving children. According to ancient Jewish law, the

husband inherited all his wife's property upon her death. The wife, by contrast, did not inherit her husband's property, and received only whatever her *ketubbah* granted her. This included property she brought with her into the marriage, her dowry, any personal gifts which she received while married, the standard amount specified by the *ketubbah*, and the *tosefet* (any additional amounts promised to her by her husband). The following is an excerpt from the terms of a Rhodes *ketubbah*:

> (A) If, heaven forbid, the bride should die in the lifetime of her husband without having given birth to a child which can survive sixty full days after her death, then the groom will return one-half of the *ketubbah* to her heirs and they would deal with it according to the *haskamah* made here in Rhodes in the year 5577 since creation (1817 C.E.). If a child does survive its mother, then the matter will follow the law of the Torah, namely that the husband inherits his wife. And if, heaven forbid, the groom should die in the lifetime of his wife without leaving a child which can survive, then the bride may collect from his property her *ketubbah*, dowry and *tosefet* and the same holds in case of divorce. (B) However, if he is survived by a child who can survive, whether son or daughter, then she may only collect the main part of the *ketubbah* and the property which she brought with her into the marriage. But as to the collection of the *tosefet* this should follow the procedure of the *haskamot* made here in our city in the years 5482, 5512 and 5562 (1722, 1752 and 1802 C.E.). (C) The groom agrees not to marry another woman while still married to the woman he is now marrying, and also not to divorce her without her knowledge and proper consent and with the consent of one of her closest relatives.[21]

Section A existed in varying forms among Sephardic communities. It was known as the custom of Toledo or the custom of Damascus, since those communities had originally developed it.[22] Even prior to the *haskamah* of 1817 in Rhodes, variations of these clauses appeared in the community's *ketubbah*. Rabbi Hayyim Algazi in the 18th century was asked to rule in the case of a woman who had died and was survived by her husband and a ten-month-old son. According to the terms of the *ketubbah*, the husband was to return one half of the amount specified in the *ketubbah* to the wife's heirs if she did not leave a child who survived her for thirty days. (In the post-1817 Rhodes *ketubboth* the required period was lengthened to sixty days). The child died on the thirtieth day, raising this

question: Did the terms of the *ketubbah* require that the wife be survived by a child for thirty full days, or only that the child reach its thirtieth day from the time of her death? Rabbi Algazi stated that the child must live thirty complete days. As this requirement was not met, the husband was obligated to pay half the *ketubbah* amount to his wife's heirs.[23]

A 17th century case brought before Rabbi Mosheh Benveniste dealt specifically with the *ketubbah* terms as followed in Rhodes. An orphan girl was married off by her brothers, but the union was unhappy and culminated in divorce. The girl received her *ketubbah* settlement from her husband, including the substantial amount which had been her dowry. She was then married to another man. The following stipulation was made in the *ketubbah* governing the second marriage:

> If, Heaven forbid, the wife should die during the husband's lifetime and should not be survived by a child who could survive sixty days after its mother's death, then the husband is obliged to return half of the dowry which she brought into the marriage. One half of the sum was for a certain scholar, Yehudah, and the other half for her heirs.

The woman died childless after several years. In accord with the *ketubbah*, Yehudah collected his portion of her property. However, her brothers and legal heirs, then in Constantinople, demanded Yehudah's portion as well as thier own. Inasmuch as they provided their sister's original dowry, they claimed she had no right to make such a stipulation to Yehudah's benefit.

In this instance, Rabbi Benveniste considered it unlikely that the rabbis of Rhodes had established a fixed rule in such matters. He concluded that it was simply a custom for individuals to make stipulations at their own discretion at the time of marriage. Rabbi Benveniste then concluded that the woman gained legal right to the dowry when she was divorced by her first husband, at which point the brothers lost control of that property. Their sister was therefore within her rights to stipulate that half of the money should go to Yehudah.[24]

In an 18th-century case, Rabbi Mosheh Israel was asked for an opinion concerning a husband who had attempted to circumvent a custom which had developed in Rhodes. The husband persuaded his wife to accept a document which would avoid the customary

inheritance terms of the *ketubbah* of Rhodes. Being childless and unable to have children, the couple stipulated that when either partner died, the survivor would take as a gift all the inheritance except a nominal amount which was to go to the legal heirs. The wife's father was infuriated when he learned of this arrangement, particularly as she said she had been forced to accept it against her will. The father thereupon asked if the document was valid inasmuch as it contradicted the terms of the *ketubbah* amount to the wife's heirs. Pointing out numerous legal errors in the husband's document, Rabbi Israel ruled that it was invalid and that the terms of the *ketubbah* were to be upheld.[25]

In another instance, Rabbi Mosheh Israel was confronted with a question concerning term B of the *ketubbah*, which stipulated that the woman may not collect the *tosefet* when children born to her and her deceased husband survive. The officials of the community would not allow a certain widow to collect the *tosefet;* instead they intended to hold it for the surviving children. The widow protested, claiming that the money rightly belonged to her. Furthermore, she had never consented to the Rhodes *haskamah* which, she argued, was intended to apply only to cases of orphans who had no other means of providing for themselves. In this case, her husband had left such a large estate that even after the widow collected the *tosefet*, the children would find themselves with ample means for their support. She contended further that the *haskamah* applied only to an instance where the widow intended to marry another man. As this widow was not planning to remarry, she considered herself entitled to the *tosefet*. On their own behalf, the surviving children argued that the woman's interpretations of the *haskamah* were irrelevant. They held fast to their conviction that the *ketubbah* specifically granted the *tosefet* to them.

In his response to the question, Rabbi Israel affirmed the legal validity of the Rhodes custom in this matter, while noting his own reservations about it. He insisted that the communal authorities should not force the woman to comply with the custom. If she did not agree to do so of her own free will, the authorities should negotiate a compromise agreement with her. Rabbi Israel held that the primary objective was to solve this problem peacefully without creating further ill will.[26]

Term C of the *ketubbah* was common among Sephardim. Rabbeinu Gershom (c. 960-1028), an outstanding German rabbinic

authority, had decreed a prohibition against polygamy. This decree was universally accepted among Ashkenazic Jews, but did not bind Sephardic communities. Therefore, in order to protect a wife from being bound to a polygamous husband unless by her consent, the Sephardic *ketubbah* gave her the right to veto her husband's taking another wife.

Divorce

The rate of divorce among Rhodian Jews was always low, as was true among Jews generally. Social stigma, rabbinic pressure, the financial obligations of the *ketubbah* all contributed to discourage divorce. Among the Moslems, a husband merely had to repeat a short formula of dismissal to his wife three times in order to divorce her. Among the Christians, divorce was sinful. Among the Jews, though, a median policy was maintained. Divorce was discouraged and was not given without legal justification; yet divorce when necessary was an option that carried no taint of sinfulness. Divorce was a regular procedure of Jewish law and the bill of divorce (*get*) was issued by a competent rabbinic court.[27]

Property Rights

Although traditional Jewish law did not normally allow daughters to inherit with their brothers, early custom among the Jews of Rhodes did permit a married woman to inherit a "nice portion" of her father's estate. In a late 16th-century case, brothers objected to sharing their father's estate with their married sisters, claiming that this would violate the law of the Torah under which only sons had the right to inherit. Their position was upheld by Rabbi Hayyim Shabbethai, who objected strenuously to the more liberal custom of Rhodes, indicating that "this custom was a very bad one." Yet when Rabbi Hayyim Bassan of Rhodes had been faced with such a dispute earlier in the century, he had negotiated a satisfactory compromise whereby the brothers consented to let their married sisters share in the inheritance.[28] Apparently, when there was no objection from the brothers, their sisters routinely shared in the inheritance.

Some Jewish women throughout the Ottoman Empire, including Rhodes, engaged in commerce. Some assisted their husbands in their stores. A few even became active, competent business people

in their own rights. In the responsa of Rabbi David Ibn Zimra of the 16th century, for example, we learn of a Jewish woman who was an expert in business and investment, purchasing various buildings. Another case involved a woman who rented a building to a group of Jews for use as a synagogue.[29]

Such women also existed in Rhodes. We learn from a responsum of Rabbi Yehiel Bassan (late 16th-early 17th century), of a married woman who earned money independently and took none from her husband. She used her money as she saw fit, without asking her husband's consent, and became so successful that she was able to buy the *hazakah* rights to certain buildings in Rhodes. When the community's tax assessors came to estimate her husband's wealth, they wanted to include her fortune as part of his. This gave rise to the question: inasmuch as the wife's wealth was entirely her own, why should her husband assume its tax burden? Rabbi Bassan ruled that the husband could not be taxed for money and property that were owned by his wife.[30]

In the responsa of Rabbi Ezra Malki (18th century), we find the case of a Rhodes woman who insisted on asserting her independence. Her husband, a doctor, had died. His heirs wanted to collect their share of his estate, while allowing the widow to collect the sum specified in her *ketubbah*. But the woman did not wish to cooperate in this routine settlement of the estate. Instead, she argued that she was entitled to all her husband's property inasmuch as she had assisted him in his performance of medical services. She had, for example, performed blood-letting. Her husband had frequently sent her to deliver medicines to his Jewish and non-Jewish patients. Because her husband's wealth had been acquired with her assistance, she maintained that the entire estate should belong to her. The Jewish court attempted to negotiate a peaceful compromise assuring the widow that ample provision would be made for her by the heirs. But she refused to agree to any compromise. Unless she was allowed to keep the entire estate, she threatened to burn all documents of debts owed to her husband, thereby preventing the heirs from collecting them. She also threatened to dispose of her husband's money. To ensure that no part of the estate could be received by the heirs, she took up the matter with a friendly Rhodian official who stated that the civil law concurred with the woman's position. He ordered the leaders of the Jewish community to heed the widow's wishes or face the prospect

that he himself would bring the case to the civil courts. The heirs had to bribe city officials to prevent such legal action. Meanwhile, the widow hid her husband's clothing and valuables. As long as she lived, the heirs were unable to acquire any part of the estate.[31]

Influences of Modernism

When the French traveler, Victor Guerin, visited Rhodes in the mid-19th century he found no schools for Jewish girls there. Jewish women usually remained at home, emerging only to do their shopping or to meet friends for conversation and gossip. The favorite meeting place of the Jewish women was at the fountain of the *calle ancha*, "the broad street," or central square of the Jewish quarter. Guerin wrote: "When they come together, gracefully holding their filled urns on one of their shoulders, they form a tableau worthy of being depicted by a fine paint brush, imprinted with Biblical colors." The Jewish women were beautiful, Guerin noted. The girls were pale, almost diaphanous, and delicate. A certain Oriental languor was reflected in their eyes and gaits. Nearly all the girls knew how to play a type of guitar resembling a Spanish mandolin, and accompanied singing and dancing at family celebrations on these instruments.[32]

Victor Guerin did not realize, however, that age-old traditions among the Jewish women were already in the process of changing. For example, it had always been customary for married women to cover their hair and to wear clothing which completely covered their arms and legs. By the early 19th century, some women were disregarding these traditional norms of dress. Rabbi Michael Yaacob Israel sermonized against the growing number of Jewish women in Rhodes who appeared in public with bare arms and legs and uncovered heads. He condemned this "brazen and immodest" behavior, noting that no respectable Jewish women should dress improperly.[33] In the early 20th century, Rabbi Reuben Eliyahu Israel inveighed against the new fashion of décolleté dresses. These external changes in women's dress were manifestations of inner changes in their mentalities, of their desire to westernize and modernize.

In 1903, the Alliance Israélite Universelle opened a school for girls in Rhodes bringing opportunities for advancement to Jewish girls for the first time. Here hundreds of young Rhodian

Jewish girls received a good general as well as Jewish education. Indeed, it appears that the student body of the Alliance school for girls was generally larger than that of the corresponding school for boys.[34] As the girls absorbed western ideas, their horizons expanded. They, too, were among those young people of Rhodes who continued their educations abroad in such places as Paris and Jerusalem and various cities of the United States. They were among those who migrated to new lands in search of new opportunities.

To be sure, many of the women in Rhodes were only peripherally affected by the forces of modern education in the early years of the 20th century. However, by the time Italian control of the island was established following 1912, the westernization of Rhodian Jews was hastened greatly. Few girls, if any, did not receive education either in community, government or private schools. The situation of women in Rhodes could not help but be dramatically altered due to their increased knowledge and their desire for more independence. Although the women of Rhodes were still much tied to their traditional roles, they also were receptive to the forces of modernism. The abrupt destruction of the community halted the process which was leading towards an increased involvement of women in every phase of community life.



A GROUP OF RHODIAN JEWS, EARLY 20TH CENTURY
(Reprinted from pamphlet by Vitalis Strumza)

CHAPTER EIGHT

Rhodes and the Holy Land

The Land of Israel has always played a central role in Jewish thought and feeling. From Biblical times through the destruction of Jerusalem in 68 C.E., Jewish life was concentrated in or directly dependent upon the Holy Land. During the long centuries of Jewish dispersion, the Land of Israel never lost its significance to Jews. The Jewish prayerbook was filled with references to Erets Israel and prayers for the return of the exiled Jews to their homeland. Indeed, the prayers were recited while facing the direction of Jerusalem.

Jews who lived in Erets Israel were considered to be fulfilling a *mitzvah*, a commandment of God. Jews who sent funds to support Jewish life there were seen to be sharing the *mitzvah* of settlement of the Land. The Jewish messianic dream included the return of all Jews to the Holy Land where they could live freely, autonomously, piously.

Sephardim shared the intense feeling for Erets Israel. Indeed, the Hebrew poets of medieval Spain created an impressive, perhaps unsurpassed literature dedicated to Zion. Yehudah Halevy (b. 1086), among the greatest of the Sephardic poets, wrote a touching poem which reflected his deep attachment to the Holy Land, concluding: "A light thing it would seem to me to leave the good things of Spain—seeing how precious in mine eyes to behold the dust of the desolate sanctuary."[1]

This attitude led to Halevy's and other Sephardim's migration to the Holy Land during the course of the centuries. Following their expulsion from Spain in 1492, a number of Sephardim migrated to the Holy Land. Indeed, Sephardim formed the vast majority of Jewish settlers through the early 19th century. Moreover, Sephardim living in the diaspora provided much financial assistance

to the settlers. Erets Israel was a living reality in the Sephardic religious consciousness.

Because of its geographical position, Rhodes was for centuries a way-station for pilgrims going to and returning from the Holy Land by sea. Thus, the Jewish community of the island benefited from a continuing flow of information about Erets Israel. Rabbi Mosheh Poriat of Prague left a journal of his pilgrimage to Erets Israel in 1650 in which he noted the strategic importance of Rhodes for pilgrims.[2] Those who traveled from Constantinople to Jerusalem by sea chartered boats in Constantinople or in a nearby village, Rodosto, known as "Little Rhodes",[3] and sailed to Rhodes. The fee for this voyage was popularly known as a "Rodoli", meaning "of Rhodes." Once in Rhodes, the travelers chartered larger vessels for the voyage to Erets Israel. With good winds, the trip from Rhodes to Yaffo took six days. From Yaffo the travelers then moved overland to Jerusalem.

Aside from the frequent contact with pilgrims, the Jewish community of Rhodes drew many of its religious leaders from Erets Israel. Rabbi Mosheh de Vushal, who served as the community's Chief Rabbi during the 17th century, studied under rabbis in the Holy Land. Rabbi Mosheh Israel, who came to Rhodes in 1714 as a *shaliah* (messenger to collect funds) from Erets Israel, became the island's Chief Rabbi in 1715. Through his efforts the community was able to maintain a high level of rabbinic scholarship. His love for the Holy Land was so intense that he ultimately left his position in Rhodes (1727) to return to his former duties as a collector of funds for the communities of Erets Israel. Rabbis Yedidiah Shemuel Tarica, Mosheh Tarica, Abraham Halevi, Raphael Yitzhak Israel—all of whom held the position of Chief Rabbi of Rhodes—spent their last days in the Holy Land. In the early 20th century, Rabbi Rahamim Franco left Rhodes to serve in an important rabbinic position in Palestine.[4]

Since the community's rabbis were so deeply influenced by Erets Israel, they could not help but convey their feelings to their followers. The positive attitude towards the Holy Land manifested itself in various ways. In many cases, pious old Jews would leave Rhodes to spend the last years of their lives in Erets Israel. To die and be buried in Israel was considered by Jews everywhere a special privilege. For the Jews of Rhodes, this general Jewish sentiment seems to have been translated into action fairly often. Rabbi

Reuben Eliyahu Israel (d. 1932), in his eulogy over his father, stated that his loss was more intense than that of other Rhodian Jews who had lost pious fathers: they were already accustomed to separation in their fathers' lifetimes, as their parents had gone to spend their last days in the Holy Land. But his father had died in Rhodes.[5]

But the pious old Jews were not the only ones to migrate from Rhodes to the Holy Land. Over the centuries, Rhodian Jews of all ages responded to the spiritual attraction of Erets Israel by going to settle there. One of the popular Judeo-Spanish folksongs sung by Sephardim throughout the Levant, including Rhodes, describes the departure from home to settle in Jerusalem.[6]

The responsa literature offers evidence of Rhodian Jews who settled in Erets Israel over the centuries. We can assume that these cases—all involving some problem in Jewish law—represent only a small fraction of those who actually went to settle in the Holy Land. If we had more complete records or documentation, we would without doubt find many more examples.

In a responsum of Rabbi Joseph Karo (16th century), we learn of a widow and her daughter who moved to Israel, leaving property in Rhodes to be sold by Rabbi Yehudah Ibn Verga.[7] Another 16th century author, Rabbi Mosheh Galante, dealt with several cases involving Rhodian Jews who settled in Israel. One involved a Rhodian Jew who had married a woman from Andrianople, Turkey. Her father had insisted that his son-in-law take an oath that he and his wife would never live outside Andrianople. But the son-in-law subsequently decided that he wished to settle in Erets Israel. Rabbi Galante ruled that the original oath was invalid and the man could take his wife to settle in the Holy Land. Indeed, such an act was to be encouraged since it was a *mitzvah* to live in the land of Israel.[8] Rabbi Galante also encouraged emigration of a Rhodes grandmother who was bringing up her grandson with a stipend from the child's father. When she decided to leave the island and settle in Erets Israel, she asked to receive continued support. Rabbi Galante ruled that she was entitled to a continued stipend.[9]

In order to encourage settlement in Erets Israel, the Jewish community of Rhodes had early in its history established a special tax exemption for emigrants. Such individuals were not required to pay communal taxes on property they still owned on the island. This long-established procedure was challenged in the 18th century when the community needed to increase its revenues. It was

proposed that emigrants' properties worth 500 or more *grushim* left in Rhodes should be taxed. Rabbi Eliyahu Israel was asked to consider the protest of a man whose parents had emigrated to Jerusalem, leaving a substantial amount of property in Rhodes. Among his arguments, the son stated that the new procedure "would be a reason to hinder a person from settling in Erets Israel". Rabbi Israel ruled that the new tax could not be instituted by the community.[10]

We find another reference to Rhodian Jews who settled in Erets Israel in the responsa of Rabbi Eliyahu Israel. The case involved a group who encountered a halakhic problem on their arrival in Jerusalem. In Rhodes, a communal ordinance prohibited eating of ox meat because it was found to be infested with worms. In Jerusalem, however, there was no similar prohibition; on the contrary, ox meat was a common part of the local diet. The settlers from Rhodes therefore asked Rabbi Israel if they were still bound to follow the *haskamah* of their native city or if they could follow the Jerusalem custom. Rabbi Israel ruled that they could eat the meat of oxen in Jerusalem.[11]

In 1904, Rabbi Mosheh Franco, Chief Rabbi of Rhodes, indicated that aged and poor Jews of Rhodes would often leave the island to settle in Jerusalem. He noted that "our eyes see those who leave our community to dwell in the Land—old men and women, orphans and widows, extremely poor people—all go to Jerusalem and not elsewhere."[12]

During the early 20th century an increasing number of young Rhodian Jews chose to study and/or settle in Palestine. In March 1920, the Alumni Association of the Alliance Israélite Universelle schools in Rhodes wrote to the President of the Sephardic Community in Jerusalem, noting that "a large number of students of our schools wish to study Hebrew in Palestine." The letter inquired about the schools, provisions for room and board, annual cost per student, and possible employment opportunities for students.[13]

Another letter from Rhodes of the same date was sent to the Sephardic Community of Jerusalem by an eighteen year old man, Mosheh Franco, who inquired about employment opportunities, lodging costs, and immigration rules, apparently planning to settle in Jerusalem.[14] In the Spring of 1920, Jacques Kabuli of the Alliance school in Rhodes wrote on behalf of several of his students—aged

sixteen and seventeen—who had completed their studies at the local school in Rhodes and now wished to undertake further study in Jerusalem.[15]

In 1939, when Jews of non-Rhodes origin were expelled from the island by the Italian government, some sought to find refuge in Palestine.[16] Very few, though, were admitted at that time. Rabbi Benzion Uziel, then Chief Rabbi of the Sephardim of Palestine, appealed to the Jewish Agency to expedite the immigration of the Jews who were to be expelled from Rhodes. He sent the following memorandum, dated 11 Tebeth, 5699, to the Sephardic Community of Jerusalem:

> Our request from the immigration office of the Jewish Agency concerned the immigration of all our brethren from Rhodes who are expecting to be expelled; however, the Agency responded in a very limited manner and set aside only three certificates from the present number. However, we received assurance that in the coming time, they will be considered with the gravity of their suffering, and they will give a suitable number of immigration permits for the people of Rhodes.[17]

It is clear, therefore, that Rhodian Jews emigrated to the Holy Land throughout the centuries and helped maintain the Jewish presence there. The rise of a formal Zionistic movement in the late 19th century and early 20th centuries also found followers and spokesmen among the Sephardim of Rhodes. Rabbi Reuben Eliyahu Israel (d. 1932) was an ardent advocate of the Zionist dream. In a sermon delivered in 1909, while serving the Jewish community of Craiova, Roumania, he enthusiastically praised the revival of the Hebrew language in Palestine and called on Jews everywhere to begin to speak the language. In other sermons he also lauded the Jewish settlement in modern Palestine.[18] During his tenure as Chief Rabbi of Rhodes (1922-32), he consistently expressed his support of the rebirth of the Jewish nation in the Holy Land. Indeed, in 1922 a *Hibat Zion* (Love of Zion) Society was founded in Rhodes through the efforts of Mr. Bohor Israel and flourished with Rabbi Israel's encouragement.[19] This society's main objective was to promote the Zionist idea: that Jews should establish their own state in Erets Israel.

