

# In Search of Turkey's Jews

TEXT

AYŞE GÜRSAN-SALZMANN

PHOTOGRAPHY

LAURENCE SALZMANN

with  
**DVD**  
VIDEO



In 1984, Laurence Salzmann, an American photographer, and his wife, Ayşe Gürsan-Salzmann, a Turkish-born anthropologist, were invited by the Beth Hatefutsoth Museum of Tel Aviv to do a photo-documentation of Jewish monuments throughout Turkey.

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These were monuments of a people who were welcomed by Sultan Beyazit II to the lands of the Ottoman Empire, now the Republic of Turkey, following the Jewish expulsion from Spain in 1492.

But monuments could tell only a partial story, so the Salzmanns expanded their project to include a photographic portrait of the Jews of Turkey, and a film that explored in detail the ways in which the Jews had become a favored ethnic group among a predominantly Muslim population. The film, entitled *Turkey's Sephardim: 500 Years*, tells the story of Turkey's Sephardic Jews in the mid-1980s.

This book brings in full circle the work begun by the Salzmanns twenty-five ago, and offers stories and reminiscences from a past, not likely to be encountered again!

AYŞE GÜRSAN-SALZMANN  
LAURENCE SALZMANN

TRAVELS IN SEARCH OF TURKEY'S JEWS

LIBRA



# TRAVELS IN SEARCH OF TURKEY'S JEWS

Text: AYŞE GÜRSAN-SALZMANN

Photography: LAURENCE SALZMANN

BULGARIA

GREECE

THRACE

TROAD

MARMARA

Gelibolu

Çanakkale

Bandırma

Bursa

Kütahya

İzmit

İstanbul

Silivri

Çorlu

Tekirdağ

Edirne

Kırklareli

Lüleburgaz

İzmir

BLACK SEA

Sinop

Çorum

Ankara

Tokat

Aşkale

CENTRAL ANATOLIA

MEDITERRANEAN

AEGEAN

RHODES

CYPRUS

LEBANON

GEORGIA

ARMENIA

IRAN

IRAQ

EASTERN ANATOLIA

SOUTHEASTERN ANATOLIA

Diyarbakır

Mardin

Cizre

Nusaybin

Urfa

Gaziantep

Kilis

Haran

Adana

İskenderun

Antakya

SYRIA

Most of Turkey's Jews live in İstanbul or İzmir.  
Smaller communities exist in Adana, Ankara,  
Antakya, Çanakkale, Edirne, Gelibolu, Kırklareli, and  
Mersin. Towns where we looked for evidence of a  
Jewish past or present are indicated on the map.

# In Search of Turkey's Jews

*Capturing images to reveal a way of life,*

*searching to create and recreate the Past,*

*reading the Community in the traces of their monuments  
and in the memories of people who knew them,*

*and, in so doing, to predict the Future in the images of the Present.*

TEXT

AYŞE GÜRSAN-SALZMANN

PHOTOGRAPHY

LAURENCE SALZMANN





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We are thankful to many people who helped us to realize the Turkish Jewish Project over the years. With the publication of *In Search of Turkey's Jews*, we hope to put to rest a project that began in the summer of 1984.

The larger project includes a film, a traveling exhibit entitled *Anyos Munchos i Buenos*, and a book of the same title. They could not have been completed without the generosity of the many people and foundations that supported the work from its inception. The project was initiated at the request of Shaiker Weinberg of Beth Hatefutsoth Museum, Tel Aviv, in conjunction with a group of leaders of the Jewish Community of Turkey, led by Mr. Jak Kamhi. To them and especially the people who shared with us the stories that are recorded in this book we extend our appreciation.

We would like to thank Rifat Bali whose encouragement led to the publication of the book.

Ayşe Gürsan-Salzmann and Laurence Salzmann  
Istanbul, August, 2010

**T**his travel book is a personal narrative of our discoveries of Jewish existence in the small towns of Turkey between 1984 and 1989. As the seed of a larger joint project in which Salzmann's photographs and my ethnographic details were blended to document Jewish life in Turkey, this is a personal account drawn from my note-books, written as we traveled.

The idea of developing my notes into a book with photographs arose after we had finished producing a book and a one-hour documentary film about the Turkish Jewish community, *Anyos Munchos i Buenos* (1992). Both illuminate aspects of the Sephardic culture within the larger Turkish society. This book, however, also fills a gap: it documents life within the rural Jewish communities that have mostly disappeared and about which little was known. Communities that were still extant consisted of a few families on the verge of immigrating to larger cities where their children would have better educational opportunities. We therefore invested our efforts into reconstructing patterns of life from meagre physical remains and interviews with remaining Jews and their Muslim neighbors.

Of the nearly 22,000 estimated Jews living in Turkey then, almost 19,000 lived in İstanbul, 2,000 in İzmir, and the remainder in small towns. The Jews of İstanbul have not been included in this book as they are the primary focus of *Anyos Munchos i Buenos* (Good Years and Many More).

Now, a few words about how this project was

initiated. It began with an invitation to Laurence, in 1984, from the Chief Rabbi's Office of İstanbul to come to Turkey and to carry out a documentation project on Jewish monuments throughout the country. The invitation had been encouraged by the Beth Hatefutsoth Museum of Tel Aviv, which was interested in creating a photographic record of what remained of Jewish monuments in Turkey, to enhance the Museum's already existing photo archive of Jewish monuments worldwide.

What started out as a two-month project developed into a five-year study to include a film, an in-depth photographic documentation, and an ethnographic portrait of the community. How this came about is a story in itself. "Patience" became our watchword; we waited endlessly for research permits and the necessary signatures needed to carry out the work, not to mention the permission required to make the film which took a year to obtain.

In addition to the initial support provided by Turkey's Jewish community, additional funds had to be raised in Europe and the U.S. on a continuing basis, which also proved to be very time-consuming.

Soon after our arrival in İstanbul in July 1984, we visited Turkey's Chief Rabbi David Asseo. As the official representative of the Community his blessings were sought to carry out the project.

Our first meeting was with Giacomo Saban, an historian, and photographer İzzet Keribar. Then, after waiting a period of time for permits to materialize,

we set off on our first series of trips to visit small towns in Thrace where Jews were still living or had lived. We began our journey at the end of August 1984.

In the course of our travels, we visited 32 towns and cities in four geographical regions (see maps). Occasionally between 1984 and 1989 we returned to the same places to collect more data or to verify facts and to renew our acquaintance with people we had met earlier.

Laurence captured the physical remains in correct form and context with his camera, and in so doing, he became conscious of their aesthetic dimension. I was concerned with community life and how it had been when people lived in these towns. In essence, we set out to recreate the past, to breathe life into the people and their monuments.

The Jewish existence in Turkey dates back to biblical times; it represents nearly 2,500 years of continued existence there. However, for the most part, the communities we visited traced their origins to the Spanish Jews who, in the late 15th century, were expelled from Spain and Portugal and were welcomed to lands that were then under Ottoman-Turkish rule. During the reign of Sultan Bayezid II, the Jews were, in fact, encouraged to settle in Turkey, as the new Imperial policy was to populate the lands that had just been conquered.

Among the different ethnic groups of varied religions within the domains of the Ottoman Empire, the Jews occupied a special position. Why? The reasons echo in

the words of the noted Judeo-Islamic scholar Bernard Lewis: they were complementary to the Turks and not in competition with them.

At the turn of the century close to 100,000 Jews were living on the lands of the Ottoman Empire. This number included the cities of Saloniki and the island of Rhodes, where Jewish communities were destroyed by the Nazi atrocities during World War II. It is very important to point out that Turkey's adherence to a strong neutral position vis-à-vis Germany during World War II saved the Turkish Jews from sharing the fate of European Jewry. (Fortunately, the Turkish government enforced political neutrality, which saved the country from another disaster after the ravages of World War I and the Turkish War of Independence).

We traveled from the northwest to the southeastern regions, covering a distance of nearly 3,000 km. The scarcity of Jews in small towns was notable. What had happened to these communities? Dr. Yasef Bayar, a Jewish physician in Edirne, explained that the combination of wars, riots, and revolutions had all led to periods of instability in the past 80 years, and that Jews had already begun to move away from Thrace at the beginning of the 20th century (the wars to which he was referring were the Balkan Wars, World War I, and later the Turkish War of Independence). Some moved to bigger cities in western Turkey, to İstanbul and İzmir, while others immigrated to the U.S. and Cuba to join relatives. In 1948, yet more Jews began to leave, and this time for Israel. Another contributing factor to the general unrest and instability was a special tax

called Varlık Vergisi (asset tax), which in 1942 was unfairly levied against Turkey's minorities. Jews and other minorities were thus further motivated to leave. Nevertheless, there are several incidents that point to the Turkish government providing a safe haven for European Jews who were escaping through Turkey en route to Palestine. There was, however, one sad event: in February 1942 a damaged Romanian registered boat named *Struma*, bound for Palestine with Jewish Romanian refugees on board, was towed out into the Black Sea by Turkish authorities. Within hours after being set adrift the boat was sunk by a Soviet submarine. All but one of its 768 passengers drowned.

Generally, when we drove into a town, we stopped near the center, preferably where the main coffeehouse was located. Then, in the course of having a cup of tea, we asked the older men if they knew where the Jewish Quarter had been. If there was still a Jewish community in that town, we would be directed to their business addresses. In instances where a living community no longer existed, the elderly Turkish men (65 to 80 years of age) would relate their remembrances of the Jewish people, down to the smallest detail. The towns of Silivri and Bandırma are such cases in point. In fact, in the latter town, we were taken to the home of a 90-year-old, blind Turkish-Romanian farmer who had worked for a Jewish farming family at the turn of the century. (The farm was one of many agricultural centers created for Jews living in Middle Eastern countries by the French industrialist Baron Maurice de Hirsch.)

In small towns we received much cooperation from the Jewish residents themselves. Without their willingness and enthusiasm to give information and to allow us to observe them during their interactions, we would not have been able to accomplish our goal. Usually, Laurence would wait until he sensed that people were comfortable enough to be photographed, and I would take mental notes of our conversations rather than conspicuously writing them down. Thus, the flow was not interrupted. Our languages of communication were in Spanish and Turkish. I, a native speaker of Turkish, conducted the interviews in Turkish. Laurence, who is fluent in Spanish, had no difficulty understanding the medieval Spanish known as Judaeo-Spanish (Ladino), which is spoken by most Turkish Jews over 50 years of age. However, among the Jews of Antakya and İskenderun in southeastern Turkey, Arabic was commonly used in public as the language of commerce.

It seemed that the small-town Turkish Jews were more integrated into Turkish culture than those who lived in cities like İstanbul and İzmir. However, they still identified themselves as Jews. Since the formation of the state of Israel, they felt proud to be part of that nation; many had family connections in Israel. (Dr. Bayar of Edirne mentioned that the Turks were more respectful of the Jews since the founding of the State of Israel).

As we traveled through the countryside, we came upon many traces of monuments, from distant and recent past, from various cultures and civilizations. For example, a partially standing 12th-century deserted

caravanserai was found superimposed upon a Roman bath, or a Hellenistic column base with Hebrew inscription. In Edirne we noted some 18th century Ottoman style houses with gold-gilded frescoes in terrible disrepair. In Gaziantep, we found a synagogue with only four walls and the *bimma*, the rest of the structure was open to the sky. We stumbled upon many historical remnants and wished for their preservation. But in a land so rich with cultural remains, which ones would be selected for preservation? And where could the resources be found, and who would implement them?

Would the Jewish community of Turkey, one day, restore its synagogues to house the treasures of its past? We observed that in small towns where a Jewish Community still existed, the synagogue was maintained by one or more interested members despite the fact that the community might not have sufficient number of people to make up a minyan to pray in it each day. Thus, Davit Cohen in Çanakkale came each day to that town's synagogue to open it and look after it. In other areas where there were more people but no one interested in maintaining the synagogue, it fell into such disrepair after a short time as to be no longer viable. In such cases, the community was either ashamed of the state of their synagogue or just shrugged their shoulders, as if to say that after all it was not a thing of great importance to them.

In places where the land on which the synagogue, cemetery, or other community-owned Jewish buildings were not needed for urban expansion, they were left to disintegrate naturally; in some instances, the

surrounding poorer communities made free use of the materials and thereby speeded up the process of decline. In some towns like Tire and Bergama, we found remains of buildings that had been the Alliance Israélite Universelle schools that were established in late 19th century by a group of enlightened French Jews, with the specific purpose of introducing French language and culture to the Jewish community. (These schools had also been established in İstanbul and other big cities in Turkey).

With the proclamation of the Republic of Turkey in 1923, the Alliance schools ceased to function as French schools and the language of instruction became Turkish. Nevertheless, the impact of French language and culture on the Jewish community, which had lasted for a period of nearly 60 years, was indelible. Furthermore, the activities of the Alliance had generated a spirit of westernization among Turkish Jews. People of a certain age, class and education still spoke a Levantine French among themselves.

The order in which the towns are presented follows our itinerary, starting from İstanbul to Thrace in the northwest, the Aegean in the west, then followed by the Mediterranean coastal towns in the south and southeastern Turkey. We then drove to central Turkey.

In 2001 Laurence and our daughter Han went to visit Başkale and Aşkale, two towns that we had not visited during our long travels in the 1980s. Başkale, a town on the Iranian-Turkish border, was once home to Aramaic-speaking Jews. Aşkale, a small town in the east, had been the site where Jewish males and

other ethnic minorities who were unable to pay an unfairly levied value-added tax were sent to do hard labor, in 1942.

Ayşe Gürsan-Salzmann





# THRACE



As the eastern extension of the Balkan Peninsula, Thrace comprises northwestern Turkey, Bulgaria, and Greece and is therefore a multicultural region populated with several ethnic and linguistic groups. Furthermore, it is the main gateway to Europe from the East. The topography of the region lends itself to wide, fertile, plains and valleys where agriculture and animal husbandry have been practiced since the era of prehistoric village settlements.

Byzantine chroniclers point out that Jews lived in parts of Thrace under the Byzantine emperors before the conquest of Istanbul by the Ottomans in 1453. Many of them were Ashkenazi communities that had emigrated from the Balkans and Central Europe. As early as the 4th century when the Roman Emperor Constantine moved the capital to Constantinople, he found an extant Jewish community. The Jews under the Byzantines continued to speak Greek; in the early 13th and 14th centuries Thrace was already under Ottoman rule. In the 16th century as Eastern European regions such as Hungary came under Ottoman rule, Eastern European Jews were encouraged to settle in the region of Thrace.

In this region we visited the towns of Çorlu, Tekirdağ, Edirne, Kırklareli, Gelibolu, Çanakkale.

## SİLİVRİ

The town of Silivri was our first stop, after driving out of İstanbul. Our several inquiries in the town center led us to the campus of University of İstanbul's Educational Center for Post Graduate Studies. No one had heard about the existence of a Jewish community there, nor were there any visible signs of one. As we walked on campus, I tripped on a piece of stone sticking out from the earth. Upon scrutiny, it turned out to be a tombstone with a Hebrew inscription on it. The date and the inscription had been partly effaced. Altogether, we found three tombstones. As we walked further, we found more tombstones on the campus grounds on which once stood the old Jewish cemetery. During the construction of the campus, some tombstones had been sent to İstanbul, others reused or thrown away. The gardener had left these three stones intact as a reminder of the original use of the site.



A view of Marmara Sea, close to where Silivri's Jewish quarter had been.

Jewry," *Commentary*, June 1984).

Our informant Yakup Özay led us to a hilltop tea garden named Kale Çay Bahçesi (Castle Tea Garden), overlooking the Marmara Sea, where the synagogue and an Armenian church had once been located. Though there were no traces of the synagogue, Yakup pointed to its

three entrances. The Jewish Quarter, now called Fatih Mahallesi, had been built around it. He explained that Jews once had lived there in 2-storey houses with large bay windows, built of brick and wood, in contrast to Turks who lived in one-storey mudbrick houses.

The Jewish residents had left in the early 1950's for Israel and İstanbul. However, at the turn of the century, 400 families were recorded by the French representatives of

the Alliance schools: the professions of the community members was recorded as follows: "130 hawkers, 50 bootblacks, 40 water carriers, 20 grocers, 12 tinkers, 4 butchers, 3 goldsmiths, 2 cobblers, 3 tavern keepers, and a very large number of people who are described as doing 'what they can', presumably odd jobs. In addition, most of the Jewish girls in Silivri worked at making lace for various entrepreneurs in İstanbul" (Bernard Lewis, "The Decline and Fall of Islamic

Yakup remembered that Jews were tradespeople, grocers and butchers, small shop owners selling dry goods and leather goods. They also excelled in making yoğurt and cheese, a skill that survived even to this day in many towns in the region of Thrace.

Victoria and Albert, owners of a cheese producing business, had moved from Silivri to İstanbul, but still made periodic visits to Silivri to supervise their *kaşar* cheese (a version of cheddar cheese) factory.

Later in the afternoon we paid a visit to Bayram Ağa, an old grocer who had vivid memories of the community. He reminisced: "Salamon Moreno, Yesuva, Yasef, they dressed in western style clothes, lived quite luxuriously in two- and three-story houses; women washed the sidewalks in front of their houses every morning. They were such gay people, on Sundays they would gather in the square, play the violin, sing and dance. Those were good times." One sad memory, he said, was of a young Jewish girl named Sara who jumped off a cliff into the sea, allegedly for an unrequited love or, that her lover did not ask her father for her hand in marriage.

Another one of Yakup's indelible memories was when he was a seven-year-old child, he saw several horse-drawn carriages stop in front of the Jewish cemetery. He and his friends had looked in awe at the scene: men with shovels were digging up a pile of bones of dead bodies to give them proper burial. These people were victims of the *Struma* (see Introduction), a ship carrying hundreds of Jews that had been sunk in the Black Sea during World War II.

In the 1960s, the Israeli government requested the return of the bones; they were collected in sacks and flown to Israel.

As we were leaving, Yakup commented that some Jewish people who had emigrated to Israel occasionally

returned to visit their homes in Silivri. (We were told the same for Jews who had left other towns.)



We found this tombstone stored in the municipal service building of Silivri.

## CORLU

Çorlu, a provincial town in Thrace, is about a two-hour drive from Silivri. We arrived there at night, and stayed at the Balkan Otel which was the only hotel in town. All night long, we heard the booming voices of feuding gangsters, dejected friends, and unhappy lovers, along with gun shots and horses galloping across fields—emanating from the outdoor cinema. In the morning we went to a local soup shop where Laurence had his favorite lentil soup, *mercimek çorbası*, and I had my *simit* (Turkish bagel with sesame seeds) and cheese with tea.

As in other towns in Thrace, in Çorlu there were large populations of emigrants from the Balkan countries. When we inquired about the Jewish community, one



The Havra-Cami (synagogue-mosque) of Çorlu.

local resident shook his head and pointed in the direction of a mosque. *Havra Cami* (synagogue-mosque) was the only clue that there had been a Jewish community in Çorlu. In 1923 a moderate-sized Jewish community had lived there. Forty years later, when the last Jews left, the local merchants wanted to use the synagogue as a warehouse, as was done in the Aegean town of Bergama. But the Chief Rabbinate in İstanbul was opposed to handing it over to the community unless it was used as a house of prayer. So a tall minaret was added to the synagogue, and the deed was transferred to the Turkish community. It was the only mosque in the region with a Star of David imprinted on its exterior wall!

In the courtyard of this curious wooden mosque was a little hut hidden under a trellis of grapevines. It was Ahmet Çiçek's, the mosque keeper's, shoe-repair stand. He volunteered to maintain the mosque, cleaning the fountain and the toilets in return for tips from the patrons. Ahmet was a tall, handsome, ethnic Bulgarian Turk. That day he was wearing a blue hand-knit cardigan and a matching wool cap. He had lived in Çorlu since 1943. He led us into the large prayer room and pointed to the *kible*, the prayer niche where the ark had been. It was kept as it had been designed for the synagogue and was marked by an elaborately carved doorway framed by engaged columns. The room was sparsely furnished, the floor was covered with rugs, and simple glass chandeliers hung from the ceiling that was lavishly decorated with hexagonal wooden plaques painted with floral designs. The second floor balcony, previously reserved for the Jewish women, was now used by Muslim women during *Ramazan* services.

Ahmet explained that when it was still a synagogue, the contributions of the congregation were kept in a money box. The Rabbi would count the money, enter it in his books, and it would be spent for the maintenance of the synagogue.

Ahmet continued with his recollections—the relationship of the two communities was harmonious. The needy Jews and Turkish Muslims alike benefited from the philanthropy of Jewish merchants, in food and clothing. The shopkeepers sold food and dry goods. Ahmet reminisced that as a young man he had learned his first lesson in profit making from Avram, the Jewish butcher. He sold good meat but his price was always cheaper than the other butchers. People thought maybe he cheated them on the weight. Finally, one day, Ahmet put forth the question: "Avram, why do you sell



Ahmet Çiçek's (right) had a shoeshop in the mosque's courtyard.

meat for less?" Out came the answer, short and clear: 'Come, my friend, let me teach you a lesson—and have a cup of coffee on me—I sell cheaper, so I sell a lot. That's how I make my profit. Others wait and the meat goes bad, there goes their profit.' Avram the butcher obviously knew the tricks of the trade!

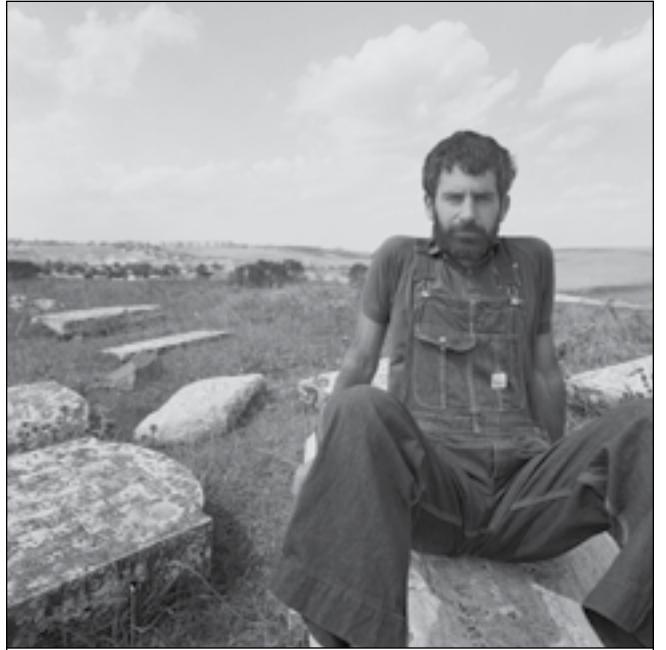
The emigration of Jews from Çorlu began in the 1950s; by 1964 all Jewish residents had left for İstanbul and Israel. They sold their stores and houses to their Turkish neighbors. The wealthier people left last, after they retired. The Jewish Quarter was re-named in Turkish, *Cemaliye Mahallesi*. As in Silivri, the old Jews still occasionally made sentimental journeys to their hometown to see and feel their roots. Ahmet recalled that several years ago, a 90-year-old woman introduced herself as the daughter of the man who had



Waiting for a prayer service to begin.

financed the building of the synagogue. She referred to the town as her “land” where her grandparents had lived. Her real home was in Çorlu. Ahmet said it was a touching scene.

We drove about a kilometer from the Havra Cami, and found ourselves facing a new flour factory, near a small hill that flourished with melons and sunflower fields. It had been the location of the Jewish cemetery. A crow perched upon a sarcophagus, surrounded by weathered stones. Some tombs were opened and plundered; tombstones were roughly chipped, inscriptions had disappeared long time ago. The precise date of the founding of the cemetery was not known, but the style of the tombstones suggested between dates from 16th to 17th centuries.



The photographer's self-portrait at Çorlu's cemetery.



Çorlu's Jewish cemetery on the edge of town was next to a field of sunflowers.



Our shadows traced forgotten ancestors in Çorlu's cemetery.  
Some tombstones were well preserved, others were defaced.  
Was it nature's or man's hand at work? We could not tell.

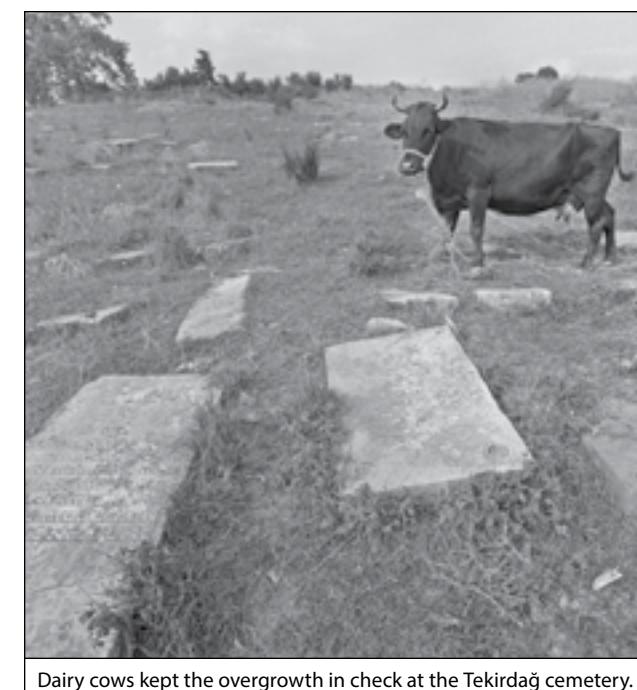
Fishermen of Tekirdağ mending and folding their nets.  
The fish is then shipped off to İstanbul and beyond.



## TEKİRDAĞ

Tekirdağ is a port town located on the Sea of Marmara, about two hours from İstanbul. In the downtown area we spoke with two Jewish cousins, Mordo Funes and Nesim Jak Barokas at their fabric store. They greeted us with inquiring smiles and firm handshakes. They had been working together for 30 years, and they had no plans to leave Tekirdağ anytime soon. Their wives and children were living in İstanbul where the children attended school, and on weekends, the two cousins visited their families.

"Life has been good, people are very good and friendly here, and business has been excellent, why should we leave?" said Mordo. When they first started, all the merchants were Jewish and sold dry-goods, foodstuffs, hardware and jewelry. About 100 years ago the Jewish population was 600, now it was reduced to five or six families. In the 1930s, many members of the community left for Western Europe and South America. Immigration to Israel further reduced the overall Jewish population of Thrace. The most recent move from Tekirdağ to İstanbul was in the early 1970s.



Dairy cows kept the overgrowth in check at the Tekirdağ cemetery.

In 1958 the synagogue of Tekirdağ was torn down to make room for Londra Asfaltı, the highway that connects Turkey to Europe. At that time the Jewish men moved the *Sefer Torahs* from the intricately carved and painted wooden ark, with its silver ornaments, to a new synagogue which was a modest, one-room structure on a hilltop, in the middle of the old Jewish Quarter.

Set in the center of the room of the new synagogue, a potbelly stove heated up the entire space. Wooden benches lined the walls. One room was more than sufficient to accommodate the dwindling population that gathered only on special holidays. A rabbi was called in from İstanbul for weddings and *Brit Milah* ceremonies.

