

חברה שלום והולכי קדימה



מוסיידאד פאס אי פרונריסו

# The Rhodes Jewish Historical Foundation

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## “KE HABER ?”

**Newsletter for the Year 2005 Describing “What Is New” Regarding Rhodes Jewish History**  
**By Aron Hasson**

Welcome to the fourth publication of the “Ke Haber?” newsletter by *The Rhodes Jewish Historical Foundation*. The *Foundation* has continued its goal of preserving the unique cultural background of the Jews from this Island in the Aegean Sea and has served as a link between the Jewish community of Rhodes and everyone who is interested around the world.

### **The Destroyed “Kehilah Grande” Synagogue in Rhodes is Newly Excavated**

In 2004, the Greek Archaeological Department has completed its task of clearing away the 4 feet of rubble which had accumulated and buried the *Kehilah Grande* over the past decades.

During World War II the synagogue was accidentally damaged by Allied bombings targeting German ships docked at the nearby port. The full name of the synagogue was the *Kahal Kadosh Gadol* (the Holy Great Congregation) and was also called *Kehilah Grande* in Judeo-Spanish (“Ladino”). Additional photos and background information is presented on the following page of this Newsletter.



This photo was taken in September 2004. It shows the floor and the south wall (with arches) of the *Kehilah Grande*. On the floor in the center right is the rectangular foundation of where the “teva” (reading table) was located. The “teva” is facing an eastern direction toward the four steps along the wall where the Ark of the Torah existed.



## Perimeter, Floor and Other Features of the Destroyed “*Kehilah Grande*” Synagogue is Newly Viewable After Being Buried for Decades

The “*Kehilah Grande*” was the largest synagogue in “La Juderia” (the Jewish Quarter of Rhodes). The full name of the synagogue was *Kahal Kadosh Gadol* (The Holy Great Congregation) and was called the *Kehilah Grande* in Judeo-Spanish (“Ladino”).

Although heavily damaged in 1944 during World War II bombings, the structural walls of the *Kehilah Grande* synagogue remained standing for several more years. During the next thirty years, the walls collapsed and the area filled with rubble. Prior to the 2004 Olympic Games, the Greek government cleared away the 4 feet of rubble which had accumulated and buried the *Kehilah Grande* over the past decades.

The synagogue is believed to have been built in the late 1400’s after the Turkish siege of 1480. It actually replaced an existing Jewish synagogue that was built hundreds of years earlier but destroyed by cannon balls during the conflict of 1480.

The size of the sanctuary floor is about 54 x 46 feet (16 x 14 meters). The floor tiles were made in Bari, Italy. In 1912 Italy conquered the Island of Rhodes from Turkey which leads us to believe the floor tiles were laid during the Italian occupation.

It is not yet known what will be done for the future preservation of this special Jewish landmark.



September 2004: View from the northeast corner. View of the two arches of the south wall which has two doorway entries to the women’s prayer room. At the left side of the picture (along the eastern walkway) are two seating areas.



Interior view of the newly vacant women’s prayer room.



Photo of the tile flooring. (For this photo, water was poured over the dirty tiles in order to reveal the actual colors.)



1957 photo taken by Art Benveniste of the northern wall and entry of the *Kehilah Grande* showing the damage from World War II bombings.



## Expert Analysis Confirms “800 Year-Old” Torah From Rhodes Has Sephardic Origins

An investigative study conducted under the aegis of *The Rhodes Jewish Historical Foundation* has concluded that the renowned “800 year-old Sefer Torah” from the Island of Rhodes was originally from and used by the Sephardic Jews of the Iberian Peninsula.

In 2003, *The Rhodes Jewish Historical Foundation* acquired a short-term permission from the *Chalom Temple* in Buenos Aires to exhibit and analyze the ancient Torah in the United States in order to promote the education and preservation of the Jewish history of Rhodes.

Prior to its arrival in Los Angeles, this ancient Sefer Torah was scientifically measured by the University of Buenos Aires using the Carbon-14 dating analysis and was found to be approximately 800 years-old.

### Distinct Examples of the Religious Writing Style of the “800 Year-Old” Torah

We have learned that there are many different indications which give clues as to a Sefer Torah’s age and Sephardic origin. The following are some of the simpler to understand examples without getting too technical:

- \* All modern Torahs have 42 lines per column, while the 800 year-old Torah has 45 lines per column.
- \* The letter “lamed” is now written with a “cap” at the top, while the 800 year-old Torah has no “cap” on top.
- \* The letter “yud” in the 800 year-old Torah is written with an extra point or protrusion downward from the left center of the letter.

It was speculated that its geographic origin was from Spain from before the Spanish Inquisition. Therefore, during 2003 and 2004, a study was conducted by *The Rhodes Jewish Historical Foundation* focusing on the peculiarities of its ancient Judaic religious writing styles.

This incredible Torah was viewed and analyzed by several rabbis and sofrers (scribes of religious writings). Based upon several factors, it was concluded that this Torah was from the Sephardic Jews at the time of Maimonides.

Therefore, we can imagine that this Torah was likely brought from the Iberian Peninsula to the Island of Rhodes by the Sephardic Jewish refugees when they fled Spain and Portugal.

\* When the letters “nun” and “yud” are next to each other they are separate letters in new Torahs, while the 800 year-old Torah has the “nun” extend below the “yud”.

\* In order to justify the margins in modern Torahs only certain letters are elongated. In the 800 year-old Torah most letters are elongated.