At a conference of the Sephardic communities of the Balkan countries held in Belgrade in 1932, Dr. Yakir Behar represented the

Jews of Rhodes. In expressing the purpose of the conference, Behar said that the delegates had come with the sole purpose of establishing harmony among themselves so that all their energies could be concentrated on the rebirth of the Jewish state.[20] The Sephardim of Rhodes and the other communities dedicated themselves to the fulfillment of this vital objective.

Financial Assistance

The Sephardic communities of the Ottoman Empire had always generously supported the Jewish colonies in Erets Israel. Indeed, until their serious economic decline by the end of the 17th century, these Sephardic communities were the most important source of funds for their coreligionists in the Holy Land.[21] The Sephardim of Rhodes were part of this Sephardic tradition.

It was considered an act of piety to contribute to the Jewish institutions in Erets Israel. Rhodian Jews sent their donations regularly and often left part of their estates in their wills for use in the Holy Land. They also warmly received the messengers who came to raise funds for the communities in Erets Israel. Rhodes hosted many such messengers over the centuries and, as has been indicated, its most famous Chief Rabbi—Mosheh Israel (served 1715-27) was himself a messenger from the Holy Land.

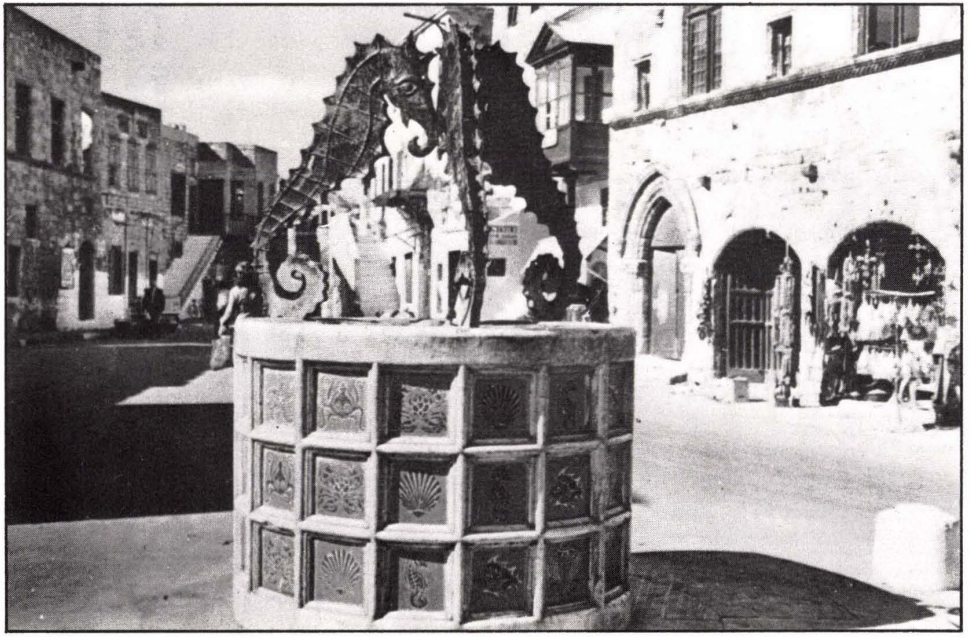
The synagogues of Rhodes would collect money from worshippers each weekday morning, the proceeds earmarked for use in Erets Israel. In the early 19th century, funds so collected were sent to the Beth-El Synagogue of mystics in Jerusalem.[22] As the Rhodian Jews daily contributed their few coins to Erets Israel, they constantly linked themselves to the colonies there.

The archives of the Sephardic Community in Jerusalem contain various documents indicating donations of money from the Jews of Rhodes during the 20th century. On December 4, 1919, the Alumni Association of the Alliance schools in Rhodes sent a donation to the President of the Zionist Federation of Palestine. In the winter of 1922, Chief Rabbi Reuben Eliyahu Israel sent a check for 4,000 Italian francs "which we collected among our brethren, residents of this city." In 1923, there was another donation of 400 Italian francs as well as a promise of 4,000 francs for Keren Hayesod. In 1924, a check for 450 liras was sent.

In the winter of 1924, Mr. Masliah Notrica, a leading philanthropist among Rhodes Jews, visited Jerusalem and saw evidence of

the desecration of an ancient cemetery on the Mount of Olives. Notrica and several fellow Rhodians contributed to the reparation of the cemetery.[23]

It is clear that the Jews of Rhodes contributed generously to the settlements in the Holy Land over the centuries, and played a role in the re-establishment of a Jewish state in Erets Israel in the 20th century. The deep love for Erets Israel, nurtured by steady contact with that land, played an important role in the cultural and religious life of the Jews of Rhodes.



THE CENTRAL SQUARE OF THE JEWISH QUARTER, THE *CALLE ANCHA*
(Courtesy of Victor Tarry)

CHAPTER NINE

The Juderia

The Jewish quarter of Rhodes, known among the Sephardim as the *juderia*, was inhabited by Jews at least since the time of the Knights of St. John's rule of the island. Indeed, many of the *juderia's* buildings were constructed during that period. The medieval aspect of these edifices and the surrounding city wall is still striking today. As one walks through the streets of the old *juderia*, one experiences the same buildings, the same colors and moods experienced by Rhodeslies since the middle ages.

The houses in which the Jews lived were made of hewn stone, some also having bricks. They lined the streets, building crowded against building. The dominant colors were browns and grays with many buildings showing signs of age during the course of time: cracks, large areas of roughness in the once-smooth stone, chipped and corroded facades. A number of the box-like houses with flat roofs, were several stories high. Some had balconies overlooking the street. Grape vines often dangled gracefully on lattices hung over courtyards, adding a bit of green to the dull-hued surroundings. Most of the dwellings housed single families, but in some instances several families shared one house; this usually involved sons or sons-in-law whose families lived with parents.[1]

Many of the streets of the *juderia* were long, narrow, winding. Many were paved with tiny pebbles, or *piedras* as Sephardim called them, pressed tightly together. Floor mosaics of white and black pebbles were fashionable in Rhodes for centuries, and Jewish courtyards and synagogue floors were decorated in this manner.

The main street of the quarter was known among the Jews as *calle ancha* or broad street. In the center of its main square stood an ancient, decorative monument with bronze sea-horses. The *calle ancha* was the main artery of Jewish life in the city, the central gathering place, through which weddings and other joyous

processions passed. Crowds of people going to and from the synagogues filled the street daily. And there were other streets: *calle de los ricos* (the street of the rich people), inhabited at one time by the wealthiest members of the community; *calle de los locos* (the street of fools) which was thoughtfully renamed *calle de los savios* (the street of sages).[2]

For a diversion, Jews could walk through the gate in the wall at the northeast section of their quarter, just past the ruins of a medieval church, and gaze at the sea. Or they could walk out of the old city and stroll along the Mandraki, the port of Rhodes, where they could watch the boats, or swim in the clear, warm sea. Like other inhabitants of Rhodes they would marvel at the ancient statues of deer gracing the port's entrance. They could watch the medieval windmills built in the time of the Knights of St. John. Traveling to the nearby village of Candilli, they could enjoy a day or two in the fresh country air.

The *juderia* was a place where Jews felt at home and happy, in spite of the generally depressing surroundings. One could scarcely walk down a street without meeting a friend or relative. There was not a day when Jews were not visiting the homes of other Jews, drinking a cup of coffee together, talking of their families and friends. The *juderia* was the place where the Jew of Rhodes felt he/she belonged. It was a social fabric as much as a collection of houses and streets.

In a responsum of Rabbi Hayyim Algazi (d. early 18th century), we learn that the rabbis of Rhodes had long ago established an *erub* for the Jewish quarter.[3] An *erub* is an arrangement whereby a designated area is considered jointly owned by a number of individuals, so the area gains the status of private rather than public property. This enables Jews to carry objects through the enclosed area on the Sabbath, an act which would be forbidden in the absence of an *erub*.

Size of Population

The boundaries of the *juderia* varied over the years. Under Ottoman rule, the quarter seems to have expanded or shrunk with the growth or decline of the Jewish population. It would be helpful here to consider the size of the Jewish population in Rhodes over the centuries, as well as its proportion to the non-Jewish population of the city.

As we have seen, Giovanni Botero estimated 500 Jews in Rhodes at the end of the 16th century.[4] Louis Deshayes Courmenin, who visited the city in 1621, estimated a population of 1,200 Turks and only 200 Jews, the remainder consisting of Greeks.[5] Ten years later, another traveler estimated 3,000 Turks and 500 Jews.[6] A Karaite pilgrim, Samuel ben David, found two synagogues and 25 mosques in Rhodes in the early 1640's,[7] indicating again that the Jews were a decided minority in the city.

Bernard Randolph, a traveler, noted in the 1680's that the city's population had diminished following the Turkish conquest in 1522, but that "many Greeks returned, and it is now very well peopled."[8] The proportion of Jews to Turks and Greeks continued to decrease so that by the latter 18th century, Claude Savary estimated 4,700 Turkish families, 2,500 Greek families and only 100 Jewish families in Rhodes.[9]

A question addressed to Rabbi Ezra Malki of Rhodes in the mid-18th century noted that the city's Jewish population was small. The majority of Jewish taxpayers had emigrated. The economic conditions in the city had deteriorated seriously, so that many Rhodeslies sought new places of settlement.[10]

During the 19th century, the community witnessed a significant growth in population. This was partly due to immigration. Rhodes had become a desirable location for the establishment of various foreign consulates, and with the general influx of consulate personnel came a considerable number of Jewish employees. Indeed, Rabbi Michael Yaacob Israel (d. 1856) wrote that the steady increase in foreign Jews in Rhodes had caused certain problems in the area of taxation—the foreign Jews not wanting to be taxed as members of the Jewish community of Rhodes.[11]

Rabbi Raphael Yitzhak Israel, in the middle of the century, estimated that there were 300 Jewish families in Rhodes.[12] The French traveler, Victor Guerin, at about the same time had estimated 5,500 Turks and 1,000 Jews in the city.[13] Elkan Adler, who visited Rhodes at the end of the 19th century, reported a Jewish community of 3,500 souls.[14] In 1900, the leaders of the Jewish community claimed a population of 3,600.[15] Abraham Galante, writing in 1935, put the number of Jews in Rhodes at 5,000.[16]

Although nearly all Rhodian Jews had always lived in the Jewish quarter throughout the centuries, there were also some who lived

temporarily or even permanently in nearby villages. By the late 19th and early 20th centuries, a fairly large group of Jews was living outside the *juderia*. Community leaders in 1900 estimated that 550 Jewish families lived in the Jewish quarter, while 250 Jewish families lived in newer sections of Rhodes.[17]

Synagogue Buildings

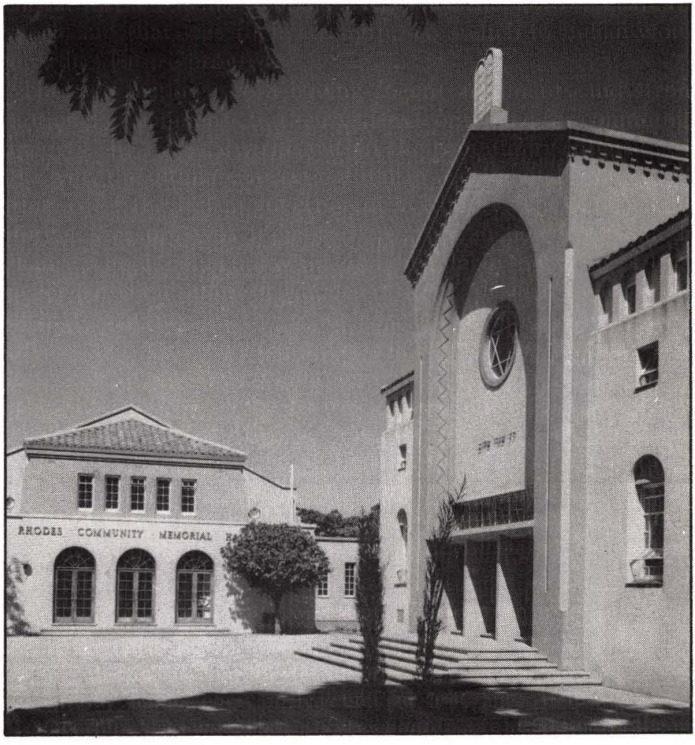
When the Sephardim came to Rhodes after the Turkish conquest in 1523, they found a synagogue building already in existence. They called this Kahal Kadosh Gadol (The Holy Great Congregation), or in Spanish, *Kahal Grande*. It had been built during the 1480's. Due either to increased numbers of Jews or communal dissension, another congregation was formed by at least 1570. From a letter to Rabbi Shemuel de Medina, dated Iyar 23, 5330 (1570), we learn of a communal ordinance in Rhodes which was signed by the *Hakham* of the community and by the "*parnassim* of the two congregations which are on the Island of Rhodes."[18]

The second congregation, Kahal Kadosh Shalom, (Holy Congregation of Peace), built its own synagogue building no later than the end of 1577. In the courtyard of the synagogue, there still stands a water fountain which was used to wash the hands of *cohanim* (priests) prior to their giving the priestly blessing. This fountain bears an inscription dated the month of Kislev, 5338 (1577). Apparently, this was constructed at the same time as the synagogue or some years later.[19]

In the 19th century, several other synagogues began to function in Rhodes. Kahal Kadosh Camondo was established in 1865 through the generous support of Count Abraham de Camondo, a noted philanthropist of Constantinople. Another small synagogue, founded in the latter part of the 19th century, was the Kahal Kadosh Tikkun Hatsot. Services were also held in various small schools and yeshivot.[20] Presently, only the Kahal Kadosh Shalom Synagogue is maintained in Rhodes. Kahal Kadosh Gadol's building was destroyed during British bombing raids in World War II. The other buildings which housed synagogue services no longer exist as synagogues.

Before closing this chapter, it should be noted that the Jews of Rhodes, as Jews in every community, had always formed organizations for self-help. Rhodeslies always tried to care for their poor and needy, their ill and elderly. They provided the community

with all needed services from birth to death. Although this seems like an obvious observation, because universally true among Jewish communities, it is nevertheless important to record. In their efforts to help one another and relieve suffering, the Rhodeslies were true children of the Jewish people.



THE SEPHARDI HEBREW CENTER OF SALISBURY, RHODESIA



STUDENTS AND FACULTY OF THE ALLIANCE SCHOOL FOR BOYS IN RHODES, CA. 1919.
Instructors in top row include Yosef Hai Franco (1), Leon Mehrez (2) and Jacob Shalem Franco (3)
(Courtesy of Hillel Franco)

CHAPTER TEN

Customs, Traditions, Beliefs

In order to understand the history of any group, one must go beyond the study of its major personalities and achievements. One must try to grasp what Lionel Trilling has called the "half-uttered or unuttered or unutterable expressions of value" which characterize the group's manners, the ways it behaves and thinks.[1] So much of a people's culture is reflected in its common customs, traditions and attitudes.

We have already examined many aspects of the life of the "Rhodeslies". We now turn to their popular usages and beliefs in order to broaden our understanding of the cultural foundations of the community. Though much of the following information is based on 19th and 20th century sources, many of the customs date back a number of centuries.

Birth and Childhood

The birth of a male child was the source of great joy for the parents and family. The child was circumcised on the eighth day of life, according to Jewish law. Throughout the night preceding the day of circumcision, two people guarded the baby. Known as the *shemirah* or watch, this ceremony was designed to protect the baby from evil spirits which might attempt to snatch him away. A sword was hung in the child's room in order to ward off evil spirits. Those who spent the night with the baby read selections from the Bible, Mishnah, Midrash and Zohar.[2] Rabbi Hizkiah Shemuel Tarica (19th century) of Rhodes wrote a Judeo-Spanish poem to be sung on the night of the *shemirah*. In it, he indicates a mystical symbolism—that the blood of the circumcision should be counted as a sacrifice (*korban*) to God.[3]

It is interesting to consider the *shemirah* in light of notions

prevailing among the non-Jewish population. When C. T. Newton visited Rhodes in the mid-19th century, he commented on a superstition common among Greek Rhodian peasants: the belief in *anerades*, or supernatural female spirits. Whenever a child was born, Rhodian parents closed their house doors at sunset and did not open them again until dawn. They repeated this procedure for 40 days, in the belief that it would prevent the *anerades* from entering the house and kidnapping the infant.[4]

On the morning of the circumcision celebration, the *kitatha*, or godmother, carried the infant to the synagogue on a cushion. She was accompanied by a joyous retinue of relatives and friends. As the group wove its way through the streets of the *juderia*, people sang and danced. Some played on violins, guitars, mandolins. The circumcision was performed in the synagogue. An ornamental chair was placed on an elevated platform and was known as the chair of Eliyahu Hanavi. The *sandak*, or godfather, would hold the child on a cushion on his lap during the circumcision operation. After the operation, the *kitatha* once again took the baby on a cushion and led a parade throughout the Jewish quarter. The rest of the day was given to celebration and merry-making.[5]

A Judeo-Spanish poem by Rabbi H. S. Tarica indicates the importance of the circumcision.[6]

Perform the *mitzvah* with happiness,
Do not say penitential prayers this day.
Let all the *juderia* rejoice
With Elijah, the prophet.

This day is called a festival,
The *sandak*, the father dress themselves up,
And do not go to work but are
With Elijah, the prophet

Sing hymns with joy
During the meal of this day...

In the latter 18th century, Rabbi Hayyim Tarsa of Rhodes was asked if the father of a child to be circumcised and the *sandak* were permitted to have their hair cut if they were simultaneously in the period of mourning for an immediate relative. Tarsa responded that

the celebration of a circumcision made the day into a holiday for the father and *sandak*, who were therefore permitted to have their hair cut in honor of the occasion, even though they were in mourning. Rabbi Mosheh Israel II agreed that a circumcision preempted mourning, going so far as to state that the father and *sandak* should be called to read from the Torah during synagogue services on the day of a circumcision.[7]

When Colonel Rottiers visited Rhodes in 1828, he attended a celebration in honor of the circumcision of the son of Boghore (Bohor), the Jewish employee he engaged during his stay on the island. Boghore's house was crowded, many friends having gathered for the party. They sat on Turkish-style sofas, ate sweets and drank excellent wine. The rabbi gave an erudite discourse in which he expressed his ideas eloquently.[8] The same description would have held true even in modern times.

Ceremonies surrounding the birth of a daughter, although less elaborate, were impressive. The parents gave a banquet to which they invited relatives and friends, among them a rabbi. The rabbi held the infant on his lap and recited a blessing for the child's good health and happiness. He also announced the girl's name as chosen by her parents. The baby was then passed around to the guests who all wished her and her parents long life. This ceremony was known as *las fadas*.[9]

Children were customarily named after their grandparents in the following order. The first son and daughter were named after the husband's parents; the second son and daughter were named after the wife's parents. Children who followed were named after other relatives, alternating between the husband's and wife's side of the family. In most cases, children were named after living people, a widespread custom among Sephardim to this day.

When parents were concerned that their child was not learning how to walk early enough, they took him to the synagogue. There, the parents tied the child's feet together with a rope and another person then untied the rope. It was believed that this procedure could make the child begin to walk.[10]

When a child attended school for the first time, his mother distributed fritters with honey to all the students in his class. The rabbi of the school also received a gift on this occasion.[11] The Bar Mitzvah seems not to have been celebrated in a large way, but was essentially a happy event for the boy and his immediate family.

Marriage

The most auspicious day for a wedding among the Moslems of the Ottoman Empire was Friday. Not surprisingly, Friday was also the popular day for weddings among the Jews of Rhodes. On the Thursday night before the marriage, the fiancé sent his fiancée a plate of henna surrounded by lit candles. His parents and friends delivered this gift while singing traditional wedding songs. Upon receiving this gift, the fiancée distributed it among the family and friends who had gathered at her home.[12] During the marriage ceremony the next day, the bride and groom were covered with a prayer shawl while the seven wedding benedictions were being recited (*nisuin*).

Wedding parties apparently became quite lavish during the latter 19th century among some Rhodian Jews. Rabbi Rahamim H. Y. Israel sharply criticized the wastefulness involved in such weddings. "Isn't it great foolishness to spend two and three thousand *arayot* for food and drink at a wedding?" In the rabbi's view such extravagance was sinful.[13]

During the week following the wedding, the bride's trousseau (*ashugar*) was displayed for guests. The trousseau often included linens which contained elaborate decorations sewn or crocheted by the bride or her mother. The trousseau would be a source of significant pride for the bride and her family. Guests who came to examine it sang songs and showered praises on the newly-married young woman and her parents.

On the Sabbath following the marriage, the groom took an extra Torah scroll from the ark prior to the reading of the portion of the week. After the regular Torah reading was completed, the groom brought his special Torah scroll to the reader's desk. The *hazzan* then read from it the portion of Genesis 24:1-7, in which Abraham commanded his servant Eliezer to find a proper wife for Isaac. The *hazzan* read each verse in Hebrew and then another individual sang the traditional Aramaic translation. Each verse of the translation was sung to a different melody. This ceremony was known as the *Avraham siv*, derived from the first two words of the Aramaic translation of Genesis 24:1.[14]

Following synagogue services, members of the congregation escorted the newlyweds to their home where a light repast was served. Refreshments included sweets such as Jordan almonds, baklava, and candies made of almond paste.

The Family

Within the families of Rhodian Jews, as among Levantine Sephardim generally, there was a definite hierarchy of authority, with the father holding the supreme power. Even forms of address reflected this pattern. A husband seldom called his wife by her first name, but rather addressed her in the formal second person plural in Judeo-Spanish. In turn, the wife spoke to her husband in the respectful third person singular.[15]

The oldest brother in a family was called *hermano*, or brother, as a mark of respect. He ranked second in authority after his father. In general, the members of a family felt strong ties and obligations to each other.