From the center of the town, we drove over a hill, through a winding street to the Jewish cemetery where the sea view was overwhelmingly beautiful. According to some

tombstone inscriptions the town had a major Jewish settlement whose existence dated to the 17th century. Needless to say, as in other towns we visited, the cemetery had fallen into disuse, the tombstones were strewn about, covered with wild blackberry shrubs that housed a colony of tortoises.



I noticed that farmers had already started plowing the hilly upper part of the cemetery for planting wheat and sunflowers.

This was a very large cemetery, with an estimated 1,500 tombstones that spanned 300 years. The earliest stones were uphill, their inscriptions were written exclusively in Hebrew. Change had come about in the 1900s when the stones were inscribed in Ladino\* and Hebrew, and they were located closer to the sea. Yet again, After the 1960s the inscriptions changed to Ladino and Turkish. An old Muslim cemetery separated the Jewish cemetery only by a row of tall, elegant cypress trees.



Mordo Funes (right) flanked by Selim Riat (left) was the owner of a bakkal (grocery store) that sold everything from Rakı, (an anisette liqueur) to scouring pads.



Jak and Nesim were two of the three Jewish businessmen left in Tekirdağ when we first visited the town.

Since our first visit to Tekirdağ, Jak moved to İstanbul, and Nesim followed him within one year. Upon meeting them again they said, "Life without children and grandchildren is meaningless."

\* Ladino known also as Judaeo-Spanish, is a Romance language derived from Old Castilian. It is influenced by Hebrew and Aramaic, Arabic, Turkish and to a lesser extent Greek and other languages where Sephardic exiles settled around the world, primarily throughout the Ottoman Empire.

This decorative piece had been the top part of an Aron Kodesh (closet that holds the Torah scrolls) in a synagogue that was torn down for the building of Londra Asfaltı, connecting Turkey to Europe.



## KIRKLARELİ

In the midst of a bustling shopping district, we found the fabric store of the Magriso family; it was owned by two brothers, Moše and Israel. With a cordiality characteristic of small town people, they greeted us and answered our questions while attending to their customers. Moše was not married, he was an ambitious businessman, opposite of his brother Israel who was quite relaxed and full of humor. Moše thought Israel was not a good businessman, because he tried to conduct business on the telephone with customers instead of face-to-face interaction.

Their store had been established about 90 years ago. Israel Magriso also owned a cheese-production business that produced a hard yellow cheese called *kaşkaval* that he sold under the trade name of I.M. Balkan. In the past, many Jews of Thrace were involved in butter, cheese, and yoğurt production. One of America's most famous yoğurt brands was started by descendants of such a family, the Danones, who emigrated to France to start the famous yoğurt factory. At the time of our visit there were 35 Jews living in Kırklareli, 25 were over 60 years old. The younger men like Moše and Israel ran small businesses, dry goods in retail and in wholesale.



Israel Magriso (center) with his cousin Moše Magriso to his right, and his friend Yeşova Kaneti, to his left.

The Magriso family members were the main keepers of the synagogue; they had good personal relations with the Turkish community, and were highly respected. During the two hours we stayed in their shop, several people stopped to buy, chat and gossip, and were offered tea and coffee. Outside, Moše would stop to talk with local businessmen who referred to him as "patron," the boss. Moše's feathers rose to a fan!

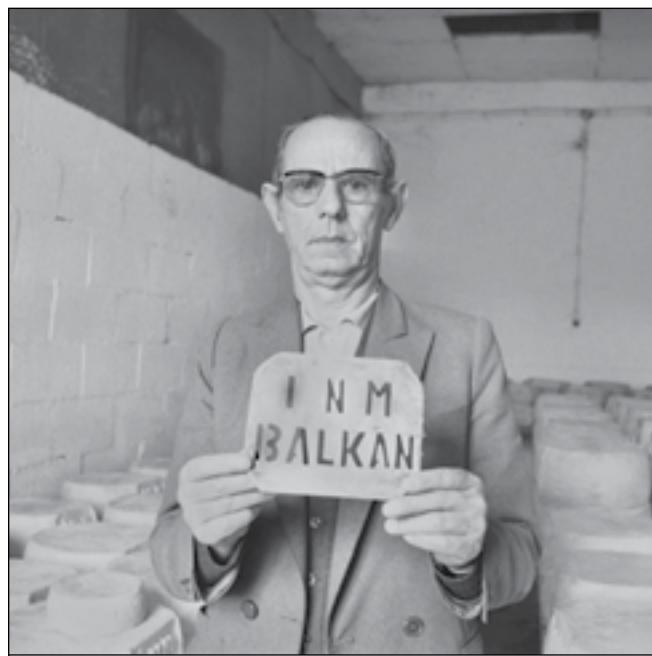
On a Friday evening, Israel accompanied us to the old synagogue, an old, two-storey building. The ceiling beams were rotting, services were held in the small, one-room prayer house adjoining the main hall. In the courtyard outside, the women sat on a bench and chatted while the men went in to pray. The people spoke a combination of French and Spanish, having learned the former language at the local Alliance School. Israel was quite apologetic about the poor condition of the

synagogue. He said although the community had saved money for the repair work, but obtaining permission to do it required so much bureaucratic red tape that they had been deterred by the procedures. (Since it is a historically certified building it is subject to the inspection and approval of the Department for the Preservation of Historic Buildings at every step of the restoration).

Yeşova Kaneti, another member of the community, is a contemporary of Moše's. He remained single despite several attempts at marriage, including a Turkish woman from İzmir. His sister had also married a Turkish banker from the nearby town of Tekirdağ. Yeşova was so devoted to his mother, that when she died he was in a desolated state, and his business began to decline.

Hayim Abravanel, the Rabbi and ritual butcher of Kırklareli, spent his time traveling in Thrace, between Kırklareli, Çanakkale, and Edirne. He and his family lived on the small retaining fees he received from each community he served in the region.

The Jewish cemetery in Kırklareli is one of the oldest in Thrace. Like most of the cemeteries we visited, it is



Israel Nesim Magriso proudly holds the stencil that identifies his initials on his cheeses.

perched on a hilltop; it provided a refuge for the local fauna—sheep grazing with their lambs, tortoises burrowing under heavy slabs of stone. Some of the marble stones were cut in the shape of a coffin, they were reasonably well preserved, like those we saw in Tekirdağ. The earliest tombstone dated to the beginning of the 17th century. I noticed bilingual inscriptions (Hebrew and Turkish) on some tombstones—poems in Turkish and prayers in Hebrew. An inscription written in Turkish read: "Nineteen years later I followed my wife whom I loved for an eternity, our visitors should say in their prayers, that here lie a Mother and a Father, who were much loved and respected by their children."

Eliya Adato Haker Birth: 1879

Death: 3.1958 /19 Adar 5718



Frday Sabbath services were led by Hayim Abravanel (standing). Hayim also served as the Haham, (ritual butcher) for Edirne and Kırklareli.



Kirkclareli synagogue was hardly noticeable from the street. The portal above its door suggested that the Ten Commandments had been originally inscribed there.



Kirkclareli's synagogue was open only for shabat services when we visited. The design was very much in the classical Greek style. Perhaps an influence of the Greek population that lived there before the population exchanges between Greece and Turkey took place. The name of Kirlareli is allegedly derived from the Greek "Kirk Kilise" (40 Churches).

It is worth mentioning here that an unfortunate incident occurred in Kırklareli. During one of our visits to the town, Laurence and his Hungarian cameraman, Szabo Gábor, were filming in the cemetery, while Rabbi Abravanel, Han and I stood by. Suddenly three Turkish policemen in civilian clothes jumped out of a car and surrounded us. One of them tried to take the camera and the film, thinking we were the anarchists he was looking for, despite my pleading in Turkish that we were not! We ended up spending a night at the police headquarters. Many pages of police reports were written, passports were confiscated, and we were told that several months or maybe a year later we might be called back to Kırklareli to testify in court. Back in İstanbul it took us several days and the intervention of a high-ranking government bureaucrat to expedite the court hearing. An extremely competent and reasonable

female judge dismissed the case at once, to the chagrin of the policemen who had accosted us.

We were then led to the basement of the courthouse, where Laurence's and Gábor's passports were fished out from a deep vault. How lucky we were to have them in our possession again!

After that incident Gábor was not allowed to enter into Turkey for several years. Much to our surprise, in 2008, Gábor was invited by the Turkish government to shoot a promotional documentary film about Turkey.



Some tombs in Kırklareli cemetery dated back 250 years.



The tombstones were overrun by lichens.

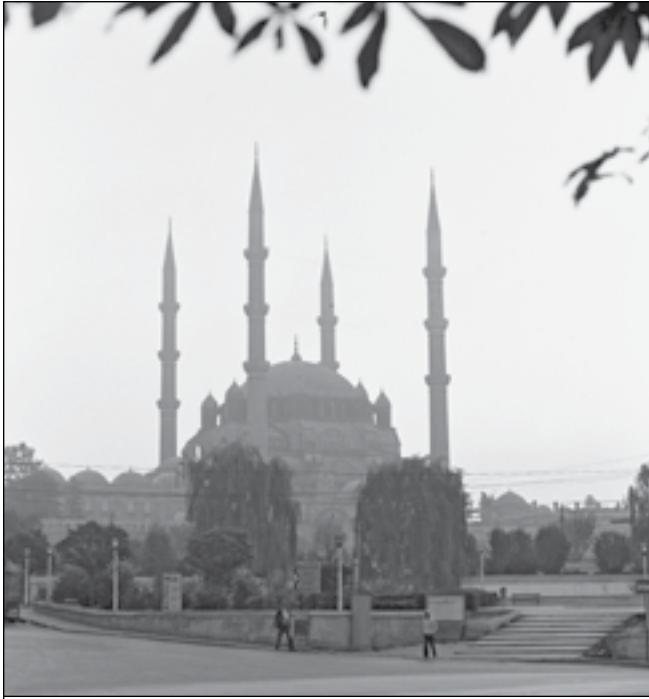


We were instructed by the Ministry of the Interior to take along with us two policemen in civilian clothes, a woman from the tourist bureau, as a translator, and a Jewish community member when photographing Jewish monuments in Kırklareli. Ayşe and Han stand at the far right, Laurence, far left, just behind the translator who was not really needed. We were one happy group!

## EDİRNE

Known as Hadrianopolis in the Byzantine era, Edirne was home to Jews long before the arrival of Sephardim from Spain in 1492. When the city came under Ottoman rule with Murad I, the Conqueror in the 14th century, one of the three largest groups of Sephardim was already living there. At that time the Jewish communities in Edirne had become so well organized that they received special permission to establish a *yeshiva*, (place of study of traditional texts), there. The city served as a principal center for the learning of Jewish law.

The Ashkenazic Rabbi Isac Zarfati who settled in



Edirne's Selimiye Mosque designed by the famous architect Sinan is one of the greatest monuments of Ottoman architecture.



The Jewish Quarter of Edirne still has few Ottoman style houses, but many have been replaced with concrete apartment buildings.

Edirne in the mid-15th century wrote a letter urging his coreligionists in the West to join him: 'I proclaim to you that Turkey is a land where nothing is lacking, where if you will, all shall be well with you. The way to the Holy Land lies open to you through Turkey. Is it not better for you to live under Muslims than Christians? Here every man may dwell in peace and under his own vine and fig tree'.

Historically, the city had been exposed to many natural and man-made disasters, fire and demolition, monumental buildings had been destroyed for highway construction. In 1903 thirteen synagogues were destroyed by fire. Only a few wooden mansions and the 19th century synagogue remained.

(In the summer of 2001, we learned that the University of Trakya wanted to take over the dilapidated synagogue to convert it into a student center; however, before funds could be procured, the remaining walls and the façade of the synagogue had collapsed).

Until 1900, 20,000-25,000 Jews had lived in Edirne. By 1984, there were only 48 people, some lived partly in İstanbul, and most of the younger generation had left for Europe and the U.S. for higher education.

When Laurence and I arrived in Edirne we called Rabbi Abravanel's daughter Soli who said her parents were visiting her from the nearby town of Kırklareli, and that she had guessed that we might be calling her.

Word travels fast in small towns! We sat in her comfortable living room, and after exchanging few niceties, I sensed she had a touch of curiosity about my status as a Turkish-Muslim wife of a Jewish man. The Rabbi, too, wanted to know if my parents accepted the marriage. He then added that because my family was of the "educated" class, it would probably be acceptable to them. (In a provincial Turkish town intermarriages were hardly common, especially in the past; yet, they did occur in İstanbul and in İzmir). The Rabbi said that we were all the same, after all; the important thing was to respect each other. Then he added, "what about the children" meaning, in which tradition would they be brought up?



Hayim Abravanel (left), his daughter Soli (center) and his wife Ester (right). Hayim spends his time travelling between Kırklareli, Çanakkale and Edirne working, as both the Rabbi and ritual butcher. He and his wife live in Kırklareli.

The Rabbi and his family talked emphatically about their life being good, they liked their Turkish neighbors. The Rabbi explained, "we are one, we have a lot of Turkish friends; yes, there are some injustices, but those are not aimed at us, everyone, including the Turks, is affected by them."

Two of the oldest members of the community, Yuda Romano (82) and Yasef Bayar (72) were the most informative and interesting people whom we had the privilege to meet. Mr. Romano had been the secretary of the community in the critical decade of 1930-1940, the period of the rise of the Nazi regime and World War II. The anti-Semitic movement in Europe had also reached Turkey and the Middle East via books and pamphlets. Yuda related an incident that underlined the goodwill of the Turkish government vis-à-vis the Jewish community, and the key role Yuda played in collaborating with government officials to protect Jews during a local riot.

Up until the 1930s, the Jews occupied a privileged position in Turkey. Most of them were well educated at the Alliance Israélite schools, spoke French, dressed in Western style clothes, and lived in upscale Turkish style mansions. They always saved their money, unlike the Turks who liked to spend it all! The Jews were looked upon as the elite. Then came the incident of July 1934. Some Turks from rural areas combined forces with the governor and instigated a riot in the city. One night before the riot, I heard two men saying they'd been too late to participate but that they would start something the next morning. Sure enough, that morning they didn't allow the Jewish fishmongers to buy from the distribution center. In the evening, they started

stoning the Jewish homes. I went to the police chief and explained that there were 8,000 Jews living here—we were like brothers. We needed his protection, we meant no harm and we wanted to continue living here. The police chief helped us, he assigned gendarmes to the Jewish Quarter for extra protection. The riot was put down, not one life was lost. Nevertheless, some got scared to the point of selling their properties and left for Istanbul or Palestine.



Yuda Romano with Torah Scroll (Rimonim) covers he kept at his house.

When Jews were being transported on German trains that passed through Edirne to reach Palestine, Yuda Romano, with help from the Turkish police facilitated passage to their destination. Thus, many Eastern European Jews were saved. Yuda would collect information from these refugees about Hitler's intentions towards Turkish Jews. He, in fact, acted as the mediator and spokesman for the Jewish community as well as providing information to the Jewish public at-large.

(When we met Yuda he was taking care of his sick wife. According to Yasef, Yuda is well-to-do but did not know how to live well. In 1988, Yuda Romano died in Israel after being operated on for skin cancer. We received this information from his son.)

In the 1930s, Dr. Yasef Bayar was a medical student in Istanbul. As a long-time resident of Edirne, Bayar was the only Jewish doctor. He was a small, sprightly man of 72 years, with much energy and good humor. His stuttering did not hamper him from speaking his mind lucidly. His tiny office was in the main shopping district on the second floor of a dilapidated building. A young village girl acted as his receptionist, she also heated and served his home-cooked lunch.



Dr. Yasef Bayar on the balcony of his office which overlooked a busy shopping street of Edirne.

In the early 1950s he had gone to Israel but returned after five years of residency there. In Israel, he had no patients to speak of, whereas in Edirne his patients spanned several generations, coming mostly from rural areas. On the day we visited him, most of his women patients had come with their husbands. The women suffered from heart disease, high blood pressure, obesity and other related medical problems. For thirty years, Dr. Bayar treated not only their illnesses but also was concerned

about their work and family environment, diet, and psychological problems. It was most surprising that in a fairly conservative town, in which women were not even allowed to associate with a non-family male person, Dr. Bayar could examine women, encourage them to voice their concerns, and prescribe a cure. It was clear that his patients had complete trust in him and that he, in turn, treated them with tender care. "I am the only man in Edirne who can order a woman to undress," he said jokingly. He was like a grandfather to many of them. So his business flourished.

He emphatically said he was not keen on treating Jewish patients, for they did not like to pay for his services. "Yet even the gypsies pay me," he said.

Yasef Bayar's life story is one of success. As one of eight children of a poor farmer, he had a very difficult life in a crowded and impoverished home. His mother wanted Yasef to become a rabbi, but he was disqualified due to his speech defect. Finally, he was sent to a widowed aunt in İstanbul to work as a messenger boy in a hotel. He attended the Jewish school during the day, and at night did errands for hotel management. Needless to say, it was a life of hardship, and he lived frugally.

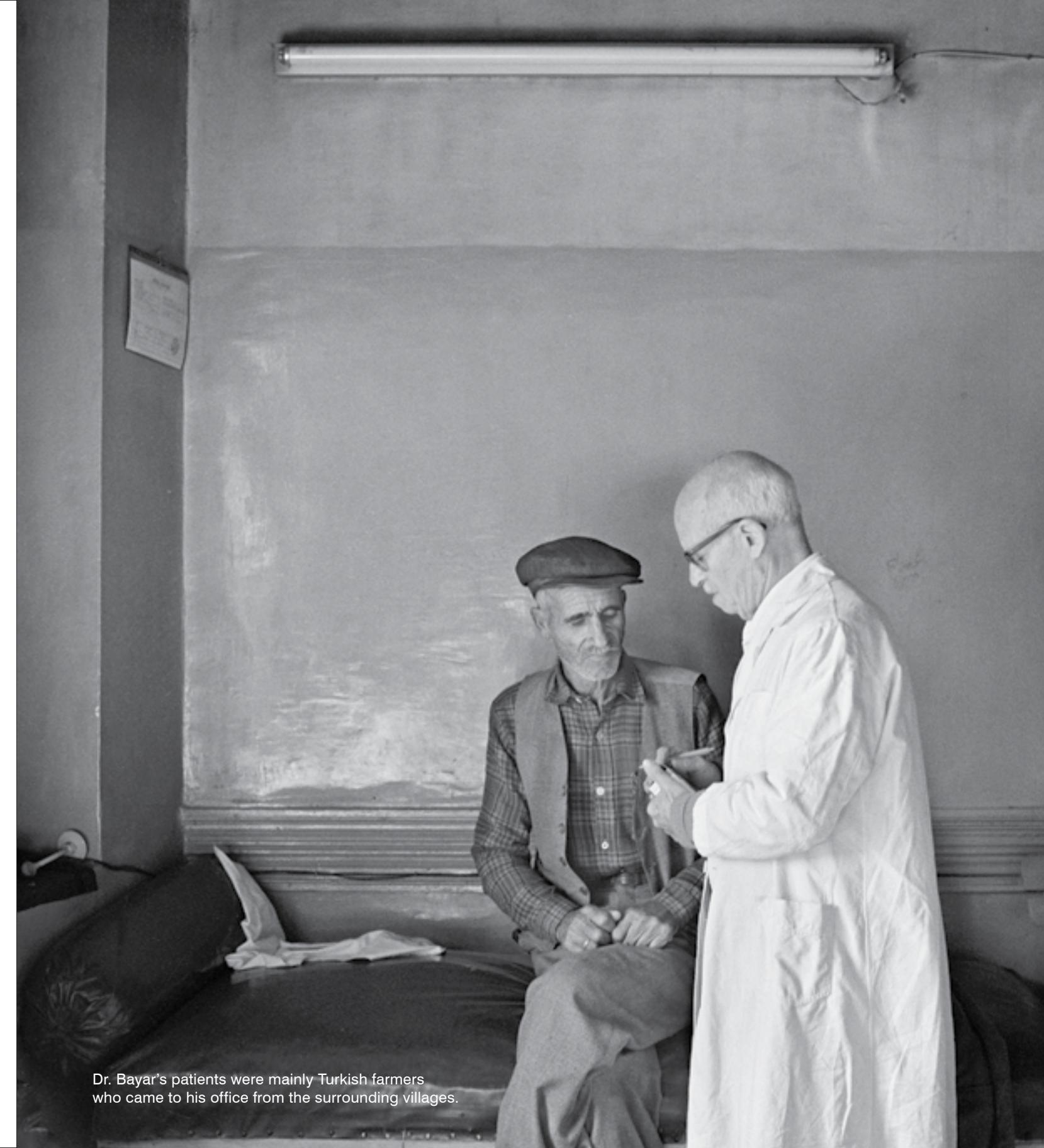


Dr. Bayar checked our daughter Han's (imagined) back pain.

But Yasef was ambitious. He passed his baccalaureate exams with honors and entered medical school. As a trained internist, he returned to Edirne to practice. Both his lycée diploma and an Honor Certificate from the Turkish Medical Association were hung prominently on his office wall. Yasef's two sons followed his example, one became a surgeon and the other a dentist. Both currently live and practice in the United States.

Dr. Bayar stated emphatically that Jews lived comfortable lives in Turkey, they liked their Turkish neighbors. He was quick to point out that in World War II, while the Jews in neighboring Greece were burned in their villages by the Nazis, the Turkish Jews were protected from such atrocities. In part, their survival was due to keeping good relations and cooperating with the Turks. Although cultural differences existed, the Jews shared many Turkish customs—hospitality, cuisine, respect for people of other religions and language. Where the Jews mainly differed from the Turks was that they saved their money while the Turks were in the habit of spending quickly what they earned. Bayar was very proud to be a Jew; he was against intermarriage, which he said resulted in the loss of one's identity. Religious devotion, he asserted, was the main force that held Jews together.

Dr. Bayar went on to explain that wars, riots, and revolutions all had helped to create periods of instability during the past eighty years and that Jews had already begun to move away from Thrace by the beginning of the 20th century. Also, a capital asset tax, *Varlık Vergisi*, levied disproportionately on Turkey's non-Muslim minorities during the early days of World War II was instrumental in the Jewish emigration to Israel.



Dr. Bayar's patients were mainly Turkish farmers who came to his office from the surrounding villages.



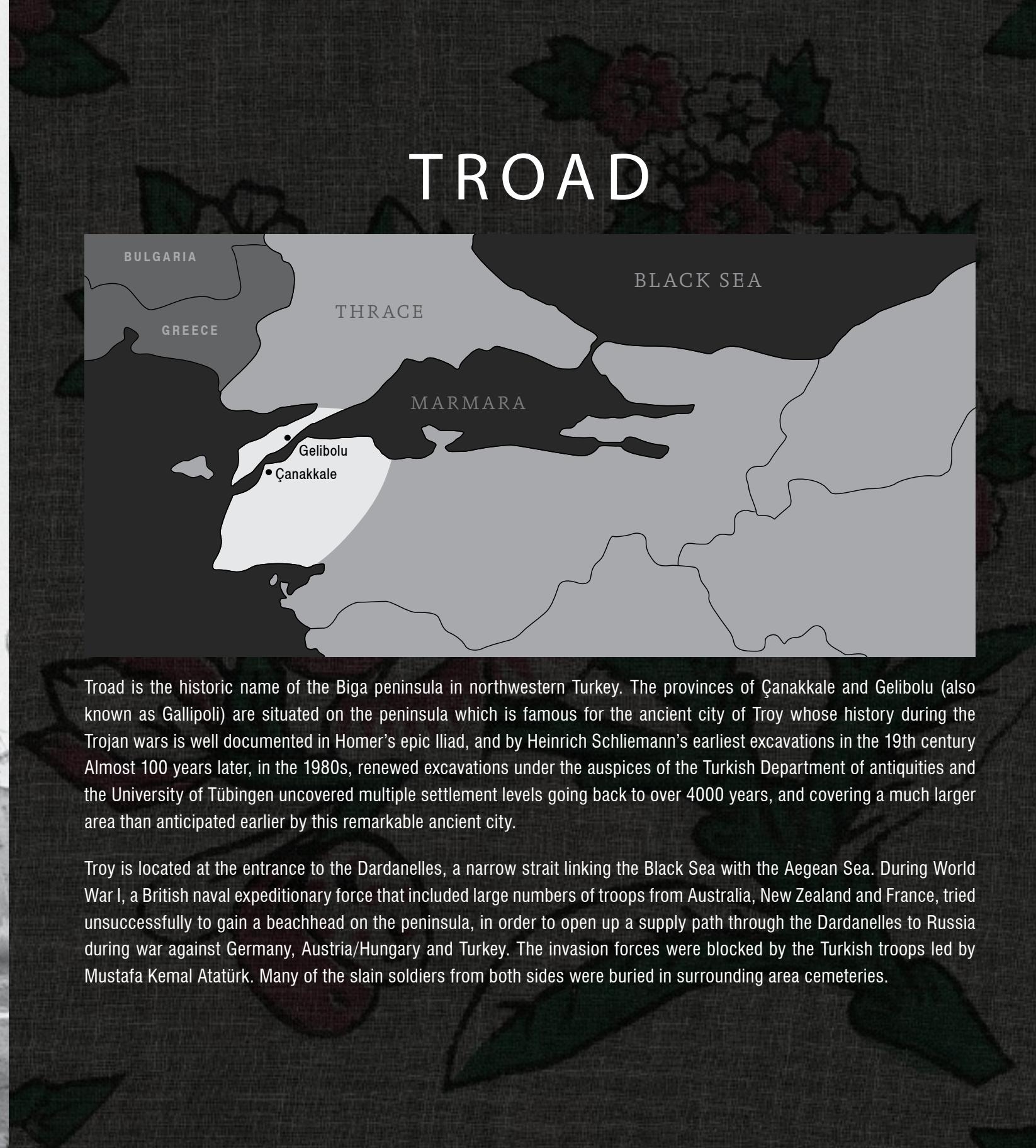
Main sanctuary of the Edirne synagogue.



The Edirne synagogue was designed by Austrian architects in the 19th century, built on the model of the main synagogue of Radauti, a town in the Bukovina region of Romania, where Laurence documented Jewish life in the 1970s.



The building that had housed Gelibolu's synagogue had once been an elegant Ottoman style house characterized by its wrought iron balcony and overhanging roof.



Troad is the historic name of the Biga peninsula in northwestern Turkey. The provinces of Çanakkale and Gelibolu (also known as Gallipoli) are situated on the peninsula which is famous for the ancient city of Troy whose history during the Trojan wars is well documented in Homer's epic Iliad, and by Heinrich Schliemann's earliest excavations in the 19th century. Almost 100 years later, in the 1980s, renewed excavations under the auspices of the Turkish Department of antiquities and the University of Tübingen uncovered multiple settlement levels going back to over 4000 years, and covering a much larger area than anticipated earlier by this remarkable ancient city.

Troy is located at the entrance to the Dardanelles, a narrow strait linking the Black Sea with the Aegean Sea. During World War I, a British naval expeditionary force that included large numbers of troops from Australia, New Zealand and France, tried unsuccessfully to gain a beachhead on the peninsula, in order to open up a supply path through the Dardanelles to Russia during war against Germany, Austria/Hungary and Turkey. The invasion forces were blocked by the Turkish troops led by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. Many of the slain soldiers from both sides were buried in surrounding area cemeteries.