\* The “open” spacing between the words in the 800 year-old Torah show that it follows the Sephardic style of the Rambam called “petuhot”. For the last 400 years all Torahs have been written with the “closed” style (called “stumot”).

### Examples of Differences Between the Ancient and Modern Judaic Religious Writing Characteristics:



### Expert Analysis of the Ancient Torah:

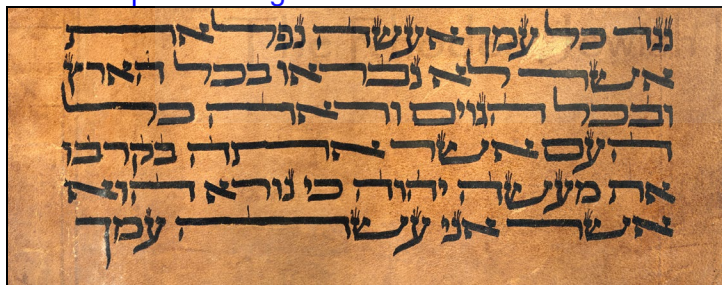


August 2003 in the library of the *Sephardic Temple Tifereth Israel* in Los Angeles, of Rabbi David Rue analyzing the Hebrew characters and spacing of the Sefer Torah with Aron Hasson observing.

Rabbi Rue is a “sofer” (scribe) with over twenty years of experience in Israel analyzing the age and origins of ancient Torahs in the museums of Jerusalem and Tel Aviv.

It was recognized that this ancient Torah did not utilize a strict alignment (justified text of the columns), instead it follows a style that has not been used for over 600 years.

### An Example of Elongated Letters in the Ancient Torah:



Script from the Exodus portion of the 800 year-old Torah. The words were elongated in order to show even margins.



## Grand Opening Exhibit of the 800 Year-Old Sephardic Torah From Spain and Rhodes

September 2003: *Sephardic Temple Tifereth Israel* in Los Angeles:

### Ancient Torah of Rhodes Exhibit Excites Memories, Much Nostalgia – By Jack Israel

The Torah scroll, encased in a clear plastic shield and displayed in front of the altar at Sephardic Temple Tifereth Israel was like any other, only much, much older and browned with age. A hush fell over the crowd as Stella Levi and Aron Hasson lifted the cover and for the first time ever, an American audience was able to view the Sefer Torah that had served the Jews of Spain and Rhodes for centuries. The 800 year-old Sefer Torah was the centerpiece of a world-class exhibit depicting “Jewish Life in Rhodes” before the Holocaust brought a tragic end to the revered community. The event was sponsored jointly by the Rhodes Jewish Historical Foundation and the Levy Family Exhibition Center.

More than 300 Rhodeslis filled the halls of the Exhibition Center on Sunday, September 21, 2003 and nostalgia glowed on the faces of every one of them. As Master of Ceremonies, Neil Sheff himself with only one-quarter claim to roots in Rhodes, pronounced with his opening welcome “today, all of us are Rhodeslis.”

It was a day for memories for many in the audience, remembering the stories of life on the island told vividly and with love by their parents and grandparents. And along with the old Torah scroll, a magnificent display of photos depicting life in Rhodes and a collection of heirlooms brought from the Old Country, it was a treasured journey into the past. A standing ovation greeted Aron Hasson, Founder of The Rhodes Jewish Historical Foundation, and the man behind the exhibit and program of the day. A third generation American and practicing immigration attorney in Los Angeles, he has established the Jewish Museum of Rhodes located in the Kahal Shalom Synagogue.

Aron's interest in his ancestral homeland began as a youngster listening to the stories told by his grandfather, Joseph Behor Hasson, and blossomed when he was a university student. But he explained that it came into full bloom when he traveled to Rhodes in 1995 with his family. There, while visiting the Synagogue, he overheard tourists asking questions

about the Jewish community that was no longer on the Island and for which there was no answers. He then sought the establishment of a pictorial museum that now proudly occupies the old prayer rooms once set aside for the women.

His interest has never waned and when he learned that a Torah scroll had been salvaged from the evil destruction of the Nazis and had found a new home in the Sephardic community of Argentina, he knew he had to bring it to the United States. And, so, after great expense and negotiations with the community in Buenos Aires, Aron has succeeded in bringing the Torah to Los Angeles on loan for a limited time. A tour of the other Sephardic communities in the United States with the ancient Torah is on the agenda for the Foundation and its founder.

The history of Rhodes, the jewel in the Dodecanese Island-chain in the Aegean Sea southwest of Turkey, was reviewed by Educator, Scholar and Historian, Art Benveniste. It was a descriptive story dating from before the time of a Jewish presence there, to the settlement of Jews from Greece and, later, the influx of the Sephardim after their expulsion from Spain. In time, the Jews from Spain assumed a dominating position and all of the Island's Jews adopted Ladino as their primary language.

A special guest speaker, Holocaust survivor Stella Levi, fascinated the crowd with tales of her personal experiences of life in the Rhodes Juderia. “I think of my childhood in Rhodes with smiles of happiness and tears of sadness. It was a peaceful and beautiful life especially in the years of Italian rule and made particularly more rewarding with the liberation of Jewish women in society and our freedom in the workplace. And then came the Germans,” she concluded as her voice trailed off.

Chairs for the event were Sandy Candiotty and Rae Haky who appeared at the podium together, expressing their thanks to Aron and the many members of their committee.