Respect for elders, especially those in one's own family, was inculcated in children from their earliest years. This traditional Jewish value was reinforced by a similar attitude among the Turks; respect for parents was regarded as a great virtue in the Ottoman Empire. Turks equated disrespect for parents with such heinous sins as idolatry and murder. Even an adult son was careful not to sit, eat or smoke in the presence of his father without permission.[16] Jewish sons were equally respectful. (Daughters did not smoke at all!) When Jewish children grew into adulthood, they tried to earn enough money to enable their fathers to retire or at least enjoy an easier life. As a sign of respect, children kissed their father's and grandfather's hands.

Death and Mourning Rituals

Among the Jews of Rhodes, only men walked in a funeral procession. Women mourners did not go to the cemetery until at least a month after a funeral.[17]

When an immediate relative died, the Jewish laws of mourning were, of course, observed. Mourners would sit on cushions on the floor during the seven days of mourning. Relatives and friends prepared all the meals for the mourners and their guests during the entire week. When people planned to be in the home of the mourners at meal time, they sent food there in advance to avoid giving unnecessary trouble to those who were preparing the meals.[18]

When male mourners attended synagogue services on the Sabbath, they were seated in a specially designated section in the

front of the synagogue. Although public signs of mourning were normally forbidden on the Sabbath, this practice was permitted because it enabled other members of the congregation to sit near the mourners and console them. Toward the end of the service, congregants moved to the section where the mourners sat. Rabbi Hayyim Tarsa wrote that this custom permitted the people to fulfill the commandment of lovingkindness towards their fellow men.[19] At the conclusion of services, congregants accompanied the mourners to their homes and read Psalms for some time, before returning to their own homes.[20]

Rabbi Mosheh Israel in the 18th century was asked a question concerning a rabbi who was in mourning. Since Jewish law does not permit mourners to attend happy celebrations for one year, a certain rabbi had absented himself from a wedding. In his place, he sent one of his students to deliver the wedding address. Another rabbi argued that the mourner-rabbi should have attended the wedding himself. Mosheh Israel first supported the mourner-rabbi's position, then concluded that he was nevertheless permitted to officiate at weddings during his year of mourning.[21]

When Victor Guerin passed through Rhodes in the mid-19th century, he noted a custom of the local Jewish women. On fixed days of the year, they visited the graves of their relatives. As they entered the cemetery, the women began to cry and give vent to their emotions. When they approached the tomb of a departed relative, their sighs would increase substantially. Women dropped to the ground, even threw themselves desperately onto the tombstone of a beloved relative. Some sang a melancholy chant while their weeping friends mourned over the graves. This crying continued until the women were too tired to go on. Guerin noted that their cries were not always sincere, but that they played their roles wonderfully well![22]

On the anniversary of the death of an immediate relative, the surviving relatives observed the *meldado*, or reading. Family and friends were invited to attend, with at least one rabbi present. Men and women were seated in separate rooms of the house. After evening services were recited, the men read selections from the Mishnah in memory of the departed. The rabbi then gave a short speech germane to the occasion. Following this "reading" or study session, the hostess and other women passed around plates of food for the guests. These would include such things as raisins,

hardboiled eggs, sweet rolls and Greek olives. Whiskey and raki were also served. The doors of the house were left open so that anyone could come in. Special packages of food were prepared for poor guests who happened to attend the *meldado*. These gatherings often lasted late into the night.[23]

Sabbath Customs

On Friday mornings, poor Jews of the city went from house to house carrying pots and bottles, begging for food for the Sabbath. Donors gave them foodstuffs; a bit of oil, beans, chicken or anything else they could spare. When the beggars' containers were filled, they were ready to celebrate the Sabbath with its traditional three meals.[24] In addition, the sextons of the synagogues collected bread for distribution to the poor.[25]

Synagogue services were conducted in the Sephardic mode. K.K.Gadol and K.K.Shalom each had two arks for their Torah scrolls. In the K.K.Gadol, one ark was on the eastern wall and one on the northern wall. In K.K.Shalom, both were on the eastern wall.[26]

An important aspect of the synagogue services involved the auctioning of *mitzvoth* to members of the congregation. Prior to the ceremonies related to the removal of the Torah scroll from the ark, the sexton went to the front of the synagogue and auctioned the following *mitzvoth: por la petihah*, to open the doors of the ark; *por meter los rimonim*, to place ornamental silver bells on the Sefer Torah; *por llevar Sefer Torah*, to carry the Sefer; *por tener ets hayyim*, to hold the Sefer at the reader's desk while its bells, band and cloak were removed; *por hacer la gelilah*, to remove the bells, band, and cloak; *por la hakamah*, to lift the opened Torah scroll and turn it around so the worshippers could see the text before the reading: *por meldar la haftarah*, to read the *haftarah*. The purpose of this custom was twofold: first, it increased the synagogue's revenues; second, it prevented quarrels about apportioning honors among the congregants. The system also engendered problems.

In the days of Rabbi Michael Yaacob Israel (early 19th century) a dissident group established its own synagogue, promising as an inducement to new worshippers that the price of buying *mitzvoth* would be lower than in the other synagogues of Rhodes.[27] The auctioning custom was problematic for the poor who could not always afford to buy *mitzvoth*. Moreover, people sometimes bid for a

mitzvah and then failed to pay the synagogue after the Sabbath or holiday had passed.[28]

The purchaser of a *mitzvah* could either perform it himself or honor someone else by asking him to do it. It was customary to purchase the honor of reading the *haftarah* in memory of a departed relative whose death anniversary would occur during the subsequent week. The auction of the *haftarah* could be very heated if more than one person had a *meldado* during the coming week.[29] In the latter part of the 18th century, Rabbi Hayyim Tarsa was asked if a mourner could be called to the Sefer during the first seven days of mourning if his intention was to be called as *maftir*? In other words, could a mourner purchase a *haftarah* and read it publicly? Tarsa permitted this since the individual would thereby be performing a meritorious act, helping the soul of the departed.[30]

It was considered a great honor to be called to the Sefer. As the designated congregant rose to go to the reader's desk, other worshippers called out to him: "*bekhavod*," or, "in honor." Younger relatives stood up in honor of the individual who was called to the Sefer, remaining standing while he recited his blessings before and after the Torah was read.

When the Torah reading includes the Ten Commandments, many communities have the custom of standing when the decalogue is read. In Rhodes, however, the custom was to remain seated. This was in order to counteract a notion that only the Ten Commandments were divinely revealed. Individuals who stood while the rest of the congregation was seated were asked to sit down. In the 18th century, Rabbi Eliyahu Israel stated that anyone who stood while the congregation was seated deserved to be excommunicated. Such individuals were guilty of haughtiness and disrespect for the congregation. False piety was to be strongly condemned.[31]

Among the Jews of Rhodes, as among Levantine Sephardim in general, almost the entire service was chanted aloud. A reader would lead the congregation, and the congregants would sing along with enthusiasm. The section of Psalmody (*zemirot*) was often chanted by one or more of the laymen; young boys, in particular, were encouraged to lead this part of the service. The chant was simple and repetitious, resembling the chants of the mosques and Greek Orthodox churches. The Sephardic synagogue melodies

were imbued with a middle-eastern flavor.

The *hazzanim*, or official readers, were very familiar with the modes of Turkish music and freely adapted non-Jewish melodies into the synagogue services. Turkish and Judeo-Spanish melodies (even secular songs) became part of the congregations' liturgical music. Being attuned to Turkish and Greek voices, the Rhodian Sephardim naturally preferred their *hazzanim* to sing in those styles. An Ashkenazic *hazzan*, for example, who prided himself on his operatic voice, would not be much appreciated by the Rhodeslies. His voice and music would seem strange, artificial.

While the Sephardic *hazzanim* were expected to have pleasant voices, they were not primarily performers. Most of the service was sung by everyone. There were few points in the service where a *hazzan* sang an elaborate passage by himself (e.g., the first paragraph of *Nishmath*, the *Kedushah*). The *hazzan* was expected to be an expert reader of the Torah scroll. His real worth was judged not by the excellence of his voice alone, but also by his ability to read the Torah, a skill which required much study and technical competence. This was in sharp contrast to the role of some non-Sephardic *hazzanim* whose chief concern was the beauty of their voices and who considered the reading of the Torah a chore best left to someone else.

The synagogue services in Rhodes, as in other Sephardic communities, were sung energetically. Even the most solemn liturgical selections were chanted at a lively pace or in a straightforward way. The general tone of the service would give one a sense of optimism, even happiness.

Synagogue services on the Sabbath commenced early in the morning and were completed by 8 or 8:30 A.M. Following services, people returned to their homes and ate a large breakfast. Some synagogues held afternoon services in the early afternoon; thus their congregants attended services three times during the day. Prior to *minhah*, the rabbi read to the congregation from Judeo-Spanish books and expounded religious lessons. After *minhah*, children remained in the synagogue to read Psalms with their teachers. Rhodian Jews preceded their afternoon meal with the recitation of a prayer over wine, a practice common to many groups of Sephardim.[32] Special foods were prepared in honor of the Sabbath.[33]

The High Holy Day Season

During the month before Rosh Hashanah, the Jews of Rhodes rose before daybreak to say *selihot*, the penitential prayers, as was common among many Jews. Rabbi Simhah bar Yehoshua, an Ashkenazic rabbi, passed through Rhodes on his way to the Holy Land in Ellul of 1774, and left the following revealing description:

> From Rhodes onwards we saw no islands nor any other place, only sky and sea. On the entire voyage we prayed with the Sephardim. The Sephardim awoke prior to daybreak to say *selihot* with a quorum as is their custom in the month of Ellul. During the day they eat and rejoice and are happy of heart. Some of them spend their entire days in study.[34]

On the eve of Rosh Hashanah, Jews went to the cemetery to pray at the tombs of the community's deceased rabbis, asking their spirits to intervene with God so that He might grant a good year for the Jews of Rhodes.[35]

On the two nights of Rosh Hashanah, the Jews of Rhodes, like Sephardim throughout the world, celebrated the *"yehi ratsones"* before dinner. This ceremony involved eating symbolic foods, each preceded by a prayer opening with the Hebrew words, *yehi ratson*. Foods eaten on this occasion included dates, pomegranates, apples dipped in honey, small pumpkin pies or turnovers, leek patties, and beetroots. The head of a fish was displayed to symbolize that the future year should find us at the head and not at the tail, that we should advance and not fall behind.[36]

During synagogue services on the High Holy Days, the *hazzanim* dressed in white robes, but congregants wore regular holiday clothing, not the special white garments (kittel) common among some Ashkenazic Jews. Although most of the service was read in Hebrew, some poems in the liturgy were sung in Judeo-Spanish. Rabbi Reuben Eliyahu Israel (d. 1932) translated 35 Hebrew poems into Judeo-Spanish verse for the benefit of those who did not understand Hebrew. These translations were very popular among Rhodes Jews.[37]

On the Sabbath between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, the rabbi preached a sermon urging repentance. This was one of the few Sabbaths during the course of a year when the rabbi would sermonize.

On the day before Yom Kippur, the Jews of Rhodes observed the custom of *kaparoth*. Each family filled a basin with ashes. A *shohet* came to each house and slaughtered one chicken for each member of the family: a rooster for males and a hen for females. He slaughtered the chickens over the basin of ashes. He then put a bit of blood from the rooster or hen upon the forehead of the person on whose behalf it had been slaughtered. This was a symbolic way of seeking forgiveness for sins. The chickens were slaughtered as substitutes for the people, who considered themselves to be deserving of death for their transgressions.

The chickens slaughtered for *kaparoth* were eaten at the meal prior to the commencement of the fast. Families who had more chickens than they could eat would give the extra ones to the poor. Where there were no extra chickens, Jews gave money and bread to the poor on this occasion.[38] Before services began on the eve of Yom Kippur, women went to the synagogue to light oil lamps.

The Rhodes Jews had certain liturgical pieces for the High Holy Days which were not found among other Jewish communities. Rabbi Hizkiah S. Kodron published a volume, *Pithei Teshubah*, to supplement the regular Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur prayer books. He included prayers said specifically by Rhodes Jews, including the memorial prayer recited in memory of the deceased Chief Rabbis of the city, as well as meditations in Hebrew and Judeo-Spanish."

During services on Yom Kippur, before the *cohanim* stood in front of the ark to give the priestly blessing, their hands were washed with rose water. This custom was prevalent among Sephardim throughout the Levant. Rabbi Eliyahu Israel was asked if using rose water was permissible on Yom Kippur since this act might be considered comparable to annointing which was forbidden on that holy day. Rabbi Israel ruled that the custom of washing with rose water was acceptable, as the prohibition of annointing referred only to oil.[40] Before the day's worship closed with the *Neilah* service, worshippers dipped their handkerchiefs into a container of rose water. The entire synagogue was redolent with this sweet fragrance as the congregation concluded its Day of Atonement prayers.

Succoth

The Succoth festival was an especially joyous one for the Jews of Rhodes. Each household had its own elaborately decorated Succah. The Succah was covered with myrtle or palm branches. Various fruits and circular baked pastries known as *biscochos* were hung from the crossbeams. Among the decorations might also be some embroidered pictures.

On the evening of the seventh day of the holiday, groups of Jews gathered in their succoth to spend the night studying and reading a special *tikkun* for Hoshaanah Rabbah. The *tikkun* included Biblical sections as well as portions of the Zohar. Some people made it a practice to hold the Hoshaanah Rabbah service in their own succah.

On the eve of the eighth day, Shemini Hag Atsereth, the congregations had a procession of *hakafoth*, circuits. The Torah scrolls were taken from the ark and paraded around the synagogue seven times. Songs sung on this occasion differed from those sung for the *hakafoth* of Simhat Torah. Although breakfast and lunch were eaten in the succah on Shemini Hag Atsereth, the blessing on sitting in the succah was not recited.[41]

On Simhat Torah, *hakafoth* were made both in the evening and morning. Each synagogue selected three men to serve as *hatanim*, or bridegrooms of the Torah. The *Hatan Me'onah* would read Deuteronomy 33:27-9. The *Hatan Mesayyem* then read the entire portion from Deuteronomy 33:1-34:12. The *Hatan Bereshit* read the opening section of Genesis until Genesis 2:3. At one time the honor of being *hatan* was auctioned like other *mitzvoth*. Later, however, it became customary to award these honors to deserving individuals.[42]

When Abraham Galante first experienced Simhat Torah in Rhodes as a young boy, he was profoundly impressed. To a child raised in a tiny Jewish community in Turkey, it was extraordinary to see thousands of Jews dressed in holiday clothes, dancing and singing as they made their *hakafoth* in the synagogues. The *hatanim* of each synagogue, accompanied by parents and friends, visited the other synagogues. The streets were filled with singing and dancing.[43]

Hanukkah

Hanukkah was marked by lighting the *hanukkiah* (candelabrum) in homes as well as during evening services in the synagogues. Oil lamps were used, not candles. The traditional food associated with this holiday was *bourmuelos*, a pastry dough deep-fried and then dipped in honey. It was not customary to give presents to children during Hanukkah.[44]

The Sabbath of Hanukkah was known as *Shabbat Halbashah*, the Sabbath of clothing the poor. On this occasion, the rabbi spoke about the importance of providing garments for the poor. The Jews brought clothing to the synagogue, and the garments were distributed on Rosh Hodesh Tebet, which falls on the sixth day of Hanukkah.[45]

Purim

On the Sabbath before Purim, *Shabbat Zakhor*, congregants made much noise in the synagogue when the section of the Torah was read dealing with Amalek. There was also great noise when the Torah was read on Purim day. This custom reflected the symbolic destruction of Amalek and enemies of the Jews in general.

Rabbi Rahamim Hayyim Yehudah Israel, however, condemned this practice severely. He could not understand how all the congregants, old and young, could clap their hands and stamp their feet against the benches, causing a terrible commotion which could be heard even outside the synagogue. They disturbed the reading of the Torah and were themselves unable to hear the blessings over the Torah or the *kaddish*. Moreover, the noise made a bad impression on non-Jewish passers-by. Rabbi Israel wanted this custom abolished and succeeded in obtaining support for his views from leading rabbis in Smyrna, Constantinople and Jerusalem.[46] However, the popular practice continued during the reading of certain sections of the Megillah dealing with Haman. Adults clapped their hands and stamped their feet while children made noise with little hammers and noise-makers.[47]

The streets of the *juderia* were alive with celebrations on Purim day. Jews closed their places of business. They dressed in costumes and played games in the roads. Families sent gifts of foodstuffs (*platicos*) to relatives and friends. These packages, usually containing

candies and baked goods, were delivered by the children. As a reward for their services, the children received gifts of money from the recipients of the *platicos*. Sometimes, Jews took a horse-and-buggy ride to the lemon gardens outside Rhodes and bought fresh lemons.[48]

Among Sephardim, the traditional food associated with Purim was *foulares*. Different Sephardic groups made *foulares* in different ways. In Rhodes, the most widespread recipe was to make a circle of pastry dough about one-fourth inch thick and two inches in diameter. A hard-boiled egg was placed on this base. Thin strips of dough were then placed over the egg in a criss-cross which was connected to the base. Then the *foulares* were baked. Among various groups of Sephardim, the *foulares* are made to symbolize Haman's foot or ear. In Rhodes, it seems that the latter symbol was intended.

Passover

The Passover holiday was observed rigorously. The Jews cleaned their houses thoroughly and repainted the interiors. When Colonel Rottiers visited his friend Boghore's house in Rhodes in 1828, he noted that the Jew's house had recently been painted in preparation for the Passover holiday.[49] Some Jewish mothers did not allow their families to eat inside their homes for several weeks prior to Passover in order to insure that no *hamets* would be spread about. During this period, families ate outside on the porch.[50]

Each year the Chief Rabbi inspected the windmills used to grind flour for matzot. Once a windmill had been found satisfactory, women brought their wheat to be ground, taking care to keep their mouths and noses covered so no liquid of any kind could come in contact with the wheat. Once the flour was ready, the women brought it to the community oven where a rabbi supervised its baking according to the specifications of Jewish law. Matzot were large and flat, circular in shape.

A specially prepared type of matzah, *matzah shemurah*, was baked on the day before Passover (Nisan 14). Some Rhodian Jews ate only *matzah shemurah* throughout the Passover festival. These matzot were made from wheat which had been guarded from fermentation since the time of harvest. Others ate regular matzot made from wheat which had been guarded from fermentation only since the time it was ground into flour. The first group, having stricter

standards, did not eat or drink in the houses of the latter group during the Passover holiday.[51]

Prior to the afternoon service on the first two days of Passover, it was customary to chant the Song of Songs in the synagogues. Each verse was sung first in Hebrew and then in a traditional Judeo-Spanish translation.[52] On the eve of the seventh day of Passover, Rhodeslies met in their synagogues or homes for a *vilada*, where they spent the night studying and reading a special service until morning. At the conclusion of the Passover holiday, men brought grass to their homes, symbolizing the reeds along the shore of the Red Sea. Children were treated to candy and money on this occasion.

On the six Sabbaths between Passover and Shavuoth, the *Pirkei Abot* was read prior to afternoon services. Normally the passages of rabbinic ethical teachings were chanted in Judeo-Spanish, each *mishnah* being sung by a different person.[53]

On the eve of Lag L'Omer, the Rhodes synagogues would remain open all night with their lights burning. Worshippers filled the synagogues and read a special *tikkun* for this occasion.[54] On the thirty-third day of the Omer, the community brought to the cemetery its religious items and books which had become too deteriorated for further use. These religious objects were buried reverently. In the procession to the cemetery, the children of the Hebrew schools followed the men. During the burial ceremony, they sang Chronicles I, 16:8-36, the *yigdal* hymn, and Psalm 118.[55]

Shavuoth

On the first night of Shavuoth, many Rhodeslies stayed up all night for a *vilada*. This service, which would usually take place in someone's home, consisted of a *tikkun* designated for this evening. In the synagogue the next morning, congregants sang the *ketubbah de la ley* (marriage contract between the Torah and the Jewish people) in Hebrew. The following day they sang it in Judeo-Spanish. Prior to the afternoon service on the first day of Shavuoth they sang the first half of the book of Ruth and the positive commandments of the *Azharoth;* on the next day they would read the second half of Ruth and the negative commandments of the *Azharoth*.[56]

Although it was not customary to eat only dairy meals on Shavuoth as is common among some Jews, the Sephardim of

Rhodes did make special cheese-filled pastries for the holiday. However, they also ate meat meals during the festival.[57]

Superstitions and Seguloth

Being much influenced by their non-Jewish neighbors, the Jews of Rhodes believed in certain superstitions, as well as the efficacy of incantations and special cures known in Hebrew as *seguloth*. These survived until the very destruction of the community in 1944. However, with the spread of western ideas during the 20th century the superstitions and *seguloth* became less and less prevalent. Modern medicine and knowledge replaced the old folk ways.[58]

The "evil eye", for example, was a basic reality for the people of Rhodes—as for numerous people in other places. The evil eye, it was popularly believed, "emptied palaces and filled graves". As this malicious power was activated by envy, it was necessary to underrate or conceal anything that might attract its harmful influence. For example, one had to avoid overt praise of a beautiful baby or precious object. Such praise might incite the "eye". Instead, admiration had to be expressed through subterfuge: either by denigrating the object or by making a neutral, indirect statement. A popular exclamation among Moslems was also used commonly by Jews: *mashallah*, i.e., whatever God (Allah) wishes. Saying *mashallah* was a way of giving approval without bringing on the evil eye.

Most inhabitants of the Ottoman Empire had brown eyes. In the popular view, blue eyes were considered to be particularly dangerous. It was common for people to wear blue beads, symbolic of blue eyes, to cast back the evil influence of any blue-eyed individual they happened to encounter. Some people were so afraid of blue-eyed individuals that they did not allow their children to marry anyone so endowed. Aside from blue beads, garlic was considered a good antidote against the evil eye.[59] C. T. Newton reported in the mid-19th century that Rhodian peasants counteracted the "evil eye" by fumigating themselves with burnt olive wood or palm branches given in church at Easter and blessed by a priest.[60]

The Jews also had their own ways of combating the evil eye. One common method was *enseredura*, or isolation. The victim of the evil eye was locked in a room toward the end of a lunar month. An old woman usually was in charge of the cure. Soon after midnight, she asked the victim to name the person who had given him the evil

eye. Once she gained this information, she went to the home of the named person, washed the steps of his house, collected the water used in this washing, and brought it back to the patient. He drank the water, and thereby freed himself from the powers of the evil eye.[61]

A variant of this procedure was also common. At sundown on the first day of the victim's isolation, the woman administering the cure gave him a concoction made of sweet marjoram, orange blossoms and sugar. This dosage was repeated at midnight and noon of the next day. She also put some sort of powder on the patient. On the third day, she gave him mocha to drink. She then led the patient to a hot bath where he smeared a sulfur solution on his body. All these ceremonies were accompanied by appropriate incantations designed to ward off evil spirits.[62] These techniques reportedly had a high rate of success.