## GELİBOLU

We arrived in Gelibolu on the first day of *Kurban Bayramı*, an annual religious observance based on the Biblical story of Abraham, when sheep are sacrificed and distributed among friends and neighbors. Part of the public festivities took place in the main square, men shaking hands, young children strolling hand-in-hand in their Sunday best and people visiting their neighbors and relatives. (I recalled as a young girl living in İstanbul, a few days before the morning of *Kurban Bayramı*, some of the inhabitants of our apartment building would tie their sacrificial sheep to trees in the back garden. Since we lived on the second floor of a six storey building, I'd hear the "meehs" of the sheep through the night, which saddened me a great deal, knowing what the fate of the poor sheep would be, and I could never sleep until the meehs stopped, which was after the butcher had already done the deed!)



The torahs of the former synagogue were missing.

A resident of Gelibolu took us to the home of the Sivacı family. Rozet Sivacı opened the door, she rolled her eyes with amazement when Laurence addressed her in Spanish and explained the reason for our visit. After

the introduction she was all smiles, inviting us into their living room. She and her husband, son, mother-in-law, brother-in-law and his family, all lived in the same house.

Roza (short for Rozet), an attractive, middleaged woman was wearing a *salvar* (baggy pantaloons), the local attire for women of the countryside. After the usual niceties, she explained that she was an accom-

plished seamstress and managed the family owned general store. One daughter was married and lived in Israel, where Roza's brother, parents, and grandparents also lived. (Roza was already a grandmother, she hoped to visit her daughter and grandson in Israel.) She and her husband did not consider moving to Israel because their life was comfortable in Turkey, their son attended the local university, studying business administration, and her husband was not motivated

to start a new life in Israel. Culturally, they felt removed from life in Israel. In Gelibolu, they were close to the Muslim community; in fact, one of their neighbors had just given them some mutton meat sacrificed for the *Bayram* (the grandmother refused to eat it because it was not kosher). Roza appreciated the gesture and said she often reciprocated by offering her services free



Süzet Sivacı, the youngest member of the Gelibolu community, stands in front of her grandmother, Alegra. The ladies seated are Fortüne Kalo (left), and her sister Lalo Kalo (right).

of charge as a seamstress. The family showed their respect to the Turkish community by closing their store on Muslim holidays. “One has to respect the customs and be nice to the people at large, to survive as a minority group,” she commented, seated on the low divan, as we sipped our Turkish coffee, served with homemade *kadayif*. I noticed when she spoke with me she always referred to Turks as “your people,” and noted that, unlike their Turkish neighbors, her family refrained from conspicuous consumption and public display of their wealth.

Roza’s husband, a quiet man who preferred to listen to his gregarious wife, put in his few words about his concerns of maintaining their customs in the face of shrinking communities. (At the time of this interview, two families and a single man, altogether 11, were



living in Gelibolu, while 50 years ago there were 600 Jewish families living there.) The synagogue did not function and was, in fact, in a state of total decay. When the husband of an elderly woman died two years ago, they did not have ten men for the minyan and had to invite friends from other cities so that the old man could have a proper burial in Gelibolu. He explained that in small Turkish towns, Jewish life was ending; they couldn’t be buried and couldn’t be married. The prospect of finding a mate was next to impossible, so the young people moved to big cities where they had better educational and marital prospects. Also, the move saved girls’ families from investing in a dowry which was still the custom in small towns.

The cemetery of Gelibolu was about 2-3 km outside of the town. Following the arrow marked *Plaj* (beach



in Turkish), we arrived at the cemetery of the Turkish soldiers who had died in the War of Gallipoli. In front of us, a dirt road led to the Jewish cemetery. To the left of the entrance was an inscribed marble plaque dedicated to Avram Levi, the philanthropist who had contributed generously to the cost of repairing the wall in June 1966. He now lived in the U.S. The plaque on the cemetery read: “Our Infinite Thanks to the Philanthropist, Sir Avram Levi.”

The cemetery was overgrown with weeds. Although I did not come across dates earlier than 20th century on tombstones, research indicates there were 18th-century tombstones once standing over the graves.

Most of the tombstones were not intact, but one could still decipher the inscriptions in three languages: Ladino, Turkish, and Hebrew. Especially interesting were the poems written in the local dialect of Turkish. The inscriptions detailed the type of work, circumstances of death, and even a carved picture depicting the occupation of the deceased (e.g., a fisherman in a row-boat), as we had seen at the cemetery of Kırklareli. One of the most descriptive, perhaps intimate, epitaphs read: “Pepo, Death took you away in your youthful days—Before you

Tasted the Delights of this World,—Your Appendicitis rotted your Flesh—When you Entered the Earth on 8.8.1945,—You Left Your Children as Orphans.”

As we pulled away from Roza’s house, she emptied a bowl of water after our car, a Turkish custom to ensure good luck, safe travel and a return to Gelibolu.

That day we decided to stay in Gelibolu overnight. The

climactic moment of the evening was a superb fish dinner at Neşe Restaurant by the sea. The *Raki*, national drink, came with the usual meze—delicious dolma with grape leaves, *börek*, pepper dolma, fruits and shepherd salad. Our daughter Han had *köfte* (meat balls). The bill came to the grand sum of 3000 T.L. (\$7.50).\* Today such a meal would cost at least that amount per person.

\* Exchange rate in 1984.



According to Jewish tradition, a piece of the garment worn by the close blood relatives of the deceased is torn.

Once a prosperous Jewish community had lived in Gelibolu; a plaque inside the gate read, "our endless gratitude Avram Levi and his working companions for the repair of this cemetery 1966."



At the Gelibolu cemetery Han and I were treated to apples by Turkish soldiers who stopped by to say hello.

## ÇANAKKALE

The Jewish community of Çanakkale dates to the 18th century, as does the community in Gelibolu. According to our informants, in 1984 the Jewish population in Çanakkale numbered 10 families (25 people), compared to 100 years ago when the population was 800 people.

Having heard the name Eski Havra Sokağı (Old Synagogue Street) from a resident, we walked over there, and we were shown to a house where Madame Korin lived. She was busy cleaning house, and was taken by surprise when we arrived. She was expecting a visit from her son and his family from İstanbul, she said, so her younger son Dario took us to see Davit Kohen, a goldsmith who was another member of the



Davit Kohen kept the synagogue functioning as its caretaker.



The torah arc was lit by bare light bulbs.

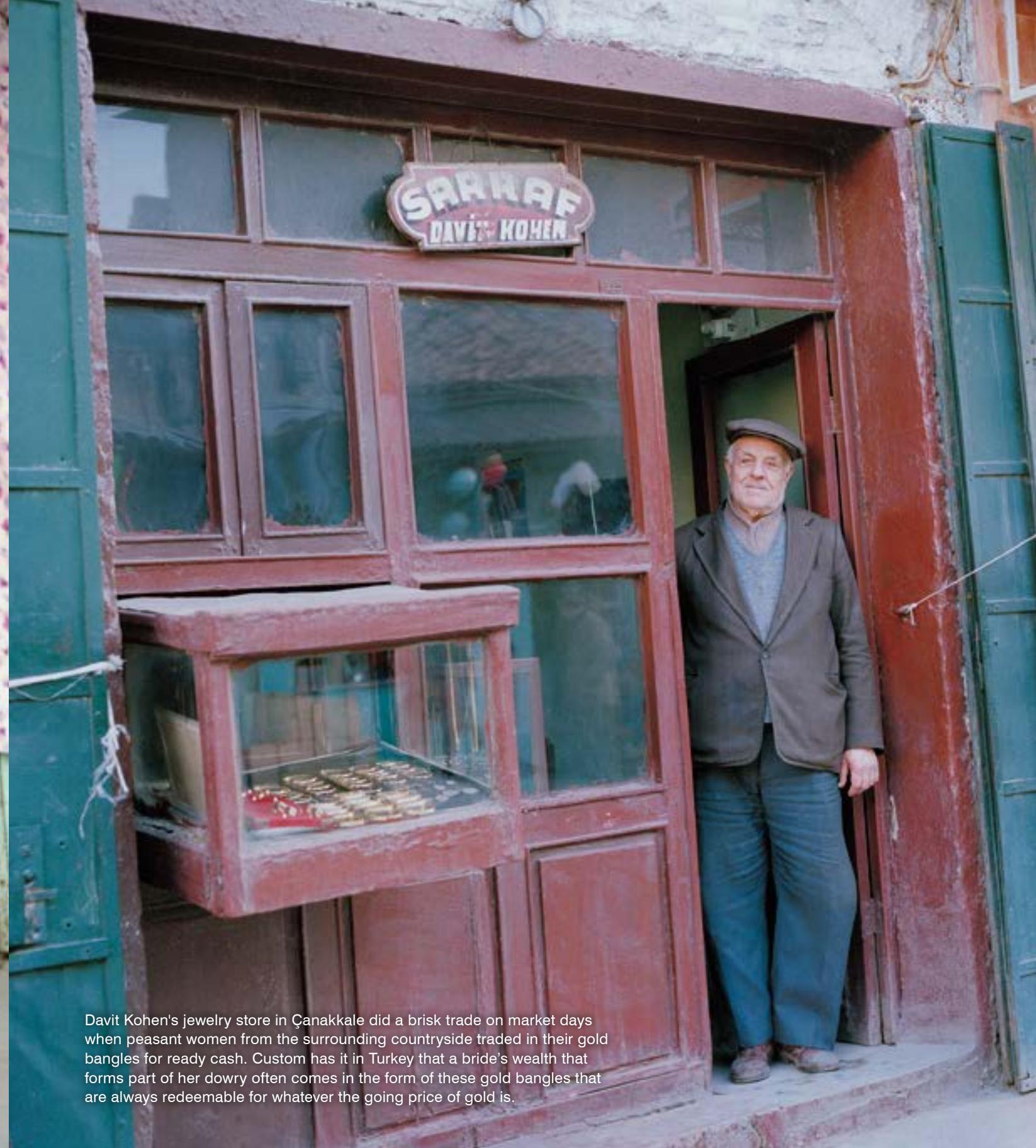
community. He is a tall, energetic middle aged man, also related to Roza's husband (from Gelibolu) by marriage. Davit held the keys to the synagogue.

The Mehor Hayim synagogue was built in the 19th-century. It was a large structure that occupied two blocks. The prayer room opened to a courtyard of old fig trees. The *bimmah* (main reading desk), was situated in the center, as is customary, with the seats lined up along the walls. The ark curtain which was donated by a member in memory of his mother, was of red velvet and lacked the elaborate embroidery of some of the curtains we had seen in old synagogues. An oil lamp, now converted into an electric lamp, hung over the ark which had the Ten Commandments inscribed above it. It was in excellent condition due to Davit's conscientious care and maintenance, despite



The keys to the synagogue's gate was kept by Davit Kohen.

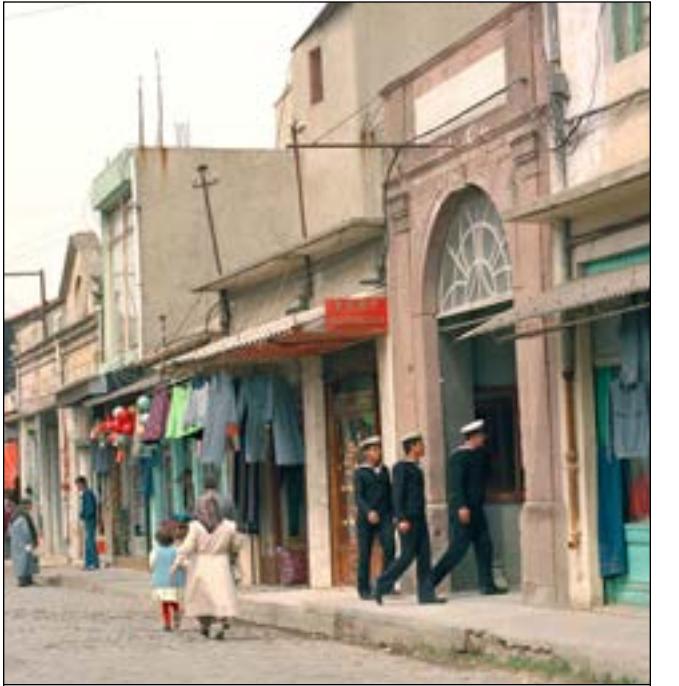
Many Jews in Turkey were involved in the textile trade. Everything from making buttons, zippers, thread, and designer labels, to selling garments of latest fashions. Yusef Azuz was a typical small town merchant.



Davit Kohen's jewelry store in Çanakkale did a brisk trade on market days when peasant women from the surrounding countryside traded in their gold bangles for ready cash. Custom has it in Turkey that a bride's wealth that forms part of her dowry often comes in the form of these gold bangles that are always redeemable for whatever the going price of gold is.

the dwindling Jewish population. He said they still held services there once a week, but most of the community members would go to İstanbul or İzmir for *Rosh Hashanah* (Jewish New Year), and *Yom Kippur*, (Day of Atonement), services. In most small towns we found that the condition of the synagogue and Jewish monuments depended on the care of community members who were able to look after them. The other two synagogues of Çanakkale, Kal Yasan and Kal Hadas, were no longer in existence.

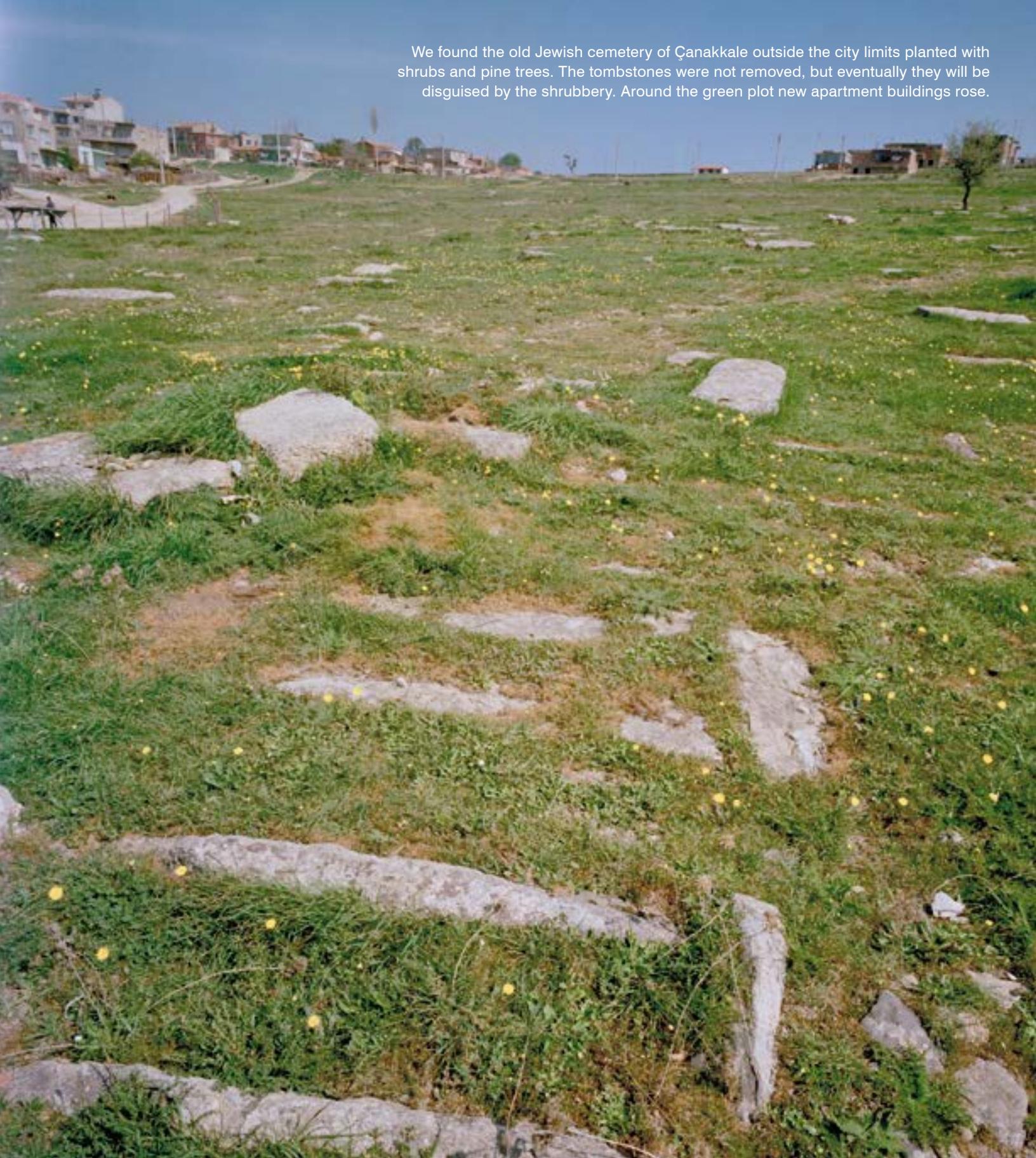
Davit recalled that when he was a young apprentice, there were many Jewish merchants who owned stores in the main market area, which had now been transformed into a modern shopping district.



Entrance to Aynali Pasaj—once there were many Jewish owned stores inside the Pasaj. An inscription plaque above its entrance read: Built by İlya Haliyo 1889.

The Jewish cemetery was surrounded by a wire fence, it had a “Do not Enter” (*İçeri Girilmez*) sign. It was in the process of being converted into a pine forest by the municipality, small shrubs and pine trees were planted inside.

We found the old Jewish cemetery of Çanakkale outside the city limits planted with shrubs and pine trees. The tombstones were not removed, but eventually they will be disguised by the shrubbery. Around the green plot new apartment buildings rose.



A large marble offering table with two eagles in bas-relief—one with a somewhat battered beak stood guard in the ancient synagogue of Sardis. The eagle, a Roman symbol, was also popular in Jewish iconography.



## AEGEAN



While the city of Izmir was our main focus, our visit included the towns of Sardis, Manisa, Tire, Bergama, Milas and Bodrum. In Western Turkey the presence of Jewish populations is attested by historical and archaeological evidence, principally in and around the ancient and modern city of Izmir as early as 3rd century BCE. The first coins were minted in gold by the Lydians whose capital is located at the ancient city of Sardis, near the city of Izmir.

The Aegean region has a Mediterranean climate and highly fertile soil which produces a large variety of crops, olives, grapes, figs, cotton and flax, that are exported and consumed in the region. In addition its well watered plains are widely used for cereals. On the upland valleys stockbreeding is practiced.

## SALİHLİ

We traveled south, along the Aegean coast toward the plain of Manisa, which is close to the modern town of Salihli. Black goats followed our car for a little while as we passed by the town of Ödemiş plain ringed by Bozdağı mountains. Soon we arrived in a wide, fertile valley of Gediz river where cotton harvest was still in progress in October. The women in the fields said work would continue till January. The Gediz area was once the winter quarters of transhumant nomads; they were now mostly settled, and practiced mixed subsistence of agriculture and animal husbandry (herding sheep, goat and cows). The scenery was breathtaking with snow-white fields of cotton—the cotton flower transformed from a hard shell of seeds into the delicate fluffy flower while the seed was still firmly attached to



The sundial from the Sardis synagogue dated to 325 BCE.



Detail from mosaic floor of Sardis synagogue.

its leaves—. The women collected each flower by hand so as not to harm the fragile buds on the stem.

We stopped at a coffeehouse a few kilometers before reaching the ancient site of Sardis where the excavated remains of a synagogue still stood. Our usual questions, about a Jewish community in Salihli was “no.” But we remained convinced that there had to be one, because several Jewish merchants now living in İzmir had been having business dealings with Salihli farmers for several generations.

Salihli is home to the ancient city of Sardis, the capital of the Lydian Empire, a major trading center for the Hellenistic and Roman worlds. The River Pactolus *Sart Çayı*, was the major source of gold dust for the Empire’s gold coins; it still flowed through the ancient



Turkey is a major producer of cotton, some of it is still hand picked. Jewish traders near Sardis acted as middlemen in selling the crop.

city, giving life to the countryside richly endowed with vineyards, fig and olive orchards.

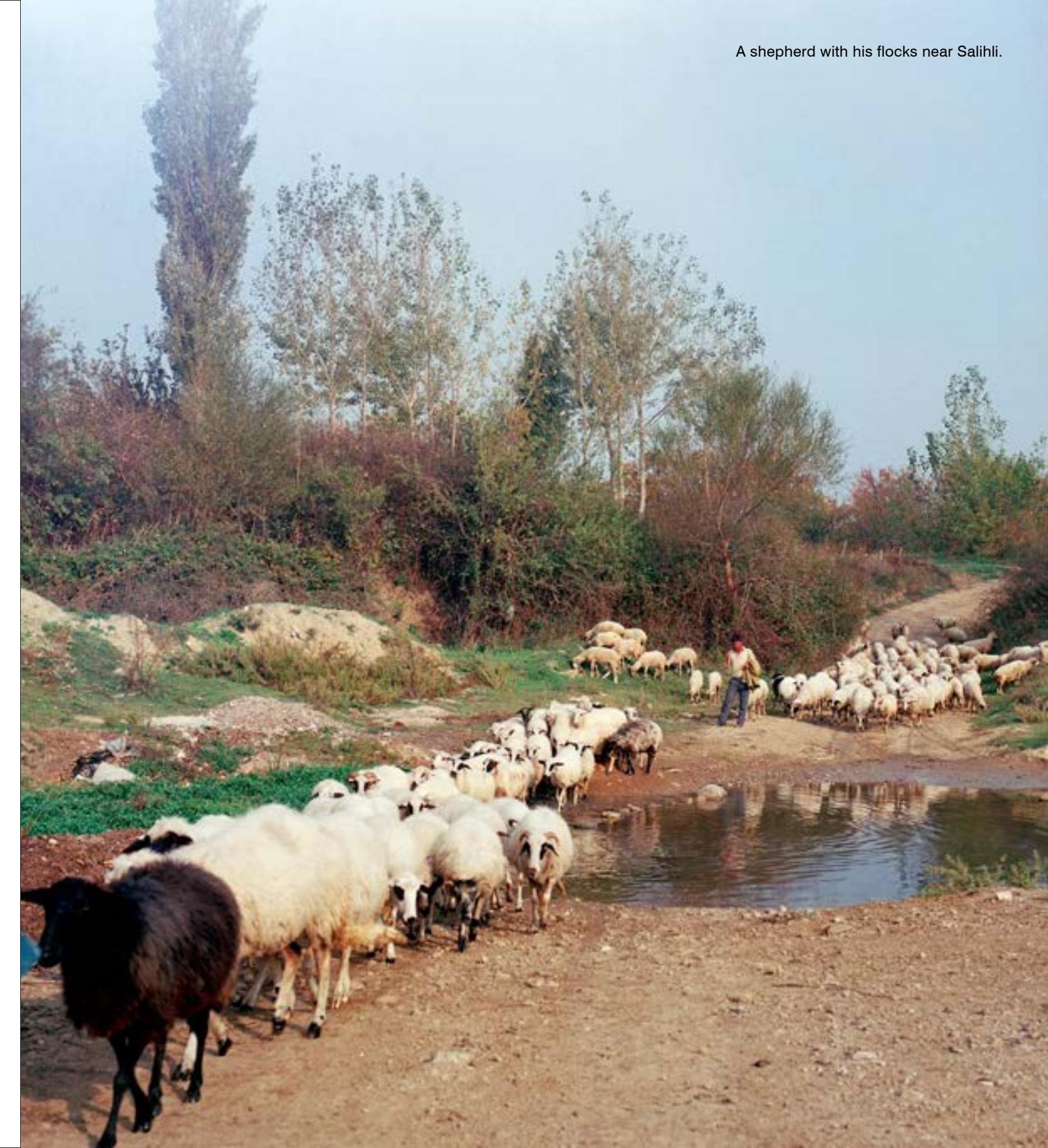
The monumental synagogue dates to the first half of the 3rd century BCE. In the backdrop is the looming precipice of the mountain chain against the silhouette of the minaret of the modern mosque of Salihli. The synagogue abuts the wall of the Roman gymnasium; from its size, formal plan, and the fine craftsmanship of the mosaic floor, one could only conclude that the synagogue belonged to a large, flourishing community. The historical records also attest to it: according to the Roman historian Josephus, the city authorities made a decree to the effect that a place for a synagogue would be allocated for a large Jewish population.



A view from the outer courtyard of the Sardis synagogue.

The building was long, planned in the shape of a basilica; it was divided into three naves by two rows of columns. A vase for ablution was centrally placed in the antechamber. To the east of the apse, four semi-circular marble seats were built in tiers. Facing these was a marble slab, the sides adorned with palm leaves, and resting on a carved lion's feet stand to prominently display an eagle with open wings. Outstanding features of the hallway were a pair of podiums and a pediment supported by two marble columns. Both the floors and the walls were inlaid with colored mosaics of rosettes, circles, and diamonds intertwined to form large geometric designs. In addition to the Hebrew inscription found in the synagogue and the symbol of a menorah, there was also a group of shops bearing the Hebrew names of their owners.

Despite our search, we found neither traces of a modern synagogue nor a living community in Salihli. We were told that in the aftermath of the War of Independence in 1922, the Jewish people had moved to İstanbul and İzmir, leaving few traces of their existence.



## MANİSA

From Sardis we drove northwest to Manisa. Seen from a hilltop, the view of the Manisa valley is lushly fertile, planted with tobacco, cotton, and vineyards. We approached a crossroads with an arrow pointing to a Moris Şinasi Children's Hospital. This was the hospital established by a Jewish philanthropist, as told to us by the Jewish community members of İstanbul. We continued to drive into the town of Manisa, a moderately large town of 150,000 people. As in many modern Turkish towns, the wide avenues, nondescript apartment buildings, and modern shops have successfully erased the past. Once the ancient city of *Magnesia*,



Manisa still has a few old buildings of cut-stone, erected by the Greek inhabitants of a century ago. Those that remained intact are used as public buildings. We asked a few people about the Jewish Quarter. No one had heard about it; presently, there was no living community of Jews in Manisa. Nevertheless, historical records indicate that there had been a synagogue there, called *Sibhat Lev* (Joy in my Heart) and that the area below the present Municipal building had housed the Jewish Quarter.

We returned to the crossroads where we had seen the sign leading to the hospital. We entered through the gate of the hospital, a high stone wall surrounding a

large garden with fruit trees and a vegetable patch. Sprawled across 27,000 square meters, the hospital was built originally as a general hospital, to include three surgery rooms, a morgue, a washroom, a big kitchen and living quarters for nurses. (Presently, it is a Children's hospital.) Moris Şinasi envisioned it as a self-sufficient institution that would provide subsistence for the hospital personnel: a farm, a greenhouse, and a fruit orchard.