The unveiling of the Torah by Aron Hasson and Stella Levi (the event's special guest speaker). Stella holds a handmade quilt from Rhodes, made in the 1920's by Flora Codron Benatar.



Hundreds of people lined up to respectively view one of the oldest Sefer Torahs in the world. Almost all of the audience was of Sephardic origin and most of them were descendants from the Greek Island of Rhodes, who migrated to Los Angeles during the first half of the twentieth century.



## The Ancient Scroll Was Accompanied by the Unique Photo and Artifact Exhibit called "Jewish Life in Rhodes"



The viewers enjoying the exhibits. There were 20 photo display panels and 30 original Jewish artifacts from the Island of Rhodes in Greece. The exhibit was called "Jewish Life in Rhodes".



Ted and Pearle Hasson posing in front of one of the photo panels.

## Original Items From the Jewish Families of Rhodes on Display:



Clothing, embroidered materials as well as a trousseau chest ("baul").



A "megillah" used in Rhodes during Purim.



A "cucharera", hanukia, talet bag, belt buckle and mikva sandals.

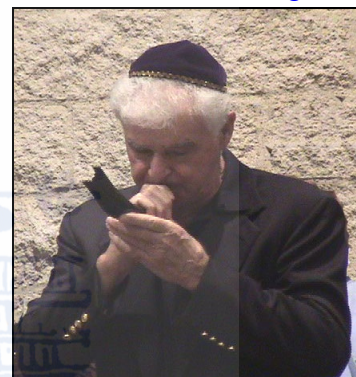
## March 2004: Encore Exhibit and Performances at *Sephardic Temple Tifereth Israel* in Los Angeles:



Special guest, Liliana Benveniste beautifully singing Ladino "romanzas".



Edward Mizrahi describing how his father, Morris, brought his shofar from Rhodes to the United States in 1919 (Neil Sheff and Aron Hasson listen in the background). Edward (right) blowing the shofar for the audience in the distinctive Rhodesli style.



## "Bendichos Manos" (of blessed hands) Preparing Sephardic Foods for the March 2004 Event:





## The Ancient Torah From Spain and Rhodes on Exhibit Around the United States

January 2004: *Congregation Ahavath Achim* in Portland:



Audience at the Rhodes Photo and Torah Exhibit sponsored by Congregation Ahavath Achim and Cedar Sinai Park.



President Richard Matza, Rabbi Shlomo Truzman, Aron Hasson with the "800 year-old" Torah.



Students from local Jewish schools listening to the lectures and viewing the ancient Torah up close.

February 2004: *Temple Israel* in Long Beach



This event was arranged by Jack and Binnie Berro. Jack was born in Los Angeles and his parents, Sam Berro and Matilda Levy were born on the Island of Rhodes.

February 2004: the Talmud Torah Classes of *Sephardic Temple Tifereth Israel* in Los Angeles:



This event was arranged by the Talmud Torah principal, Yossi Malka and Rabbi Daniel Bouskila.



### April 2004: Congregation Ezra Bessaroth in Seattle:



Hazan Isaac Azose photographing ancient Torah.



Audience in the sanctuary of the event, spearheaded by President Joe Agoado.

### March 2004: Congregation Anshe Israel in Tucson, Ariz.:



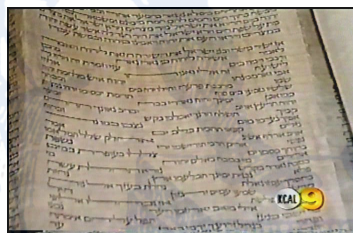
This was arranged by Liba and Seymour Feuerstein. Liba was born in Rhodes, and her father, Marcus Breger, Professor of the Talmud, served in the Rabbinical College of Rhodes.

### April 2004: "Out To Lunch Bunch" in Los Angeles:



This was arranged by Victor Levy. Victor was born in Los Angeles, and his parents, Jacob Levy and Hermiana Miriam Hasson, were born in Rhodes. This men's group was also previously led by Al Collins (Cohen) and Sam (Feets) Israel.

### September 2003 on Los Angeles Television



Ray Mallel, President of *Temple Tifereth Israel* and Aron Hasson on KCAL 9 television showing the Torah display and story.

### September 2004: On Atlanta Television



30 minute interview by Jan Epstein of Aron Hasson on the "Tikun Olam" Jewish television program featuring the Sefer Torah.

### Special Thanks

*The Rhodes Jewish Historical Foundation* would like to thank all of those families who have shared their photos and personal treasures with us for our archives, displays and exhibits.

The *Foundation* continues to be interested in acquiring additional photos, documents, clothing and various artifacts from Rhodes for its archives, traveling exhibits and future display in *The Jewish Museum of Rhodes*. Please contact us if you would like to share your personal treasures with future generations.



## August 2004: Congregation Or VeShalom in Atlanta



Audience in the south side of the sanctuary for the "800 year-old" Torah from Spain and Rhodes.



Professor Isaac Jack Lévy, born in Rhodes, delivering a lecture.

### Remarks at the Occasion of the Visit of the Ancient Sephardic Torah -- By Isaac Jack Lévy

Like so many of us who have come here from other places, my birth place is my birth right. I was only a child, 11 years old, when in September of 1939, 64 years ago, I along with my mother, grandmother, my relatives, and neighbors were forced to leave our native island of Rhodes to find refuge in North Africa, in Tangiers, Morocco. I have carried the memories of these early years in Rhodes within me as the core of who I am.