When a person was critically ill, relatives or friends offered a *korban*, or sacrifice. They brought a cow or lamb to a *shohet* for slaughter. Afterwards, the *shohet* pronounced a special incantation, then rubbed some of the animal's blood on the door of the sick person's house. The meat of the animal was distributed to the poor. Rabbi Eliyahu Israel wrote that the people did not really consider this ceremony an actual *korban* of the kind offered in the Temple of olden times. It was, rather, taken as a symbolic request for God's forgiveness.[63] Another method for helping the critically ill was for a relative of the patient to light all the lights in the synagogue (*encender el kaal.*) The folk mind associated this act with a miraculous cure.[64]

A person afflicted with malaria was given quinine to drink. Then a rag was filled with spices and buried with the proclamation that the disease had been buried along with the rag and spices.[65]

Rev. Nissim Israel, a *hazzan* and *shohet* in Rhodes until the late 1930's, left a manuscript in which he listed various *seguloth*.[66] For example, in order to stimulate the love of her husband, a wife should take an egg which was laid on a Thursday and boil it in water. The water should be used to cook food that will be served to her husband in the future; the egg should be buried in a place where the husband does not usually pass (151b).

In order to bring peace between a husband and wife so that they will never quarrel, the following is prescribed. Take the heart and liver of one male and one female ox. Burn them in a new earthenware pot until they turn into ashes. Put some of these ashes

in food or drink so that both will taste of it. They will never separate. This formula was said to have been a tested success (156a).

The following *segulah* was used to protect a rider from falling off his horse. An incantation was repeated three or four times. Then, as the horse began to move, the rider was to bend over and whisper into its ear, "Man and beast you save, Oh Lord". The rider could then be assured that he would not fall. Moreover, Israel adds, if he did indeed fall, he would not be severely injured (155a).

Someone falling from a high place and injuring his limbs could rely on the following well-tested cure: just after the fall, mix unsalted butter and good cheese and eat two olive-sizes worth of it. Then go to sleep immediately wearing good garments. The injured person will sleep and sweat; when he awakens, he will be healthy (156a). There were, or course, numerous other *seguloth* for different occasions. Those listed here, though, suffice to give an idea of the folk superstitions and cures of the Rhodian Jews.

The rich variety of customs and folk beliefs of the Rhodeslies reflects their own religious observances as well as the influence of their non-Jewish society. These customs pervaded their lives. If we are to understand the "half-uttered or unuttered or unutterable expressions of value" of Rhodeslies, we must pay attention to their common everyday actions and attitudes.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Judeo-Spanish Folklore and Literature

The Sephardic scholar, Professor Maír José Benardete, asserted that "culturally speaking, the linguistic triumph of the Castilian tongue was the most significant happening that occurred in the transplanted Hispanic world."[1] The Jewish exiles from 15th-century Spain brought their Hispanic culture and character to their new homes in the Ottoman Empire. The non-Spanish native Jews generally assimilated into the larger and more aggressive Sephardic communities within a generation or two. Thus, the Jewish communities throughout the Ottoman Empire became essentially Sephardic and reflected a basic unity of culture.

The language of the Sephardim was Castilian, interspersed with some Hebrew words. In time, words from other languages (e.g., Turkish, Greek, French) made their way into Sephardic speech as well. The language of these Sephardim has been variously termed Judeo-Spanish, Ladino, Judezmo.

Each Sephardic community had its own linguistic characteristics. For example, the word *hijo* (son) was generally pronounced as *ijo* (j as in Jacques). But in Salonika, it was pronounced *fijo* and in Rhodes, *iju*.[2] Alberto Hemsi, a Sephardic musicologist of Rhodes background, noted that the Sephardim of Rhodes spoke in a very sweet-sounding sing-song manner, differing from the Sephardim of nearby Smyrna in the pronunciation of certain vowels.[3] The Jews of Rhodes tended to pronounce words that ended with an *o* to sound like a *u* e.g., *manu (s)* instead of *mano (s)*, *biscochu (s)* instead of *biscocho (s)*. Words that ended with a short *e* sound were pronounced with a long *e* e.g., *padree* instead of *padre*, *nombree* instead of *nombre*.

Since Judeo-Spanish was the mother-tongue of the Sephardim, it is not surprising that they created an extensive literature in that language. Not only were classic Hebrew works translated into Judeo-Spanish, but a substantial number of original works was

produced. Printed in "Rashi" Hebrew letters, Judeo-Spanish literature included ethical tracts, Biblical commentaries, fiction, poetry and works on a wide variety of topics of general interest e.g., history, medicine. In the 19th and 20th centuries, newspapers were added to the available literature. Rhodeslies, of course, were part of the audience for Judeo-Spanish publications.

Moreover, Judeo-Spanish literature benefited from the work of Rhodian authors and editors. During the 19th century, Hizkiah Shemuel Tarica authored a pamphlet of poems in Judeo-Spanish.[4] The verses were sung to melodies well known to the Sephardic audiences of the time. Several were sung on the evenings of *selihot* (penitential prayers prior to High Holy Days), the eve of Rosh Hashanah and the evening of Hoshaanah Rabbah. There was a prayer for rainfall to be sung during a drought. Songs for special occasions were also presented: for the night before a circumcision; for the eve of Lag L'Omer (in memory of Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai); for the 7th of Adar (the traditional date of Moses' death); the 28th of Iyar (the traditional date of the prophet Samuel's death); and the first day of Ab (the traditional date of Aaron's death). The final poem in the collection is meditative, calling for soul-searching and self-scrutiny. Tarica laments religious shortcomings and the tendency to esteem material goods more highly than spiritual values. Most of the poems are set in acrostics, usually spelling out the name of the author.

In 1888, Hizkiah Shemtob Kodron edited and published *Pithei Teshubah*, a supplement to the High Holy Day services according to the custom of the Jews of Rhodes. Although most of the text was in Hebrew, several meditations and prayers were presented in Judeo-Spanish.[5] Rabbi Reuben Eliyahu Israel published a pamphlet of Judeo-Spanish translations of Hebrew poems included in the High Holy Day liturgy. The first edition appeared in 1910 while Israel was serving as Chief Rabbi of the Sephardim of Craiova, Roumania. In this first edition, Israel included a six-column glossary, explaining "some words for those who did not understand them". He offered translations (in Judeo-Spanish) of words drawn from modern European languages. Israel had adopted many new terms in his Judeo-Spanish vocabulary and wanted to be certain that his audience would understand them. When the work was republished in 1931, through the efforts of Yaacob Eliyahu Surmani of Rhodes,

the glossary was omitted.[6] By that time, the words were no longer unfamiliar. Incidentally, Israel's translations are still sung today among Jews of Rhodes descent.[7]

Rabbi Israel also published a Judeo-Spanish translation and commentary of the *Pirkei Abot* (*Ethics of the Fathers*).[8] His translation was liberal, rather than literal, and he offered explanatory notes intended to clarify the meaning of the passages. Following his translation, notes and commentary, he included a number of poems and maxims. The variety and depth of his volume made it a popular work among Sephardim.

Several individuals from Rhodes wrote articles for Judeo-Spanish newspapers during the 20th century. Hizkiah Franco, Benzion Menashe and others were among the contributors to *El Tiempo*, a newspaper published in Istanbul with David Fresco as editor.

The underlying unity of culture among the Judeo-Spanish-speaking Jews of the Levant made these newspapers popular and widely read. They included not only general news, articles, stories and poetry, but reports of specific Sephardic communities. The Jews of Rhodes published their own Judeo-Spanish monthly bulletin beginning in 1928, but the project was shortlived.[9]

Romances

Early in the 20th century, the Spanish Senator Dr. Angel Pulido y Fernandez, visited various Sephardic communities in the Orient. He was fascinated by these living depositories of medieval Spanish culture, among whom the old Spanish language was spoken and the medieval Spanish songs were sung. He referred to the Sephardim as *españoles sin patria*, Spaniards without a country.[10] From that time, interest in Sephardim from a linguistic and folkloric point of view increased dramatically among Spanish and Sephardic scholars, and a wealth of material has been published in these areas. A number of individuals have collected *romances* (ballads) sung by Sephardim and have studied their literary and historic importance.

The *romance* tradition was particularly vibrant among the Jews of Rhodes.[11] Alberto Hemsi noted the astonishing fidelity of the Rhodeslies to the Spanish poetic and musical heritage.[12] Professors Armistead and Silverman found that the Sephardim of Rhodes preserved the old Spanish *romances* in vitality, moreso than

Sephardim of the cities in Turkey. Jewish women of Rhodes origin, aged 45-55, could sing in general fifteen *romances;* the older women knew many more.

By contrast, among the old women of Istanbul it was difficult to find one who knew more than three or four.[13] The outstanding Spanish scholar, Ramon Menendez Pidal, has also marvelled at the extraordinary faithfulness of the Rhodes Jews in preserving the *romances* through the centures.[14]

One of the reasons for the unusual ability of the Jews of Rhodes to preserve the ancient *romances* was their genuine love of singing. Moreover, one of their general cultural characteristics was a concern for detail and precision. Since the *romances* were often sung at family gatherings and public celebrations, the singers and audiences could check one another and would correct any deviations from the traditional words and/or melodies. The community was relatively small in number and closely-knit, factors which also tended to strengthen their cultural traditions.

The significance of the *romance* tradition among Sephardim has often been treated in a one-sided fashion. Many scholars have devoted major efforts to link the *romances* of the Sephardim to medieval Spanish archetypes. They have collected Sephardic songs, not so much from an interest in Sephardim as in Spanish folklore. The Sephardim were seen to be important because of their memories rather than their own cultural worth. It is important, therefore, to attempt to understand the influence of the Judeo-Spanish musical traditions on the lives of the Sephardim. After all, the Jews sang these songs, and composed new ones in their spirit, because they were meaningful to their lives. For them the *romances* were alive and fresh, not heavy historical burdens which they were obligated to transmit.

The themes of the Judeo-Spanish songs were numerous. Some referred to kings and queens and the life of royalty. Some carried religious lessons and cited moral values. Many related to major events such as birth, marriage and death. Others sang of love, happiness and sadness. Some were humorous, others mournful. In the dull, gray-brown atmosphere of the *juderia*, Rhodes Jews sang songs which lifted their imaginations from their surroundings and which gave their everyday emotions added poignancy.

In many of the popular *romances* the themes were not specifically religious. Pious Jews and Jewesses did not blush while singing songs

of passionate love, even songs which reflected immoral behavior. One of the songs *(El Rey Por Muncha Madruga)* tells of a king who came into the queen's room while she was combing her hair early one morning.[15] She had been expecting her lover and was so busy with her grooming, she did not realize that it was the king who had come. Thinking that her lover was in the room, she proceeded to tell that she had two sons by the king and two by the lover, and the latter were treated far better than the former. After making this fatal admission, she turned around and saw the king. She quickly made up the excuse that she had been having a strange dream. But the king was not deceived by the queen's cleverness. He ordered that she be beheaded at day break. Another song (*Tres Hijas Tiene el Buen Rey*) tells of the immoral desire of a king for his youngest daughter.[16] One touching *romance* describes the conversation of a mother and her daughter.[17] The young girl has a sprig of ruda (a fragrant green plant) and flower in her hand. The mother asks where she got them. The daughter answers that they were a gift from a young man who is in love with her. The mother then warns the daughter that she should not lead a life of sin, that a bad husband is better than a new love. The daughter argues that the new love deserves more than a bad husband, and she maintains her devotion to her lover. The mother pleads for the daughter to repent, not to let herself be lost "among the 70 nations," i.e., not to be lost to the Jewish people.

Many songs expressed love or the anguish of unrequited love. One of the most popular love songs (*Durme*) has a lover telling his woes—he sleeps neither day nor night, he suffers due to his beloved's apparent indifference. He asks her to look him in the face; if she will not do even that, he wishes to die.[18]

The very fact that these poems of love could be sung comfortably by Jews deeply dedicated to their religion and strict in their observance of Jewish law is a reflection of the religious culture of Sephardic Jewry. The Sephardim of Rhodes and elsewhere had a broad outlook on life. They saw no sharp conflicts between the teachings of religion and the singing of the *romances*. Love was part of the human experience and, therefore, a perfectly appropriate theme for songs. It is not insignificant that Chief Rabbi Reuben Eliyahu Israel, in his volume of the *Pirkei Abot*, includes a series of maxims dealing with women, love and marriage.[19] For Jews of other traditions, such openness on these topics might have seemed

irreverent. But for the Sephardim of Rhodes and elsewhere, this seemed only natural.

The songs had other important ramifications. They kept the Sephardic imagination and sense of beauty alive and active. Shoemakers and street-porters, merchants and peddlers, housewives and tired grandmothers were able to rise above the tedium of their daily drudgery.

Their songs did not bewail their poverty or make them feel sorry for themselves. Rather, the music tended to reach outward, giving fresh visions and opening different mental images. New songs were composed in the spirit of the old. The senses of poetry and imagery were nourished and bore fruits. The tradition of singing helped the Sephardim remain optimistic and happy in spite of the relatively poor settings in which they lived.

One other aspect should also be noted. The Judeo-Spanish songs reflected and influenced the Sephardic appreciation of graceful behavior and good manners. In one song, for example, a daughter asks her mother's permission to go to Venice to be with her love. The mother informs her daughter that the trip is difficult, and that there are no relatives along the way who might help her. She also reminds her that it is not proper for a young woman to be brazen, to chase after a man. "For one who wishes to become a married woman, it is not proper to be a traveler on the streets; but rather she should be pretty and very nimble in winking to make a good appearance."[20] Other songs described the honor and grace which obtain among *cosuegros*, the parents of the bride and groom.

Folk Sayings

The commonsense folk-wisdom of the people found expression in numerous proverbs and sayings. Many of them derived from rabbinic sources; others went back to Spanish origins; yet others were created by Sephardim as the occasions arose. There were sayings to describe almost all personality traits and almost all situations. Underlying the proverbs were certain main themes and values which allow a glimpse of the inner attitude patterns of the Sephardim.[21]

A number of sayings dealt with the Jews' self-image. They regarded themselves as very intelligent, clever, sensible and helpful to others. On the negative side, they recognized that their overwhelming individuality and pride could lead to dissension.

Ğudio bovo no hay.
(There is no stupid Jew.)

El ğudio kuando kevra si asavienta.
(When a Jew errs, he learns from his mistake.)

Kual banker sino el ğudio?
(Who is a banker if not a Jew?)

Ğudio ki no ayuda a otro non ay.
(There is no Jew who does not help another.)

Dos ğudios, tres keilot.
(Two Jews, three synagogues.)

There were also several sayings which reflected Jewish opinion of non-Jewish neighbors. The Jews generally considered themselves more perceptive and even more self-respecting than other groups.

El ğudio savi lo ke otros no tienin ni la idea.
(The Jew knows what others don't even have an idea about.)

Si el ğudio es torpe, guay del Turko.
(If the Jew is stupid, woe unto the Turk.)

El ğudio bive riko, muere prove. El grego bive prove, muere riko.
(The Jew lives rich and dies poor. The Greek lives poor and dies rich.)

El turko dimanda sedaka en kantando, el grego yorando, el ğudio en malkiziendo.
(The Turk begs for charity while singing, the Greek while crying, the Jew while cursing.)

Certainly, many groups have high estimates of themselves in relation to others, and the Sephardim are by no means unique in this respect. Yet, it is significant that the Sephardim were able to maintain a positive self-image in spite of the fact that they were *dhimmis*, suffering various legal disabilities and social discrimina-

tions. Perhaps their self-esteem helped them to maintain their dignity and to overcome mentally the sense of being considered a second-class minority group.

A number of sayings describe the basic human tension between the rich and the poor. Since the masses of Sephardim were impoverished, at least since the 18th century, it was usual for proverbs to be sympathetic to the poor. The rich were often depicted as callous, thoughtless people, while the poor were faithful and good. They compensated for their lack of money by an abundance of good moral qualities.

Tanto lavora el provi k'el rico si enrikese.
(The poor man [employee] works so hard that the rich man gets rich.)

El provi kon el Dio, el riko sin alavasion.
(The poor man is with God, the rich man doesn't praise [God].)

El harto no cree al hambriento.
(One who is full does not believe one who is hungry.)

En dia di luvia pensa en el provi; el tambien tiene frio.
(On a rainy day think about the poor man; he also is cold.)

An extension of the glorification of the poor is the attitude that, in the final analysis, people are basically the same and share the same ultimate fate. Pomp and vanity, rather than being signs of greatness, are signs of folly.

El rey es con la gente.
(The king is with the people. i.e., not aloof and haughty.)

Los ojos no se inchin con moneda sino con polvo de tierra.
([At death] the eyes are not filled with money, but with the dust of the earth.)

El diamente briya, pero al fin i al kavo es piedra.
(The diamond glitters, but in the final analysis, it is a rock.)

The following sayings reflect other common attitudes among the Sephardim.

Ken bivi kon ispiranza bivi alegri ma si mueri di ambri.
(One who lives with hope [alone] lives happily but will die of hunger.)

Del Dio y del vecino nada no se encubri.
(From God and a neighbor nothing is hidden.)

Tu savis, ma yo mâs, dišo el lonsu al haham.
(You know, but I know more, says the dullard to the sage.)

Quien merca lo que no tiene de menester, vende lo que tiene de menester.
(One who buys something which he does not need, will come to sell that which he does need.)

Most of the folkways and folklore discussed in this and the previous chapter no longer enjoy much vitality among the Jews of Rhodes origin. The "old-timers" still reminisce, still observe some of the customs, use some of the proverbs. But the social and intellectual framework of contemporary Rhodeslies is far removed from that of their forebears. It is very unlikely that many of the customs and traditions will live again, except in a nostalgic or academic way. History moves on and some of our cultural baggage must be left behind. And yet, there are sparks of inspiration in these old folkways waiting to be released, waiting to shed at least a little light on our lives. Perhaps they will succeed in some way.



ISRAELI SOLDIERS IN RHODES, 1948, LAYING A WREATH IN THE *CALLE ANCHA*
(Courtesy of Hillel Franco)



THE ISRAELI FLAG FLIES IN RHODES, 1948
(Courtesy of Ascer and Edward Turiel)

CHAPTER TWELVE

The Closing Chapter

Migration

One of the important phenomena which affected the Jewish community of Rhodes in the early 20th century was the large scale migration from the Levant. The rise of western education and values in the late 19th century began to influence the thinking of young Sephardim. They became discontented with the limited cultural and economic opportunities in their native towns. They wanted to leave the confines of the Jewish quarters and search the world for adventure and treasure. Moreover, the unstable conditions of war in their homelands worried them. The first decades of the 20th century witnessed an unprecedented level of migration from the Sephardic communities of the Levant.[1] The Jews of Rhodes were part of this movement.

The migration trend began slowly. Several young people from Rhodes went to Palestine to learn trades or advance their educations. Graduates of the Alliance schools, in some cases, went to Paris to continue their studies. Several went to Beirut or the United States to study medicine. These individuals were the forerunners of a much greater migration movement which was engulfing the community.[2]

It was not long before many other young Rhodeslies decided to leave Rhodes. Often they were searching for economic advancement rather than educational opportunities. They went to Africa, Europe, the United States. They worked hard and once they began to prosper they sent for their relatives and friends in Rhodes. When word spread that a small group of Rhodeslies had settled in a particular place, others were inspired to follow. The pioneers helped the newcomers, so that new communities of Rhodeslies were founded in a spirit of cooperation and loyalty.

In their early phases, these new communities were microcosms of the mother community in Rhodes. The same customs and

traditions were observed. The synagogues and communal institutions of Rhodes served as their models.[3] The Rhodeslies in the new communities were profoundly loyal to their native community.[4] By tracing the development of some of these communities, we shall see how the community of Rhodes spread its influence.

Africa

In the first decade of the 20th century, two brothers, Solomon and Mosheh Benatar, left Rhodes for Rhodesia. One later went to the Congo.[5] They opened an import business and sold general merchandise. As business increased, they added new stores and employed their young relatives and friends from Rhodes. By 1914, there were about 25 young Jews from Rhodes in the Congo, including pioneers in the community such as Semah Franco and Morris Alhadeff. (At its peak in the 1950's, Elisabethville had about 550 Jewish families of Rhodes descent.) The Sephardim came to outnumber the Ashkenazim and eventually took over the synagogue, changing it to the Sephardic custom. Rabbi Mosheh Levy, educated in the Rabbinical College of Rhodes, became the Sephardic rabbi in the Congo. The Jews prospered, particularly in the textile and oil industries. In 1960, when the Congo won its independence from Belgium, the majority of Jews left for Capetown, South Africa, because of the uncertain economic and social prognosis for the Congo.

The community in Rhodesia began in Queque. As more Rhodes Jews came, the congregation gradually began to move to Bulwayo and Salisbury. It is presently concentrated in Salisbury where a large congregation of Jews of Rhodes descent flourishes.[6]

The United States

The largest number of Rhodes Jews who emigrated went to various cities in the United States. In the early 1900's, a nucleus of Rhodes Jews lived in New York City.[7] In 1912, they were able to organize a self-help group known as the Rhodes League of Brothers' Aid Society, Inc. Like many other Jewish immigrants, the Rhodes Jews were concentrated in the Lower East Side. They engaged in many types of work, notably in the candy concession business. A number of young men worked their way through school and entered the professions. The Rhodes League of Brothers

sponsored synagogue services for its members on the High Holy Days. It also established a Hebrew School for its youth which at one time had as many as 100 students.