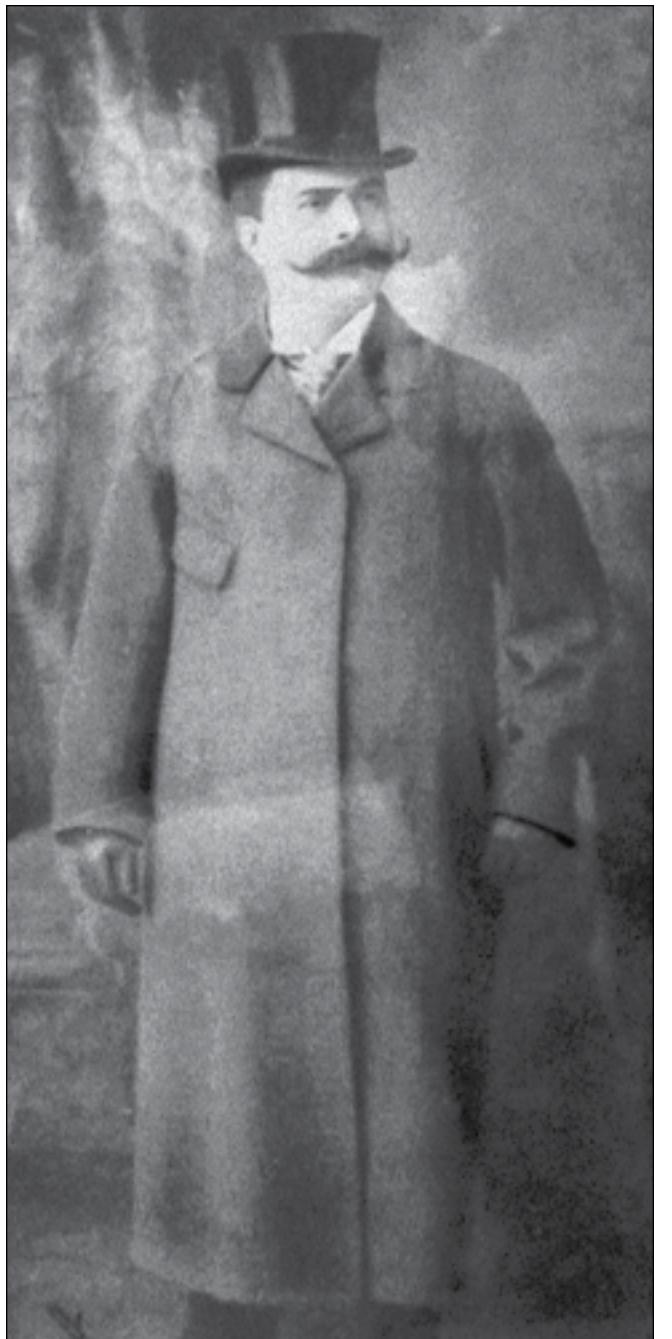
Moris Şinasi Hospital was created by an endowment from a native Jewish man who had emigrated in the 1880s to the U.S. by way of Egypt. He started a small tobacco import business in America, which developed into a lucrative tobacco company. Some of the tobacco was imported from Manisa. In the 1920s, Mr. Şinasi (née Eskenazi) funded a hospital in his hometown as an expression of his gratitude to his place of birth, and he assigned his wife with the task of finding the appropriate piece of land for it. Unfortunately, Mr. Şinasi did not live to see the completion of the hospital in 1933.

We took an extensive tour with the chief administrator, Dr. Seniha, who proudly told us: "There are only 50 beds, we need to increase the number, buy more equipment and materials." A new pavilion for premature babies was under construction. The hospital was initially funded through the Şinasi Trust Fund (\$33,000/year), and received matching funds from the Turkish Ministry of Health. (Later, the annual support was raised to \$50,000, and up-to-date surgical equipment had been sent by the Trust in New York). Dr. Seniha went on to say that when the hospital was first built

all medical equipment and building materials were imported from the U.S. The surgery rooms, kitchen, even the washroom facilities and linoleum for the floor were of 1930s vintage, but still in good condition. The wooden refrigerator and washer worked well; the cooking was done with coal fuel, and a freight elevator pulled by pulleys. In case of electrical shortage, a generator room was set up, which was an original idea for 1930s.

The tour was like a visit through a museum. In this "museum," mothers carrying their children milled in and out, babies were born, and surgeries were performed on a daily basis. The sound and spirit of new lives reverberated through the old walls. Dr. Seniha invited us to her office where freshly brewed camomile tea from the garden was waiting for us. She noted that with the additional pavilion, new equipment, and more specialists on the staff, the hospital would, undoubtedly, serve the public more efficiently. So, the legacy of Mr. Şinasi the native Jewish philanthropist would be preserved in the memories of Manisa's people.

Our tour ended at the Chief Surgeon's office, where we found a grand, full-length photograph of Moris Şinasi hung on the wall. The image of a tall, distinguished gentleman with fashionable handlebar moustache, wearing a long black coat, top hat, and carrying a walking stick. He could have been a French or a German industrialist of the 1920s. Upon our request to photograph Mr. Şinasi's portrait, it was carefully carried by the head nurse to the garden so Laurence could capture it with the current staff posing behind it.



Mr. Şinasi was also credited with introducing some of the early manufacturing techniques that helped cigarette smoking become so ubiquitous in the early part of 20th-century America.

Returning to the center of the town, we went to the Municipal building to inquire where the Jewish cemetery might have been. Once again we were told that during the building of the Municipal building complex the Jewish cemetery was carried over to the Muslim cemetery. So, we headed in that direction. The keeper of the grounds, a Bulgarian émigré, showed us the section designated for Jewish burials. He said when the Lycée of Commerce was built on the grounds of the original cemetery, the bodies had been re-interred in the Muslim cemetery. There were only 15 some graves dated to late 1930s and 1940s.



## İZMİR

İzmir, Turkey's third largest city, is home to the second largest Jewish community. In 1984, İzmir's Jewish population numbered some 2,000 people. Over a two-year period, we made several visits to İzmir, and became well acquainted with some members of the community. We were invited to their homes for Sabbath meals and occasionally stayed overnight as house guests.

Roza Gomel, one of the working wives invited us to her home and work place. She was a successful rug dealer and mother of two sons who were attending universities in the U.S. Roza started her business at her house, selling *kilims* to interested foreigners to keep herself busy and to supplement the income from her husband's retail fabric business. Roza's business had grown to such an extent that she participated in international rug and textile fairs in Turkey, the U.S. and Europe. Her involvement in Turkish crafts led to an interest in archaeology; eventually she became an active member as a fund raiser for the Association of Friends of Aphrodisias, a monumental classical site near İzmir.

Among the many families of Izmir, we enjoyed meeting the family of Avner and Yıldız Çikurel. One Friday evening we went to their home for Sabbath dinner. It began with the lighting of oil candles, a tradition that marks the beginning of the Jewish Sabbath at sunset. Normally, lighting the candles is a woman's job, said Mr. Çikurel, who nonetheless helped his wife with this task.



Izmir's Beth Israel synagogue on October 29th, Turkish Independence Day.

served everyone from one end of the table, while her husband sat at the other end. Her lively conversation intermingled with Avner's blessing of the wine and the Sabbath bread.

Avner was undoubtedly the patriarch of the family. He had overcome the hardships of a poverty-stricken

We shared the Çikurel's Sabbath meal with their son Hayim, his wife, and their son. Yıldız Çikurel's Sabbath table was a feast for the eyes before we sat down at the elegantly set table: we tasted a blend of Sephardic-Turkish dishes that included baked leg of lamb, *kabak köftesi* (squash patties), *çoban salatası* (similar to a Greek salad), *börek* (phyllo dough stuffed with cheese or meat filling), and spinach casserole. The sweet kosher wine was imported from Israel. Yıldız

childhood, and with hard work and good luck, he had managed to prosper. His son Hayim owned a business of manufacturing industrial equipment, and his wife was a chemistry teacher at the local French lycée. The Çikurel family was typical of the middle-class Jewish families in İzmir; they were well educated and fluent in several European languages, in addition to English and Turkish. We spoke about community life in İzmir, and Avner, as the self-appointed community organizer, spoke about supervising the maintenance of the İzmir synagogues and keeping them in working condition.

The Çikurels owned a spacious flat in one of the high-rise buildings overlooking the sea, in an upper middle class neighborhood called *Birinci Kordon*. From their balcony, we watched the sun retreat into a crescent



Roza Gomel's fluent English helped her rug business to flourish.

moon, leaving a crimson halo over the horizon. We could hear the foghorn of the ferryboats at the quay. It was a magical moment; in my mind I heard the song "My Beloved İzmir," popularized in the late 1950s by Dario Moreno, a Jewish popular singer from İzmir who had emigrated to France in 1960s. I used to listen to that song as a teenager on the radio. At that time it sounded like any other sentimental song, Moreno's lament that he had never found a city that captured his heart like his beloved İzmir. Years later, on that Sabbath day on the balcony, the song reverberated, and ushered in a new meaning for me.

İzmir's Jewish population goes back to the 2nd century CE, but the community was not formally organized until the 17th century. With the influx of Sephardim



Hayim Çikurel recited the Kaddish at his family's shabat dinner.

from the Ottoman lands the city grew into a major port for Mediterranean commerce. The Jewish community included wealthy merchants, eminent Rabbis, renowned physicians. Talmudic learning flourished in the city. In the mid 17th century, however, a dramatic event took place: İzmir became the venue for an unprecedented religious turmoil instigated by Sabbatai Sevi, also known as the false messiah. Sevi was born in İzmir in 1626. Gershon Scholem, the noted scholar of Jewish mysticism, calls the Shabbatain movement “the most important messianic movement in Judaism since the destruction of the second Temple.” Having alternated between ascetic piety and transgression of the law, Sabbatai was eventually excommunicated by the Rabbis of İzmir, as well as those of every city he visited. Nevertheless, his disciples increased. Sevi’s preaching reached people throughout the Ottoman Empire and



A window in Sevi's house seemed to impart a mystical message.

Europe via his emissaries and broadsheets printed in Germany and Holland.

The Rabbis were greatly disturbed by his messianic claims but could not stop him from forming a passionate group of followers. Finally, Sevi was threatened with excommunication and taken to the capital city of Edirne to appear before the Royal Council. According to legend, the Sultan asked Sevi to submit to the following test to prove he was the Messiah: the Sultan’s archers would shoot Sevi full of arrows. If no blood appeared, the Sultan would accept Sevi’s claim of being the Messiah. If, on the other hand, Sevi refused the test, he had to convert to Islam. The pragmatic Sevi chose Islam, as did many of his followers.

We visited what was claimed to be Sabbatai Sevi’s house



Shoemakers now used Sevi's house.

of birth, a dilapidated building in an old neighborhood near the agora of ancient İzmir (Smyrna). I suspect that the house we were shown had been built on the remains of the “Messiah’s” house. It was a two-story row house. The first floor was occupied by a shoe manufacturing shop. The second storey opened to a roof garden with a panoramic view of the city. Samuel Cohen, our guide, related the legend in Judaeo-Spanish: Sevi would sit on the roof with his students under fig and pear trees, pondering the meaning of certain mystical Jewish writings. He told his students that as the Messiah he had been ordained to save his people.

On a Friday we attended the Musta Bey synagogue for *Simcha Torah* services with Avner Çikurel. This holiday celebrates the completion of the annual cycle of the reading of the five Books of Moses. As one of the founders of the synagogue, Avner was given the honor of carrying one of the Torah scrolls in the traditional procession. Laurence asked him why Musa Bey synagogue was built when the older synagogues in the *Judeira* District remained empty. He replied that it was closer to the new residential neighborhoods and served as a modern community center. (I think the new modern structure lent the community the prestige it deserved.) Along the *Havra Sokak* (“street of the synagogues”), there were several historical synagogues, each one a precious gem recalling the golden era of İzmir’s Jewry of earlier eras when Talmudic learning and the study of Hebrew literature flourished there.

The historic Shalom synagogue was opened on a weekly basis for the few elderly men who still prayed there. Nisim Escapa, the caretaker, informed Laurence

that the synagogue was also known as the Aydin Synagogue, because many of the men who used to frequent it were from that town. Beth Israel was another impressive synagogue built at the turn of the century in Karataş district. Its elaborately carved ark had a purple velvet, gold embroidered curtain hiding the Torah scrolls. There were two large silver menorahs in front of the ark, each with a crescent and a star, the symbols of



Shabbatai Sevi as messiah sitting on the kingly throne, under a celestial crown held by angels and bearing the inscription “Crown of Sevi.”

the Turkish flag. The juxtaposition of the Jewish and the Turkish symbols was a clear expression of harmonious relations between the two communities.

After 1948, many of Izmir's Jews emigrated to Israel; those who remained were preserving their traditions, but their diminishing numbers did not allow for the continued maintenance of all the synagogues. So, as in many other cities and towns, the fate of the historic synagogues of Izmir was uncertain.



Street of the Jews in the Juderia section of the Izmir market.



The Minha, early afternoon service, at the Senyora Synagogue.



Nisim Escapa pointed out us the dedication plaque of the Aydin synagogue. It was dated 1890.



Nisim Escapa holding the parokhet, (torah arc cover), of the Bikur Holim synagogue, one of many synagogues along Havra Sokak—the street of the synagogues. Each one is a precious gem. They recall a period when the surrounding district called the juderia had a Jewish population of some 20,000.



Bikur Holim synagogue's teva, main reading desk, is in the style of late 19th century Ottoman decorative woodwork.



The Jewish School of İzmir was located in the city's Alsancak district. In 2001 we were told that it had closed its doors.

## TİRE

The town of Tire is situated in the plain of the Menderes River (Meander), surrounded by the Ödemiş Mountains. On our way from İzmir we passed huge fields of cotton, like snowflakes in the muted September sun. It was the season for cotton harvest. The village women in their multicolored pantaloons pulled each cotton flower gently and piled them into rope bags.

Tire was a major center of cereal, tobacco, olive and cotton production, also famed for its vineyards and fig orchards. The countryside is a Biblical tableau—large herds of sheep and goats by the river grazing in slow motion on harvested fields and fresh grass.

The history of the Jewish community in Tire dates back to the 1st century CE when the region was under Byzantine rule. In late 15th century Jews from Spain and Portugal settled in the countryside. In 1904 the population grew to 360 families, and by 1930s the population declined to 200 families. When we were searching for the community in 1984, the sole Jewish resident was "Madame Ester."

We arrived in Tire, at dusk. No one was to be seen except an old, hunchback man walking up the hill



The house that Madame Ester lived had been the Alliance Israélite School of Tire.

from the main street. I gently patted his back and asked the usual question: Where is the Jewish Quarter located? Yes, he replied, he could take us to the *Havra Mahallesi* (the Synagogue Quarter), where a certain Madame Ester would tell us the story of the community. The old man led us to the front of a half-demolished house next to the skeleton of a synagogue. Ester lived there, but there was no one inside. A village boy set off to find her. Several minutes later, we noticed a

frail figure coming down the hill, leaning on her walking stick. As she came closer, we beheld Madame Ester in her full regalia: wearing big *şalvar* (pantaloons), a blue flower print shirt, her hair covered by a white scarf. Ester was an albino. Her dark sunglasses emphasized the folds of her chalk-white skin, necessarily to protect her eyes from sunlight. Until she started speaking, one would never have guessed her to be other than a Turkish villager. She spoke *Ladino*

interspersed with a curious local dialect of Turkish. When she found out why we were there, she told us her life story—a story of sad events of which the contours were pieced together by broken images.

Ester's story was full of twists and turns of fate. She was only three years old when her mother died.

Madame Ester wearing the *şalvar* (pantaloons pants), typical of the Turkish peasants of the region spoke to Laurence in *Ladino*, and with me, in the local Turkish dialect.





Her stepmother was not disposed kindly to her and her brothers, so they grew up “like orphans.” Nevertheless, she was educated at the *Alliance* school, later continued her education to become a pharmacist’s assistant, which “placed” her above the level of her Turkish contemporaries, especially the girls. While working as a trainee at a Jewish-owned pharmacy, she met the love of her life, a Circassian-Turkish doctor. She married him and they moved to Alaşehir (the ancient city of Philadelphia). During her pregnancy, he became ill and died. Ester returned to Tire and gave birth to her first son. She supported herself and her son as a cleaning woman, seamstress, cotton picker, and cook. She finally moved with her young son to a room at the Hebrew school, next to the synagogue. By that time, her stepchildren by her first marriage were married, and Ester’s brothers had moved to Israel with their families. Ester’s 15-year old son insisted that he wished to go to Israel, to live with his cousins in a kibbutz. She assented. A year later, she received the tragic news of her son’s death; he and his cousin had died in a traffic accident. This time, her world had toppled down completely.

Her second marriage was to a Jewish butcher. Many years of poverty followed, marked by a dismal existence of caring for her sick husband and his children by a former marriage.

When we met her she lived in a room infested with lice (so she told us). Her neighbors did her errands, cooked her meals, and gave her clothing and wood for fuel. She valued her independence too highly to move in with somebody. In her room, she kept a number of cats, which she fed and cared for. But at night, she was

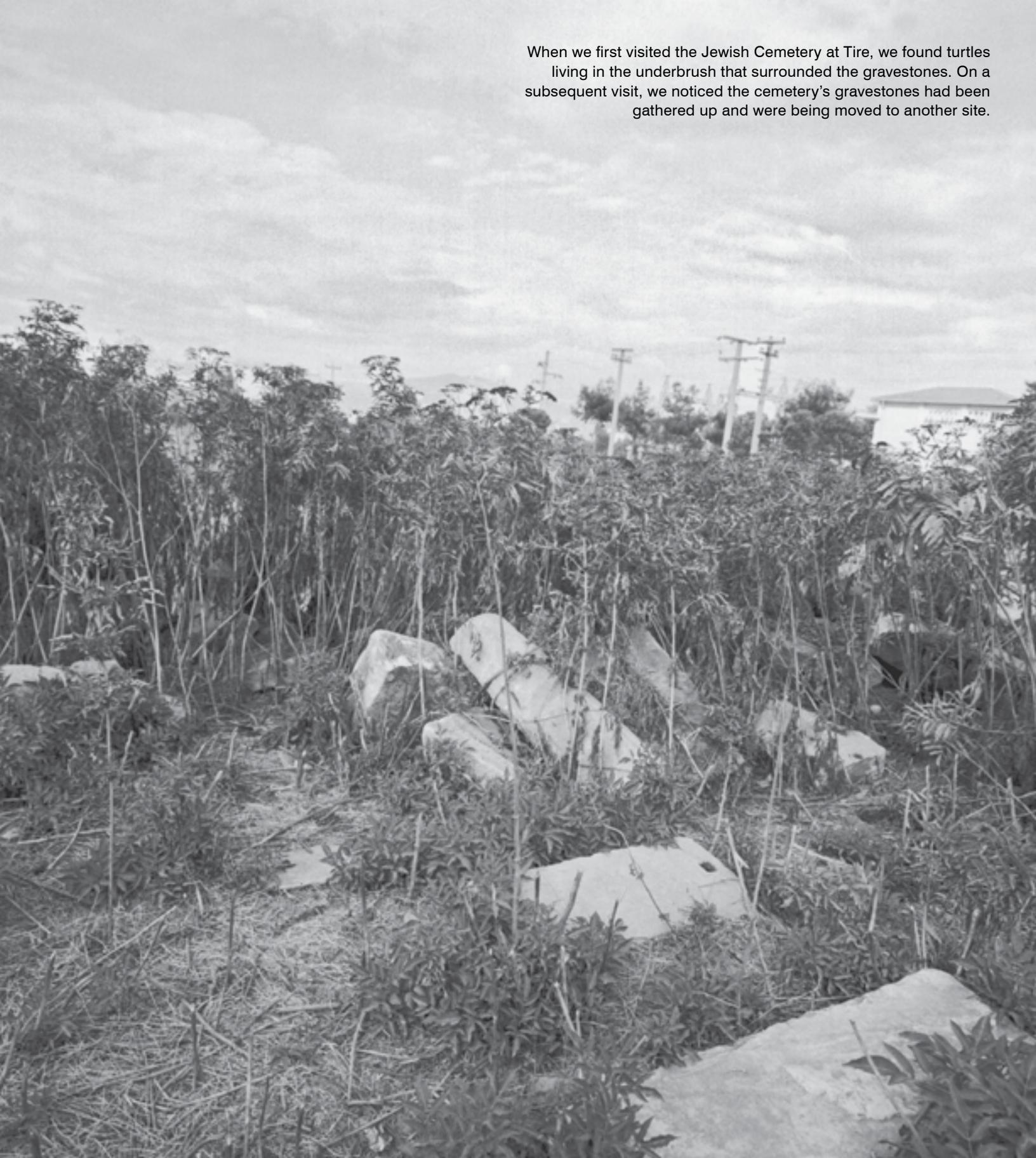
too nervous to sleep. Her few moments of happiness were when her relatives visited her from Israel and the U.S., and provided her with emotional and financial support.

Such is the tragic story of Madame Ester from Tire. Her mind and eyes wandered so often that many of our general questions concerning the community were left unanswered. I felt that our interview was unfinished; when we went back to Tire two years later, in 1986, we learned of Ester’s death.



Later we learned that Ester's brother lived with her.

When we first visited the Jewish Cemetery at Tire, we found turtles living in the underbrush that surrounded the gravestones. On a subsequent visit, we noticed the cemetery’s gravestones had been gathered up and were being moved to another site.



In a country filled with archaeological treasures, the Bergama landscape included this Ottoman arched bridge, built upon a Roman bridge.



## A E G E A N

### BERGAMA

We drove along the Gulf of Edremit, a truly magical landscape, especially when viewed from a hilltop. Olives were still green, but the green figs were already plump. Along the way there were many classical period sites that deserved stopping by. We passed near Troy, drove uphill until we reached İntepe and Ezine. Following the coastline, we passed from Ayvacık to Ayvalık, some small towns perched on a hilly landscape of thick olive groves.

We arrived in Bergama on a Monday which was the day of the weekly market. The town was teeming with village shoppers, merchants hustling and bustling behind open stalls. Bergama and its environs are one of the richest agricultural regions on the Aegean. Cars and motorcycles whizzed by, horse-drawn carriages were piled with foodstuffs, animal skins, housewares, clothing. We stopped at a cloth merchant's stand, and asked where was the Jewish Quarter. The vendor knew exactly with whom we should get in touch, a Jewish merchant by the name of Salomon Sağlamlar, otherwise known as *Karaoğlan* (black boy). He and his



Salamon Sağlamlar

family were the only Jews left in town, and he could be found in the *Lonca* (guild), section of the old market where one-room shops were located.

We took a short walk on a narrow street paved with cobblestones, and found Salomon's shop in a 16th-century caravanserai. These shops had wooden doors with glass panes, at night the owners pulled wooden shutters over the windows. Each shop had a wood burning stove in the middle of the room. The shopkeepers were always haggling with the buyers. They sold a wide range of goods as wholesale, from horse trappings, grains to acorns. During the haggling process tea glasses clinked, small boys delivered messages from one merchant to the other, until the transactions were concluded. It was a scene from a medieval marketplace.



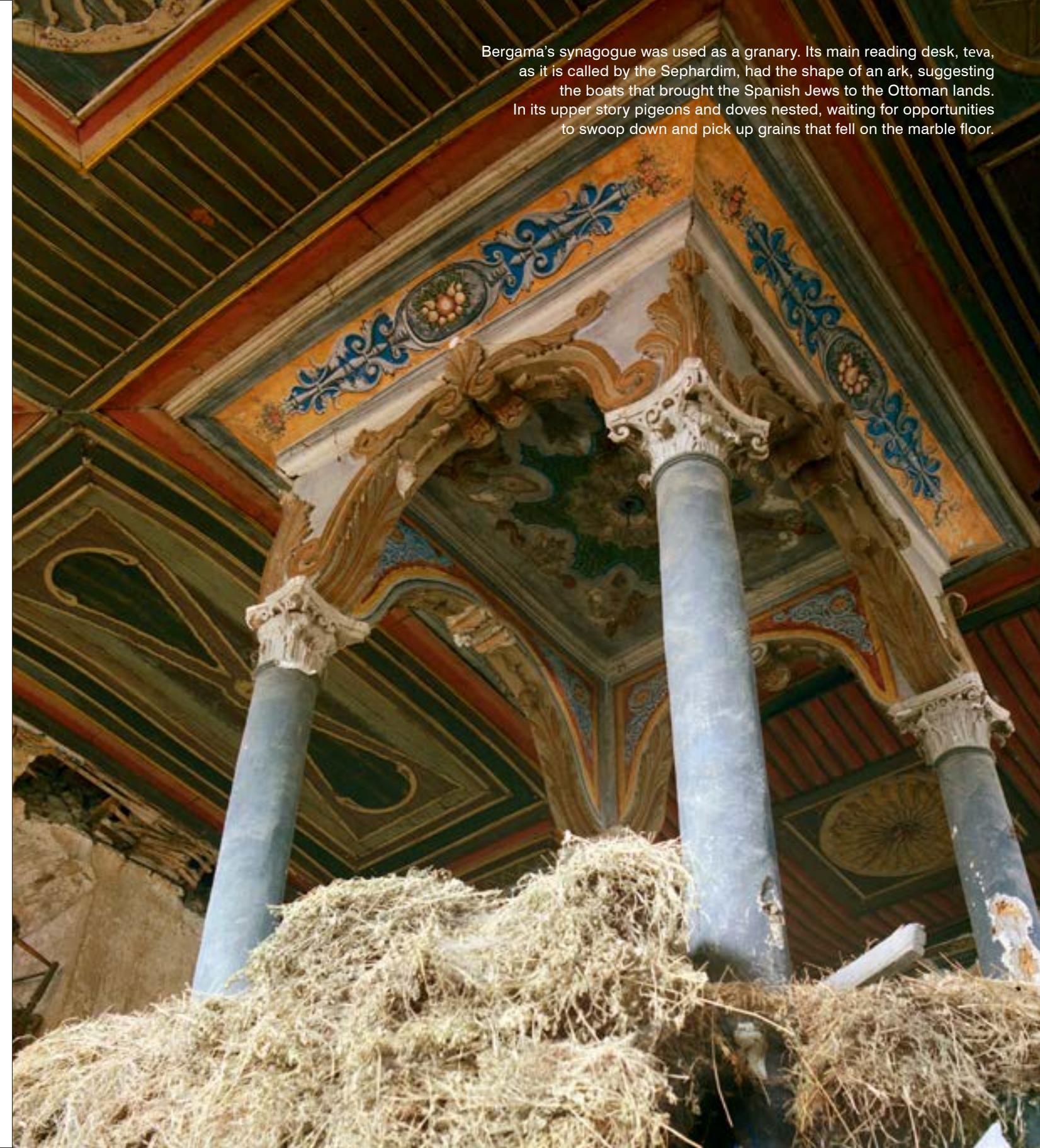
Horse-drawn carts waited their turn to load hay that was stored inside the former Bergama synagogue.



Ceiling ornament carved in wood in Bergama's synagogue.

Salamon, a distinguished tall man, stood out amongst the others in his European style pants and shirt, and the classic *Borsalino* (an Italian brand) hat. The plaque over his shop read: *Yün/Yapak/Susam* (wool/thread/sesame), Yusef Sağlamlar. He asked us who we were, as he greeted us graciously into his shop. At that time Salomon was about to conclude sale of wool to a Turkish carpet manufacturer, flanked by his two sons. He was orchestrating the deal in local Turkish dialect, in the center of a circle of eight to ten men, while at the same time he ordered tea for us and instructed his sons to transport the wool to its buyer in "good time!"