Please allow me to cast back a bit to that time in Rhodes, a time that some of you will recall, either from your own experience, or from the stories of your parents and grandparents.

I remember how wonderful it was to explore as a child the maze of narrow and winding streets of the old Medieval town: courtyards gave way to houses brimming with life, time-worn steps and alley ways, history, everywhere history, written by chroniclers and sung by poets, forever it seemed, a cradle, safe and secure within the massive *kale* (the massive walls).

All along our daily paths, whether going to school, to work, to the synagogue, or visiting a friend or relative, we walked among familiar and smiling faces. We passed through courtyards and in front of whitewashed houses covered with morning glories and bougainvilleas, with oleander bushes and potted plants in colorful bloom. What pleasure I had in holding my mother's or grandmother's hand and walking through the streets: the Kay Ancha, the Kay di la Buzana, or the Kay di la Punta dil Charshi, and hearing people call to one another from the doors of their homes, greeting each other as they passed on the streets: "Komo esta Mana Rahel?" (How are you Mrs. Rachel?) "In vida de padre i madre" ("May he/she grow with father and mother living"), "Primero il Dio bien" ("Thank God, fine").

Save on Jewish holydays, the business section, only a few steps away from the residential quarter, was always bustling with activities of the merchants and shoppers, greeting one another in Judeo-Spanish, Turkish, Greek, Italian, and at times, in French. I remember hearing the hammering of the carpenters, cobblers and tinsmiths. And I remember smelling the aroma of the spices – spilling over as they were from

the large burlap sacks – huge wheels of cheeses, or those immersed in brine; the olives in open tins, the salted fish in wooden barrels, and the freshly baked bread and pita piled high on tables. Vendors crisscrossed the streets hawking their wares – cool drinks, rich pastries and roasted chestnuts. Young Turkish men, dressed in their *shalvar* (baggy pants), delivered coffee on shiny copper trays. And stronger odors emerged from the taverns, where large barrels, resting on their sides, tempted Jews and Greeks with imported and domestic wines, as well as the Turkish liqueur, *raki*. Since the Turks were forbidden by their religion to drink, most taverns were located in the Jewish Section. The fondness for raki was such that it gave rise to the popular song, "La vida do por el raki" (My Life I Give For Raki).

I still recall the exuberance in the streets when everyone would join in the happiness of families on their way to the *banyo de novia* (bridal bath) in preparation for the wedding day. What a sight it was to see the bride's trousseau, draped over the arms of relatives and carried on copper trays, or piled on horse-drawn carriages, paraded from her father's house to that of her fiancé. In another ceremony, everyone shared in the happiness of seeing *la kitada* (the godmother) carry on a pillow the eight-day old male child on his way to the *brit milah* to be welcomed into the house of Israel. The oriental music of the musicians, the songs of the people, the laughter, the tossing out of Turkish and Greek candy, the carriages decorated with colorful ribbons and flowers, transformed the *judería* in the Old City into a festival. The celebration ended in the home, in the synagogue, or, if the family was wealthy, in a large ballroom.

Indeed, the work of the women was never-ending. For every occasion, but especially for visits, religious holy days, and weddings, women prepared the finest traditional pastries, cakes and sweet trays in joyous atmosphere, with songs and laughter. It would be an impossible task to list all the exquisite Sephardic recipes and to describe the mastery with which they were prepared. Several cook books have been written not only to preserve the rich culinary heritage of the Sephardim, but also for the benefit of their descendants. Rabbi Robert Ichay in the Foreword to



*The Sephardic Cooks* explains that "Cooking is an art and a tradition with the Spanish Jews. Whenever these delicacies were prepared, care, love and pride were always part of the basic ingredients". Indeed, Rabbi Ichay is correct in pointing out that throughout their journey through faraway lands, and while totally immersed in their present cultures, the Sephardim still remained faithful to centuries of culture, heritage, and way of life.

Men also had their roles to play. They were taught to be responsible for the welfare and maintenance of the family, to be devout Jews and to attend the daily services. They did the shopping, especially on Fridays, when they went to the new market in the *Mandraki*, where they filled the *sestas* (baskets) for the Sabbath meals. Men took pride in ensuring that the children received the necessary religious and secular education, and that the elderly were given proper care.

There were many happy moments in the life of the community – the birth of a child, the *b'rit*, the *fadas* (naming of a baby girl), the *bar mitzva*, the engagement and wedding celebrations. Every day seemed to be a feast, but the Sabbath and festivals were especially happy occasions for rich and poor.

My first return to Rhodes in the summer of 1968 was not a joyful one. The streets were in ruin, my home destroyed, and the new inhabitants, strangers. I yearned for the warm faces of my people. I walked the narrow alleyways in search of one friendly soul. I went to the *Mandraki*, and especially to the three windmills looking for the small Turkish café where I had spent many a Saturday afternoon with my grandfather,

Isaac, watching the men play cards while they sipped Turkish coffee. I looked for the house of my birth. Wherever I went, I did not find my past. I could only find peace during my visit to the grave of my father, Jacques; and even then, his burial place was not in the original sacred ground, but a new cemetery, for even in death, our loved ones were not allowed to rest from the Fascist rule. My six subsequent trips were pilgrimages to the city that was no longer there.

At the conclusion of World War II, only a few Rhodian survivors returned to the island hoping to find in their old surroundings the security, warmth and richness of their past life. Unfortunately, they, too, sought in vain for familiar faces; the memories became a constant reminder of tragedy. To such an end has come *La Chika Yerushalayim* (The Little Jerusalem), a flourishing Sephardic community whose glorious past was a shining star among the Jewish centers of the Orient.