The Rhodes Jews in New York were particularly helpful to the mother community in Rhodes. They frequently sent money to the charitable organizations of the Jewish community there, as well as to their individual relatives. They were also helpful during the years of World War II and its aftermath. The Society still exists but is no longer as active as it once was.

In the South of the United States, Rhodes Jews settled in Montgomery, Alabama, and Atlanta, Georgia. These communities have historically been closely connected. The Etz Ahayem Congregation of Montgomery procured a charter on July 27, 1912.[8] Even in the earliest days of their settlement, the Rhodes Jews of Montgomery made regular collections of funds for their brethren in Rhodes. The community owns a Torah scroll which originally had been a gift of Mr. and Mrs. Salomon Alhadeff to the K.K. Gadol in Rhodes. The scroll, presented to the Montgomery synagogue in 1954 by Mr. Nace Cohen, was buried in Rhodes during the German occupation.

The Sephardic congregation in Atlanta dates to 1906 when two Sephardic Jews migrated to that city. They were followed by a steady stream of Jews, mainly from the Island of Rhodes.[9] In 1912, the congregation was weakened by a secession of a group of its members, but by 1914 the two groups were united and became Congregation Or VeShalom. The community grew, expanded its services, and has become one of the leading Sephardic congregations in the United States.

Other groups of Rhodes Jews settled along the Pacific Coast. The community in Seattle, Washington, dates from 1904 when Nissim Alhadeff arrived as a young adventurous bachelor. The community grew steadily. By 1914, Congregation Ezra Bessaroth was officially incorporated.[10]

A committee of Jews was active in raising funds for the community of Rhodes. On April 25, 1939, Rabbi Isidore Kahan, who had been a teacher in the Rabbinical College of Rhodes, became the Rabbi of the entire Sephardic community of Seattle, Turkish Jews as well as Rhodes Jews. However, shortly after his arrival, this arrangement collapsed and Rabbi Kahan remained associated only with the Rhodes congregation. The Ezra Bessaroth is an important

congregation within the Jewish community of Seattle.

A small group of Rhodes Jews settled in Portland, Oregon and established Congregation Ahavath Ahim in 1916.[11] Their present rabbi, Michel B. Albagli, was formerly a member of the Jewish court of the Island of Rhodes. He was a graduate and faculty member of its Rabbinical College. The Portland community had many family ties with the Seattle community. Ahavath Ahim, never a large congregation, is presently relatively inactive.

The Rhodes community in Los Angeles founded the Peace and Progress Society on February 5, 1917.[12] The Society ultimately grew into the Sephardic Hebrew Center of Los Angeles. Rhodes Jews also settled in San Francisco and in other cities in Southern California.

The effects of the extensive migration from Rhodes were many and varied for the community there. Psychologically, the departure of so many young people served to inspire other young men and women to leave the island. The success stories that children sent back to their families also tended to reinforce the notion that migration was worthwhile.

The migration fever reached such heights by 1915 that parents were demanding that the English language replace Turkish in the Alliance Israélite Universelle schools in Rhodes. The other schools of the Jewish community of Rhodes had already instituted English studies. Parents felt that English was vital for their children, "nearly all of whom were destined to emigrate to America."[13]

Migration created serious social problems in Rhodes. Fathers who went to the United States or elsewhere often left their families behind until they could earn enough to buy tickets for them. Thus, wives were compelled to raise children without the benefit of husbands. They depended on the money sent to them by their men who worked in far-off lands; any delay in the mail caused hardship. During World War I, the poverty in these families intensified due to the difficulty of ship travel from the United States to Rhodes.[14] Ms. Sarah Graziani, Head of the Alliance School for Girls, writing in January, 1918, commented: "The heads of a great number of families are in America and the mails are so rare!"[15]

Migration led to a decrease in students in the Jewish schools of Rhodes.[16] When the strict United States quota laws went into effect in 1921 and 1924, the outlet for migration to this country was almost completely sealed for Rhodes Jews. As the rate of migration

from the island tapered off, however, migration to Rhodes increased.

In the early 1920's, some Sephardim from Smyrna and from Asian Turkey (Anatolia) preferring to migrate, came to Rhodes when the Greeks took over their cities. By 1938 (when Jews who had come to Rhodes after 1919 were ordered to leave the island by the fascists) they numbered about 500 souls—more than ten percent of the total Jewish population of the city.[17] From these migration trends, it is clear that the Jewish community of Rhodes underwent major demographic changes during the first decades of the 20th century.

Destruction

The migration to and from Rhodes made a strong impact on the nature of the community. Moreover, the effects of Italianization tended to move the community away from its old traditions and patterns of thought. It was a community in process: it was changing rapidly and in many ways.

But before the Rhodeslies had time to understand or feel comfortable with the changes of the 20th century, events beyond their control caused the community's development to cease. The Nazis had taken power in Germany. Their program of world domination and destruction of Jews began to be felt in Rhodes.

When Italy aligned itself with Germany in June, 1936, the Italian government began to reflect subtle changes in its attitude towards Jews. Some marks of honor which were to have gone to Jews were rescinded.[18]

In the first half of December, 1936, Mario de Vecchi di Val Cismon was appointed governor of the Dodecanese Islands. An arch-fascist, his arrival marked the beginning of severe anti-Jewish measures in Rhodes. The Rabbinical College was closed. Jews were required to keep their stores open on the Sabbath and Jewish festivals. De Vecchi even demanded one hundred tombstones from the Jewish cemetery for use as building material for his new house. De Vecchi's predecessors used to visit the Jewish synagogues on Rosh Hashanah. De Vecchi, however, demanded that the Jewish community council visit him on that holy day.[19]

On September 1, 1938, the Italian newspapers announced the establishment of anti-Jewish laws. The local officials in Rhodes upheld this legislation strictly. Ritual slaughter of animals was

prohibited. Jews could not buy property, employ non-Jewish servants, send their children to government schools. Non-Jews were not allowed to patronize Jewish doctors or pharmacists.[20]

Jewish children expelled from non-Jewish schools became estranged from their gentile friends. They studiously avoided meeting eyes when passing each other in the street.[21] For a short time, de Vecchi converted the Jewish schools into government schools where Jewish children were given rudimentary instruction, fascist-oriented. However, the schools were soon returned to the community albeit in a disorganized state.[22]

An anti-Jewish law published in September, 1938, ordered Jews who had come to Rhodes after January, 1919, to leave the island. Affecting about five hundred people, most of whom had come to Rhodes from Asian Turkey, Greece and Bulgaria due to the consequences of the first World War, the deadline for departure was March 12, 1939. Hizkiah Franco, a leader of the Jewish community, went to Paris to solicit aid from the Alliance Israélite Universelle, hoping to activate the large Jewish organizations in France and England to use their political influence on behalf of the Jews of Rhodes.[23]

While these political efforts were under way, a delegation of Jews from Jerusalem came to the island in an attempt to alter the government's decree and to improve Jewish morale. The three-man committee—Abraham Elmaleh, David Aboulafia and Abraham Franco—met de Vecchi and argued that it was illegal to expel the Jews who had come to Rhodes after 1919, since they were granted Italian citizenship through the Treaty of Lausanne. De Vecchi, however, remained firm. But he did grant a one month reprieve, extending the expulsion date to April 15, 1939.[24] This extra month was little consolation to the victims and deep despair prevailed. One member of the community committed suicide.[25]

Following these events, Hizkiah Franco received word from the Alliance Israélite Universelle that their intervention with the Italian government had succeeded. Mussolini admitted that Jews who gained Italian citizenship through the Treaty of Lausanne could not be expelled. De Vecchi then made an ambiguous statement implying that the decree of expulsion would be suspended, but not indicating how long the suspension was to be. Fearful and uncertain, the majority of the Jews in question left Rhodes. They were assisted by the officers of the Jewish community of Rhodes

who provided the necessary passports and identification. Many of these exiles went to Naples, then to Tangiers. Some went to Palestine.[26]

In May, 1939, an old ship docked in Rhodes to pick up several hundred Jews who were susceptible to expulsion. Approximately six hundred Eastern European Jewish refugees were already aboard. The ship was one of the "secret" ships of "illegal" emigration to Palestine. But before the vessel had traveled far from Rhodes, a fire broke out on board. The passengers safely reached the Island of Samos, but they had lost nearly all their baggage. The unhappy victims were transported back to Rhodes after midnight. The Rhodes Jews returned to their homes. The East European Jews were allowed to sleep in the stadium of the city. The next morning, the Jews of Rhodes brought food and clothing to the Jews in the stadium and even organized a kitchen on the premises.

In a short time, the community managed to procure another old ship and the refugees sailed for Palestine. The community also arranged for the transport of about three hundred Jews to Tangiers. Jews of Rhodes origin from throughout the world sent money to help in these relief efforts.[27]

Admiral I. Campione became governor of Rhodes in July, 1942 and openly manifested his sympathy for the Jews by rectifying various anti-Jewish measures. For example, under previous administrators, the Jews were given less food rations than other residents of Rhodes. Campione demanded an equal division of provisions to all citizens, including Jews.[28]

Though the Jews' status improved somewhat, the community still suffered severe hardships. On February 2, 1944, eight Jews were killed by bombs dropped by British planes and many Jewish homes were destroyed. On the first day of Passover, 1944, twenty-six Jews were killed by bombs when they left the synagogue after morning prayers.[29] Thus, even the enemies of the Nazi-fascist alliance inadvertently killed Jews.

Military development led to new uncertainties. On July 24, 1943, Mussolini was removed from power. His successor struck an armistice with the allies on September 8, 1943, and the Jews of Rhodes thought their troubles were over. But contrary to their expectations, the Germans occupied Rhodes, overcoming the far more numerous Italian forces on the island. On July 19, 1944, the Germans ordered all Jews to appear on the next morning at the

aeronautic command at Tchemenlik. A German officer told Jacob Shalem Franco, president of the Jewish community, to tell all Jews to bring enough baggage and provisions for a ten day period. He was also to ask them to bring all their valuables within twelve hours. The Jews were told that they would be temporarily installed in a small island near Rhodes. When the Jews appeared on July 20, their valuables were confiscated.

On July 23, 1944, the Jews were crowded into three small freight ships. At the port of Leros, the ships from Rhodes met one from Cos which held one hundred Jewish victims from that island. After four days in Leros, they went to Samos, finally landing in Paraeus on July 31, 1944. Five Jews died due to the hardships of the voyage. The Jews were placed in the concentration camp at Haydar, near Athens, where ten more died. On August 3, the survivors were crowded into trains and shipped to Auschwitz. Of the Jews who were deported from Rhodes, only 151 survived. Twenty-two had died on the voyage, 1145 at Auschwitz, and 437 in the labor camps.[30] The Sephardic community in Rhodes was born as a result of the expulsion of the Jews from Spain. It died in the ashes of the German concentration camps.

Thirty-nine Rhodes Jews escaped deportation because they or their spouses had Turkish nationality, and they were protected by the Turkish consul in Rhodes.[31] But they too suffered greatly. They were required to appear each morning at 8 A.M. before the Gestapo, and were held for one or two hours without reason. Famine, inadequate medical care, and constant British bombardment of the island broke their morale and threatened their lives.

On August 8, these Jews were told that they would be sent to Athens where their Turkish nationality would be contested. Then they were told that genuine Turkish subjects could remain in Rhodes, but their spouses and children were to be deported the next morning. These threats were not carried out, but they served to frighten the hopeless victims.[32]

When the Nazis were finally defeated, a double emotion filled the survivors. They were relieved that the unspeakable horrors had ended; they were grief-stricken when they realized the extent of the tragedy which had occurred. April 16, 1945 brought liberation. On May 8, 1945, the armistice was signed, officially bringing the war to an end. The primary problem of the Rhodian Jewish survivors was not to reconstruct the Rhodes Jewish community:

that was almost an impossibility. Their main concern was to reconstruct their own shattered lives. They had to free those Jews still in bondage, to settle them in new homes, to start new lives. From the ashes, new life was to emerge.[33]

Following the war, Rhodes was under English military occupation. It went to Greece on March 31, 1947. During this short period, some of the survivors of the war had made their way back to Rhodes. In April, 1946, there were about fifty Jews in Rhodes.

In order to help the holocaust survivors, Jews of Rhodes descent throughout the world raised funds. In Rhodesia, the Sephardic Benevolent and Cultural Youth Society collected money for the survivors.[34] In New York, a very active organization was established to help resettle the survivors of war.[35] All other communities of Rhodeslies also assisted in the reconstruction effort.

In April, 1946, the remaining Jews of Rhodes tried to reorganize the community, but the attempt could not succeed.[36] Gradually, Jews left Rhodes to join communities of Rhodeslies in the United States and Africa. Some went to the Holy Land. Only a handful of Jews live in Rhodes at present.

A number of memorials rose to honor the victims of the war. In 1933, the family of Salomon Alhadeff had donated a large park to the city of Rhodes. The head of the municipal council at the time, Alfred Billioti, had the main street of the park named Salomon Alhadeff Avenue. In 1941, the street name was crossed out by anti-Jewish fascists and de Vecchi renamed the street after a fascist hero.[37] Following the war, the street was again given the name of Alhadeff. The main avenue through the Jewish quarter was renamed, "Martyron Evreon," street of the Jewish martyrs.

A marble plaque was erected in the Jewish cemetery. Inscribed in Greek, French and Hebrew it says;

> In memory of the 2,000 martyrs of the Jewish community of Rhodes and the Island of Cos, brutally butchered by the barbaric Nazis in the concentration camps of Germany, 1944-45. May their souls rest in peace.

On another portion of the memorial is an alphabetical list of family names of those who were destroyed in the crematoria. Memorials stand where Jewish life used to be.

Epilogue

The armistice between Israel and her Arab enemies following Israel's War of Independence in 1948 was signed in Rhodes. The presence of Israeli officials and soldiers profoundly affected the few Jews who still lived in the city. The Rhodian survivors of Nazism, the remnants of an ancient and vibrant community, could not help but be moved by the presence of representatives of the new Jewish state, symbol of the rebirth of the Jewish people. A number of Rhodian Jews who lived in Rhodes at the time, or whose relatives lived there, proudly display photographs of the Israelis in Rhodes.

That the state of Israel signed its first armistice in a place where Jewish life had been almost totally wiped out is perhaps symbolic of the experiences of Jewish history. Out of the ashes new life arose. From the pit of despair, dreams and hopes for the future came forth. In general, Jewish communities in the diaspora were like flowers without roots. They blossomed, grew and developed; but they were ultimately destroyed or withered away of themselves. Jewish communities in the Land of Israel were for centuries like roots without flowers. They held fast to their ancient land, but they lived in desolation, poverty, and in small numbers. Now, in Rhodes, the root and the flower were joined together symbolically. The destruction of a large segment of diaspora Jewry was followed by the re-establishment of Jewish government in Erets Israel. The Guardian of Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps.

Notes

I have tried to make the notes as informative and easy to follow as possible. I have not observed all of the conventions normally found in the notes of such books, but have chosen rather to use a method of citation that will be easiest for the reader. Once a work has been cited, I have seldom given it a full citation subsequently. Specific bibliographic details can be checked easily in the Bibliography.

The following abbreviations occur frequently in the notes:

O.H. = Orah Hayyim
Y.D. = Yoreh Deah
H.M. = Hoshen Mishpat
E.H. = Eben Ha'ezer.

It is with a sense of sadness that I record the passing of three individuals who helped me so much in my research for this book. Dr. Marcus Breger, who had served in the Rabbinical College in Rhodes, devoted numerous hours to this project and was selfless in his generous assistance. He was a scholar, a true *talmid hakham*. Rev. David J. Behar, who had served the community in Seattle for many years, shared his wealth of knowledge concerning the customs and rituals of the Rhodeslies. A friend of my family, Rev. Behar was a friend and guide to me since my earliest youth. Mr. Sami Notrica of New York, a former officer of the Jewish Community in Rhodes, shared his memories with me eagerly and enthusiastically. Each of these men played a part in the history of the Rhodeslies. I hope that this book might in some way serve as a memorial to them and to what they represented in their lives.

CHAPTER ONE

1. The major historians who have dealt with Sephardim in the Ottoman Empire are Solomon Rosanes and Abraham Galante. See the Bibliography for their works which are of particular importance for the history of the Jews of Rhodes. Maír José Benardete, *Hispanic Culture and Character of the Sephardic Jews* (New York, 1952), is the only author in English who has attempted to give a thorough picture of post-expulsion Sephardic life. It should be pointed out that until now there has been no comprehensive book in the English language devoted to the history of a single Sephardic community of the Ottoman Empire. There have been various studies on aspects of Sephardic life; these will be cited during the course of this work.

2. Francois Savary de Brêves, *Relation des Voyages de . . . tant en Grèce, Terre Sainct et Aegypte* (Paris, 1628), p. 18.

3. Alphonse de Lamartine, *Pilgrimage to the Holy Land* (Philadelphia, 1838), p. 76.

4. Pliny, *Natural History*, Book 5, Chapter 36.

5. *Canon Pietro Casola's Pilgrimage to Jerusalem in the Year 1494* (Manchester, 1907), p. 208. (trans. M. Margaret Newett).

6. Jonas Gurland, ed., *Ginzei Israel Besaint Petersberg* (Lyck, 1865), p. 3; for an English version, see Elkan Adler, ed., *Jewish Travellers* (New York, 1931), p. 333.

7. For a perceptive description of island life, see F. Braudel, *The Mediterranean*, Vol. 1 (New York, 1966), p. 148.

8. Genesis 10:4 refers to Dodanim. See, however, Chronicles 1:7 where Rodanim is used in the same context. The Jerusalem Talmud, Megillah, 1:9, lists the descendants of Japheth and includes "Rodes", or according to another textual reading, "Rodos."

9. See R. Matton, *Rhodes* (Athens, 1949), p. 14; and Claude Savary, *Letters on Greece* (London, 1788) pp. 53f, for a summary of the various Greek traditions about the origin of Rhodes.

10. Pliny notes that Rhodes had formerly been called by nine different names. The following discussion is based on Cecil Torr, *Rhodes in Ancient Times* (London, 1885); Matton, pp. 17f; Savary, pp. 59f; and the articles on Rhodes in various encyclopedias.

11. Reuben Levy, *The Social Structure of Islam* (Cambridge, 1971), p. 77.

12. Eric Brockman, *The Two Sieges of Rhodes* (London, 1969), pp. 18-19.

13. Sidney Tedesche, trans., *The First Book of Maccabees* (New York, 1950), p. 235, and notes.

14. The extant fragments of Molon's work are found in Theodore Reinach, *Textes d'Auteurs Grecs et Romains Relatifs au Judaisme* (Paris, 1895), pp. 60-64.

15. The anti-Jewish writings of Poseidonius are found in Reinach, pp. 56-59. See also Edward Flannery, *The Anguish of the Jews* (New York, 1965), pp. 11f.

16. See Jean Juster's remarks in *Les Juifs dans l'Empire Romain*, Vol. 1 (Paris, 1914), p. 189, note 4. He argues that the Jewish community in Rhodes must have been substantial at the time if it had attracted such attention from Poseidonius and Apollonius Molon. Max Radin, *The Jews Among the Greeks and Romans* (Philadelphia, 1915), pp. 198-9, however, suggests that Molon's attack on Jews may have been a speech "in a fictitious cause" and may not have been aimed at a Jewish community in Rhodes.

17. *The Life and Works of Flavius Josephus* (Philadelphia, n.d.), p. 897. (trans. Wm. Whiston).

18. *Ibid.*, p. 435.

19. Yaron Dan, *"Shenei Soharim Yehudim Bemeah Shebi'it," Zion*, Vol. 36 (1971) 8-9. See also S.D. Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society*, Vol 1 (Los Angeles, 1967) p. 214.

A possible reference to the Jews of Rhodes during the second century C.E. occurs in the Jerusalem Talmud, Yebamoth 8:2. However, other sources in the Jerusalem Talmud present variant readings. See Jerusalem Talmud, Kiddushin 4:6; Bikkurim, 1:5. The Babylonian Talmud reports this case in a different version in Yebamoth 60b. See also, Yehiel Hirschenson, *Sheba Hokhmot Shebetalmud Umidrash* (Lemberg, 1883), p. 226.

See Harry Leon, *The Jews of Ancient Rome* (Philadelphia, 1960), pp. 159-162, for a discussion of an inscription which may indicate a settlement of Rhodian Jews in ancient Rome.

20. Marcus Adler, ed., *Masot Binyamin* (London, 1907), p. 17.

21. Rabbi Obadiah of Bertinoro noted that Jews were not allowed to touch merchandise in the market. His letter is found in A. Yaari, ed., *Iggrot Erets Israel* (Tel Aviv, 1943); see p. 111.

22. A. Yaari, ed., *Masa Meshullam Mivolterra* (Jerusalem, 1948), p. 44.

23. F. Guicciardini, *The History of Italy* (London, 1969), p. 1522. (trans. Sidney Alexander).

24. Wilhelm Heyd, *Histoire du Commerce du Levant au Moyen-âge*, Vol. 1 (Leipzig, 1923), pp. 526-7.

25. C. T. Newton, *Travels and Discoveries in the Levant* (London, 1865), p. 158.

26. Quoted by Joshua Starr, *Romania* (Paris, 1949), p. 86.

27. A. Friemann, *"Shelihim Ve'olim," Zion,* Vol. 1. (1935/36), 187, 191. Friemann's discussion is based on a manuscript of Balbo's work in the Vatican Library. There is reference to a Rabbi Shelomo of Rhodes in the *tosafot* to Gittin 49a, *"Ve'od Mai".* However, this rabbi seems to have been from Dreux, France, rather than from the island of Rhodes. See Ernest Renan, *"Les Rabbins Français du Commencement du Quatorizième Siècle,* in *Histoire Litteraire de la France,* Vol. 27 (Paris, 1877), p. 441. See also, Efraim Urbach, *Baalei Hatosafot* (Jerusalem, 1955), p. 279; Henri Gross, *Gallia Judaica* (Paris, 1897), pp. 171-2. See Shelomo ben Adreth, *Responsa,* Vol. 3 (Livorno, 1778), no. 3, where the word "Rodos" clearly refers to Dreux. See also, Galante, p. 112; and Yehuda Leib Fleischer, *"Rabbeinu Abraham Ibn Ezra Betsarfat," Mizrah Umaarav,* Vol. 5, no. 1, 38-46, where it is argued that Ibn Ezra did not visit Rhodes, but Dreux.