He said he had started his business in 1949. In the 1920s, there were as many as 1,000 families living in Bergama (I think he meant the total population). In



Bergama's synagogue was used as a granary. Its main reading desk, teva, as it is called by the Sephardim, had the shape of an ark, suggesting the boats that brought the Spanish Jews to the Ottoman lands. In its upper story pigeons and doves nested, waiting for opportunities to swoop down and pick up grains that fell on the marble floor.

the 1940s and 50s majority of them left for İstanbul, İzmir, and Israel. Salomon's was the only Jewish family in Bergama; his son, Davi, lived in İzmir and commuted to work once a week. At age 72, Salomon wanted to retire and leave the business to his sons. He could hardly see or write, and he complained about his sons not working as hard as he did; they did not like dealing with merchants, collecting and delivering goods on time. On the other hand his wife Bulisa was not as harsh on her sons' work habits, she told her husband that he could not expect the younger generation to work as hard as they did, each generation took it a bit easier, that was the natural flow. She advised him to stop complaining and keep on working! (In 1986, two years after our initial visit to Bergama, Salomon died.)

Later in the day Bulisa and Salomon invited us to their house for tea. It was located in the midst of the Jewish Quarter, vis à vis the huge red brick edifice of Red Basilica (originally built in 2nd century CE) on the historic Selinus river (*Bergama Çayı*), and the well preserved Roman/Ottoman bridge, over it. Their house was a modest, two-room structure with a courtyard in front of it. To the right of the courtyard was a warehouse that the family rented out. That day it held

piles of sheepskin, soon to be sent to İzmir for processing. After offering tea and home-made cookies, and Israeli cigarettes, Bulisa took us on a walk through the Jewish Quarter.

She was a short, sprightly woman in her early '70s; she had intense black eyes framed by bushy eyebrows. Her childlike smile belied her energetic personality. Her movements were quick but measured. She said she

liked the idea of contributing to our work because she was proud of her family and heritage. We walked with her to the synagogue, or what used to be the synagogue, a mere five-minute walk from her house in the old Jewish Quarter. It was built in 1880s. The original entrance was through an arched doorway, preceded by a brick dome above the entrance. Until one entered the synagogue proper and saw the *bimkah* (ritual-reading desk) one could not guess the building's

original function. Now it was used as a warehouse for grains, animal hides, and feed. Piled up on the *bimkah*, the drying straw and bags of oats saturated the air inside. As my eyes followed the *bimkah* through the straw pile to the ceiling I caught sight of traces of red and gold paint bordering bouquets of flowers, 19th-century seascapes, and gliding birds. It must have been



Bulisa and Salomon in the doorway to their house.



spectacular once, shaped like a boat, with an arched dome over it that was held up by four wooden ionic columns. Originally the building had 13 windows set in deep niches. They were now all bricked up. The floor was of wide marble tiles, the ceiling was adorned with carved pieces of rosettes and diamonds in red and gold paint. Against one of the long walls were two closets of old books. When I opened one, a pile of prayer books fell out, bringing with them decades of dust and cobwebs.

During the past ten years the synagogue was rented by a Turkish farmer named Ali Rıza. He said the front entrance used to lead to Hayim who was the keeper's house, where he made a living by selling his homemade wine. His house was a substantial stone building, dated to the Hebrew year 5642 (1880), it shared the courtyard of the synagogue. It was originally built as the Alliance Israélite School and was later used as the Hebrew school.

En route to the cemetery, Bulisa pointed out the burned-out Romanesque mansion where she and her husband had lived during the first few years of their married life. Her father, Aron Navaro, had been dead for more than 60 years. Bension, Bulisa's brother who



Ayşe in the courtyard of the Red Basilica.

now lived in the U.S., rebuilt Aron's tomb. A general impression of neglect and silent decay pervaded the cemetery. Bulisa volunteered to tell us about her father, who had also dealt in wool, acorns (used for extracting dye), pistachio nuts, almonds.

Her father, she said, used to travel to nearby villages on foot or donkey to buy the goods and sell them to local merchants in Bergama and in İzmir. He

worked as a middleman. He was a good provider for his family, he even gave to the poor Jews and Turks alike. Bulisa recalled with a tinge of sadness that two days before his death, on a Friday, he intuitively felt his end was near, so he took a long bath, then went to the synagogue and asked his workmen to come to his house early Sunday morning. When they arrived, Davi Rafael had died. He was 65 years old.

The cemetery was located on an open hilltop on the foothills of the acropolis of ancient Pergamon. Several broken marble stones were still visible through the overgrown weeds. In the course of walking to the Jewish cemetery, we stopped at the "Red Basilica," a magnificent stone-and-brick construction erected during the Roman period and reconstructed by the Byzantine stonemasons. On the

grounds of the Basilica, we found tombstones with Hebrew inscriptions strewn among Roman capitals, sarcophagi, and Ottoman tombstones. Some marble tombstones were incorporated into the gardens of local houses. One Byzantine column base dated 1854 had been shaped into a Jewish tombstone carved with a Hebrew, inscription.

The "Red Basilica" is now an enormous ghost of a building open to the sky. Behind it are a series of carpet and craft shops. Interwoven into this rich historical legacy was the sliver of life lived by Jews for some five centuries.

In Bergama history is alive, its diverse cultural and historical fabric left its physical traces throughout the town and the acropolis: they range in date from Hellenistic to Roman, Byzantine, and Seljuk to Ottoman times—among them, the altar of Zeus, Temple of Athena, the Hellenistic theater, most significantly, the Greco-Roman medical center. The ancient monuments are sandwiched between modern houses, cafes, restaurants. According to the noted Jewish historian, Abraham Galante, the region of Bergama and other nearby towns, Tire, Ödemiş, Bayındır, were very rich in agricultural and industrial crops. They fed the metropolis of the İzmir province. This fertile region also provided highly favorable economic conditions for the Jews who lived and worked and, at times, competed with the Greek and Armenian inhabitants living there. The Jews were merchants of varying magnitude, some had established tobacco and matzo factories, others manufactured shoes, clothing, and candy. Food exporters, however, were the most successful merchants

(Galante, *Histoire des Juifs de Turquie*, v. 3, pp.330-352).



Bulisa and her grandson held a portrait of her father Aron Navaro.

## MİLAS

Driving south from İzmir, we entered the town of Milas through the ancient gate built by Alexander the Great. It is a town with a present population of 22,000 people. Dotting the winding cobblestone streets are traditional wooden houses with *cumba* (bay windows) and corner grocery stores, reminiscent of a 19th century oriental town, until one steps into the bustling main street of the 20th century cityscape.

While having breakfast at a tea garden I learned that there was only one or two families still living in Milas. By 1920s a branch of the Alliance Israélite school was established to give basic courses in the tradition of French secular schools, and up until 1950s the population was nearly 2,000. The people made a living by selling yard goods, jewelry, groceries and agricultural crops.



The gate to the city of Milas built by Alexander the Great provides an entry to the past.

The tea delivery boy knew where Dr. Yakup's house was located in the old *Yahudi Mahallesi*. We saw a large sign with his name—Dr. Yakup Siyman—Internist—on the second storey of his house. We knocked on the door and introduced ourselves. He was a bit taken by surprise to see us, but greeted us graciously, and led us

to the lobby of his second floor examination room. As we waited outside, he finished giving instructions for the medications he had prescribed to his patient.

Yakup Siyman (née Yakov) was a kindly, modest man in his 40s. He had penetrating blue eyes and black hair. His manner of speaking matched his meticulously ironed grey pants, and blue blazer. Despite his slight speech defect, he was very articulate about

the history of the Jews in Milas, especially his own family. He was related to old families on both sides: the Notrika family, on his father's side, and on his mother's side to the Amato family (members of both families lived in İzmir, İstanbul, and Adana). He was also a distant cousin of Avram Galante, the noted Jewish historian and thinker whose history of the Jews of Turkey is one of the first comprehensive histories written about the subject.

Yakup was very enthusiastic about being an informant to our project. He said that our work would give him the opportunity to tell the world, who he was, and what he did; he loved Turkey, especially the people of Milas. He was born and raised there, and wanted to stay in his hometown to serve the people.

Dr. Yakup loved his town, his neighbors and his patients. As the only Jewish person (and his wife) he had devoted his life to the practice of medicine in this town where his grandfather's 120-year-old home was still standing.



He had done his military service in Eastern Turkey, after graduating from the medical school of the University of İstanbul. He then returned to Milas to practice medicine. Yakup and his wife Leah, who was originally from İzmir, had been married for 10 years. They did not have any children.

He related an interesting story about his grandfather's brothers: In the 1900s, the two brothers left for Belgian Congo to seek their fortunes. Eventually, they made their fortune by processing gold and other metals for export, and they traveled regularly to Europe to establish new business contacts. In the 1940's, they were intercepted by the German police. The only way they could escape being sent to concentration camps was by proving their Turkish citizenship. How did they do it? They sent a long telegram to their brother

(Yakup's grandfather) asking him to send their Turkish birth certificates, which he could only obtain through the cooperation of the Turkish government. Yakup said that it was an example of human kindness and protection delivered by the Turkish Government to her citizens, even those living outside of Turkey. In return for his invaluable service, Yakup's grandfather received a substantial pension from his brothers until his death. Years later, Yakup's brother spent seven years in South Africa working as an engineer for his great-uncles at their factory. Presently, the brother was engaged with his father in an import-export business based in İzmir.

In the afternoon Yakup took us through the town. He pointed out the oldest houses which, he said unfortunately were going to be torn down soon, to be replaced



by wide streets and "modern" buildings. In the Jewish Quarter he pointed to his grandfather's house, which was a historically certified building, circa 1864, and other empty homes of various families related to him. Standing by a monumental mansion, Yakup told the story of the family who had lived there—a beautiful French woman and her aristocratic Turkish husband. He was a descendant of an old ruling family called Menteşeogulları. He had gone to Paris to organize support for the Young Turk Movement in Turkey. He fell in love with a French woman who became his wife who assumed the name Suzan Murad, and lived in Milas until her death. She was buried in a small village cemetery nearby.

Yakup was a passionate local historian; throughout our walk he told us about the Greco-Roman and the Ottoman history of Milas and pointed to the standing remains—the arched gate of the ancient city built by Alexander the Great, a mosque and a 13th century caravanserai.

We then walked over to where the Jewish cemetery had been; it was almost taken over by the sprawling shantytown of Milas. Yakup was unable to take us to the two synagogues that had been functioning up until 15 years ago; he said, one had been replaced by a secondary school, the other was demolished, and remained as an empty lot.

As we took our leave, Yakup gave us the addresses of his relatives in İzmir from whom we could get more information. Needless to say, he was most helpful and forthright about giving information about his family and his

town. He had but a small request: could Laurence send him a copy of each and every photograph he had taken in Milas, and a copy of our family portrait, and could he expect to receive them soon?

Yakup received the photographs he had requested. A few years later we found out that Dr. Yakup and his wife had moved to İzmir where all their relatives lived, despite his strong attachment to his hometown.



## BODRUM

On a misty November morning we continued on to the town of Bodrum, through the Milas-Muğla road which ran along a wide valley. Soon the cotton fields gave way to tobacco plants. On the hills, there was an extensive reforestation activity to plant pine trees. Climbing a steep hill we saw a black heap of amorphous shapes moving—it turned out to be a large herd of long-haired goats migrating from their highland summer quarters toward the plains for a stay of six months until the following spring. Soon we saw four more herds, each 300-350 goats with their shepherds, and followed by women and donkeys loaded with tents and household goods. Such is the nomadic way of life which still continues in the southern regions of Turkey.

The original Jewish settlers in Bodrum came from Rhodes and Italy. Presently, no Jews live in Bodrum. Baruh Akyüz of İzmir, formerly a resident of Bodrum, informed us that in 1950 there were still 50 Jews living in Bodrum.

A local farmer accompanied us on his donkey besides us as our guide while we searched for the Jewish cemetery. We found it on a hillside next to the newly established lycée. At the entrance we found a plaque with an inscription *Talisman Yahudi Mezarlığı* (Talisman Jewish Cemetery). No more than ten tombstones were scattered about. I thought others must have been carried away for use in new construction, as it is generally done in rural towns. The oldest stone was dated 130 years ago; the most recent had a date of 1949; it belonged to a doctor, Samuel Kadra, who had died in a

traffic accident near Milas. The epitaph described him as a respected doctor who “gave his last breath while doing his honorable duty to mankind.” The farmer who gave us the information added that when Bohor Akyüz (Baruh’s father) died [in 1950s], 90 percent of the funeral attendees were Turkish Muslims.

Ten years ago Bodrum was a modest fishing village. Since then, it has been transformed into a popular vacation haven for the well-heeled Turks and sun-loving tourists.



A cracked tombstone that belonged to Bohor Akyüz.



The site of the Jewish Cemetery overlooks the Bodrum harbor.

Fethiye's Jewish cemetery stones had metamorphosed into forms that no longer had a bearing to the gravemarkers they once were. In their disintegration the shapes resembled mythical creatures.



# MEDITERRANEAN



The western Mediterranean is the birthplace of the Lycian culture that extends from Fethiye to Antalya in the east, and inland to the north. The antiquity of the coastline is a feast for the eyes and soul: the Hellenistic and Roman settlements of Perge, Aspendos, and Side are unmatched in size and grandeur, as well as the medieval castles rising on hilltops that are visible from the road.

All along the coast are splendid ancient Lycian cities which are characterized by tombs cut into the natural rocks and adorned by sculptures. Many of these tombs dot the mountainous landscape, forming a striking contrast to the wide plains and meandering streams and deltas flowing into the sea. Among the significant ancient Lycian cities are Telmessus (Fethiye), Xanthus, and Patara, which were engaged in international trade with Egypt, Rhodes, Crete, Cyprus, and Greece. Eventually, the Lycians were subjugated to Hellenistic and Roman domination, followed by the Arabs and Seljuk Turks.

Our travels along the Mediterranean took us to five cities—Fethiye, Mersin, Adana, Antakya and Iskenderun.

## FETHİYE

From Bodrum we continued to Fethiye. The Jewish community of Fethiye had emigrated from Rhodes at the turn of the 20th century. We were told that we would not find any traces of a Jewish community there, but we were in for a surprise. There was Ali Uğur, the Jewish cameraman, who had converted to Islam and married a young Muslim woman from Fethiye. Ali did not even wish to be identified with the Jewish community. (He had changed his last name from İsrailoğlu to Uğur—from son of Israel to “good luck.”) His father, Davi İsrailoğlu, had died 20 years earlier. Ali told us little of his father other than that he was the husband to two wives whom he kept separately, but treated equally. They had been a wealthy family of merchants, engaged in selling olives, grapes and



Ali Uğur loved his birthplace, and always returned to it.

acorns. In addition to a large home, the family owned real estate in Fethiye. In 1950s some family members moved to Israel, the U.S. and South America, and their family home was sold to a bank. There were no traces of Ali’s family in Fethiye; his mother and sister lived in Israel, and several of his uncles were successful businessmen living in İzmir.

Ali was a small man with lots of graying hair combed back. He had spent his youth in İstanbul as a student of film, isolated from the traditions of his family and indifferent to the intrigues of Jewish commercial life in which his father and grandfathers had been engaged. Although he had traveled widely in Turkey and Europe as a cameraman, he always returned to Fethiye. He was reluctant to talk about the Jews; his adoption of Islam was by choice. He had studied it thoroughly and had found it very profound as a philosophy of life, and well suited to his temperament. Immersed in the history and culture of the region, he was writing a script for a movie about passions of local heroes, the loves, and disappointments of ordinary people of the past and the present culture of ordinary people, shepherds, farmers, fishermen. Ali had good insights about the people of his town.

His preoccupation was not with his immediate ancestors. He appeared to live in a world of his own. He was something of a mystic, he worshiped nature, particularly the sea. He wrote a script about a Rhodian fisherman whom he knew as a little boy, in which he re-created the daily lives of people in a fishing village, their love for the sea, their passions and disappointments, and the mystical tie between fishermen and the sea.

He had a desire to visually describe the wealth of the cultural past of Fethiye, its brilliant sun, the Turkoman nomads, the stories of the ancient Lycian kings and their gods and legends. Ali had returned to Fethiye from İstanbul, because it was the town he loved, not because of its connection to his Jewish past!

We took a walk with Ali to see the Lycian tombs (4th century BC) carved into the rock mountains above the house where he lived. The most spectacular one belonged to the King Amyntas, with its carved facade oriented toward the sea. At every step of the way Ali was captivated by the history of his town.

The old Jewish cemetery was located on a hill that is now a pine forest, situated in the Birinci Karagöz quarter. When an earthquake hit the town 27 years ago, the houses by the harbor were demolished, so people began to build uphill, bordering on the cemetery. The relatives of the deceased removed the bones and buried them in the section of the Muslim cemetery set aside for Jewish burials. We went there with Ali. Only four stones were visible, and, two did not bear inscriptions. The earliest burial was dated 1949, the most recent 1958. The fate of the rest of the old cemetery and the tombstones, including that of Ali’s father, remained unknown. Perhaps they were ploughed under the pine trees.

## MERSİN

The history of Jewish settlements in this region dates to Roman times. As in Adana, the Jews of Mersin are of Spanish origin, they had settled in Mersin after living in Thrace, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, Greece, and Western Anatolia. At the time of our visit, 30 Jews were living in Mersin. From the 1930s to the 1950s, close to five hundred Jews lived there; after 1948, large numbers immigrated to Israel.

As was the general pattern, the remaining community was one of elderly people whose children lived outside of Turkey. Beginning in the 1950s the unity of the community had declined. We were told that there was very little interdependence among the families. We



The synagogue of Mersin was water damaged and the roof had partly caved in.

were left with the impression that each family was an island unto itself. Perhaps it was because the families had come from different towns along the coast.

Our three informants were Erol Cumartesi, a shoe-store owner, Salvador Avigdor, a retired merchant, and Salamon Strumza, a semi-retired merchant; they were all extremely helpful about the history of the community and its present state. In the process each had a personal story to tell.

Our meeting with Salvador Avigdor was arranged through Mr. Taki, a Greek merchant. He invited us for dinner at his modest but comfortable house. It was a delightful dinner of fresh fish, salad and Turkish *meze* (hors d'oeuvres) with *rakı*. Taki's son was married to a Muslim woman from Syria or Lebanon. Later that evening Taki and Salvador took us to the synagogue. At first Salvador was reluctant to do so. He said, "the synagogue is in a very bad state of decline, (indeed, he was right!) and you might not like to see it."

It was night time. All was silent except for the croaking crows, when we entered the courtyard of the synagogue, stepping into a small jungle of overgrown weeds. There were three buildings in the courtyard. One was the remains of a fallen *sukhot*, its vines still clinging onto it. Salvador tried in vain to open the main door of the synagogue with a long, cast iron key, so Laurence climbed through a broken window and let us in. We walked into a long, dark room, infused with a musty smell and filled with cobwebs and broken glass. The synagogue was a complete ruin. Salvador informed us that up until three years ago, the keeper



It seems that thieves had ransacked the synagogue looking for silver.  
The Torah scrolls were unfurled onto the synagogue's floor.

had cleaned it, but then he had left for South America to join his daughter.

The synagogue had a tripartite plan: the main room and two smaller adjoining prayer rooms on each side. The main room had been completely plundered and the roof had partly fallen in after years of rainfall. The smell of burned wood permeated the hall. The *bimma* had been taken down, the *Sefer Torahs* (beautifully inscribed on deerskin), rolled out on the floor and partially burnt. Clearly, this was a case of intentional destruction. The burglars might have been angry at failing to find the silver *Torah* covers and other valuable religious articles which had been carried for safe keeping to the house of one of the members. A once exquisite gold-on-silk embroidered curtain over the *Sefer Torahs* was torn into shreds. We had not seen a synagogue in worse shape except those in Kilis and Gaziantep where there were no living Jewish communities. Salvador was clearly embarrassed by the condition of the synagogue, and he quickly changed the subject.

He told us that his son, Nesim, was now living in New York with his wife Melek, a Turkish-Muslim woman who was working as a manager of RamAmerica Holding, a branch of the Koç International Corporation. Nesim had received his MBA from Harvard, after graduating from Hacettepe University in Ankara. Did his family accept the marriage to a Muslim woman? According to Salvador, at first both families had been angry and shocked, and the young couple had eloped and married in Israel. Later on both parents had to accept the done deed.

Our next informant was Erol Cumartesi, he had two sons and a daughter who was physically incapacitated. We visited him at his crowded store in the downtown area. He and his brother owned two shoe stores, and did well financially. Erol's clients called him "Uncle Erol," because they felt that he catered to individual client's wishes. He, too, confirmed the neglected state of the community buildings. "The state of the synagogue is certainly a symbol of it," he said. They had to invite rabbis from Istanbul to perform their religious rites (*brit*, *bar mitzvah*, etc.) but the rabbis were reluctant to come even though their fees and plane fares were fully paid. Erol said the rabbis asked exorbitant fees which the community had to negotiate.

Another member of this disparate community was Mr. Salomon Strumza. He visited us at the *Toros Otel*, and after a short meeting he invited us to his home to meet his family. Salomon arrived promptly at 9:00 am. His snow-white hair and intense gaze enhanced his small face. At 74, he still swam for an hour and a half every day, walked several kilometers, and enjoyed tending to his fruit orchard. Now he was semi-retired from his import-export business.

His wife Matilda met us at the door. She was feeding a band of feral cats that surrounded her. She led us into a comfortable, spacious living room with elegant rosewood furniture, vintage 1900. Against the wall were glass-enclosed bookcases full of books. While Matilda was preparing lunch, Salomon and his sister Aliz elaborated on the family background. Their father David Strumza was an educated man, a veterinarian who had worked for the Turkish government until



This empty torah case, (tik), was left in the synagogue's courtyard. Probably it held the torah scroll that was unfurled on the floor of the synagogue.

1924. He had come to Mersin from Salonika. At the close of World War I, the British in Jerusalem had taken him as a prisoner of war. (Palestine was under Ottoman rule until 1917; after that year, it became a British mandate). Following his return to Mersin he was imprisoned again, this time by the French forces occupying the city. However, he succeeded in getting out in eight days. Salamon added that his father had also been a victim of Armenian saboteurs who tried to ruin him by writing him a letter in prison, ordering him to organize guerilla forces against the French. The plot was exposed and he was subsequently released.

In 1924, father Strumza received a letter from the Turkish government, transferring him to Silifke (a minor town nearby), which he considered a form of exile. Curiously, though, his salary was raised. He



Salamon and Matilda Strumza.

responded directly in a letter to the Minister of Health: "I have served this country for 24 years, I have also served in Silifke, previously. I cannot think of any reason why I would be sent back there, and, yet with an increase in salary for which I did not ask for ... I can only think of one reason, that is, I am a Jew. And, Mr. Minister, of that I am very proud. With this statement I am sending you my resignation."

So began a new era for Salamon's father. It was only one year after the Turkish Republic had been established. He set up a business as an import-export merchant. It was a period when everything was imported, including sardines from Norway, matches from Sweden, vegetable oil from Italy, tea from Ceylon, coffee from Rio, rope bags from India. All transactions were made via sea mail. Mr. Strumza's facility with several languages helped him to explore and trade in foreign markets, and he succeeded in arranging for credit payments through both Turkish and foreign banks. At that time, his son Salamon was 14 years old. His father taught him the tricks of the trade. Salamon still remembers freighters loaded with oil from Marseille arriving at the port of Mersin. Payment was deferred but wired in a couple of months later through the Ottoman Bank. "Presently, times are very difficult," he said, "it takes two to three months just to get accreditation." Salamon's father was the leader of the Jewish community. Although he was not a religious man, he attended services on Saturday to serve as a "good example" to the community. (He had donated the *Sefer Torahs* that we found desecrated on the synagogue floor.)

While Salamon was passionately talking, his sister Aliz

was smiling. She had an advanced case of glaucoma, as well as bone and kidney ailments. She had taught herself how to write with her eyes closed in case she went blind. She was a petite, elegant woman, whose white hair was carefully combed and pinned back. The story of father Strumza continued while we had our delicious lunch of lentil soup, Adana *kebab*, salad, and *humus*, all prepared by Matilda.

When Salamon was born in 1909, four Jewish families were living in Mersin. His grandfather had emigrated from Yugoslavia to initiate an export business, shipping cereals to Crimea. Two generations later, true to family tradition, Salamon exported foodstuffs to Western Europe. While we were having lunch, in fact, he conducted business talks by phone with his partners in France. Salamon had attended a French lycée run by priests of the Capuchin Order in Mersin. In addition, he had taught himself English, Italian and German. At home they had always spoken *Ladino*. His sister Aliz had been brought up to appreciate fine arts. Despite living in a relatively small town in which art studies were not readily accessible, she was encouraged to pursue them elsewhere, and enrolled in correspondence courses at an art institute in Paris. For 25 years she continued

to paint until her eyes gave out. Her paintings in the living room testified to her serious devotion to art.

Salomon's wife Matilda was a lively woman who took pride in running her household efficiently. Her hospitality was overwhelmingly in Turkish style. She said she missed her children dreadfully; two daughters and one married son lived in Israel. Indeed, Strumza's family was scattered across Europe; one brother was

a distinguished heart-specialist and the director of a research institute in Paris.

Our delightful lunch ended with a promise to see them later on the way back from Adana. The second visit was a very short stop. We renewed our greetings and Salamon presented us with a box of delicious *hurma* (a tropical fruit with a delicate aroma and soft orange skin, known as the fruit of paradise) from his garden.



Matilda Strumza was fond of her black-striped cats.

The Jewish burials were in the Municipal cemetery, along with Muslim and Christian burials. Each group had a clearly delineated section reserved for its members. We never found out if that was the original plan or if the Jews and Christians were incorporated into the Muslim cemetery after their communities shrank in numbers.

## ADANA

Historically, the region goes back to the Hittite era, the second millennium BCE, and extends through the Hellenistic, Roman, Byzantine and Ottoman periods. The old city has Byzantine and Ottoman period monuments, historic houses, as well as more recently built mosques and fountains. But the downtown area is modern, except for the turn-of-the-century Bourse building.

As the fifth most populous city in Turkey, Adana is located in the Çukurova plain (Cilician plain), in the foothills of the Taurus Mountains. It is an agriculturally fertile province, the main crops are cotton, cereals, and citrus fruits. The River Seyhan gives life to the region through irrigation and hydro electrical power.

Adana is at the eastern-most frontier for Jews of Spanish origin. Only 200 km to the southeast is the city of Antakya (ancient Antioch) where the Arabic-speaking Jewish community has a completely different cultural and linguistic identity. In Adana no one spoke Arabic; in addition to Spanish and Turkish, some Jewish people were fluent in French and English. The population of 63 people lived dispersed throughout the



The Adana Minyan had the requisite number of males for a service.