In 2002, I attended the reunion of Rhodeslis in Rhodes, organized by my friend and colleague, Aron Hasson, and witnessed a retelling of the beautiful memories of Rhodes by those who had been deported from its shores to the death camps, and from those who more fortunately found refuge in other places. Today, I so much appreciate the tireless and unselfish work of Aron, who has brought the old Rhodes to life in photographs, in story, and in the most sacred Torah, which blesses us with its presence. To me, this Torah represents the whole history of my people from the Jewish Golden Age in Spain, a period of glory and high intellectual achievement, to Rhodes, the cradle of my traditions.



Jack Arogeti, Aron Hasson, Yocheved Koplowitz and Rabbi Hayyim Kassorla.



Albert Israel, Corrine Rousso, Aron Hasson, Sarina Rousso, Morris Rousso and Aaron Altmann. In front is Dr. Jack Rousso.



Dr. Morris Soriano, Guy Harari and others viewing the photo exhibit.



Or VeShalom viewers of the exhibit, looking for photos of families.



Emily Amato posing next to a 1917 family photo from Rhodes.



At Atlanta's *Jewish Tower* with Dora Galante, Marie Amato Lereah, Violette Amato Levy and Aron Hasson.



## Turkish Aid for the Jewish Community of Rhodes During World War II

Included here are two examples of the special assistance provided by the Turkish authorities in Rhodes to the Jewish community during World War II.

### Secretly Safeguarding the Sefer Torahs in the Turkish Mosque

Sefer Torahs contain the Five Books of Moses (the Old Testament), and is the holiest object of the Jewish religion. The Jewish community of Rhodes had maintained several Sefer Torahs in their synagogues.

In September 1943 the German military commanders took control of Rhodes. Due to British aerial bombings during the first few months of 1944, thirty-four Jews were accidentally killed and significant areas of the Jewish quarter were destroyed. Recognizing an escalation of insecurity from the German control and the bombings, the Jewish community leaders decided to hide their Sefer Torahs.

Included among these Torahs was the "800 year-old Torah", one of the oldest in the world, which has recently toured the United States by *The Rhodes Jewish Historical Foundation*.

In secret, the Torahs were given to the Turkish religious leader, the Grand Mufti of Rhodes, Seyh Suleyman Kaslioglu, for safekeeping. The Grand Mufti hid the Torahs in the *Morad Reis* mosque, in the pulpit. The mosque is located in the New City of Rhodes a safe distance away from the bombings which were causing damage in the Jewish Quarter of the Old City.

Sadly, in July 1944, the Jews of Rhodes were deported to Auschwitz where most of them were murdered. Of the 1,676 Jews who were deported, 151 survived. After the War, the Torahs were returned to the few people of the Jewish community that survived.

Several years later in 1971, the Grand Mufti confided to a long time Jewish friend, Clement Galante in a reunion: "One of the greatest moments of my life was when I was able to embrace the Torah, and carry it and put it in the pulpit of the mosque--because we knew that no German would ever think that the Torahs were preserved in the pulpit of the mosque."

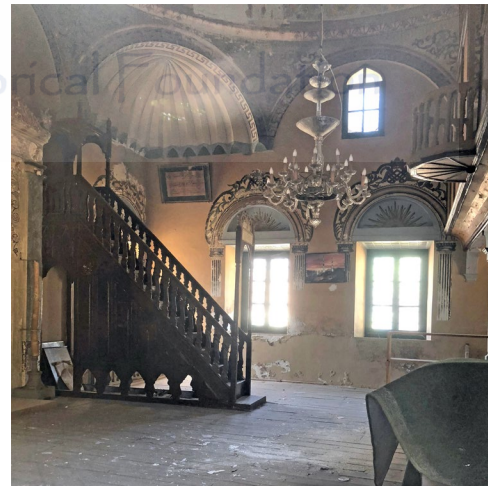
In June 2004, I interviewed Muradie, the daughter of the Grand Mufti. I expressed how the Jewish community has appreciated her father's efforts to save these treasures. She acknowledged the recognition and then stated: "I have Jewish blood." Not quite sure what she was trying to explain, I asked through the Turkish translator, what she meant by that. She replied: "My grandfather was Jewish, on my mother's side." Therefore, it meant that the Grand Mufti's father-in-law was Jewish and adds a familial justification of entrusting him with the Sefer Torahs.

After learning that surprising information of the Grand Mufti's family background I decided to return to the Turkish mosque to try to obtain additional information. There, I interviewed the 80 year old caretaker of the mosque who explained that the Grand Mufti frequently had meetings with the Grand Rabbi of Rhodes as well as the other leaders of the Jewish community.

This story provides us with a unique example of the close relationship which existed between the Jewish and Turkish communities.



The Grand Mufti of Rhodes,  
Seyh Suleyman Kaslioglu.



The "Morad Reis" mosque, located in the  
New City of Rhodes, where the Torahs were hidden.



## Saving Jewish Lives From Auschwitz and the Holocaust

This story is about 42 Jews who were originally detained, but released prior to their deportation due to the courageous acts of the Turkish Consulate General of Rhodes, Selahattin Ulkumen. He has been honored by several organizations, including the B'nai B'rith, the Anti Defamation League as well as by Yad Vashem in Jerusalem which awarded him the "Righteous Among the Nations" in 1990 with a tree planting ceremony.