28. B. Rottiers, *Monumens de Rhodes* (Brussels, 1828), p. 348.

29. Brockman, p. 62.

30. Casola, p. 382, note 70.

31. Yaari, *Masa...,* p. 44.

32. Yaari, *Iggrot...,* p. 111.

33. L'Abbé de Vertot, *Histoire des Chevaliers Hospitaliers de St. Jean de Jerusalem,* Vol. 3 (Paris, 1737), p. 107. See also J. Ludewig, *Reliquia Manuscriptorum,* Vol. 5 (Frankfurt, 1723) pp. 290-99, for a Latin account of the resistance in Rhodes dated November 18, 1480.

34. A. Yaari, *Masa...,* p. 44. The Grand Master, according to Meshullam, was cast down. But he was not killed. He continued to head the Order many years after this battle.

35. A. Yaari, *Iggrot,* p. 111.

36. This explanation would be in consonance with the discussion of Joshua Starr, p. 87.

37. Felix Fabri, "The Wanderings of Felix Fabri," *Palestine Pilgrims' Text Society,* Vol. 7 (London, 1897), pp. 31-2.

38. A. Yaari, *Iggrot...,* p. 110.

39. *Ibid.*

40. *Ibid.,* p. 111.

41. Casola, p. 208.

42. Much has been written about the Jews of Spain. For general background information, see Eliyahu Ashtor, *The Jews of Moslem Spain,* Vol. 1 (Philadelphia, 1973); Yitzhak Baer, *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain,* Vols.

1-2 (Philadelphia, 1961 and 1971); Richard Barnett, ed., *The Sephardi Heritage* (New York, 1971); Abraham Neuman, *The Jews in Spain* (Philadelphia, 1944).

43. For more information about events leading up to the expulsion, see Elijah Capsali, *Likutim Shonim Misefer Debei Eliyahu* (Padua, 1869), pp. 66-70 (ed. M. Lattes); Y. Baer, Vol. 2, pp. 424-443; B. Netanyahu, *Abravanel* (Philadelphia, 1968), pp. 38-60. For descriptions of some of the hardships faced by exiles see *Sefer-Hakabbalah* of Abraham b. Shelomo which is found in Adolphe Neubauer, *Mediaeval Jewish Chronicles* (Jerusalem, 1967), p. 112; Isaac Abravanel, *Mayenei Hayeshuah* (Stettin, 1860), introduction; Joseph Hacohen, *Emek Habakkah* (Jerusalem, 1956), pp. 62f; Solomon Ibn Verga, *Shebet Yehudah* (Jerusalem, 1947), pp. 122f.

44. See Isaac Abravanel's introduction to *Yeshuot Meshiho* (Koenigsberg, 1861), p. 4a. For a full discussion of his messianic works, see Netanyahu, chapter four. For Judah Abravanel's neo-Platonic response to the expulsion, see my article, "Judah Abravanel's Philosophy of Love," *Tradition*, Vol. 15 (Fall, 1975), 81-88.

45. This work is found in manuscript in the Vatican library. It is quoted by G. Scholem, *Shabbatai Zevi*, Vol. 1 (Tel-Aviv, 1957), p. 15.

46. G. Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi* (Princeton, 1973), pp. 67f.

47. The main works which took this general approach are Joseph Hacohen, *Emek Habakhah*, first published in 1558; Solomon Ibn Verga, *Shebet Yehudah* (1554); Samuel Usque, *Consolaçam as Tribulaçoens de Israel* (1552).

48. *Shebet Yehudah* (Jerusalem, 1947), pp. 122f.

49. The manuscript of this letter is found in the Bibliotheque Nationale of Paris, Ms. hebreu, 412, fol. 131. It is quoted by Philip Argenti, *Religious Minorities of Chios* (Cambridge, 1970), p. 151.

50. H.A.R. Gibb and H. Bowen, *Islamic Society and the West* (London, 1950), Vol. 1, part 2, pp. 217f.

51. For more on the Romaniots, see Solomon Rosanes, *Dibrei Yemei Israel Betogarmah*, Vol. 1 (Tel-Aviv, 1930), pp. 203-218. See Eliyahu Mizrahi, *Mayim Amukim* (Salonika, 1810), nos. 1, 2, 24 and 57 as examples of Sephardic-Romaniot clashes. See Barukh Angel, *Responsa* (Salonika, 1717), no. 6, for a discussion of how to resolve tensions caused by differing customs among various groups of Jews. The relationship between Sephardim and Romaniots in Rhodes will be discussed in the next chapter.

52. Rosanes, Vol. 1, pp. 132f. See also, David ben Hayyim Hacohen, *Responsa* (Salonika, 1803), no. 13, for problems among the synagogues of various origins in Arta.

53. Rosanes, Vol. 1, p. 117. See also the appendices on the Jews of various origins, pp. 203-316, for influences of the smaller groups on the

Sephardim.

54. Martin Cohen, ed., Samuel Usque, *Consolation for the Tribulations of Israel* (Philadelphia, 1965), pp. 211, and 320 notes 113-114. For Sephardic influence in North Africa, see André Chouraqui, *Between East and West* (Philadelphia, 1968), pp. 89f; also, Isidore Epstein, *Responsa of R. Simon b. Semah Duran*... (New York, 1968), pp. 14f.

55. *Life of Renowned Peter d'Aubusson* (London, 1679), p. 417.

56. Marco Coronelli, *Isola di Rodi* (Venice, 1690), pp. 180-181; Starr, p. 89; *Life of Renowned Peter d'Aubusson*, p. 418.

57. Starr, p. 89; Galante, p. 9.

58. Capsali, p. 47.

59. Cited by Joshua Starr, p. 90.

60. Mosheh Alashkar *Responsa* (Jerusalem, 1959), no. 70; and Jacob Berab, *Responsa* (Jerusalem, 1958), no. 54.

61. Joseph Hacohen, *Dibrei Hayamim Lemalkhei Tsarfat Ubeit Ottoman Hatogar*, Vol. 2 (Lemberg, 1859), p. 4b.

62. Joseph Sambari, *Dibrei Yosef*, in Adolphe Neubauer, p. 144.

63. Coronelli, p. 190.

64. Israel's statement is recorded in Ludwig Frankl, *Yerushalaymah* (Vienna, 1859), p. 82.

65. Brockman, p. 150. The Turkish victory is reported in Gedaliah Ibn Yahia, *Shalsheleth Hakabbalah* (Warsaw, 1881), p. 52.

66. de Lamartine, p. 76.

67. Charles Berlin, "A 16th-Century Hebrew Chronicle of the Ottoman Empire," in *Studies in Jewish Bibliography, History and Literature in Honor of I.E. Kiev* (New York, 1971), pp. 26f, p. 43 note 124.

68. Charles Berlin, *Elijah Capsali's Seder Eliyyahu Zuta*, Ph.D. thesis Harvard University, Sept. 1962. See Vol. 2, p. 529.

69. Capsali, p. 47.

70. Bernard Randolph, *The Present State of the Islands in the Archipelago (or Arches) Sea of Constantinople, and Gulph of Smyrna; with the Islands of Candia and Rhodes* (Oxford, 1687), pp. 26-7.

CHAPTER TWO

1. Galante, *Histoire*, p. 13.

2. Israel's statement is recorded in Ludwig Frankl, p. 82.

3. Joseph Hacohen, *Emek Habakhah* (Jerusalem, 1956), p. 71.

4. See Paul Grunebaum, *"Les Juifs d'Orient d'après les Géographes," Revue des Études Juives,* Vol. 27 (1893), 135. He quotes the account of A. Thevet d'Angoulême, dated 1552. See also, *"Relation du Voyage en Orient de Carlier de Pinon* (1579)," *Revue de l'Orient Latin,* Vol. 12, 370.

5. Cited by Braudel, Vol. 2, p. 817.

6. See Shemuel de Medina, *Responsa* (Lemberg, 1862), Y.D. 40 and 42.

7. Capsali's comments are quoted in Elias Artom and Humbertus Cassuto, eds., *Sefer Takanoth Candia* (Jerusalem, 1943), p. 43.

8. Yehiel Bassan, *Responsa* (Constantinople, 1737), no. 98.

9. de Medina, Y.D. 53.

10. See Gibb and Bowen, Vol. 1, part 1, p. 60, note 3, for a discussion of the term, *kayha.* See also, H.Z. Hirschberg, "The Oriental Jewish Communities," in A.J. Arberry, ed., *Religion in the Middle East,* Vol. 1 (Cambridge, 1969), p. 186.

11. This case is discussed by Eliyahu Mizrahi, *Responsa* (Jerusalem, 1938), no. 15. For a discussion of a *kahya* who caused trouble in Salonika during the first half of the 16th century, see I.S. Emmanuel, *Histoire des Israélites de Salonique* (Paris, 1936), pp. 151f.

12. David Ibn Zimra, *Responsa* (New York, 1967), Vol. 1, no. 906. Israel Goldman, *Life and Times of Radbaz* (New York, 1970), pp. 176-77, misinterprets this responsum. The *parnas* did not force the community to give him the title of *kahya* nor was the community disturbed that he was acting as *kahya;* the only concern was whether this violated the *haskamah.*

13. See, for example, Ibn Zimra, Vol 1, no. 582 and Vol. 2, no. 1,241; and de Medina, Y.D. 53, in the text of the *haskamah.*

14. de Medina, H.M. 12. וכבר כתבו הפוסקים שטובי העיר הוו בעירם למה שהוברררו כמו גדולי הדור בכל מקום.

15. Raphael Mordecai Malki's commentary on Torah, in Simcha Assaf, *Batei Hadin Vesidreihem* (Jerusalem, 1924), p. 135. Communal authorities in Spain dealt with cases brought before them and had judicial powers. See Isidore Epstein, *The Responsa of Rabbi Solomon ben Adreth of Barcelona as a Source of the History of Spain* (New York, 1968), p. 46. Also see Abraham Neuman, *The Jews in Spain,* Vol. 1 (Philadelphia, 1944), p. 113. He indicates that the personnel of the Jewish courts in Spain were chosen by laymen, but that the legal procedure was established and the principles of law stated by the religious authority. In some important communities, the ruling council itself served as the court of justice. See Leah Bornstein's Master's Dissertation, *The Structure of the Spiritual Leadership and the Jewish Courts of Law in*

the Ottoman Empire during the 16th and 17th Centuries (Ramat Gan, 1972), Chapter 2, for a discussion of the role of communal leaders as judges and their relationship with the rabbinic courts.

See Mosheh Trani, *Responsa* (New York, 1961), Vol. 3, no. 77, where the appointed officials in Patras had significant powers, and could issue punitive measures with or without the consultation of their *hakham*. In one case, they excommunicated a wealthy member of the community.

16. Ibn Zimra, Vol. 2, no. 1,241: הפרנסים שנוהגים למנות ברודוס אינם חשובים להפקיע ממון.

See Also Vol. 1, no. 937, dealing with a business case, where the *parnassim* consulted rabbinic scholars before making their own judgment.

17. Meir Benayahu, *Marbits Torah* (Jerusalem, 1953).

18. Shelomo ben Adreth, *Responsa*, Vol. 4 (Vilna, 1881), no. 185.

19. *Ibid.* והרי הוא קיים כדין התורה ויכולים לקנוס ולענוש כל העובר בכל אשר יסכימו ביניהם ובלבד שיסכימו בכך כל הצבור באין מעכב.

20. See the discussion of Eliyahu Israel, *Ugat Eliyahu* (Livorno, 1830), no. 23. But Rabbi Ezra Malki of Rhodes ruled that a majority could compel a minority to pay a new tax. This decision, though, came at a critical time in the community's financial condition. See Malki's *Ein Mishpat* (Constantinople, 1770), H.M. 10. For a discussion of the opinions of medieval rabbinic authorities on this topic, see Yehiel Bassan, no. 98.

21. The general laws of *herem* are found in the *Shulhan Arukh*, Y.D. 334.

22. Shelomo ben Adreth, *Responsa*, Vol. 1 (Levuv, 1811-12), no. 697.

CHAPTER THREE

1. The following discussion is based on Gibb and Bowen, Vol. 1, part 1, pp. 20f and part 2, pp. 207-61.

2. Reuben Levy, *The Social Structure of Islam* (Cambridge, 1971), p. 66.

3. *Ibid.*

4. S.D. Goitein, *Jews and Arabs* (New York, 1974), p. 67.

5. *Ibid*, pp. 68-9.

6. *"Relation du Voyage..."*, 370.

7. Goitein, p. 67.

8. M. de Thevenot as quoted by Alfred Rubens, *A History of Jewish Costume* (New York, 1973), p. 33.

9. Benardete, p. 122.

10. G.L. Lewis, *Turkey* (New York, 1955), p. 159.

11. See chapter ten.

12. Raphaela Lewis, *Everyday Life in the Ottoman Empire* (London and New York, 1971), p. 140.

13. H.Z. Hirschberg, "Muslim Lands," in Geoffrey Wigoder, ed., *Jewish Art and Civilization*, Vol. 1 (New York, 1972), p. 88.

14. Ibn Zimra, Vol. 1, no. 29. See also Vol. 1, no. 923, where certain documents of debt in Rhodes were written according to the rules of Jewish law. The custom of the Jews of Rhodes follows the precedent established by Jewish communities of Spain, where deeds of private transactions, purchase, indebtedness had to be drafted by the communal notary and signed by two witnesses in his presence in order to be considered valid. See Shelomo ben Adreth, *Responsa*, Vol. 2, nos. 107 and 245. See Isidore Epstein, p. 41.

15. Ibn Zimra, Vol. 1, no. 29.

16. Ibn Zimra, Vol. 1, no. 582. In enumerating sins in a special confession on the night of Kippur, the Jews of Rhodes included the transgression of turning over a fellow Jew to non-Jewish jurisdiction among the serious sins. See Hizkiah Shemtob Kodron, *Pithei Teshubah* (Vienna, 1888), p. 39.

17. Hayyim Benveniste, *Ba'ei Hayyai* (Salonika, 1788), Vol. 2, H.M., 1.

18. This incident is described in Mosheh ben Eliyahu Israel, *Mosheh Yedabber* (Salonika, 1827), p. 51a.

19. This case is found in Hayyim Tarsa, *Hayyim Shenayim* (Smyrna, 1827), no. 26.

20. Mosheh Israel *Apei Mosheh* (Livorno, 1828), p. 22b.

21. M.Y. Israel, *Shenoth Yamin* (Smyrna, 1867), p. 42a.

22. R.H.Y. Israel, *Ben Yamin* (Salonika, 1896), responsum 1.

23. Lucy Garnett, *The Women of Turkey* (London, 1891), pp. 8-9. Garnett is quite anti-Jewish in attitude herself.

24. Victor Guerin, *Voyage dans l'Île de Rhodes* (Paris, 1856), p. 66.

25. Y.S. Tarica, *Kidesh Yedid* (Salonika, 1804), p. 55 a.

26. See for example, Abraham Israel's introduction to M. Israel, *Masat Mosheh* (Constantinople, 1742), where he laments Jewish suffering but looks forward to the coming of the Messiah. This belief was common among Jews throughout the world and had profound psychological implications. See G. Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism* (New York, 1972), pp. 1-36.

27. For discussions of the blood libel in Rhodes, see Galante, pp. 89-91; M. Franco, *"Essay sur l'Histoire des Israêlites de l'Empire Ottoman* (Paris, 1897), pp. 158-9; Lucien Wolf, *The Life of Sir Moses Montefiore* (New York, 1881), pp. 22-26; Paul Goodman, *Moses Montefiore* (Philadelphia, 1925), pp. 64-69; Albert Hyamson, *The Sephardim of England* (London, 1951), pp. 152, 251. For documents relating to Montefiore's role in the affair, see Galante, "The Blood Libel in Damascus and Rhodes," *Mizrah Umaarav,* Vol. 5, 47-51; and for the text of the firman vindicating the Jews, see M. Franco, pp. 159-60; and Isidore Loeb, *La Situation des Israêlites en Turquie en Serbie et en Roumanie* (Paris, 1877), pp. 13-14.

28. Galante, pp. 141-43.

29. M.Y. Israel, *Shenoth Yamin,* p. 42a.

30. H.S. Tarica, *Shirah Hadashah,* pp. 6a-b.

31. Galante, p. 15.

32. Ibid, pp. 14-15.

33. Reported in *El Tiempo,* April 4, 1926, p. 541.

CHAPTER FOUR

1. Quoted by Braudel, Vol. 1, p. 158.

2. *Ibid.,* p. 104.

3. Shelomo ben Yakar was involved in a controversy between Rabbis Jacob Berab and Levi ben Habib. See Levi ben Habib, *Responsa* (Venice, 1565), p. 321, Column 4; and Israel Schepansky, *Erets Israel beSafrut Hateshubot,* Vol. 2 (Jerusalem, 1968), p. 73.

4. For example, Ibn Zimra, Vol. 1, no. 97; Yaacob de Castro, *Aholei Yaacob* (Livorno, 1783), no. 7; Joseph Karo, *Abkat Rokhel* (Jerusalem, 1960), no. 77; Eliyahu b. Hayyim, *Responsa* (Constantinople, n.d.), no. 75.

For other responsa dealing with the economic life of the Jews in Rhodes during the 16th century, see: Ibn Zimra, Vol. 1, nos. 271, 890; Vol. 2, nos. 1,247, 1,248, 1,316; de Medina, H.M. 211,432; Yitzhak Adarby, *Dibrei Riboth* (Jerusalem, 1970), no. 264; Abraham de Boton, *Lehem Rab* (Cracow, 1884), no. 92; and Yosef b.David b.Lev, *Responsa* (Amsterdam, 1726), Vol. 3, no. 89.

5. Quoted by P. Grunebaum, 135.

6. I.S. Emmanuel, *L'Histoire de l'Industrie des Tissus des Israêlites de Salonique* (Paris, 1935), pp. 13-15.

7. *Ibid.;* See also Braudel, Vol. 1, pp. 436-7; and Yaacob Canaani's article in *Zion,* Vol. 6, 195.

8. de Medina, H.M. 259. See also, J. Nehama, *Histoire des Israêlites de Salonique*, Vol. 4 (Salonika, 1936), p. 38.

9. Braudel, Vol. 1, pp. 436-7.

10. Ibn Zimra, Vol. 1, no. 1,002; Vol. 2, no. 1,209; Berab, no. 22; Karo, no. 143.

11. de Medina, Y.D. 53. On the nature of the wine industry during this period, see F. Braudel, *Capitalism and Material Life, 1400-1800* (London, 1973) pp. 162-67.

12. Ibn Zimra, Vol. 1, no. 29.

13. Yehiel Bassan, *Responsa* (Constantinople, 1737), no. 98.

14. Yehoshua Benveniste, *Shaar Yehoshua* (Husiatyn, 1904), no. 20.

15. Yosef Trani, *Responsa* (Levuv, 1861), H.M., end of no. 99. In describing the community's right to force the rebel to pay, Trani notes:

שיש יכולת ביד טובי העיר להפקיע ממון שלו דחשובין כגדולי הדור שהפקרן הפקר בכל מקום.

16. Ibn Zimra, Vol. 1, no. 30.

17. de Medina, H.M. 154.

18. Ibn Zimra, Vol. 1, no. 928.

19. *Ibid.*, no. 946.

20. Braudel, Vol. 1, pp. 103f.

21. Yomtob Zahalon, *Responsa* (Venice, 1692), no. 184.

22. de Castro, no. 14.

23. Yosef ben Lev, *Responsa*, Vol. 1 (Jerusalem, 1959), no. 65; Karo, no. 77.

24. Ibn Zimra, Vol. 1, no. 279. See also, Vol. 1, nos. 890, 923, 938; Vol. 2, no. 1,257; Eliyahu ben Hayyim, no. 31; de Medina, H.M. 51; Adarby, no. 264.

25. Ibn Zimra, Vol. 1, no. 322.

26. Braudel, Vol. 1, p. 541.

27. Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey* (London, 1961), p. 23; and Braudel, Vol. 1, pp. 36-7.

28. Claude Savary, *Letters on Greece* (London, 1788), pp. 85, 90f., 103.

29. C.S. Sonnini, *Travels in Greece and Turkey*, Vol. 1 (London, 1801), pp. 141f.

30. Ezra Malki, *Ein Mishpat* (Constantinople, 1770), H.M. 10.

31. A. de Lamartine, *Pilgrimage to the Holy Land* (Philadelphia, 1838), p. 76.

32. See their volume, *Correspondence d'Orient* (Paris, 1834), Vol. 4, p. 26.

33. C.T. Newton, *Travels and Discoveries in the Levant* (London, 1865), Vol. 1, pp. 138-9.

34. M.Y. Israel, *Yad Yemin* (Smyrna, 1859), O.H. 2.

35. Kodron, p. 11.

36. This letter was published by Y.M. Toledano, *Oẓar Genazim* (Jerusalem, 1960), p. 151.

37. Ch. Cottu, *"L'Île de Rhodes," Revue des Deux Mondes,* Vol. 5 (1844), 820-1.

38. B. Rottiers, p. 210.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 71.

40. Frankl, p. 83.

41. Newton, p. 208.

42. M.Y. Israel, Y.D. 4; Rahamim Franco, *Shaarei Rahamim* (Jerusalem, 1881) H.M. 20.

43. M.Y. Israel, H.M. 3 and 35.

44. *Ibid.*, H.M. 4, 6, 8, 43, 54, 55.

45. Galante, pp. 60-1

46. This report is found in the Archives of the Alliance Israélite Universelle in Paris, in the files on Rhodes.

47. Letter of Leon Semach dated November 27, 1901, in Alliance archives.

48. Semach's letters, dated September 24, 1902; February 12, 1902.

49. Another of her letters, dated February 11, 1915, is also relevant to this topic.

50. This information is based on interviews with Jews who lived in Rhodes under Italian rule.

51. See S. D. Goitein, "Evidence on the Muslim Poll Tax from non-Muslim Sources," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient,* Vol. 6 (1963), 283.