Curiously, while most middle-aged husbands did not have higher education, most of the wives had university degrees, their parents had been educated at the Alliance Israélite schools. The younger generation of men graduated from the American College in Adana, and they became active in educational activities, served

city. They were a warm, welcoming group of people; Moše Corodo, Jak Eskinazi, İzak Mizrahi and Moiz Amado were among the families who helped us to understand the culture of the community.

As in Mersin, the middle-aged members of Adana had not been born there; they came from different provinces in the Aegean (Manisa, İzmir), Thrace (Edirne, Bulgaria), and the Mediterranean (Mersin,

İskenderun), as far east as the Van province. But unlike Mersin, the Adana community is unified; it is a dynamic group, renewed by marriages and births. Generally, the men chose their wives from İstanbul and İzmir. They were engaged in commerce, mainly selling electronic equipment and hardware, and in the profitable business of cotton export. The wives generally stayed at home, socialized and got involved in philanthropic causes.

on the Board of the College, and preferred to send their children abroad for university education.

Moše Corodo's daughter and her husband were students in Troy, New York. They were married in Adana and still maintained ties with their families back home. In fact, when Moše's daughter gave birth to a baby boy, the grandmother traveled to the U.S. to attend his *brit milah*. She told us an amusing story: before she left for the U.S. she prepared many traditional Turkish-Jewish foods to take with her for the reception following the *brit* ceremony.

Following the ceremony a lovely table of Turkish delicacies was set up for the reception inside the local synagogue at Troy. However, the orthodox American rabbi declined to have her dishes served—he was not sure if they were kosher!

The synagogue of Adana was an old house that the community restored with their contributions. They held ongoing fund-raising activities for different social and religious events. The synagogue was open every day, and on Shabbat there were always enough men to form a *minyan*. Moše Corodo acted as the religious leader, though he admitted he was not trained as one.

Another member of the community, Jak Eskinazi, owned a hardware store. He was a soft-spoken, mild-mannered man. He took us to the Jewish cemetery located in one section of the Turkish-Muslim Municipal cemetery. (We were not told the location of the old Jewish cemetery.) In a small area there were about 50 tombs, the oldest stone dated to 1922. Most

of the graves were simple, flat slabs of marble placed on earth with a vertical headstone over it. The older graves were made of cement blocks.

A mosque located within the grounds of the cemetery served Jews and other non-Muslims. Before burial, a body was washed in the mosque in the presence of a rabbi. (A Muslim Turk performed the actual washing, as he would do for a Muslim body.) As it is also customary in the Muslim practice, Jews were buried wrapped with white shrouds.

Our general impression was that the Adana community made up a coherent entity; they lived well, planned for the future, and maintained their ties with other Jewish communities within Turkey, as well as abroad.



Our Renault 4 car which Laurence had brought from Romania was our primary means of transportation. In Adana we replaced its muffler.

## İSKENDERUN

From Adana we drove on to İskenderun in Hatay province. It was a busy port town of nearly 200,000 people. Also known as Greek Alexandretta, İskenderun was founded by Alexander the Great to celebrate his victory over the Persian Army in 330 BC. Following the end of World War I, the French occupation of Cilicia included the town of İskenderun which was finally annexed to Turkey in 1936.

In the old section of town there were splendid 17th century Ottoman mosques and fountains, Armenian and Greek churches. Located at the foot of high *Amanos* Mountains, İskenderun was a modern, picturesque town, endowed with palm trees bordering a



The synagogue of İskenderun was spotless, and very well maintained.



The Torah Arc, simple in design, contained three Torah Scrolls with elaborate decorative silver amulets. How did this synagogue manage to stay so intact while those of nearby towns were in ruin?

sandy beach. At the time one-third of the local population worked at the Russian-built steel plant, other predominant business was shipping. When we arrived there were many commercial freighters waiting to be loaded with goods for export to Europe. The seamen of different nationalities strolled in the early morning mist along the winding alleys searching for places to have a "good time."

İskenderun was the frontier town for Arabic speaking Jews. Their ancestors came from the Middle East (Iraq, Syria,) and North Africa (Algeria, Tunis, Egypt). The Jewish-owned shops were located in the old town. The men were mainly cloth merchants except for Eli Cemal, who was the director of an oil factory. Until about 50 years ago, 200 Jews lived in İskenderun.



A carpentry shop occupied the first floor of the İskenderun synagogue.

Now, only 15 remained. The big emigration started in 1977. People left for Israel or western Turkey for different reasons—failing jobs, fear of terrorists, or to find suitable mates. Some of the remaining families would send word to İstanbul, Antakya, and Damascus for marriage partners.

Our main informants in Antakya were Selim Muğrabi and his wife. Selim was a cloth merchant whose two sons worked with him at his shop. He inherited his business from his father, Mişel, who had established it 50 years ago during the heyday of the Jewish community there. Selim had Arabic and Hebrew instruction at school during French occupation of the city. His wife Ceni worked as his accountant, a skill she learned from her father in the 1940s. They were both equally at ease with speaking Arabic, French and Turkish, but Arabic was the *lingua franca* during their transactions. Selim sold on credit to his regular customers and kept the accounts in his daily note-book. Ceni Muğrabi was an accomplished woman; she graduated from the German lycée in İstanbul and spoke six languages fluently.

The synagogue was on the second floor of an old, boat-shaped building, its four shutters were kept tightly closed. The first floor was occupied by a carpenter's shop. The interior was quite modest; on each side of the portable *bimma* there were wooden benches. In contrast, the decorative silver amulets and the *rimonim* inside the ark were beautifully carved in relief and *repoussé* techniques, with scenes from nature. Selim said that the Torah scrolls were fairly new, but they were still written in the traditional manner on deer skin.

The community no longer used the synagogue; nevertheless, it was maintained as long as the community existed. It had been 10 years since the last service was held there. The people celebrated holidays in the nearby Antakya synagogue. The original Jewish cemetery had been built over by new buildings, so the deceased were interred in the Muslim cemetery which also accommodated Armenian, Assyrian and Greek Orthodox burials. I even noticed a Jewish American burial, a man from Denver, Colorado, who had died on a ship, en route to a European destination.



## ANTAKYA

Antakya (Antioch) is situated in the Antioch plain, encircled by steep mountains. The region goes back to the early stages of village communities in the Near East, dating to 7000 BCE. The later prehistoric periods revealed many layers of cultural traditions that included networks of trade activities extending from the Antioch plain to Mesopotamia via northern Syria and ancient Palestine. Antakya was a city of religious importance in the Muslim and Christian eras, the site of St. Peter's church and the starting point of Paul's missionary journeys. In the medieval era when the city became a major Byzantine center, it was fortified. Antakya's magnificent mosaic museum is a glorious testament to the cultural/artistic life of Roman and Byzantine inhabitants.



Friday prayer services outside the mosque of Antakya.

This is a city of intense commercial activity; even the husky chant of the *müezzin* (minister) from the minaret was overshadowed by the overwhelming hum of street noise mingled with different languages, Arabic, Turkish, and Kurdish. The River Asi (Amuq) flows through the old city, and divides it into two parts, to the east is the historic covered bazaar and Ulucami (mosque) surrounded by medieval walls. Here the stone houses have narrow bay windows that face closely houses across the street. To the west of the river is the modern part of the city.

Antakya was home to a large Jewish community in the 4th century BCE. The majority of the existing Jews were of Syrian origin. However, the story was more complicated, according to Ephraim Kebudi, an older member of the community. He traced his lineage to a great-uncle whose ancestors came from Spain about 300 years ago. After a short stint in Greece the great-uncle moved to Aleppo, then to Antakya. Presently he lived in Rio, Brazil. One of the distinguishing features of the Jewish community of Antakya was, as in İskenderun, the prevalent use of Arabic. The second common feature was the marriage pattern. Presently, 39 families (approximately 140 to 145 people) resided the city; there were four generations from three large families named Cemal, Kebudi, and Cenudi. The predominant marriage pattern was between first cousins. I was able to trace four living generations in the Cemal family: the first-generation marriage was between İbrahim Cemal and Emel Kebudi; the second and third generations married their first cousins. Parents named their children after their grandparents, uncles, aunts, and even cousins, which resulted in some confusion

The Antakya synagogue had an active and observant congregation which included several generations. The well-maintained synagogue was at the center of Jewish life.



in tracing kinship ties through generations. This was further complicated when two people with the same surname married, as in the case of first cousins.

The inbreeding resulted not only in physical defects, but also created a culturally insular society. In recent years, though, it is changing. Due to lack of marriageable Jewish women in Antakya, and absence of intermarriages between Jews and Muslims, families were seeking marriage partners from Syria. Such unions were arranged through the Head Rabbi of Syria. A case in point was the marriage of Olga from Aleppo to Şaul Cemal's son. Olga's family had a friend who knew Şaul's family. He consulted the Rabbi in Damascus who acted as an intermediary between the two families. Many letters were written, follow-up phone calls ensued, photographs were exchanged, and finally the family of the bride arrived in Turkey to hand-deliver their daughter to the groom's family.

The religious ceremony in the synagogue was followed by a reception that took place in December 1984. In May 1985, the bride was already three months pregnant. By then, a new match was underway between Olga's younger sister and Şaul's cousin, a 21-year-old who lived in the neighboring town of İskenderun.



A Cenudi family member with his children—our daughter Han is between two girls.

These unions were considered culturally and linguistically preferred by the parents, not to mention the practical aspect of saving many Syrian Jews! (They could leave Syria according to Syrian law without difficulty, only if they married Turkish Jews.)

The three extended families had fabric business. Their shops were located in the historic Kurşunlu Han that was built as a *caravanserai* during Sultan Selim's reign

in the 16th century, to house his soldiers en route to military expeditions to Syria and Iraq. This monumental building still stood in perfect condition. All the stores were arranged around an inner courtyard where orange and lemon trees perfumed the air. Next to the *Han* was the historic bazaar which led to narrow winding streets paved with worn flagstones from thousands of years of use. In the metalsmiths' section, the heat from the iron furnace was ablaze all

day long. The molten iron flowed into a red pile and was eventually hammered into axes. The humming with hammering could be reminiscent of medieval guilds. In the craft sections of the bazaar there were no Jewish-owned stores, as Jewish merchants were principally vendors of manufactured goods.

The Jewish cloth merchants' shops were grouped together in the courtyard. They mentioned that business had been somewhat slow. Though they were all engaged in the same business, they did not appear to be in competition with one another. The grandfathers acted as hawkers, sitting outside the shop to draw in customers, while their sons and grandsons kept busy cutting cloth inside the shop. They spoke Arabic with customers while the grandchildren spoke Turkish with a slight accent. The younger generation had opted to enter the family business after finishing high school. (I was told the university degree was becoming important, if for no other reason but to be eligible to become an officer in the Turkish army.) Viktor Cemal, a man in his early thirties, said he returned to Antakya six years after attending the Technion in Tel Aviv to enter into the family business and marry his uncle's



The Gold Jewelry Store.

daughter. He said business was very good, because the region was agriculturally rich and they had well-to-do Turkish farmers as their clients.

We were curious to know why the Antakya community had not dispersed, especially during the terrorist activities in the late 1970s and early 80s, as it had happened in Gaziantep. The answer was "well-rooted family ties." Culturally, they belonged to this region and lived there for generations, they would feel alien elsewhere. Besides, they said, they did not feel threatened by the existing terrorist activities of 1980s in the region.

In Antakya cultural heritage and economic security were the main reasons for the continuity of the Jewish community. Younger people felt very much at home, they liked to think of themselves as "one people" with the

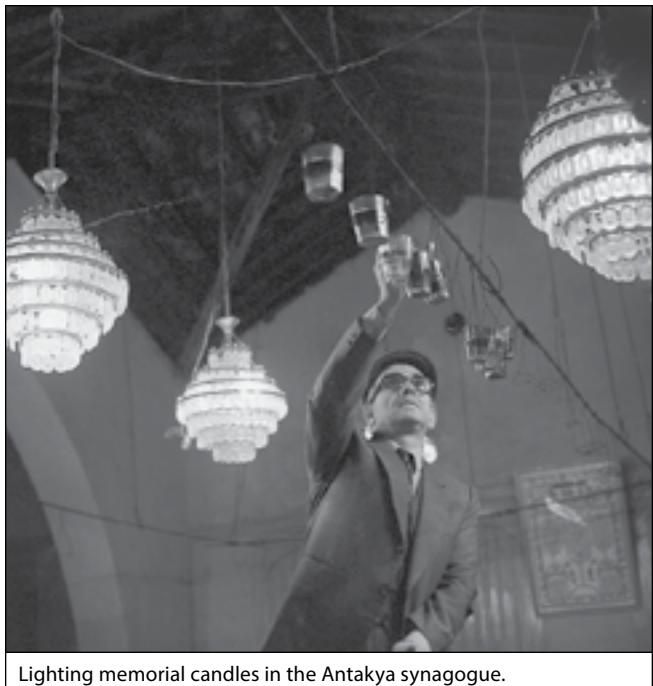


Most of Antakya's Jewish families sold cloth by the meter.

Turks. Any discrimination was attributed to “people’s ignorance” and dismissed. Ironically, discrimination within the community did exist. The better-educated brides from western Turkey found the community culturally insular and dogmatic. Among the married middle-aged couples, three women from İstanbul and one from İzmir were making great efforts to adjust to the insular, conservative way of life there. They formed a separate social group from the other women.

Şaul’s wife Tuna Cenudi was very outspoken about her dislike of the matriarchal family structure in which the mother-in-law always had the last word. Şaul’s mother arranged all of her children’s marriages, yet, according to Tuna, none of them married the right person. All Cenudi family members lived in one family-owned apartment building. Tuna kept a formal distance from her in-laws; she did not visit them, nor did she encourage them to visit her. Her husband Şaul was attached to his mother, but it seemed that he was able to maintain peace between his wife and his mother.

When Tuna met Şaul in İstanbul, his business was separate from his father’s. But six months after their marriage, he joined his father. To this day Tuna



Lighting memorial candles in the Antakya synagogue.

disapproved of his decision. She was an anomaly in this community: she came from a Spanish-speaking, middle-class İstanbul family, not to mention the fact that she did not speak Arabic and had a circle of Greek friends. She spoke harshly against the idea of marrying young, instead, advocated higher education and late marriage for her children. She sincerely hoped that her children would one day leave the community.

Antakya offered little diversion for young people. Men worked, and women met once a week on Tuesdays to play poker. There was daily contact among families. In summer, women and children went to their beach houses while men stayed in town.

The synagogue of Antakya was an ordinary-looking building in the old residential section. At the entrance a circular plaque commemorated the 100th anniversary of Atatürk’s

birth. It consisted of three buildings, one used as a storage space, the other as the residence of several Jewish families, including Yakov Cemal who maintained the synagogue meticulously. In 1981, Yakov’s family replaced the old curtain over the ark with a beautifully embroidered one in memory of his brother. The *bimma* was newly restored. The ark was kept in a

circular apse jutting into the courtyard outside. The eight torah scrolls were exquisitely adorned with silver amulets of Syrian-style workmanship. The most outstanding feature of the interior was the framed calligraphy hanging on the walls. They were Yakov’s own work, which he gave as a gift to the community. Daily, services were held in the synagogue; weddings, on the other hand, were frequently held at a fashionable restaurant nearby.



The synagogue of Antakya was hardly noticeable from the street, that is how the congregants wanted it to be!



# SOUTHEASTERN ANATORLIA



After leaving the eastern Mediterranean region, we drove inland to southeastern Turkey, which partially includes the upper reaches of the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers, and the eastern extension of the Taurus Mountains. We visited the city of Diyarbakır and Nusaybin which borders Syria.

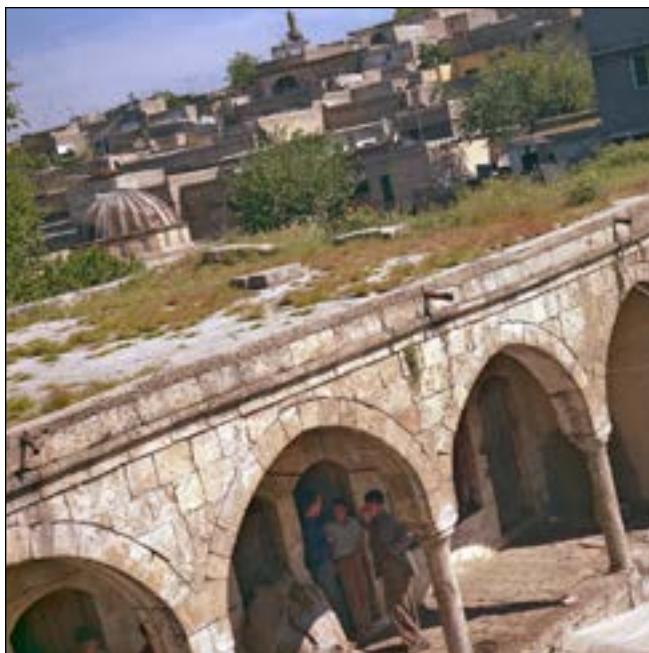
Located on the Mesopotamian trade route leading into the Central Plateau of Turkey, the region is richly layered with remains of prehistoric and historic settlements since the earliest village farming periods that date back nearly 9,000 years ago. Presently the most visible monuments date to the Hellenistic and Roman, as well as medieval Christian and Ottoman Turkish periods.

## GAZİANTEP

In the course of preparing for our travels in İstanbul, we had been informed that we would have no luck in finding any Jewish communities in the southeast, which proved to be not far from the truth. The bus from Urfa to Gaziantep took only two and a half hours. Along the way we saw endless miles of pistachio nuts, olive groves, vineyards, and green strands of wheat shimmering in the sun. Women and men were out herding sheep on the wide plains of the Euphrates. The recent rains had pumped life into the earth, which had turned a crimson red.

Gaziantep's standing neo-Hittite monuments are built upon layers of prehistory, date to 8th century BCE. In the later historic periods the Crusades and Arab invasions left their cultural marks on the land. After the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire and after World War I, the city was invaded by the French. It was regained by Turkey after the War of Independence and the signing of the Treaty of Lausanne.

Soon after we checked into a hotel, I decided to call the operator for the phone number of a Jewish man to whom we had been referred. The operator was



A caravanserai dated to the Ottoman period.

surprisingly friendly and informative. "Oh, yes, this must be the same person as the well-known dentist who used to live in town. Unfortunately, he left town a couple years ago; he was my dentist, too. He was excellent. I don't trust the others. I heard he moved to İstanbul." I was quite amazed at the operator's sense of cooperation to a stranger (myself) on the phone.

Having lost our sole potential contact, we walked over

to the old town. As in Urfa and Mardin, walls surrounded the old town from which the new city extended. It is a modern metropolis with congested traffic. In a small shop where replicas of old guns were sold, we met Ali Paşa, a soft-spoken Turkish man in his 60s. He pointed out where the synagogue used to be. The old Jewish Quarter had been inside the old town, and the synagogue was located in a prominent section called Kale Altı Mahallesi (Quarter). He remembered

the Jewish community well, because Jews had joined forces with the Turkish people in defending the city during Armenian uprisings when the latter collaborated with the French forces to destroy the town and its inhabitants. Ali was emphatic about the good relations between the two communities; they had been good friends and neighbors, he reminisced.

The synagogue had been appropriated by the Turkish Directorate of Pious Trusts (Vakıf), as there was no community to maintain it. The Turkish guard and his wife lived in one section of what had been a prayer room. Adjoining it was a small house, formerly the Hebrew school, now inhabited by a man named Murat and his family. To our surprise, he turned out to be Jewish!

The guard's wife reluctantly opened the locked door of the synagogue, fearing that her husband might return at any moment and get angry with her. We passed through a spacious courtyard containing a marble fountain, a well, and aging mulberry and acacia trees. At the end of the courtyard we came to the shell of a wooden building on which the only feature was the



The synagogue, an impressive stone building, had a large courtyard with several acacia trees.

ark, with an Hebrew inscription. The synagogue had two entrances, one for the congregation and another for funerals. While we photographed the remains, curious neighbors chatted with us, talking about the Jews who had left for İstanbul six or seven years ago. When the Rabbi Musa left in 1980, he took the keys of the synagogue with him. After that, people plundered the building. It was burglarized several times. Now, not more than a shell, it was well guarded!

According to Murat up until 1980 about 40 Jewish families were living in Gaziantep. At that time (the peak of terrorist activities throughout Turkey), two Jewish men received threatening letters. One was a dentist, the other a pharmacist. "But it was simply professional jealousy and nothing else, because these people were



This beautifully painted box (Tik) once held a torah scroll of the synagogue.

excellent in their work," Murat reassured us. "Then, the fear became contagious, the rest of the community left. But, they should have been more patient. I must add, there were no life-threatening incidents toward Jews, also many Turks were caught in the crossfire, so to speak, by Turkish and Kurdish terrorists..."

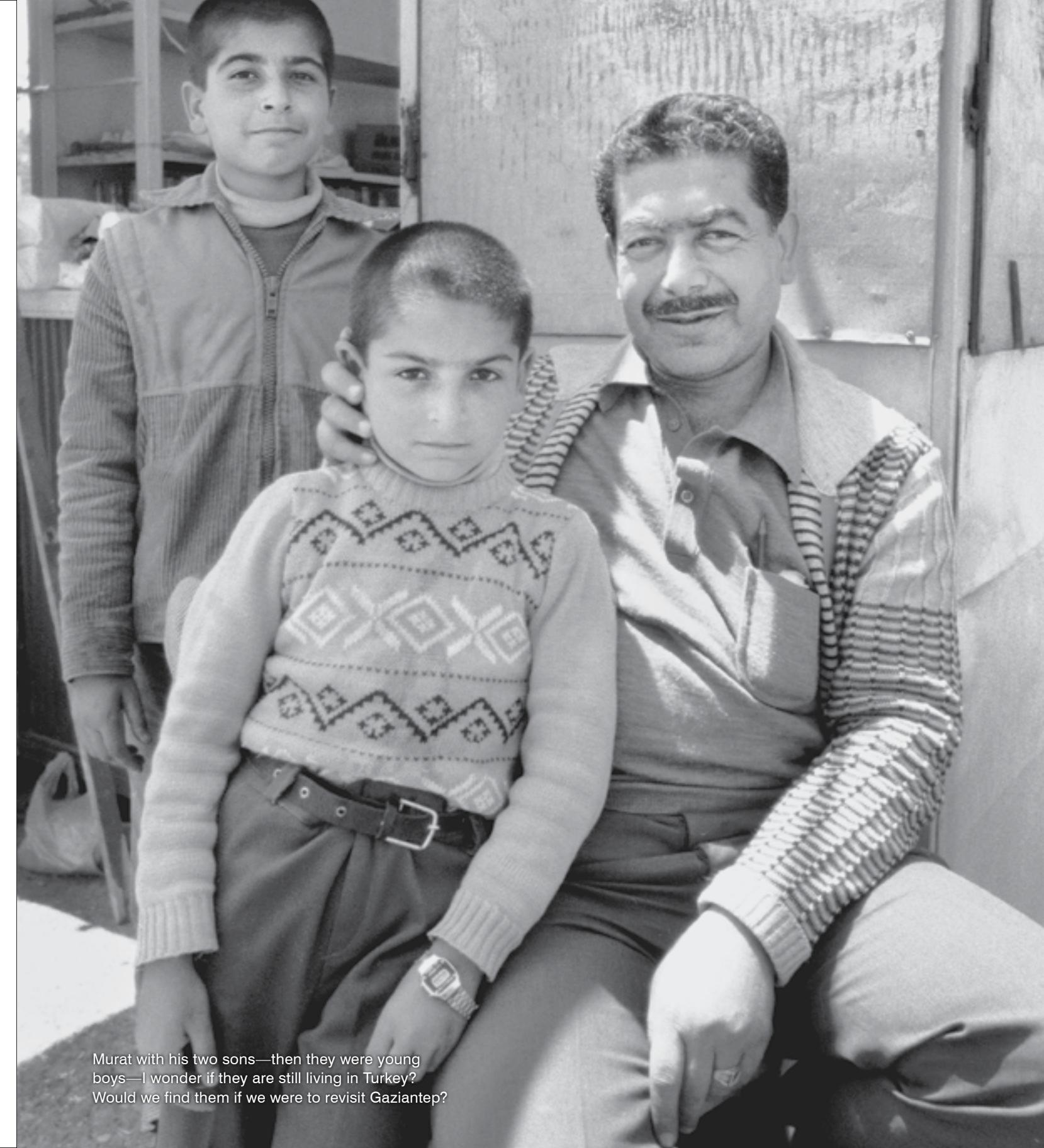
Murat was also thinking of leaving, but for a different reason: his children would get a better education in İstanbul where he had relatives. First, he would send his family, then he would sell his business (he owned a cheese store which was doing very well), and join them later. But he was highly ambivalent about leaving. If he did, he said he would definitely live near where his friends from Gaziantep lived, so he could at least reminisce about their past life.



The roof and its supporting beams had fallen in.



Torah scrolls had been kept in this wooden box (Tik.)



Murat with his two sons—then they were young boys—I wonder if they are still living in Turkey? Would we find them if we were to revisit Gaziantep?

## KİLİS

We decided to take a side trip from Gaziantep to Kilis, a drive of two and a half hours due south. The town is located 10 km from the Syrian border. As part of the Southeastern region, its antiquity extends into the early prehistoric and historic periods. Its rich history under Byzantine, Arab, Seljuk and Ottoman rules are reflected in extant fountains, bridges, mosques. Kilis remained a minor town until its heyday in the 1960s and 70s when it was an open market for goods smuggled through Syria. As the government took stricter measures against smuggling, business had slowed down, shops had closed, and unemployed people were wandering in the streets. Kilis was a green town surrounded by parks, playgrounds and tea gardens. It had an extensive craft bazaar made up of tiny shops in which the craftsmen were busy from sunrise to late evening hours producing handcrafted objects: cobblers fashion *yemeni* (a flat



Dedication plaque at the synagogue reads, in part: "This is the holy place which all of us support, consecrate...The honorable Rabbi Avraham HaLevi."

slipper made of water buffalo skin worn by the locals), baskets, mats, hand-hammered copper trays. In the past, Kilis was a center for theological learning, and home to a teachers' training school. Both were now closed. In the countryside, sheep and goat herding, wheat farming and growing cotton were the main sources of livelihood.

A teacher who said the Jews had left about 30 years ago led us to the old Jewish Quarter. The synagogue was located at the Meşetlik Quarter in the old city. As in Gaziantep, a guard had locked it and his daughter was not willing to give us the key. She said it had previously been used as a warehouse, but was now in a state of total decline. We asked an elderly man, Ali, to persuade the girl to open it for us. At last, we got into the courtyard of the synagogue. It too was in a ruinous state as those in Adana, Mersin and Bergama.

The synagogue (see photograph opposite page) was built of cut stone reminiscent of traditional Arab and Seljuk masonry. Around a large, beautifully carved marble fountain, goats and chickens fed on leftover grains. Piles of hay and unchecked weeds had taken over. The roof was open to the sky, only the stone arches over the walls remained intact. The intricately carved wooden door of the *Midrash* was now decayed from the elements of nature. From the size and the style of the synagogue's remains, one could surmise that the Jewish community there might have been quite large and prosperous.

(Kilis was a district of Gaziantep up until 1995 when it became a province upon endorsement by the President of Turkey).