On July 18, 1944, the Germans began ordering all of the Jews of Rhodes to appear with their identity cards and work permits at the Air Force Command Center in the new section of the city. On July 20th, the Consul General in Rhodes for Turkey, Selahattin Ulkumen went to the office of the German Commanders demanding the release of the Jews of Turkish nationality that were being detained. He cited various treaties and neutrality agreements between Turkey and Germany, and reluctantly the Germans released the 42 Jews.

All of the other Jews were detained for one more day until they were crowded onto three small freight ships and deported to Auschwitz. Of the 1,676 Jews deported, they were all murdered except for 151 who survived.

As written by Hizkia Franco in his book, *The Jewish Martyrs of Rhodes and Cos*, "Selahattin, the Consul General of Turkey, intervened to protect his nationals. He managed to obtain their release, along with the families, even in the case of marriages of women of Turkish origin to Jews of the Dodecanese".



The courageous Turkish Consul General of Rhodes who saved 42 Jews during World War II, the Honorable Selahattin Ulkumen.

One of the Jews of Turkish nationality, Maurice Soriano, said in an interview several years later, "I owe my life to this Turkish Consul who showed enormous strength to save his citizens' lives."

Although the 42 Jews of Turkish nationality were not deported, they were still threatened and were required to appear at 8 a.m. daily at the German Command Center. The Daniel Touriel family, who moved to the United States after the War, described the following: "Every morning, at 8 a.m. we had to be present for a roll-call at the Gestapo. Sometimes, without any given reason we were detained for 1 to 2 hours. Those hours were nightmares for us. Besides being in fear of being sent to a concentration camp, we were terrified of losing our lives under the continuous bombings of the Island since we were refused to be in bomb-shelters."

In a later newspaper interview, Selahattin Ulkumen stated: "All I did was carry out my duty as a human being".

German List of 42 Turkish Citizens of Rhodes:

fortl. Nr.	NAME	VORNAME	MAEDCHENNNAME
1	SURMANI	Rachele	Alhadeff
2	SADI	Ester	Surmani
3	SADI	Avner	
4	BERRI	Estrea	Bergaz
5	ALHADEFF	Sarah	Berro
6	ALHADEFF	Giuseppe	
7	TARICA	Giamile	Misrachi-Oezbil
8	TARICA	Vittorio	
9	MAIO	Giacobbe	
10	MAIO	Maria	Tarica
11	GALIMIDI	Abramo	
12	GALIMIDI	Lea	Franco
13	GALIMIDI	Sultana	
14	MENASCE	Bension	
15	MENASCE	Cathrine	Soriano
16	AMATO	Alberto	
17	AMATO	Renate	Cori
18	AMATO	Lina	
19	AMATO	Rachele	Soriano
20	TURIEL	Daniele	
21	TURIEL	Mathilde	Mazaldov-Nahom
22	TURIEL	Boaz	
23	TURIEL	Eliakin	
24	SORIANO	Maurizio	
25	SORIANO	Vittoria	Soriano
26	SORIANO	Elio	
27	SORIANO	Rita	
28	AMATO	Elisa	Barbaimo
29	AMATO	Isaaco	
30	AMATO	Maurice	
31	AMATO	Lea	
32	AMATO	Luna	
33	TARICA	Lina	Ferrera
34	TARICA	Sami	
35	SORIANO	Elia	
36	SORIANO	Rosa	Levi
37	CALVO	David	
38	CALVO	Luna	Coen
39	CALVO	Mazalto	
40	ALHADEFF	Batami	Caisermann
41	ALHADEFF	Giacomo	
42	ALHADEFF	Andree Is	

List of the Jews of Turkish Nationality saved by the Consul General, Selahattin Ulkumen. This list is the actual Gestapo document used for the daily roll-call of those Jews.



## Original Jewish Documents from Rhodes

My primary source of materials for creating *The Jewish Museum of Rhodes* was the collecting of photographs depicting Jewish life in Rhodes before the Holocaust. It has since expanded into several additional aspects of historical interest ranging from embroideries to books to video interviews.

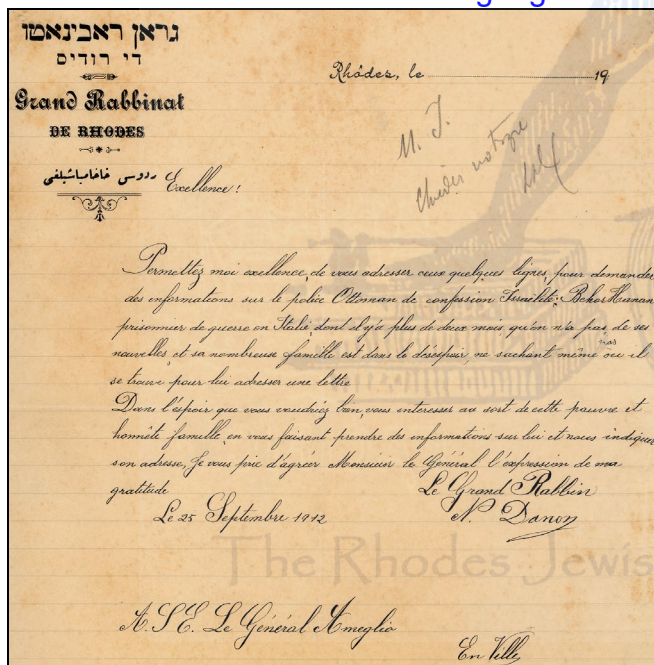
These two pages illustrate a sample of unique documents and letters dated from the 1890's through the 1940's that have been acquired. These documents in various languages help illustrate why the Jews of Rhodes were multilingual.