52. Galante, p. 60.

53. M.Y. Israel, *Yad Yemin,* O.H. 2.

54. Ibn Zimra, Vol. 1, no. 582, lists the names of five *maarikhim.* Simon Markus' article in *Sefunot,* Vol. 1, 282, notes that the usual number of assessors in communities throughout the Ottoman Empire was between five and ten individuals.

55. Galante, p. 20. For an example of the ceremony and oath surrounding the appointment of assessors see Shelomo Hasson, *Beit Shelomo* (Salonika, 1726), no. 9.

56. M.Y. Israel, H.M. 25.

57. *Ibid.*

58. R.H.Y. Israel, *Ben Yamin* (Salonika, 1896), no. 5. See also Frankl, p. 83.

59. M.Y. Israel, O.H. 2.

60. *Ibid.*

61. This has been seen earlier in this chapter.

62. For some responsa dealing with *gabela* in Rhodes, see Malki, H.M. 10; Mordecai Krespin, *Dibrei Mordecai* (Salonika, 1836), no. 12 and p. 66a; Eliyahu Israel, *Kol Eliyahu* (Livorno, 1792), Section 1, p. 94b.

63. Reported by Galante, pp. 22, 45, based on a document available to him.

64. Eliyahu Israel, *Ugat Eliyahu* (Livorno, 1830), no. 23.

65. Yitzhak Hacohen, *Batei Kehuna,* Vol. 2 (Salonika, 1754), no. 17. A second question also involved a tax the Rhodian Jews wished to impose on a certain scholar of the community. Rabbi Hacohen ruled against the community's idea.

66. Malki, H.M. 10. That this deals with Rhodes is evidenced from the fact that essentially the same question appears in Krespin, H.M. 11, where the text specifically mentions Rhodes.

67. Krespin, H.M. 11.

68. Malki, H.M. 10.

CHAPTER FIVE

1. For references to the "sages" and "learned scholars" of Rhodes, see Ibn Zimra, Vol. 1, no. 97; de Medina, H.M. 252. In both of these cases, though, views of the rabbis of Rhodes are rejected.

2. Joseph Karo, *Abkat Rokhel* (Jerusalem, 1960), no. 100.

3. *Ibid.*, nos. 86-89; Ibn Zimra, Vol. 1, nos. 904, 936, 945, 948, 949, 1,016.

4. Yehiel Bassan, *Responsa* (Constantinople, 1737).

5. See Joseph Kovo, *Gibot Olam* (Salonika, 1784), no. 34.

6. Ibn Zimra, Vol. 2, nos. 1,209 and 1,257.

7. Zarco's life and works are considered in the following: Eliakim Carmoly, *Dibrei Hayamim Libnei Yahia* (Frankfurt, 1850), pp. 38-40; Samuel Fuenn, *Keneset Yisrael* (Warsaw, 1886), p. 395; Joseph Patai, *Misefunei Yisrael* Jerusalem, n.d.), pp. 121-123; A.M. Haberman, *Toledot Happiyut Vehashirah* (Ramat Gan, 1970), p. 232; and A.M. Haberman, ed., *Sefer Lehem Yehudah* (Jerusalem, 1970), pp. 1-23. The original edition of *Lehem Yehudah* was published in Constantinople in 1560. Fragments of Zarco's works may be found in the following: Zvi Hirsh Edelman, *Dibrei Heifets* (London, 1853), p. 12; S. de Perugia, ed., *Yefei Nof* (Venice, 1564-76), pp. 2a-b; 3a; 7b-8b. In Israel Davidson's *Thesaurus of Mediaeval Hebrew Poetry* (New York, 1970), Zarco is quoted 76 times in the text. See Vol. 4, pp. 392-393.

8. de Medina, Y.D. 127.

9. Yehoshua Benveniste, *Sha'ar Yehoshua* (Husiatyn, 1904), no. 2, gives the text of the agreement reached by the two congregations. It is important to note that the Sephardic religious head was known as a *marbits torah* or as a *hakham* rather than as a "rabbi". The Sephardim did not accept ordination as being valid outside of the Holy Land and did not give the title "Morenu" to their spiritual heads. See H.Z. Hirschberg, "The Oriental Jewish Communities," in A.J. Arberry, ed., *Religion in the Middle East,* Vol. 1 (Cambridge, 1969), p. 149.

10. Meir Benayahu, *Marbits Torah* (Jerusalem, 1953), pp. 26-27, believes that this contract was for Rabbi Mosheh Amato of Rhodes to whom R. Benveniste addressed his reply. However, following the question, R. Benveniste addressed himself to Amato and his learned son, Yehudah, stating that their letter asks him

להטפל עצמי בענין זה לכבוד החכם השלם נר"ו ולכבודכם.

clearly indicating that the Chief Rabbi in question cannot be Mosheh Amato. Moreover, a careful reading of the text of the question indicates the name of Mosheh Hacohen, whom we know from Yehiel Bassan, no. 75, was rabbi in Rhodes at approximately this time. The following lines of the question refer to Mosheh Hacohen:

הדבר הגדול והקטן יביאון אל **משה** ... והאיש אשר יעשה בזדון לבלתי שמוע אל **הכהן** החכם נר"ו...

11. Bassan, no. 75.

12. David Conforte, *Korei Hadorot* (Lemberg, 1865), p. 117.

13. Benveniste, no. 2.

14. Bassan, no. 75.

15. Conforte, p. 117. Rosanes, Vol. 3, indicates that Hacohen left Rhodes prior to 1615, but Conforte's testimony as well as the discussion in the text refute this opinion.

16. It is not clear how long an interval separated these two Chief Rabbis.

17. See his introduction to *Yismah Mosheh* (Smyrna, 1680).

18. *Ibid.*

19. Gershom Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi* (Princeton, 1973), gives a comprehensive history of the person and movement. See especially chapters 4-6.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 491.

21. De Vushal's testimony is found in A. Friemann, *Inyanei Shabbatai Sevi* (Berlin, 1912), p. 97.

22. Scholem, pp. 176-7, note 189.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 697. This was apparently a common rabbinic attitude.

24. The list of rabbis so memorialized is found in Kodron, p. 31.

25. Hayyim Algazi, *Benei Hayyai* (Constantinople, 1712), pp. 31a-32a.

26. Lahmi is praised in Abraham b. Mordecai Halevi, *Ginat Veradim* (Constantinople, 1716/17), E.H. 3:4.

27. Algazi, p. 32a.

28. Biographical details have been drawn from the following sources: Simon Markus, *Toledot Harabbanim Lemishpahat Israel MeRodos* (Jerusalem, 1935), pp. 8-30; the Israel Family Tree as recorded by R.E. Israel in *Ben Yamin* (Salonika, 1897), p. 5a in the back of the volume; Abraham Yaari, *Sheluhei Erets Israel* (Jerusalem, 1951), pp. 124, 130, 403; also Yaari's article about Mosheh Israel in *Sinai*, Vol. 13, 149-65.

29. Mosheh Israel, *Masat Mosheh*, Vol. 1 (Constantinople, 1734), Y.D. 18, refers to Yitzhaki as his teacher.

30. Hayyim Y.D. Azulai, *Shem Hagedolim* (Warsaw, 1876), Vol. 1, p. 95, notes that Israel discussed things with the greatest rabbis of his generation. Aryeh Leib Frumkin, *Toledot Hakhmei Yerushalayim* (Jerusalem, 1928), p. 160, refers to Mosheh Israel as one of the leading scholars of his generation. Israel is quoted a number of times by Yitzhak Lampronti, *Pahad Yitzhak* (Venice, 1749). Rabbi David Meldola relies on the opinion of Israel in *Dibrei David* (Amsterdam, 1753), no. 3. See also, Hayyim Palachi, *Semihah Lehayyim* (Salonika, 1826), p. 143a; and Aharon Amarillo, *Penei Aharon* (Salonika, 1796), p. 33a. Israel is also quoted in many other works, including those of his sons, son-in-law, and later generations of his family.

31. *Masat Mosheh*, Vol. 3 (Constantinople, 1742), H.M. 6.

32. *Ibid.*, Y.D. no. 4.

33. Vol. 1, E.H. 27.

34. *Ibid.*, Y.D. 8.

35. See Simon Markus, pp. 30f. about the sons and grandsons of Rabbi Mosheh Israel. Among books published by members of the Israel family in

the eighteenth century were: by Hayyim Abraham Israel, the eldest son of Mosheh Israel, *Beit Abraham* (Livorno, 1786), on the Tur and Beit Yosef, H.M.; *Maamar Hamelekh*, printed with *Beit Abraham*, on the principle, "the law of the land is law;" *Amarot Tehorot* (Livorno, 1786), on Tur E.H. He also published Vol. 3 of the responsa of Rabbi Shelomo ben Adreth (Livorno, 1778). His son Mosheh Israel served as rabbi in Alexandria, Egypt. His other son, Raphael Yehudah Israel wrote a volume of musar, *Shebet Musar* (Livorno, 1781).

Eliyahu Israel, another son of Rabbi Mosheh Israel, became a leading rabbi in Alexandria, Egypt. He wrote the following works: *Kol Eliyahu*, 2 Volumes (Livorno, 1792 and 1807), which contain responsa and comments on Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah; Mahaneh Israel* (Livorno, 1807), novellae; *Shinei Eliyahu* (Livorno, 1806), sermons; *Ar'ah de Yisrael* (Livorno, 1806), explanations of various laws; *Kisei Eliyahu* (Salonika, 1811), novellae on *Shulhan Arukh; Aderet Eliyahu* (Livorno, 1828), on laws of Passover, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur and Succoth; *Ugat Eliyahu* (Livorno, 1830), responsa, and other works which were not published. His son Mosheh became Chief Rabbi of Rhodes and authored *Mosheh Yedabber* (Salonika, 1815), responsa; *Shearith Israel* (Salonika, 1815), sermons. Yedidiah Shelomo ben Eliyahu Israel was a rabbi in Alexandria.

Mordecai Krespin, son-in-law of Mosheh Israel, authored *Dibrei Mordecai* (Salonika, 1836), responsa; and *Maamar Mordecai* (Salonika, 1813), novellae on tractate Gittin.

36. A. Yaari, *Sheluhei Erets Israel* (Jerusalem, 1951), pp. 438-40.

37. *Ibid.*; also, M.D. Gaon, *Yehudei Hamizrah Be-erets Israel*, Vol. 2 (Jerusalem, 1938), p. 435.

38. Introduction to *Ein Mishpat* (Constantinople, 1770).

39. He was eulogized by Y.S. Tarica, *Kidesh Yedid* (Salonika, 1804), p. 38a, no. 16. See also Eliyahu Israel's introduction to *Kol Eliyahu* (Livorno, 1792).

40. Eliyahu Israel, Y.D. 1:

נאמן עלי הדיין שהייתי משנה מפני דרכי שלום פן יתרבו מחלוקות בישראל.

41. *Ibid.*, Y.D. 2.

42. *Ibid.*, Y.D. 3. See also, Mosheh Israel II, pp. 36b-37a.

43. Rosanes, Vol. 5, p. 66.

44. (Smyrna, 1827).

45. M. Krespin, H.M. 2.

46. Ezra Malki, E.H. 1.

47. Kodron, p. 31.

48. Markus, p. 58.

49. Kodron, p. 31.

50. (Smyrna, 1860/1). The pamphlet in my possession has no title page and I have been unable to locate another copy.

51. R.Y. Israel, *Beit Hayayin* (Smyrna, 1862); and some writings in *Pithei Teshubah.*

52. Markus, p. 75.

53. R.H.Y. Israel, *Ben Yamin* (Salonika, 1896).

54. (Jerusalem, 1881).

55. Galante, p. 33.

56. Galante, pp. 74-5. Information was given to me by Mr. Semah Franco of New York and Mr. Peter Alhadeff of Los Angeles.

57. Reuben Eliyahu Israel was the community's last Chief Rabbi. Following his death, rabbinic authority was centered in the city's rabbinical court and in the Rabbinical College.

58. The Jewish cemetery in Rhodes contains a section of graves of rabbis. The following individuals, not discussed in the text of this chapter, had apparently served as religious functionaries in Rhodes: Shemuel ben Yaacob Israel (d. 1920); Yedidiah Yosef Israel (d. 1918); Abraham Vital Ibn Stamo (d. 1922); Menahem Mizrahi (d. 1878); Meir Barukh Capelluto (d. 1874); Eliyahu Menashe (d. 1906); Gedaliah Capelluto (d. 1897); Mosheh Kodron (d. 1935); Israel Yaacob Kapuyah (d. 1943).

CHAPTER SIX

1. Victor Guerin, p. 67.

2. Galante, p. 46.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 35.

4. The letter is found in the archives of the Alliance Israêlite Universelle in Paris, in the file on Rhodes.

5. *Ibid.*

6. For background material about Galante, see Abraham Elmaleh, *Haprofessor Abraham Galante* (Jerusalem, 1954), pp. 16-17.

7. Galante, p. 50.

8. This information is drawn from a letter by Leon Semach, dated November 16, 1904, and is found in Semach's file in the archives of the Alliance.

9. *Ibid.*, letter dated May 22, 1902.

10. *Ibid.*

11. Letter of Lucy Ovadia, dated September 13, 1903, in her file in the archives of the Alliance.

12. This report is found in the last portfolio on Rhodes in the archives of the Alliance.

13. In his file in Alliance archives.

14. In 1916, fifteen years after the establishment of the school for boys with 90 students, the combined enrollment of both schools was about 650 students.

15. Letter of Leon Semach, March 25, 1906, in Alliance archives.

16. Galante, p. 15.

17. Letter of Leon Mehrez, January 22, 1915, in Alliance archives.

18. *Ibid.*, letter of November 1, 1916.

19. *Ibid.*, letter of June 15, 1917.

20. *Ibid.*

21. *Ibid.*

22. *Ibid.*

23. The mayor's statement, in French translation, is in the Alliance archives.

24. In the third portfolio on Rhodes in the Alliance archives, there is a letter from Smyrna, February 19, 1924, referring to the internal strife in the Rhodes community. The author believed that the French faction was stronger.

25. Reported in *El Tiempo,* December 9, 1925, pp. 211-12.

26. The letter is in the third portfolio in the Rhodes file in the Alliance archives.

27. Correspondence on this topic is found in the third portfolio on Rhodes in the Alliance archives.

28. *El Tiempo,* December 9, 1925, pp. 211-12.

29. *Ibid.*

30. For information on the Rabbinical College, I am indebted to Dr. Marcus Breger. Information was also provided by Rabbi Michel Albagli. See Galante, pp. 48-9.

31. Graduates of the Rabbinical College of Rhodes held rabbinic or teaching positions in Istanbul, New York, Portland (Oregon), Capetown, Buenos Aires, Elizabethville and others.

32. See Simon Markus, *Toledot Harabbanim* . . . , p. 85. See also my article,

"The Pirkei Abot of Reuben Eliyahu Israel," *Tradition* (Spring, 1971), 92-98.

33. The text of this sermon is in a manuscript volume in the possession of Mr. Morris Israel of Seattle, Washington. *"La decadencia en la cuala si topa hoy nuestra comunidad a todo loke concerna religion, lingua ebrea, istoria judia, es inadmisivle, y nos aze revoltar."*

34. *Ibid.*, 338a, 343a.

35. *Ibid.*, 315a, 316a.

37. This appears in another manuscript volume in the possession of Mr. Morris Israel of Seattle, pp. 417-8.

38. *Ibid.*, pp. 388-9.

39. *Ibid.*, pp. 390-1. *"Nos tomamos di maraviya y dizimos: hazot ha'ir sheyomeru kelilat yofi, esta es la comunidad di rodes ke tenia su ermozura moral y tradicionala?"*

40. *Ibid.*, p. 474, 478, 481.

41. Vitalis Strumza, *Alcuni cenni storici sugli ebrei di Rodi* (Bologna, 1936), p. 20.

CHAPTER SEVEN

1. Lucy Garnett, *The Women of Turkey* (London, 1891), p. 9.

2. Hayyim Algazi, *Benei Hayyai* (Constantinople, 1712), p. 82a. For other cases of early marriages for girls, see Eliyahu Israel *Kol Eliyahu* (Livorno, 1792), E.H. 15; Mosheh Israel, *Mosheh Yedabber* (Salonika, 1827), p. 29b. Galante, p. 65.

3. For example, see Mosheh Israel, *Masat Mosheh*, Vol. 3, E.H. 4, where a two year interval was accepted.

4. Algazi, p. 82a, deals with a situation where
השידוכין לא נעשו בפרסום כנהוג.

5. Mosheh Israel, *Masat Mosheh*, Vol. 1, E.H. 1, seems to be referring to a case in Rhodes.
והמה באו בפני החכם מאריה דאתרא הדין לגמור
השידוכין כמשפט המקום שהשידוכין נעשין בפניו.

6. *Ibid.*, E.H. 37.

7. Yosef Trani, *Responsa* (Levuv, 1861), E.H. 46. The question is resolved similarly by Yomtob Zahalon, *Responsa* (Venice, 1692), no. 42.

8. Mosheh Israel, Vol. 3, E.H. 7.

9. Yehoshua Abraham Yehudah, ed., *Abodat Masa* (Salonika, 1846) p. 32a.

10. The customs of Constantinople and Salonika are discussed by

Mosheh Israel, Vol. 1, E.H. 1. See also, Abraham Freimann, *Sefer Kiddushin Venisuin* (Jerusalem, 1964), pp. 239-44; and 205, 260. The status of *sivlonot* is dependent on local customs. See B.T. *Kiddushin* 50b; *Tur Eben Haezer*, 45.

11. Mosheh Israel, Vol. 1, E.H. 1.

12. Galante, p. 65.

13. *Ibid.*

14. When my father (of Rhodes descent) married my mother (of Turkish descent) in Seattle, Washington in 1937, some of his relatives considered her an *ajena*, foreigner, since she was not of Rhodes origin. By now, however, such distinctions have all but disappeared.

15. Hayyim Shabbethai, *Torat Hayyim* (Salonika, 1713), Vol. 1, no. 98.

16. M.Y. Israel, *Yad Yemin* (Smyrna, 1859), E.H. 16.

17. Abraham de Boton, *Lehem Rab* (Cracow, 1884), no. 191.

18. Luxurious Jewish clothing had incited antipathy towards Jews in various lands and eras. See for example, Abraham Neuman, *Jews in Spain*, Vol. 2 (Philadelphia, 1942), pp. 207, 224.

19. Eliyahu Israel, *Ugat Eliyahu*, no. 26.

20. Reuben Levy, *The Social Structure of Islam* (Cambridge, 1971), p. 114.

21. The Hebrew text of this section of the *ketubbah* was sometimes surrounded by artistic illuminations, some quite elaborate and colorful.

22. Hayyim Tarsa, no. 17.

23. Algazi, p. 101a.

24. Benveniste's responsum appears in Abraham b. Mordecai Halevi, *Ginat Veradim* (Constantinople, 1716/17), E.H. *Kelal* 4, no. 17.

25. Mosheh Israel, Vol. 1, E.H. 30.

26. *Ibid.*, E.H. 27. For a discussion of the *haskamah* of 1722 and its subsequent re-affirmations, see Mosheh b. Eliyahu Israel, *Mosheh Yedabber* (Salonika, 1827), p. 43a., no. 5.

27. A question arose concerning the Hebrew spelling of the word "Rhodes" in Jewish bills of divorce. See Mosheh b. Eliyahu Israel, p. 29a; Eliyahu Israel, *Kol Eliyahu* (Livorno, 1807), E.H. 20.

For some *agunah* problems involving Rhodian Jews, see Mordecai Halevi, *Darkhei Noam* (Venice, 1697/98), E.H. 13; Eliyahu Israel, E.H. 11-12; M.Y. Israel, E.H. 9.

For a case involving *yibbum*, see M.Y. Israel, E.H. 18-20. Ibn Zimra, Vol. 1, no. 309, believed that *yibbum* was to be preferred to *halitsah*. When R.E. Israel was serving as rabbi in Craiova (early 20th century), he wrote a pamphlet in which he assumed that *halitsah* was the only possible alternative, *yibbum* not

being performed.

28. Hayyim Shabbethai, *Torat Hayyim*, Vol. 2 (Salonika, 1715), no. 19. See also R. Levy, p. 97. Mohammed allowed women to inherit, though men generally received twice the portion of women.

29. Ibn Zimra, Vol. 1, nos. 67 and 146.

30. Yehiel Bassan, *Responsa*, no. 38.

31. Ezra Malki, *Ein Mishpat*, E.H. 2.

32. Victor Guerin, pp. 67-68.

33. M.Y. Israel, *Shenoth Yamin*, p. 126b.

34. This observation is based on my study of the documents in the file on Rhodes in the archives of the Alliance Israélite Universelle in Paris.

CHAPTER EIGHT

1. *Selected Poems of Jehudah Halevi* (Philadelphia, 1974), p. 2 (trans. Nina Salomon).

2. See Abraham Yaari, ed., *Masot Erets Israel* (Tel-Aviv, 1945/6), p. 274.

3. Rodosto is also called Tekirdag.

4. These individuals were discussed in Chapter Five.

5. Rahamim Israel, *Ben Yamin*, p. 167a.

6. The text of the song, *"Ir me quero madre a Yerushalayim,"* is found in Galante, p. 140.

7. Joseph Karo, *Abkat Rokhel*, no. 99.

8. Mosheh Galante, *Responsa* (Jerusalem, 1960), no. 44.

9. *Ibid.*, no. 115. For other cases of Rhodes Jews who settled in the Holy Land, see M.Y. Israel, *Yad Yemin*, H.M. 26, 49.

10. Eliyahu Israel, *Ugat Eliyahu*, no. 23.

11. *Ibid.*, no. 39.

12. R. Franco's letter, dated 15 Heshvan, 5664, was addressed to the Rishon Lezion, Y.S. Elyachar. It is found in the archives of the Sephardic Community of Jerusalem, in the file on Rhodes.

13. *Ibid.*

14. *Ibid.*

15. *Ibid.*

16. *Ibid.*, letter dated October 24, 1939, concerning the family of Reuben

Leon; letter dated 5 Tebet 5699 from Mosheh Vital to M.D. Gaon.

17. *Ibid.*

18. These sermons are contained in a small manuscript volume in the possession of Mr. Morris Israel of Seattle, Washington.