The synagogue's courtyard now served as a home for the chickens and sheep that belonged to its caretaker.



## ŞANLIURFA

The distance between Gaziantep and our next stop, Şanlıurfa, was about 150 km through the Euphrates valley, north of the Syrian border. Known as “the city of Prophets,” Şanlıurfa is an ancient city in a region endowed with multi-layered civilizations that have endured for millennia. As the birthplace of Abraham, it has the distinction of being a holy city for Jews, Muslims and Christians, in fact, it ranks close to Mecca and Jerusalem.

To the west of the city lies the wide plain of Harran which stretches along the southeastern border with Syria, and takes its life from the Euphrates River. Home to the earliest farming communities in the Near East,



The city walls had not been restored since the ending of World War I when the French had been forced to retreat.



The arches and some architecture of Şanlıurfa reflect its Ottoman and Byzantine heritage.

the region abounds with remains of settlements from the Neolithic, Hittite, Assyrian, Greek, Roman, and Ottoman periods. In this Biblical city beehive-shaped village houses rose from the plain as reminders of ancient architectural traditions. It is believed that Abraham moved from the city of Ur of Chaldees, his birthplace in southern Mesopotamia, to Şanlıurfa with his father, Terah who died in Harran. Allegedly, some members of the family remained there, after Abraham left for Canaan (Genesis 12: 4-5).

On the day of our visit several busloads of Muslim pilgrims were congregated around the complex of mosques, washing fountains, graves of saints, and the cave which the locals attribute to Abraham's birthplace. Around the entire complex rosebushes were blooming. In the old city



Şanlıurfa is famous as a pilgrimage site—legend has it that Abraham was immolated there on a funeral pyre, and the burning coals turned into schools of fish.

we met Ali Mesci, a 70-year-old leather craftsman who remembered distinctly the presence of a lively Jewish community in Şanlıurfa up until 35 years ago. He said some Jews were small businessmen, while the wealthy merchants owned caravanserais that they sold before departing for Israel. Selim Dayan was one of the latter merchants. He had left for Mersin with his father, a distant cousin of Moshe Dayan, the Israeli officer and politician and co-architect of the 1978 peace treaty with Egypt. Another former Şanlıurfa businessman, Murat, was now a retired police chief in Israel.

On the second day of our stay in the city, we were befriended by a Turkish family who lived in the old Jewish Quarter (Kendirci Mahallesi), in a house once owned by a Jewish merchant. They said the synagogue used to be two streets above this neighborhood (we were unable to locate it).



Ahmet Kemal, a Jewish man raised by Muslim neighbors, was the sole surviving member of his family. He spoke Turkish, Arabic and Kurdish with his customers.

The only reference to the Jewish community was a real event told by the Turkish couple who invited us to their house for lunch. It was a blood-chilling episode: in 1947, a Jewish family by the name of İshak Hayim Şorkaya was found murdered in their home, apparently killed with a butcher knife. Only one son (later named Ahmet Kemal), escaped

this horrendous fate (We never found out his Jewish name). At the time, Ahmet was a young boy of 13. By chance, he had come home late that night. The police investigation of the case failed to identify the murderer(s), but the butcher knife was found to belong to the kosher butcher, Davud. The theory was that fellow Jews who suspected that the İshak family had converted to Islam had murdered them in revenge. After this incident, a wealthy Turkish merchant adopted the

young boy. Soon after the murder all Jews left the city. According to our hostess Ayşe Hanım, if it had not been for the murder, Jews would have continued to live there as an integral part of Turkish society. I asked if Ahmet Kemal was still in the city, and if so, how could we find him? Surely, he owned a fabric store in the bazaar in the Tentmakers section. So we decided to pay him a visit.

On his store window, Ahmet's full name on the plaque read, Hacı Ahmet

Kemal Esmeray. He had the title of "Pilgrim" and had assumed the surname meaning "dark moon." The shop was full of customers, women dressed in colorful, wide şalvars, men wearing the thick, felt vests usually worn by local shepherds. When Ahmet saw us enter his shop he gave a quizzical look, we clearly did not look like

the local people. When we mentioned the reason for our visit he became a bit disturbed, the expression on his face changed and his hands began to quiver. But he continued to serve his many customers in the store. Women with young children who had come from Harran and the surrounding villages flocked to his store because of the wide variety of goods and reasonable prices, his penchant for sweet talk, and his habit of giving an extra "gift" with every purchase. Ahmet sat at his folding table/desk and wrote his accounts in Arabic numerals on a torn sheet of paper. After each purchase, he uttered the Turkish phrase "Bin bereket versin" (May you have abundance—that your money should multiply) and then proceeded to inhale the fragrance from a pot of white gardenias, as if drawing strength from its perfume.



Şanlıurfa marketplace with traditional water seller in background.

Our stay at Ahmet's store lasted two hours, during which time he relaxed only slightly. We were unable to speak with him about his family because each time we touched on the subject his face became ashen and his eyes welled up with tears. His eyes seemed unable to focus. No doubt, he did not wish to re-live the tragedy of his life.

But he told us that he was married to a Turkish-Muslim woman named Züleyha, with whom he had 11 children. Ahmet had made the pilgrimage to Mecca ten years ago, and openly proclaimed his belief in Islam, as his future happiness lay in it.



This photograph always reminded Laurence of how Roman Vishniac might have depicted the back streets of Şanlıurfa.

## HARRAN

The ancient plain of Harran is west of the province of Urfa, it stretches along the southeastern border with Syria. The plain is fed from the Euphrates river. Home to the earliest farming communities in the Near East, the Harran plain still abounds with the wild prototypes of the domesticated wheat stands. The wide landscape is characterized by the beehive-shaped village houses that continue the ancient architectural tradition.

The tradition for these bee-hive shaped structures goes back to 5000 years ago; in fact, they persist until today in southeastern Turkey, Syria and the Levant.



The courtyard of a complex of "beehive" houses—are even built as split-level houses.

Built of pise or mudbrick, they are outfitted and furnished as village residences. Some are even built as split-level houses.

Harran was an important city in the 14th century BCE, in the period of the Old Testament patriarchs, as well as one of the probable residences of Abraham and his family, mentioned earlier.

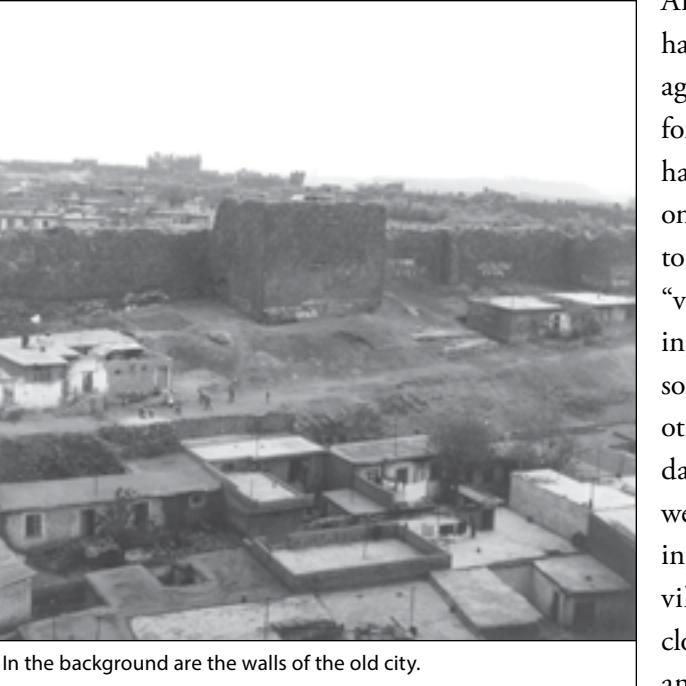


Harran was also home to semi nomadic people who grew hay for their horses and sheep.

## DİYARBAKIR

Leaving the fertile plain of the Euphrates valley, we headed toward Diyarbakır, which lies near the Tigris River. This ancient city is completely surrounded by walls dating to several millennia of occupation during the Urartian, Roman, Byzantine, Seljuk, and Ottoman periods. The walls are the second longest after the Great Wall of China; a massive construction of three sets of walls encircle the city for 5.5 km. One of the remarkable features is the double-eagle symbol carved above the entrance gates, a symbol of power and freedom shared by all of the conquering groups.

Outside the walls, a shantytown settlement of mud-brick houses existed. In the old city there were some magnificent buildings of black basalt masonry that had survived the passage of time.



In the background are the walls of the old city.

There were some Armenian and Assyrian churches in the city. They were built around a large courtyard consisting of a complex of elegant mansions, probably owned by wealthy merchants who supported the churches. (Some of these churches had been converted to mosques.) It appeared that the non-Muslims lived in a specific quarter, called *Gâvur Sokak* (Street of the Infidels). Each time we asked about a Jewish quarter we

would be led to an Armenian church, through endless, narrow, winding streets that ended in cul-de-sacs. Our guide would proudly refer to the church as the “old synagogue.” After two days of searching, we finally met an old Armenian (or Assyrian) woman, Arşalos who invited us to her house. Her father Ali knew all about the Jews, she said. He had been a farmer and spoke Arabic and Kurdish.

Ali told us that the Jews had left the city 30 years ago, most of them bound for Israel. Their Quarter had been near Yenikapı, one of the ancient gates to the city. The Jews were “very well-to-do,” according to Ali. Some merchants sold cloth by the yard, while others specialized in haberdashery. The poorer Jews were itinerant vendors, buying and selling in distant villages and exchanging clothing for raw foodstuffs and wood. Graciously, Ali

promised to take us to the Jewish Quarter.

We proceeded through the narrow alleys and stopped in front of a house with a tiny wooden doorway at the Hasırlı Quarter. A new door was installed over an arched entrance.

Kurdish women gather to socialize in one of Diyarbakır's old neighborhoods.





Ali pointed to the Hebrew inscription above it, the only remaining piece of tangible evidence of Jewish existence in Diyarbakır. The inscription was over the door to the entrance to the synagogue.



We asked a local woman to wet the wall so we could make the inscription more legible.

## NUSAYBİN

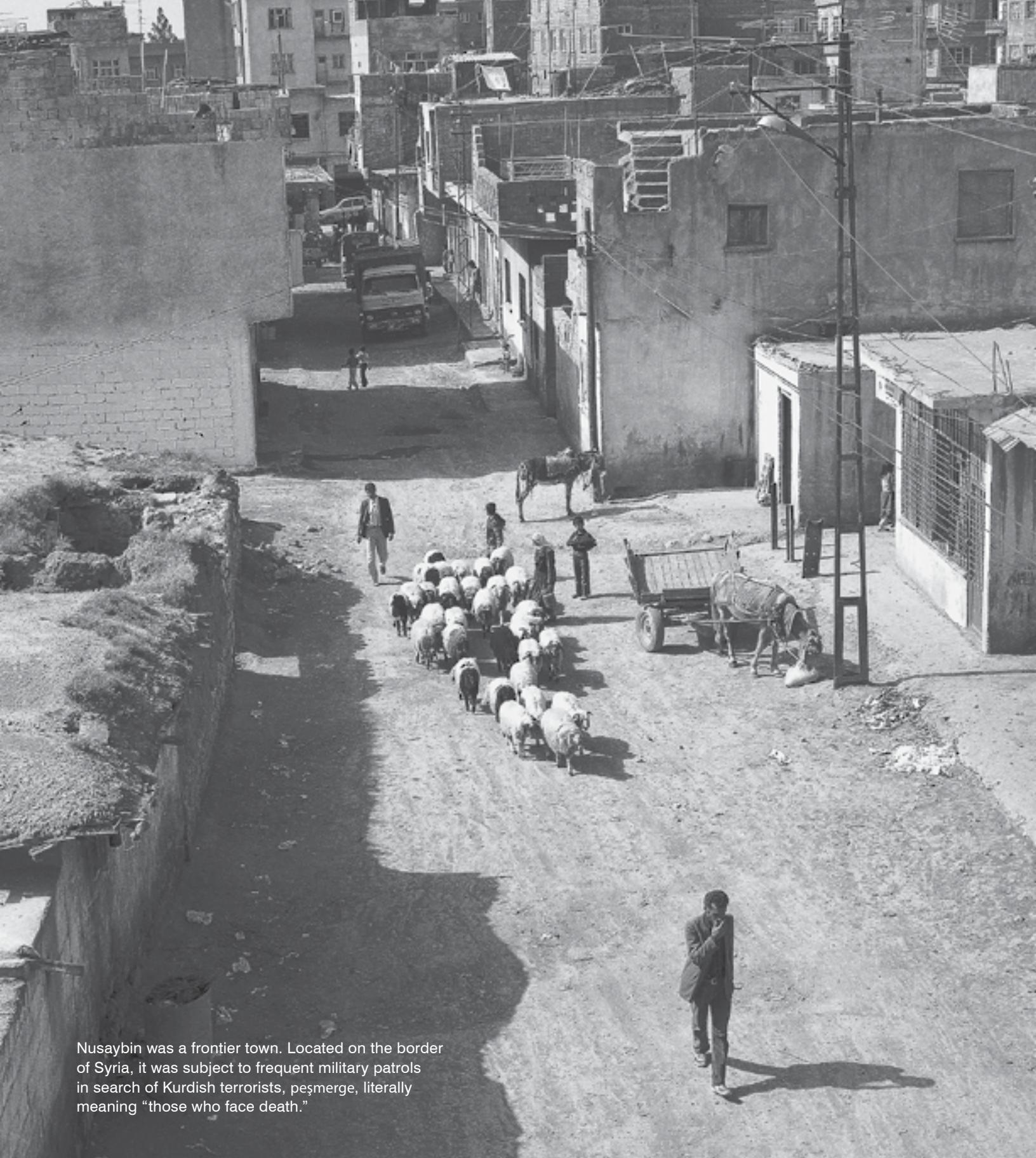
We were not able to find any informants who would lead us to any clues about the existence of a Jewish community there.



Nusaybin is close to the Syrian border which in this photograph is marked by barbed wire fence between white concrete posts.



We were told that this empty space had once been the courtyard of the Nusaybin synagogue.



Nusaybin was a frontier town. Located on the border of Syria, it was subject to frequent military patrols in search of Kurdish terrorists, *peshmerge*, literally meaning "those who face death."



In the mid 1980s in small neighborhoods of Turkey one would inhale a faint mist or fog during winter months. It was partly due to the bituminous coal that was used in heating—not too unpleasant, but like Proust's Madeleine, always a memory jogger just as the shopkeepers who displayed their wares for all to see. For Laurence this image encapsulated many sensations.



# CENTRAL ANATOLIA



Central Anatolia is a bowl shaped region surrounded by mountains. To the south is the Taurus chain; to the east and west are high plateaus and low mountain ranges. While it is considered to be the breadbasket of the country, animal husbandry is a significant component of the agro-pastoral economy. The Angora goat is well adapted to this region, although its numbers is diminishing due to government quotas and expansion of agriculture. Kızılırmak River (Red River), one of the major rivers in the country flows northwards into the Black Sea, and gives life to the region along with its many tributaries.

Since the establishment of Ankara as the capital in 1923, its industrial sector has flourished, along with a well developed network of transportation radiating from the city center to all parts of the country. The antiquity of the region goes back to the Neolithic period, the region is highlighted by many archaeological sites, including the Hittite capital of Boğazkale, The ancient city of Angora had been the site of an important Roman city that has left its traces in numerous monuments of public architecture. The Archaeological Museum of Ankara is an outstandingly rich museum which houses antiquities from the region, as well as from the rest of the country.

South of Ankara, in the city of Konya, the Museum and the Sufi school of the 13th century poet-philosopher-mystic Rumi, (Mevlana Celaleddin-i Rumi), are located where commemorative celebrations are held annually, with dances of the Whirling Dervishes. Mevlana's tomb is near the Museum.

A view of the old neighborhoods in the valley, looking from the ancient citadel of Ankara, close to where the Jewish quarter used to be.



## CENTRAL ANATOLIA

### ANKARA

Following the dissolution of the sultanate and the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923, the capital was moved from İstanbul to Ankara, which is a centrally located region of the country. Prior to the Seljuk and Ottoman dynasties, The region had been the seat of many kingdoms among which the Phrygian and the Roman occupations left indelible monuments.

The Jewish community of Ankara was probably not older than 100 years. The first neighborhood was established in the Samanpazarı district, which was not far from the Roman citadel of the city. It was previously adjacent to the hay market. As of the late 1960s, members of the Jewish community had moved to more fashionable areas in Ankara. Their houses were bought by middle class Turkish Muslims, some blue-collar workers and some unemployed people.

At the time of our visit Ankara's Jewish community comprised 26 families, 60 individuals. The majority was 60 years of age and over. There appeared to be little communication between generations. Older people

were not always able to go to the synagogue, and the younger people lacked interest in attending it. Since the Rabbi had left five years earlier for Israel, the motivation to participate in services was virtually nonexistent.

After visiting the Karako family to gather information about the structure of the community and the names, locations, and means of contacting individual families, we drove to the old Samanpazarı district. Today this

area is a forgotten section of the city, even though people refer to it as "the place of the oldest houses of Ankara." In accordance with Turkish Antiquities Law, as an historic area, the buildings cannot be torn down—they can only be restored.



A statue of Atatürk (founder of modern Turkey) watches over the Ulus Plaza, near the first parliament building, and Ankara Palas hotel where Atatürk and many foreign dignitaries had stayed.

Jews lived and worked for nearly a century in and around Ankara. They built a monumental synagogue in Birlik Sokak (Unity Street) that accommodated 400 to 500 people, a religious school, and houses in

traditional Ottoman style. The synagogue was erected at the end of the 19th century, and subsequently restored by Italian architects in 1907. Adjacent to it was an Ottoman period bathhouse that was still in use. Many of the Jews worked in the nearby district of Ulus, where they owned hardware, haberdashery,

clothing, lingerie, and electrical repair shops along Anafartalar Avenue.

We were led to the old Jewish quarter by Albert Karako. Turkish children were running about in colorful *salvars* (pantaloons), chasing cats and balls. Women looked down at the street through trellised windows. In the center of the street was an ancient plane tree and a water fountain from which people drew their daily water (many of the houses were not equipped with running water). It was bustling with older men discussing politics, women carrying plastic water buckets, and young women in their Sunday finery on their way to visit neighbors. The houses across from the synagogue were laid out on both sides of the street, some more modest than others. They were generally built of brick and wood, two stories high,



Ankara's synagogue, on Birlik Sokak (Unity Street) in the Samanpazari (haymarket) quarter. It is hidden from public view by high walls.

with a bay window jutting out on an angle from the second story, and a small courtyard near the entrance. Most of the 25-odd houses were in bad repair except for two stone buildings that had been owned by the wealthiest merchants in the community, named Aron Araf and Hayim Albukrek. They had sold building materials and hardware. The houses were built as a double house of cut-stone masonry, each with a separate, columned entrance. There were still several corner grocery stores and a few cobblers in the quarter.

Albert pushed the long, iron key through the metal gate of the synagogue, and turned it several times. We entered the marble courtyard, which at one time was planted with apple trees. On both sides of the synagogue proper were a *midrash* on the right, and offices on the left. The



The Samanpazari quarter still has many traditional style Turkish houses characterized by bay windows.

interior had the feeling of a wide, expansive space, partly due to the white painted walls and columns and the high ceiling. A marble floor and steps led to the ark. Old silver oil candles that still retained a bit of oil hung over the ark. When the seven-armed candelabra (dated 5696 in the Hebrew calendar), was lit, it flickered over the bluish glass Star of David that was suspended over the ark.

Our informant Davit Sivil explained, some 300 wooden seats used to be completely filled as recently as the 1920s. He remembered on certain holidays some congregants were forced to stand throughout the service because all the seats were taken.

At the time of our visit, the synagogue was open only on Saturday mornings when only five or six men



The wrought-iron trellis over the gate of the synagogue included a five pointed star set in two concentric circles that alluded to the crescent and star on the Turkish flag.

came to pray. The short, one-hour service was led by Avram Kızılgül (Kohen), the community leader. His goal was to keep the synagogue functioning, to prevent its appropriation by the Turkish Directorate of Pious Trusts. When we visited Avram at his lingerie shop he was very outspoken about the lack of support provided by the Chief Rabbinate of Istanbul to the Jewish Community in Ankara. Avram claimed that the Rabbinate was indifferent, providing neither moral nor financial support. Once a year at Yom Kippur, however, the Chief Rabbinate sent a Rabbi to Ankara (paid for by the community).

During our three-day stay in Ankara, we visited five families in their homes and two men at their shops. One elderly couple was Davit and Viktorya Sivil (née



Albert Karako was not a very observant Jew, but for this photo he chose to don the outfit worn by the synagogue's shamesh (caretaker).

Seville). Their life stories were so interesting that we barely had a chance to talk about the community at large during our initial meeting.

Davit was a 75-year-old man, short and frail but with a full head of white hair. He said little but smiled a lot. Viktorya, on the other hand, made up for his silence. She was a woman in her mid-50s, a ball of fire, in every sense of the word. After his first wife died, Davit went to İstanbul in search of another wife. Viktorya was introduced to him through his friends. Having been married twice and sworn never again to marry, she had been living with her sister and grown daughter. When Davit made it known to her and her sister that he was a serious contender, Viktorya got serious, too. She told him that she had two conditions: (1) She had no money

to give, and (2) her daughter had to live with them, both of which were acceptable to Davit. Shortly after their marriage, Davit's son and Viktorya's daughter met, resulting in a second marriage.

Viktorya often spoke in proverbs, such as "One who is burned from eating hot soup blows on the yoğurt." This proverb might have been singularly suited to Viktorya. She called her first husband a "monster" who was a philanderer. Her second husband was not only 22 years her senior but also very "cheap." But her third marriage to Davit was "a pure joy," she said.

At the age of 20 she had married a handsome young man from a poor family. Viktorya's father owned a printing press and planned to employ his son-in-law



The *teva* of the Ankara synagogue was held up by a fan-like wooden piece, intricately carved and painted in white and gold.



The tin "sadaka" box (charity box), bears an inscription which reads "K.K. Ankara," "Tzedakah," and "Ritual oil."



Only seven people showed up for Saturday morning services at the synagogue, among whom was Laurence (second from left), wearing his Romanian beret. According to Jewish tradition, ten Jewish males—a minyan, are needed to permit the Torah to be taken out and read.

in the business. The husband, however, was more interested in getting drunk and courting other women, even when Viktorya was pregnant with their daughter. She said she put him out of the house several times, but he returned each time with promises of good behavior. The marriage lasted four years, finally Viktorya divorced him. Estrella, the daughter, did not acknowledge her father's existence. Her marriage to Davit's son was a happy one. He was 15 years her senior and they had two children. Davit and Viktorya often visited them in İstanbul.

Unlike Viktorya, Davit came from a poor family in Hasköy, İstanbul. After finishing Hebrew school, he apprenticed himself to an Oriental rug repairman. His perseverance, mild-mannered nature, and linguistic

skills helped him gain foreign clients who paid him well for his excellent work. Finally, he moved to Ankara and offered his services to foreign embassies. At Samanpazari, he opened an atelier in his house, collaborated with another repairman, and business soon flourished. Now he was semi-retired, although people still brought him work that he completed at his leisure.

Davit's father Kemal had been a musician who played several string instruments, including the *kanun* and the *ud*. He had the opportunity to be one of the court musicians, teaching the Sultan's entertainers. In fact, the last Sultan was an accomplished musician himself, he used to call Davit to the court to "drink and play together."

As an older couple living some distance from the



The sign above Avram Cohen's shop read, *GÜL* Tuhafiye Mağazası (The Rose Haberdashery Store).



Albert Karako's family liked to light their shabbas candles (a wick in a bowl of oil), together as a family.

synagogue, Davit and Viktorya did not attend services frequently. They claimed that the Ankara community was on the brink of dissolution, partly due to the lack of support from the Chief Rabbinate in İstanbul.

Just as Davit Sivil the rug repairman had provided a craft much in demand, Erol Vitas, another member of the community, had learned how to repair cars with automatic transmissions in a city where foreign cars (in the 1960s) were plentiful. Mr. Vitas had no competitors.

We had been told about this "eccentric" character by Davit and Viktorya and wanted to meet him. We made the mistake of asking Viktorya to call him for an appointment. There was a bit of an argument on the phone, as Erol did not want to be photographed, but he



Davit Sivil, although retired, was often called upon to repair carpets for members of the diplomatic community.

was finally persuaded to invite us to his repair shop.

Erol Vitas met us with a grand gesture of welcome. Why did we want to interview him? He did not wish to be singled out as a Jew. If we wanted to see what a skilled mechanic he was, he would be willing to show us everything—all of the new, old, and rebuilt transmissions in his shop, from 1955 Cadillacs to Studebakers, Pontiacs, and Mercedes Benz. Some of the cars were part of his personal collection. As Laurence and I were marveling over his energy and enthusiasm over the "beauty" of his transmissions, he mentioned that his brother was also a mechanic, in Brooklyn. Erol was planning to go there to teach him how to rebuild Mercedes transmissions. Erol was, to say the least, a gregarious, colorful man.



Viktorya's talent in making good Turkish coffee matched her skill in reading my fortune from the coffee grounds.



With his impeccable Turkish, dark hair, and handlebar moustache, he could easily be mistaken for a Muslim Turk, except for his piercing green eyes. He was a dynamo of a person; while he supervised his workers, he carried on several conversations with his customers, one hand holding the phone and the other gesticulating at us. He bargained hard, talked loud, and ran fast.

Erol confessed that he did not feel a part of the Jewish community. His relations were further strained when Moris Karako asked to marry Erol's daughter and she rebuffed him. Erol had to extricate himself from the situation diplomatically. He arranged for a visit with the Karako family, sending in advance, a large bouquet of flowers and a box of the finest chocolates "bigger and better than those brought by Moris' family," he said.

He communicated with his workers through monologues—they knew Erol had the upper hand. When I told him that we would have regretted not meeting him, his initial reluctance faded and he agreed to pose for photographs with his workers. He invited us to join his staff for a lunch of eggs and hamburger cooked on a hot plate in the garage. Later, he offered to drive us to the airport. On the way, he explained why he was still in Turkey, when 90 percent of his relatives lived in Israel and the U.S. He had traveled extensively throughout Europe, but there was no place like Turkey, his homeland. "Turks are the smartest; we have democracy here. In Germany they threw me out of a beer house because I am Turkish... Is that what they call upholding human rights? Ours is a country of beauty, with gentle people. I would never leave my country for another one." Erol's son was already

established in Istanbul as a dealer of car parts, and his daughter was studying German Literature at the University of Ankara.

Erol believed in forming relationships with his workers based on mutual trust. His most seasoned foreman had been with him for 20 years. He said it took a long time to learn his craft. When he opened his shop in the 1950s he already had some training from the American mechanics who worked on embassy cars. He persevered, and he was lucky.

He was a man of principle; for him, success was a function of hard work, discipline, and up-to-date knowledge in the field. I noticed a quotation from a speech by President Kemal Atatürk on his wall, which translates: "Gentlemen, all of you can become politicians, deputies and even presidents. But, not everyone can become an artist." And, indeed, Erol was a kind of artist.