### 1893 Promissory Note in the Greek Language



This was payable in Rhodes to David Menashe (father of Bension Menashe). It was issued in Izmir and last paid in Alexandria.

### 1912 War Letter From the Grand Rabbi of Rhodes in the French Language



Written to the General in charge of the Island after the Italians conquered it from Turkey. The Grand Rabbi, Nissim Danon, is trying to obtain information on the status of Behor Hanan, who served in the Turkish Army and was taken prisoner.

### 1929 Letter From the President of the Jewish Community of Rhodes in the Italian Language



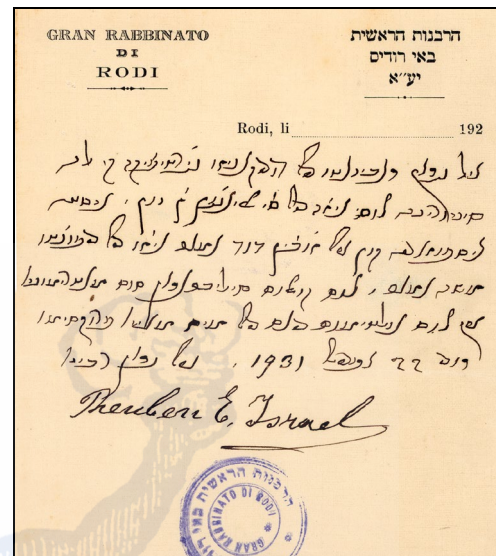
Letter from Hezкия Franco, President of the Jewish Community of Rhodes asking permission to set up a display in front of the Jewish Community and also to work on an interior wood screen.



## Documents From Rhodes Written in "Solitreo", the Ancient Ladino Handwriting



This receipt was signed by the treasurer, Behor D. Almelah, of the "Kupat Ozer Dalim" beneficial organization. It was given to Behor Mussafir, for his donation of 5 Francs issued at the "Midrash Camondo" in Rhodes on 24 Av 5679 (August 1919).



This document announces "that the Miss Lucia Benun of Elia, engaged the young David Dervisci, son of the deceased Moise and will celebrate their wedding towards the end of May. Dated in Rhodes, April 22, 1931. The Grand Rabbi, Reuben E. Israel"

## 1920's Letter From the Grand Rabbi of Rhodes Written in the Turkish Language

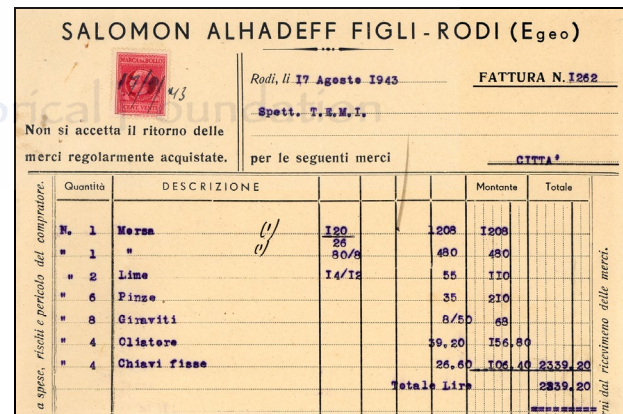


Letter relating to the relationship with the Turkish community.

## Business Documents



1941 rent receipt verifying payment to Isaac Benveniste.



1943 invoice of office supplies from the Alhadeff business.



## The Kahal Shalom Synagogue Restoration Completed

In 2004 the Greek Archaeological Department completed its two year restoration of the *Kahal Shalom* synagogue in Rhodes which included structural and architectural enhancements. Since the synagogue is several hundred years old, the first step involved the physical analysis of the integrity of the building itself and its foundation.

At the same time, meticulous analysis was focused on the religious historical remains of the main

sanctuary. One of the most intriguing aspects of the synagogue is the number of religious paintings on the walls. Most synagogues have few if any paintings, while the *Kahal Shalom* has several. Therefore, careful aesthetical repairs and repainting were undertaken as well.

The balcony's structural support was enhanced as well as the reinforcement of the outside stairs leading to the women's balcony.



Paintings at the top of the columns have been stripped away revealing older paintings underneath. The left side shows the newer painting, while the right side reveals an older decoration.



The structural support for the balcony of the sanctuary was enhanced. The walls, ceilings and wood trimmings were repainted.



May 2004 Bar Mitzvah service of Rowley Amato in the newly restored *Kahal Shalom* synagogue. Family and guests came from far away cities to attend the celebration.

## Restoration to Begin of the Roof and Rooms Above the Museum

In 2004 the restoration of the sanctuary of the *Kahal Shalom* synagogue has been completed. Therefore, it now has allowed the *Jewish Community of Rhodes* to focus its attention to the restoration of the other parts of the adjacent synagogue property, including *The Jewish Museum of Rhodes*.

In particular, the Museum had annual water leakage which limited the improvement of the Museum itself. Therefore, the work has begun to completely restore the roof with a water-proof asphalt coating.

In assessing the roof repair it was realized that there are five heavily damaged rooms above the museum area that have been unused. These five rooms were heavily damaged by the World War II bombings in 1944. The roofs caved in leaving only walls standing. A family used to live in these rooms which are owned by the *Jewish Community of Rhodes*.