19. Galante, p. 42. Founded by Bohor Israel, the society no longer existed as a formal organization by 1937.

20. Behar's words appear in a pamphlet, *Conference des Juifs Sepharadim des Pays Balkaniques* (Belgrade, 1932), p. 9.

21. A. Yaari, *Sheluhei Erets Israel* (Jerusalem, 1951), p. 20.

22. M.Y. Israel, O.H. 2.

23. Archives of the Sephardic Community of Jerusalem.

CHAPTER NINE

1. Hayyim Algazi, *Benei Hayyai* (Constantinople, 1712), p. 16a. See also L. Frankl, *Yerushalaymah* (Vienna, 1859), p. 83.

2. Galante, p. 17.

3. Algazi, 16a.

4. Quoted by Braudel, Vol. 2, p. 817.

5. *Voiage de Levant* (Paris, 1645), p. 356.

6. Cited by R. Matton, *Rhodes* (Athens, 1949), p. 55.

7. The account is found in Jonas Gurland, ed., *Ginzei Israel Besaint Petersberg* (Lyck, 1865), p. 3.

8. B. Randolph, *The Present State of the Islands* . . . (Oxford, 1687), pp. 26-7.

9. Claude Savary, *Letters on Greece* (London, 1788), p. 92.

10. Ezra Malki, *Ein Mishpat*, H.M. 10.

11. M.Y. Israel, *Yad Yemin*, H.M. 25.

12. Frankl, p. 83.

13. Victor Guerin, p. 63.

14. Elkan Adler, *Jews in Many Lands* (Philadelphia, 1905), p. 156.

15. Report in the archives of the Alliance Israêlite Universelle in Paris, in file on Rhodes.

16. Galante, p. 82.

17. Report in the Alliance archives.

18. de Medina, Y.D. 127.

19. I saw the inscription myself. The commonly repeated notion that K.K. Shalom dates from 1593 is clearly incorrect. It originated in Frankl, p. 82.

20. Galante, p. 27. For more about Count Camondo, See H.Z. Hirschberg, "The Oriental Jewish Communities," in A.J. Arberry, ed., *Religion in the Middle East*, Vol. 1 (Cambridge, 1969), pp. 199-200.

CHAPTER TEN

1. Lionel Trilling, "Manners, Morals and the Novel," *The Liberal Imagination* (New York, 1953), p. 200.
This section merely attempts to catch a glimpse of the people's soul. It does not claim to be absolutely comprehensive, nor does it offer a thorough comparative study of the customs of Rhodes Jews and those of other places. A full study—which deserves a volume in itself—remains to be done.

2. The *tikkun* is contained in the volume *Berith Yitzhak*, ed. Yitzhak bar Mosheh Lopes Pereira (Amsterdam, 1729). Shemtob Gaguine, *Keter Shem Tob*, Vol. 1-2 (London, 1934), pp. 577-578, describes this custom, and relates it to the female demon, Lilith. Gaguine asserts that the origin of the custom derives from the *Zohar*, p. 93. The custom was described to me by Rev. David J. Behar of Seattle and Mr. Semah Franco of New York.

3. The poem appears in a small pamphlet entitled *Shirah Hadashah*, pp. 8a-b. The pamphlet, made available to me through the courtesy of Rev. David J. Behar of Seattle, does not have a title page.

4. C.T. Newton, *Travels and Discoveries in the Levant* (London, 1865), p. 211. Galante, p. 116, notes that the *pidyon haben* in Rhodes was celebrated on the fortieth day of a first-born male's life, rather than the thirtieth day as prescribed by Jewish tradition. Possibly this practice stemmed from the general Rhodian custom of warding off the *anerades* for forty days. See also, Raphaela Lewis, *Everyday Life in the Ottoman Empire* (London and New York, 1971), p. 94, for a discussion of the ceremony of the "forty".

5. Galante, p. 64. This description was given to me by Mr. Sammy Tarica of the Congo. My mother, who had served as a godmother for one of her nephews in Seattle, remembers well that she carried the baby to the synagogue—a walk of nearly twenty blocks.

6. *Shirah Hadashah*, pp. 8b-9a. The following is the Judeo-Spanish text:
אגה לה מצוה קון אליגריאה. נו סי דיזי וידוי אין איסטה דיאה. סי אליגרה טוד׳ה לה ג׳ודיריאה. קון אליהו הנביא. יום טוב סי ייאמה אין איסטי דיאה. איל סנדק איל אבי הבן סי ביסטיריאן. אי מלאכה נו סי אריאה. קון אליהו הנביא. קאנטין פזמונים קון אליגריאה. אין לה סעודה די איסטי דיאה...

7. Hayyim Tarsa, no. 11.

8. Bernard Rottiers, pp. 347-348.

9. Rev. David J. Behar of Seattle described this ceremony to me in detail. Professor M.J. Benardete told me that the term *fadas* derives from the Spanish *hadas*, meaning "fairies". It was a custom among non-Jewish Spaniards to have a child blessed by various good fairies. Sephardim apparently adopted the Spanish custom, giving it a Jewish, religious symbolism.

10. I learned this in an interview with Mr. Semah Franco of New York City.

11. Galante, p. 116. Cf. Raphaela Lewis, pp. 95-6.

12. R. Lewis, pp. 101-2, describes similar customs among non-Jews of the Ottoman Empire.

13. R.H.Y. Israel, *Ben Yamin*, p. 144b.

14. This ceremony was described to me by Rev. David J. Behar of Seattle and Mr. Sami Notrica of New York. I have dim memories of having witnessed an *Avraham Siv* in our synagogue in Seattle as a young boy. The groom would bring his Torah scroll to the reader's desk following the reading of the haftarah. He would recite the normal blessings before and after the Torah reading.

15. See R. Lewis, p. 91, where she notes that the head of the Turkish household had absolute authority over those in his domain.

16. Ibid., p. 95. See also, Galante, p. 69. Information on this topic was also drawn from an interview with Mr. Semah Franco of New York.

17. From interviews with Mr. Semah Franco and Mr. Hillel Franco of New York. Among the Turks, also, only men followed the procession to the grave. See R. Lewis, p. 105. E. Artom and H. Cassuto, eds., *Sefer Takanoth Candia* (Jerusalem, 1943), p. 150, list an ordinance in Candia (16th Century) which forbade women from going to the cemetery during funerals. The reason for this was that Jews—while on their way to the cemetery—would be mocked, insulted and even stoned by roudy non-Jews. Thus, to spare the women this terrible experience, the rabbis of the city ruled that they could only go as far as their own houses and no further.

18. This custom is reflected in Hayyim Algazi, p. 41b. Though it is not clear if this case refers specifically to Rhodes, this was the custom in Rhodes in any event.

19. Hayyim Tarsa, no. 10.

20. From an interview with Rev. David J. Behar of Seattle.

21. *Masat Mosheh*, Vol. 3, Y.D. 11.

22. Victor Guerin, pp. 69-70.

23. I vividly remember the *meldados* which were held at our home during my youth. See M.J. Benardete, *Hispanic Culture and Character of the Sephardic Jews* (New York, 1952), pp. 117-118.

24. From an interview with Mrs. Esther Shear of New York.

25. From an interview with Dr. Maurice Amateau of New York.

26. I have been unable to find a satisfactory reason for these customs.

27. M.Y. Israel, *Yad Yemin*, O.H. 2.

28. M.Y. Israel, *Shenoth Yamin*, Vol. 2 (Smyrna, 1866), p. 4b. Israel criticized those who made donation pledges and never redeemed them, and those who bought *mitzvoth* and never paid for them.

29. I myself witnessed this situation many times during my youth in Congregation Ezra Bessaroth in Seattle.

30. Hayyim Tarsa, no. 10.

31. Eliyahu Israel, *Kol Eliyahu* (Livorno, 1792), no. 5. See Shemtob Gaguine, p. 315, for a discussion of the customs of standing or remaining seated during the reading of the decalogue. Maimonides ruled that it is proper to remain seated. See his *Responsa* (New York, 1947), no. 47. (Found in Vol. 1 of his *Mishneh Torah* in this edition.)

32. This blessing is found in most Sephardic prayer books. The blessing over the wine is preceded by the following Biblical verses: Exodus 16:25, 29-30; and the last part of Exodus 20:11.

33. A good Sephardic cookbook is *The Sephardic Cooks*, published by the Sisterhood of Congregation Or VeShalom of Atlanta, Georgia, 1971.

34. This travel account is found in J.D. Eisenstein, *Ozar Hamasaot* (Tel-Aviv, 1969), p. 241.

35. Vitalis Strumza, *Alcuni Cenni Storici sugli Ebrei di Rodi* (Bologna, 1936), p. 21.

36. See the New Year Prayer Book of the Sephardim, ed. and trans., David de Sola Pool (New York, 1960), pp. 91-93. See also, Shelomo Ganzfried, *Kitsur Shulhan Arukh* (New York, 1927), no. 129:9, where similar customs among Ashkenazim are described.

37. R.E. Israel, *Traduccion Libri* (Smyrna, 1910). This pamphlet went into several printings in Rashi script as well as Latin script.

38. This ceremony was described to me by Mr. Samy Tarica of the Congo.

39. H.S. Kodron, *Pithei Teshubah* (Vienna, 1888).

40. Eliyahu Israel, no. 39.

41. From an interview with Rev. David J. Behar of Seattle.

42. *Ibid.*

43. Galante, pp. 16-17.

44. From interview with Rev. Behar.

45. Raphael Yitzhak Israel, *Beit Hayyayin* (Smyrna, 1862), p. 2a.

46. R.H.Y. Israel, no. 1, in section of responsa.

47. Galante, p. 116.

48. From interview with Mrs. Esther Shear of New York City.

49. B. Rottiers, p. 347.

50. From interview with Mr. Victor Capelluto of New York City.

51. Galante, p. 115. The differences in custom stem from different interpretations of the Babylonian Talmud, Pesahim 40a-b. For a discussion of various opinions on this topic, see Ovadia Yosef, *Hazon Ovadiah* (Jerusalem, 1967), pp. 102-3.

52. Jacob Surmani, ed., *Shir Hashirim* (Rhodes, 1930). Rev. David J. Behar of Seattle informed me that the translation was sung according to Judeo-Spanish pronunciation rather than to the Spanish pronunciation as indicated in the text of the translation.

53. R.E. Israel, *Pirkei Abot* (Smyrna, 1924). See also, my article, "The *Pirkei Abot* of Reuben Eliyahu Israel," *Tradition*, (Spring, 1971), 92-98.

54. From an interview with Rev. David J. Behar of Seattle.

55. Galante, pp. 115-116.

56. See *Mahzor leShalosh Regalim* (Vienna, 1914), pp. 192-196, for the *ketubbah* of *Shavuoth*. See *Ibid.* pp. 199-225 for the *Azharoth* and Ruth.

57. From an interview with Rev. David J. Behar of Seattle.

58. Galante, p. 73.

59. R. Lewis, pp. 52f, 93.

60. C.T. Newton, p. 212.

61. From an interview with Dr. Maurice Amateau of New York. See also, Riccardo Pacifici, *"Notizie sulla vita degli Ebrei a Rodi," La Rassegna Mensile de Israel*, Vol 8 (1933), 76.

62. Galante, pp. 120-21.

63. Eliyahu Israel, *Mahaneh Israel* (Livorno, 1807), no. 1. See also, Pacifici, p. 75.

64. Pacifici, p. 75.

65. From an interview with Mr. Acher Touriel of New York.

66. The manuscript is owned by Mr. Morris Israel of Seattle. For other customs and beliefs of Rhodes Jews, see Abraham Galante, *"Minhagot shel Yehudei Rodos," Reshumot*, Vol. 2 (1947), 97-100.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

1. Benardete, p. 63.

2. For a discussion of various pronunciations, see Max Luria, *A Study of the Monastir Dialect of Judeo-Spanish* (New York, 1931); and his article in J. Fitzgerald and P. Taylor, eds., *Todd Memorial Volumes*, Vol. 2 (New York, 1930).

3. Alberto Hemsi, *"Cancionero Sefardi," Sefarad*, Vol. 19 (1959), 379.

4. *Shirah Hadashah.* I am grateful to Rev. David J. Behar of Seattle for making this pamphlet available to me.

5. (Vienna, 1888), pp. 33-7, 57, 58.

6. *Traduccion Libri* (Smyrna, 1910); Surmani's edition: (Livorno, 1931).

7. Congregation Ezra Bessaroth, for example, sings several of these songs on the High Holy Days. Located in Seattle, that is the congregation in which I was raised.

8. The volume was printed in Smyrna. See my "Pirkei Abot of Reuben Eliyahu Israel," 92-8.

9. *El Tiempo*, June 15, 1926, pp. 727-8; Galante, p. 50.

10. Angel Pulido, *Españoles Sin Patria* (Madrid, 1905).

11. For research in this area, see Galante, p. 136f, as well as Galante's *Appendice*, p. 17f; S. Armistead and J. Silverman, *Diez romances hispanicos en un manuscrito sefardi de la Isla de Rodas* (Pisa, 1962); Alberto Hemsi, *Coplas sefardies* (Alexandria, 1932-7); G. Diaz-Plaja, *"Aportacion al cancionero judeo-español del Mediterraneo Oriental," Boletin de la Biblioteca de Menendez Pelayo*, XVI (1934), pp. 44-61.

12. Hemsi, Op. 7, in the *Nota del Autor.*

13. Armistead and Silverman, pp. 14-15.

14. See Ramon Menendez Pidal's prologue to *ibid*, pp. 6-7. For other works dealing with the *romance* tradition among Rhodes Jews, see R. MacCurdy and D. Stanley, "Judaeo-Spanish Ballads from Atlanta, Georgia," *Southern Folklore Quarterly*, Vol. 15 (1951), pp. 221-238; Alberto Hemsi, *"Curiosités Folkloriques," Le Judaisme Sephardi* (July, 1965), pp. 1307-1309; S.G. Morley, "A New Jewish-Spanish Romancero," *Romance Philology*, Vol. 1, (1947-8), pp. 1-9.

15. Hemsi, Op. 8, no. 8.

16. *Ibid;* no. 9.

17. Armistead and Silverman, p. 50.

18. Hemsi, Op. 7, no. 2.

19. R.E. Israel, *Pirkei Abot*, p. 95.

20. Hemsi, Op. 7, no. 4.

21. The following sayings have been culled from the collections of Isaac Jack Levy, *Refranero Sefardi* (New York, 1969); and Abraham Galante, in *Revue Hispanique* (1902), 440-454. I have used the spelling as recorded by these authors. In the case of Levy's transcriptions, the pronunciation in most instances is that of the Jews of Rhodes. I have heard a number of these sayings as I grew up among Seattle's Sephardim.

CHAPTER TWELVE

1. For a fuller discussion of the migration process, see my article, "The Sephardim of the United States: An Exploratory Study," *American Jewish Yearbook* (New York and Philadelphia, 1973), pp. 84f.

2. Information about early migration from Rhodes was derived primarily from interviews with numerous Jews of Rhodes origin.

3. For example, in the newspaper of the Sephardim of Seattle, *Progress* (October, 1934), Jacob Almeleh calls for a communal organization based on that in Rhodes.

4. Even second and third generation descendants of these migrants feel a special kinship, and many visit Rhodes with feelings bordering on "nostalgia".

5. Information drawn from interviews with Mr. Semah Franco of New York and Mr. and Mrs. Sammy Tarica of the Congo.

6. Solomon Gaon, "The Rhodesian Tour," *Le Judaisme Sephardi*, no. 18 (April, 1959), 784-7.

7. Albert Franco, *History of the Rhodes League of Brothers* (New York, 1954). This is a pamphlet.

8. Rubin Hanan, *History of the Etz Ahayem Congregation* (Montgomery, 1962). This is a pamphlet.

9. A brief history of the Atlanta congregation was written by Rabbi Joseph Cohen, dated February 28, 1954, and is found in the American Jewish Archives of Cincinnati.

10. Rabbi William Greenberg outlines the history of the congregation in its Dedication Program (1970), pp. 19-26.

11. This information was provided by Rabbi Michel Albagli.

12. See the Dedication Book of the Sephardic Hebrew Center of Los Angeles, 1967. Mrs. Regina Schwartz sent me taped interviews of Rhodeslies living in Los Angeles. Dr. Irving Benveniste and Mr. Peter Alhadeff also provided information, as did Mr. Albert Benoun.

13. Leon Mehrez, letter dated January 22, 1915, found in his file in the Alliance archives.

14. S. Graziani, letter dated February 11, 1915, in Alliance archives.

15. *Ibid.*, letter dated January 20, 1918.

16. *Ibid.*, letter dated January 25, 1917.

17. Galante, *Appendice*, p. 32. Hizkiah Franco, *Les Martyrs Juifs de Rhodes et de Cos* (Elizabethville, 1952), p. 63, numbered 850 such Jews.

18. Franco, pp. 17-18.

19. *Ibid.*, pp. 19-21; 79.

20. *Ibid.*, pp. 30-4.

21. From interview with Mrs. Esther Shear of New York.

22. Franco, p. 57; Galante, *Appendice*, pp. 29-31.

23. Franco, pp. 60-63.

24. *Ibid.*, pp. 63-65.

25. *Ibid.*, pp. 66-67.

26. *Ibid.*, pp. 70-72. Information was also drawn from an interview with Mr. Sami Notrica of New York who was an official of the community at that period.

27. Franco, p. 74; Galante, *Appendice*, p. 33.

28. Franco, pp. 87-89.

29. *Ibid.*, pp. 90-91.

30. *Ibid.*, pp. 100-109; Galante, *Appendice*, pp. 38-40; Raul Hilberg, *Destruction of European Jews* (Chicago, 1961), pp. 452-3; Joseph Nehama, *In Memoriam: Hommage aux Victimes Juives des Nazis en Grèce*, Vol. 2 (Salonika, 1949), pp. 74-6.

31. Franco, pp. 108-9. Information was also drawn from an interview with Mr. and Mrs. Daniel Turiel and their son Bernard of New York City who lived in Rhodes during the war. Mrs. Turiel was of Turkish nationality.

32. Galante, *Appendice,* pp. 44-5.

33. Franco, p. 111.

34. *Ibid.*

35. Leaders of the New York organization included Mr. Acher Touriel, Mr. Victor Tarry, Mr. Hillel Franco, Mr. Marco Shemariah, Mr. Victor Capelluto and others.

36. Galante, *Appendice,* p. 71.

37. *Ibid.*, pp. 74, 85-7.

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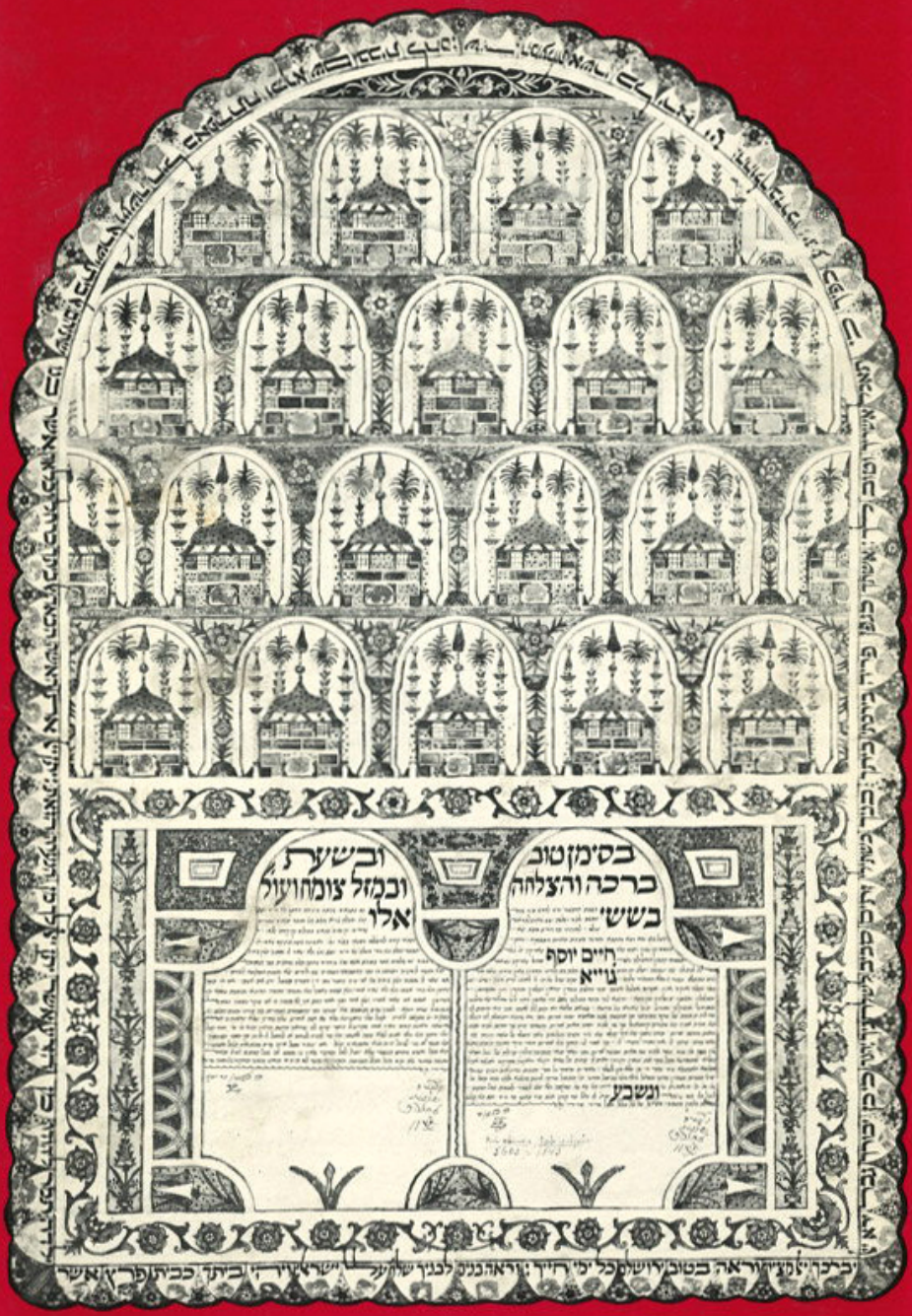


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