There is much work ahead for the *Jewish Community of Rhodes* to restore these rooms for future uses.



Climbing a ladder to reach the roof and rooms above *The Jewish Museum of Rhodes*. Entry to the museum is the doorway on the right.



Standing in one of the five rooms above the museum and the women's prayer rooms. The roof collapsed from World War II bombings in 1944, although the walls are still standing.



## Four Rooms Adjacent to the *Kahal Shalom* Newly Available for Restoration

The Jewish Community of Rhodes plans to restore the six rooms adjacent to the synagogue, formerly used as the women's prayer rooms ("la azara").

Two of the rooms were utilized in 1997 to house *The Jewish Museum of Rhodes*. There are four additional rooms of various sizes which have recently been cleared out and are now available for restoration. This offers the potential expansion of the Museum and/or the possible creation of an office and library.

Until recently, one of the four rooms was not available for restoration. Thanks to years of efforts by

the Administration of the Jewish Community of Rhodes, the newly reacquired room is now vacant and ready for restoration.

A special discovery of one of the four rooms has been what appears to be an ancient "mikva". A "mikva" is where the ritual bath of purity would be taken. The small room was filled with debris until the past year when it was among the rooms recently being cleared out for restoration. The bath has three steps leading into it for immersion.

The below photos were taken in September 2004.



The newly reacquired room, now vacant (23' x 11').



This large room (21' x 14') has two doorways leading directly to the sanctuary as well as the Museum.



The small room containing the "mikva" (11' x 10').



The smallest room (14' x 5').

## Cemetery Restoration

Bella Restis, the President of the *Jewish Community of Rhodes*, has admirably continued the restoration of the Jewish Cemetery. Her outstanding accomplishments have helped make the Jewish cemetery of Rhodes one of the best preserved in all of Europe.

The past two years has seen a dramatic improvement of the cemetery building, perimeter, landscaping, monuments and restoration of the tombs of the Rabbis. Plans are currently underway to set up an exhibit of the oldest tombstones inside the cemetery building (see photo at the bottom right of this page).



Restored entrance and side structures for cemetery buildings.



Restored area for tombs of the Rabbis.



Aron Hasson, Bella Restis and Carmen Cohen viewing repair work of the cemetery building.



View of the interior rooms of the newly restored cemetery building.



September 2004: Aron and Sam Modiano with a sample historical panel describing the ancient tombstones from the 1500's planned for exhibit.



## Jewish Wedding Celebration in Rhodes

From the *Erensia Sefardi* issue of Summer 2003: Our good friend and collaborator, Rachel Amado Bortnick, has recently returned from the Eastern Mediterranean, where she witnessed a Jewish wedding on the island of Rhodes. Here is her report:

"The marriage of Nathalie Rica Jonas and Aaron Dessner on July 6, 2003, in Rhodes could have been just another Jewish wedding on this "Island of Roses", in this town once known as "Little Jerusalem". But this was a special event, for it took place fifty-nine years after the deportation to the death camps of the town's Jewish community, and at least just as many years since a similar event at this synagogue called *Kahal Shalom*.

The bride and groom, their parents and guests traveled long distances for the occasion. The young couple lives in New York. Guests arrived from Israel, South Africa, France, Belgium, Italy, Norway, Costa Rica, Athens, and many cities in the United States.

The scene was reminiscent of pre-War Rhodes wedding photographs. The crowd of family and guests gathered in front of the synagogue after the wedding ceremony and, with the beautiful bride and elegant groom in front, walked down the narrow pebble paved streets, past the Square of the Jewish Martyrs (of the Holocaust), which used to be "La Kaye Ancha", the Wide Street in Ladino, within the old Juderia, the Jewish quarter.

People in the streets stopped and applauded, others looked on from balconies and doorways, probably much as they used to years ago, until we reached the building with a large garden terrace on the top floor, where the wedding

dinner and celebration took place, a restaurant converted from a house that had belonged to a Turkish Pasha.

Today, only 30 Jews live in Rhodes, most having come here from the cities of Volos and Athens on the Greek mainland. Only one of the Rhodesli (Rhodes native) survivors returned to live here (Lucia Sulam, who sits daily at the synagogue entrance).

Yet, Rhodeslis the world over and their descendants continue to have a special pride in their origins and a strong attachment to this city and its Jewish history. That is why Nathalie and Aaron and their families decided to hold the wedding here. Nathalie's grandparents, the late Fortunee and Abner Soriano, were born in Rhodes and immigrated to the Belgian Congo before the war, but the family members who remained in Rhodes were murdered in Auschwitz. Nathalie and Aaron's wedding and the special service on the preceding Sabbath honored their memory and that of grandparents and other family members now deceased.

On Friday before the wedding, Holocaust survivor and Rhodes-native Stella Levi, now of New York, conducted a tour through the Juderia, pointing out the old Jewish schools and houses, recalling who lived where, and describing the way of life that went on these streets before the War.

For everyone involved and everyone present, the Jonas-Dessner wedding in Rhodes was a beautiful, unforgettable, emotional event, giving honor to the past, celebrating the future, and symbolizing the undying spirit of Judaism."



The wedding couple, Nathalie Rica Jonas and Aaron Dessner, under the "hoopa" at the Kahal Shalom synagogue.



The wedding procession making its way through the streets of "La Juderia".