As a whole the Jews of Ankara did not constitute a close-knit community. At first, this seemed surprising, because even in the smaller communities we visited a sense of unity existed among the people of the community. One might say that in Ankara the "center did not hold" anymore. The new center of life was the family, rather than the community at large. Furthermore, in an effort to assimilate into Turkish culture and society, Ankara Jews intermarried with Muslim Turks and thus weakened their ties with the Jewish community. Finally, without the support of the Chief Rabbinate in Istanbul, the dissolution of the community accelerated.

Erol Vitas was unique among all the Turkish Jews that we had met. He took great pleasure in working with his hands and lived up to the famous maxim of Atatürk, "Happy is he who can call himself a Turk."



Often Laurence played with shadows on tombstones  
and pondered, is life but a shadow cast on a tombstone?  
Will the dead remember us as we remember them?

# MARMARA



The most important aspect of the Marmara Region is that it is situated between two continents, Europe and Asia, thus forming a gateway to the East and West and the northern shores of the Black Sea, through the straits of Bosphorus and the Dardanelles which also open to the inland Sea of Marmara. İstanbul, as the most populated and historically rich city in Marmara Region is the seat of an international seaport. On sunny days, after the fog clears from the Marmara Sea, one can see massive commercial tankers, passenger boats, and local ferries gliding from the Black Sea crisscrossing the Bosphorus and the Marmara Sea, into the Mediterranean and further west.

The largest river in the region is Sakarya River (Sangarius) that originates in Central Turkey and flows through the Marmara region into the Black Sea with its several tributaries along the way, creating fertile agricultural zones. In this region we visited the city of Bursa.

## BURSA

The city of Bursa is situated on the slopes of the monumental Mt. Olympus. It was the first capital of the Ottoman Empire for about four decades (1326-1363), following its capture from the Byzantines. Known as the “green city,” it flourished with rare examples of Ottoman architecture, mosques, museums, mausoleums dating from the 13th century on, as well as the celebrated natural hot springs of Çekirge which flows into many local bathhouses. Over the years it has become an industrial/commercial city—car manufacturing, textile (especially silk) and food industries. Unfortunately, the collateral damage caused by industry, mainly, pollution, was beginning to embody the city.

Bursa had a Jewish community dating to early 300 CE, prior to Alexander the Great’s passage through the city on his Eastern conquests. Also in 15th century, it had one of the large Sephardic communities, in addition to İstanbul, Edirne, İzmir, Salonika and others, and the community was proud of its ancient heritage.

The present Jewish community was 54 families (175 people); most were socially active, adhering to their traditions, but at the same time open to social change.



Leon Özbarut welcomed our visit to Bursa, he was happy to tell us in detail about the Community.

By and large it was a middle class community. The people were engaged as shopkeepers, artisans, jewelers. A few families owned small factories of wine and textiles. The younger generation was being educated in various professions as doctors, lawyers, engineers, business managers.

We arrived in Bursa, just two days before Rosh Hashana, and stayed at the celebrated Çelik Palas Hotel which I,

as a young girl, had enjoyed visiting with my parents. Our room had the breathtaking view of the snowy peaks of Mt. Olympus. In the evening we stepped into the domed Turkish bath of white marble, then rested and cooled off in the anteroom by the fountain.

The next day we met Leon Özbarut, the *gabbay* of the Gerush synagogue. He invited us to attend the morning services there. Leon, as a retired electrician had a lot of time to devote

to the maintenance of the synagogue, and his wife Diamante was the head of the Women’s Committee.

I entered the synagogue with Han from a side entrance door overlooking a cobblestone street. We were led to the second floor balcony, used exclusively by women, according to Sephardic tradition. I later found out that

formerly the balcony was completely “caged in” and men couldn’t see the women from below! This caused much boredom among men and women, especially during long services, so the trellis enclosing the balcony was lowered, and people could throw glances at each other. There was a large congregation, there were even some families who had come back from Israel to be with their parents for the celebration. The women kept pointing to their husbands, sons and grandsons down below, as the ritual procession during the *Sefer Torah* reading. The services continued on and on—the women would take a walk, go out, then come back again to continue with their prayers. Han promptly fell

asleep, the chanting must have sounded like a lullaby to her ears!

I met Fortune in the synagogue. She was sitting next to me, a 70-year old, bubbly woman with fuzzy red hair and happy eyes. She asked me openly what we were doing there. I explained briefly our interest, and then she began to tell me about her family and their status in the community. Her family name was Saban; for many years they were engaged in kosher wine production which was distributed throughout the Jewish communities in Turkey. After her husband retired two years ago, the business came to an end. (Kosher wine was no



The shofar traditionally heralds the Jewish New Year.

longer commercially made in Turkey, it was imported from Israel), though some women like Diamante and Fortune still made their own wine for holidays.

At 12:30 pm the congregants shook hands and wished one another happy New Year as they left the synagogue. Leon and Diamante invited us graciously to their home for lunch. (Last evening all the family had congregated at their home for dinner—sons, daughters, grandchildren and close relatives.) Diamante served a wonderfully tasty lunch of stuffed eggplant, rich assortment of hors d'oeuvres including fish eggs, stuffed grape leaves and a hearty lamb stew. She also served her home-made wine and apple jam which were traditional for the occasion. During lunch we talked about their family and how the parents try to keep their children close to



A book case stored old, unused prayer books.



A fountain of white marble graced the courtyard of the Gerüş synagogue.

home. She favored marrying daughters at 15-16 years of age, so the parents could enjoy the grandchildren.

Leon and his wife, like some of the well-established, middle-class families, lived in the same building as their married children and their families. The Bursa community still practiced the tradition of *iç güveyisi*, inviting the son-in-law to live near the wife's parents, and work with the father-in-law, especially if the son-in-law was from another region. In this tradition, explained Leon, the daughter found a husband, the whole family grew together and stayed together.

Leon had inherited his father's house which he sold to a contractor who, in turn, built an apartment house and gave Leon three flats. Now, two daughters and

their families lived in the same building with their parents, another daughter lived in İstanbul. She was happily married, the mother of twins, the pride and joy of grandparents. Leon said continuously, "thank God, we have a very good life here." He felt that some of their relatives in Israel, and even his brother in France did not have successful, happy lives. They were home-sick for Turkey, and not even well-to-do. "Except for a few poor people, the community here is well off, and we also take care of our poor members," he said.

After lunch the Rabbi and his wife came to visit. He was originally from Balat (an old Jewish quarter in İstanbul which is becoming gentrified in the last five years), he had worked in Bursa for 12 years. He liked his congregation, he stressed the importance of education



On Rosh Ashana the ladies of the Gerüş Synagogue came down from their balcony to the courtyard for a breath of fresh air in between prayers.

and preservation of the Hebrew traditions. The next day Leon went to visit the Rabbi. On special holidays Leon and the Rabbi paid visits to each other as the two prominent leaders of the synagogue.

We were told there used to be four synagogues in Bursa; they were all located in the Altıparmak Quarter (named after an illustrious resident who had six fingers on one hand), also referred as the *Yahudi Mahallesi*. Presently, the neighborhood had been built up with big apartment buildings and shops below them. Three of the synagogues were still standing, one had burned down in 1951. The Gerüş synagogue was the only one in use. It was 300 years old; its simple façade, belied the elaborate architectural details of the interior, with its large dome resting on a circle of columns. It had been built to



Leon's wife Diamante graciously served a treat to her son-in-law, who was the Rabbi of the Gerüş synagogue,

accommodate a large congregation of at least 700 people. As one of the major Jewish settlements Bursa had a population of 1,000 families until 1925. So, the synagogues would have been crowded with its worshipers.

The cemetery was a clear testimony to the age of the community, the oldest tombstone dating to 350 years ago. An old Turkish guard named Hayri Saç was a bit suspicious about our inquiries, so we had to coax him to open the gate. His shepherd dog and pet ram remained on guard next to him. He explained that part of the cemetery land had been expropriated by the Municipality to build the main highway connecting it to İzmir, and another section was taken up by a Laboratory for Veterinary Medicine. The tombstones were carried to another part of the cemetery grounds. The guard had been there for 30 years, so if we wanted to know about the circumstances of peoples' deaths

(of course, not the ancient ones) he would willingly tell us... "One boy of 17 committed suicide—cause was unemployment. Another man whose wife was courted by his best friend was found dead at his home...in one grave a young couple named Nesim Yanko Benardete and Jale Benardete devoted themselves to their children, they left this mortal world without seeing their

happiness, may they lie in peace and light. Amen... The couple over there died in a traffic accident. They were from a rich family of silk manufacturers..." and so on.

Indeed, the guard was an informative, talkative man. He was most grateful to a Rabbi who was the only person capable of exorcizing his wife from other-worldly creatures; "thank God and the Rabbi," he said, "my

wife has returned to this world now."



Hayri Saç was the caretaker of the Jewish Cemetery.

ben Avram, year 5693." Was he the donor of this synagogue? We did not find it out. Dominating the courtyard was a large apple tree and a plane tree. Apples and leaves filled the courtyard; he had it cleaned two weeks ago for the *Sukhot*, had even paid 20,000 TL to the cleaning man. Then, Leon led us to the washroom where the bodies were given their ritual bath.

He washed the deceased men, his wife Diamante did the women. He pointed out that the cost of repairing this synagogue was so great now that they could only do the most necessary repairs. As we walked out into the street, Leon carefully placed the key in his pocket, pointed out the buildings that were still owned by the community, in this narrow, cobblestone street. Some of ther houses were rented to families for minimal sums, but every little bit helped. Otherwise, how could they pay the Rabbi, make the *Sukhot*, maintain the synagogues, said Leon. He made a certain gesture of concealing his tip to the Turkish guard in front of the synagogue. (Since the Neve Şalom synagogue bombing in İstanbul in 1986, the municipal governments in Turkey assigned guards for the communities' safety.) But Leon liked to pay the guard a little extra to keep him happy and alert.

Leon and Diamante were still well liked and respected by the community. Leon said even Israeli tourists knew to look them up, just for information and friendly chat. Diamante was once asked by an Israeli tourist if the Jews were discriminated against... She responded, "never." She then explained, "if someone said yes, he/she was surely using 'being a Jew' as a false reason for his/her bad luck and inadequacies..."

At our second visit the Bursa community was reduced to 42 families, 150 people; one year before, it was 175. people. The men were engaged in either synthetic yarn trading or selling garments. In a region which was famous for silk and terry cloth towels, Jews in Bursa were not involved in textile manufacturing, although in the past, Leon's father, like many Jews, did silk-worm/

cocoon trading. They used to go to the farthest villages to buy silk worms from Turkish farmers and sold them in the Koza Han, a monumental 16th century covered bazaar with small cubicles for shops. The last Jewish person who dealt in silk worms was Şaul Markus who had died 40 years ago. There was a marble fountain in his name near the bazaar.

We visited one of the Jewish yarn traders in Koza Han. As a father-son team, Albert and Sami Manisa (son-in-law and grandson of Leon) sat by a telephone, following up on prices and customers. Every Monday the son was in the habit of visiting the customers who owed them monies.

In a relatively small town such as Bursa, Sami had little opportunity to find a spouse. If the wife-to-be was from İstanbul it was unlikely that she would agree to live in Bursa. So, Sami was thinking to move to İstanbul where his aunt lived. Would he consider marrying a Turkish/Muslim girl? Probably not, he said. Despite their unwillingness to intermarry, young Jewish people in small towns are forming social groups with their Turkish contemporaries—meeting for sports, picnics and other social affairs... My opinion is that if this type of social interaction continued on, it would invariably lead to further assimilation and intermarriages.

Outside the Koza Han we visited Ezra Venturero's Garment Shop. He greeted us from the corner of a tiny store full of shelves packed with socks, underwear, lingerie. Ezra was the leader of the Bursa community for a number of years, he said he looked forward to more integration with the Turkish community.

Assyrian Church near to Mardin. Often locals pointed out churches to us thinking that they might be a synagogue.



# EASTERN ANATOLIA



The Taurus mountains which parallel Turkey's southern border and the Black Sea Mountain range in the north join together to form a spectacular landscape in the eastern border. The ecological diversity of the eastern and southeastern regions is displayed in the red ochre plateau of Erzurum; the forests, waterfalls and green pastures of Kars and Ağrı; the permanent snowcap on the Biblical Mount Ağrı (Ararat), and the immense Lake Van with its deep blue waters.

While agricultural activity used to be secondary to animal husbandry until 30 years ago, with the building of several dams on the Euphrates river and its tributaries since 1980s, irrigation agriculture and new industries, textiles, cement, steel and others have enriched the region.

However, in the mountainous rural regions the major part of livelihood is still based on animal husbandry practiced by nomadic and settled farmers.

The region's long and turbulent history has left monuments of various civilizations: the capital of the Urartu Empire of the 1st millennium BCE was established in and near the Van Fortress; Byzantine and Armenian monasteries and churches, Selçuk (Seljuk) mausoleums, caravanserais, elegant Ottoman mosques and hilltop citadels, all have left their traces.

## AŞKALE

On an unseasonably hot morning in August 2001, my daughter Han and I made a trip to Aşkale, in the Erzurum province (see map), to talk to older members of the local community in an attempt to find out about the conditions of life for the non-Muslim minority groups sent to work there in 1943. A Turkish film entitled, *Salkım Hanımın Taneleri* (Lady Salkım's Pieces, 1999), portrayed the Aşkale experience as something not unlike that of a concentration camp, where those sent were subject to harsh and inhumane treatment. An article in *Aksiyon*, a popular Turkish news magazine, not only contradicted the film's thesis that the minority groups at Aşkale had been mistreated, but reported that they were relatively comfortable there. Who should we believe?



The road to Aşkale was rather bleak. Its hillsides provided the stones that were mined for local roadbuilding.

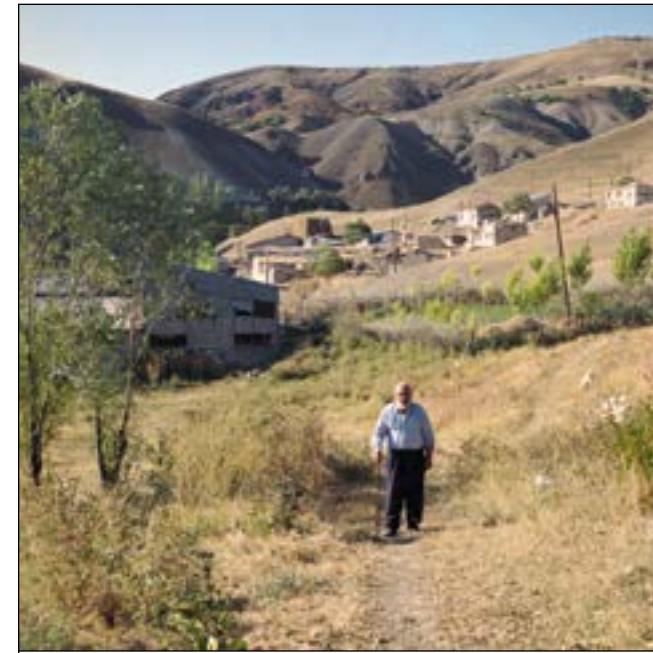
During our research on Turkey's Jews, we had come upon the topic of the *Varlık Vergisi*, the capital asset tax levied on Turkish minorities during World War II. Armenians, Greeks, Jews and *Dönməs* (ethnic Jews who had converted to Islam in the 17th century) were subject to a heavy tax aimed primarily at breaking their stronghold on the Turkish economy. Those unable or unwilling to pay

the tax were sent to do labor at Aşkale, a small town near Erzurum in Eastern Turkey. There, they were put to work shoveling snow and breaking up stones for their failure to pay the *Varlık Vergisi* tax. It is estimated that about 1500 men were sent to Aşkale in 1943, with individual stays varying between three to six months. More than simply creating a sense of inequality and insecurity in the psyche of the Jewish community, the *Varlık Vergisi* represented a betrayal of the republican principle that all of Turkey's citizens were equal before the eyes of the law, regardless of ethnic and/or religious background.

The underlying principle of the tax was to prohibit wartime profits of black market merchants, especially from minority groups who evoked resentment in the public-at-large, during the early 1940s. As opposed to being determined by specific earnings, the tax was fixed arbitrarily, and at a much higher rate for the Turkish non-Muslims than for Turkish Muslims. During this time, however, almost everybody in Turkey was subject to taxes beyond their means. The phrase "Keçi bir para, vergi iki para," which means, one quid for the goat, and two quid for the tax, dates back to this time. Turkish peasants unable to pay the tax known as *Yol Parası* (bus ticket) had to work 12

days a year to pay the 12 TL tax. In addition to boosting the budget of Turkey's ailing wartime economy, the tax artificially created more viable conditions of competition for Turkish Muslim merchants. We felt that a visit to Aşkale and interviews with some of the locals who still remembered the events of 1943 would allow us to make our own conclusions about the other side of the story.

In talking to Jews in İstanbul, we were not able to find any living member of the community who had been to Aşkale. Through friends we learned the stories of uncles and grandfathers who had been there. One friend told us that after her brother had returned from Aşkale, he had said with ironic jocularity that the cold and dry climate had cured him of the last remnants



Springtime in Aşkale gave little indication of its harsh winters.

of his tuberculosis. The father of Ishak Alaton, one of Turkey's wealthiest businessmen, had also been in Aşkale. The younger Alaton tempered the effects of the Aşkale event by referring to his present prosperity, a degree of prosperity that was beyond the dreams of his family. So, it ended well for them. But others told stories of extreme hardship and deprivation.



Those who were sent to Askale were obliged to break such stones into smaller pieces for road construction.

## BAŞKALE

When we stepped into our hotel in Van, a woman with one end of her headscarf over her mouth and a child holding onto her skirt came into the lobby to ask for money. The receptionist scolded her away, saying, "I'll beat you up if you don't leave." The woman answered with surprising speed, "Are you a woman, that you want to beat up another woman?" The man called her something like a crazy bird, at which the woman called out, "Shut up, monkey face!" and disappeared onto the street.

We came to Van to go to Başkale, a town dating back to the 13th century, which had once had a Jewish community, and at its height was made up of about

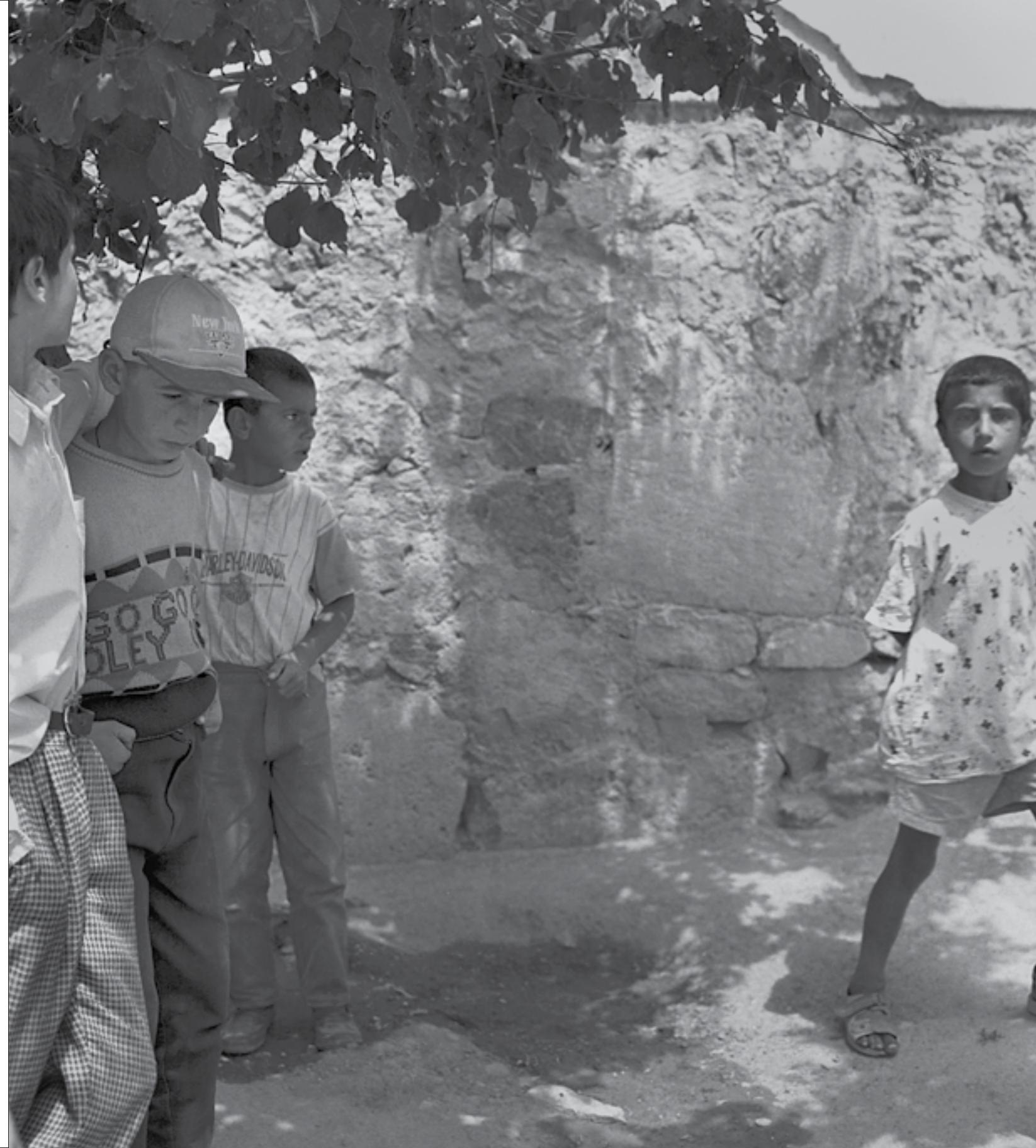
100 households. The Jews had come to Başkale from Iran and Iraq (Başkale is situated 20 km west of the Turkey-Iran border); they were speakers of the ancient language of Aramaic. (The Jews of this region call their language Tarhum.) The Başkale Jews were largely storekeepers and traders. According to our elderly Turkish informants, it appears that up to the 1940s, more than half of the businesses in Başkale were owned by Jews. Ekrem Acar, a local tailor, who started his career as an apprentice to a Jewish tailor, and later had a Jewish partner for eight years, pointed out the various stores once owned by Jews, one of which was his own. Most of the Jews were *manifaturacı*: in other words, they dealt in textiles and small items of clothing such as socks and underwear. Some Jews kept sheep, dyeing and selling their wool to be used in rug making.



Han turned out to be a good interviewer, and was glad she volunteered her services to Laurence to finish this project.



Kadri Abbasoğlu shared his memories of the Başkale Jewish community with us.



The Kutlar Family was the last to leave Başkale. When they left for İstanbul in 1942, they took the Torah belonging to the Başkale Jewish community with them, and gave it to the head Rabbi there. Our Başkale story begins in the store of the brothers Nuri (Uryel) and Ağa (Aron) Kutlar in İstanbul. Ağa, the younger brother of Nuri, told us that they had been a family of nine siblings, and that his parents had spoken not only Aramaic and the languages of the countries they had fled, but also Turkish and Kurdish. He remembered that there had been good relations between the Jews and the local community there, but said that like many families in Başkale, Jewish and Muslim alike, many Jews had left town to improve their prospects in a bigger town. Some of the Jews who left Başkale went to Israel, while others set up businesses in big cities in Turkey.

An interesting anecdote about the Jewish existence in Başkale was related by Kadri Abbasoğlu, a local official who was kind enough to show us around the town, where he was born, and had been a civil servant for the past 28 years. He had grown up in the "Jewish Quarter" of Başkale, and had not only been friends with the Jewish children, but had also received a phone call from one of these old friends now living in İstanbul, with whom he was regularly in contact, just one week before our arrival. While Kadri took us on a hike of the hills surrounding Başkale, he pointed out wild grasses used against various ailments, and as we passed, a husband and wife team were building their house on a hilltop. Kadri explained that in families of lesser means, the women had to work alongside the men. As we waved to them, it started raining, and we

continued our walk in the rain. We were interested to see the site of the town's Jewish cemetery, but when we got there we discovered there were no traces of it left. With no one to tend it, and its stones having been used in the building of village houses, all one could see from the hilltop on which the cemetery once stood was the view of the surrounding mountains separating Turkey from Iran. In fact, one of the things we were searching for in Başkale was a headstone with a Hebrew inscription on it, which had been used in the outer wall of a house that my father had seen on a visit twelve years earlier. As we continued our tour, Kadri told us how he used to ride on horseback to Iran when "he was in a hurry." Presently, trade conducted unofficially was an important source of income for this region. Heroin, gasoline and lesser goods found their way across the border and were then sold across a chain of middlemen to Van, İstanbul and further westward.

As we crossed paths with curious shepherd boys and other locals, all the greetings were conducted in Kurdish by Kadri, while we communicated with him in Turkish. Toward the end of our tour we passed by the local military base, at which point we put our cameras away, not wanting to attract attention to ourselves. It is often necessary to obtain permits for photographing historical sites, which is both a time-consuming procedure, and almost inevitably involves accompaniment by an appointed official on the site to be photographed. Of course it was impossible not to attract attention, since Başkale rarely received visitors, Turkish or foreign, and we were to discover just how many tales had been woven around our presence the next day, when we planned to go back to Van.



But first, the intriguing story told to us by Kadri. It was about the fate of the daughter of the Rabbi of Başkale. Kadri was a man of about 60 years, he had been a child during the events he recounted, so the story was probably set sometime in the 1950s. A local Muslim boy and the Rabbi's daughter fell in love. The two had probably known each other from school, in their mid-teens. When the family of the boy went to the Rabbi to ask for his daughter's hand, the Rabbi responded positively, but said he needed to consult with his relatives before giving his final decision. Upon the boy's family's second visit, the Rabbi said that his relatives did not approve of a marriage with a non-Jew. Not long after the Rabbi's final decision, the boy and local townsmen stormed the Rabbi's house and took the girl. The two young people married, and moved to Balıkesir, where the boy, whose name was Niyazi, was posted for military service. A son was born to the couple, and the story seemed finally to have reached a happy end. However, one day when Niyazi came home, he discovered that his wife and son were missing. He searched for them in Başkale, thinking that perhaps his wife had taken their son and gone back to her father's home. But when he arrived in Başkale, Niyazi realized that his wife was not there either. After some time, news came that the Rabbi's daughter from Başkale had in fact run away with a man from İzmir, and was now living there. As Kadri told the story, the son, upon comprehension of his mother's betrayal, ran away from home to Adana, where he currently lived. Years later he contacted his father, and the two made a final journey to İstanbul a few years ago, where the father was to be treated for an illness. We had heard of the story of the Rabbi's daughter before, but had

not heard of the interesting twist it had taken after the kidnapping.

That night we stayed in one of the two hotels in Başkale belonging to the brother of Ekrem Acar. One wall of the reception room was adorned with photographs of Atatürk, General Fevzi Çakmak, and of the former prime minister Turgut Özal. Our room had a view of the courtyard where a sheep had just been butchered, and in the far distance, the mountains dividing Turkey and Iran, were barely visible.

The next day we set out to see if we might find that headstone with the Hebrew inscription on it before we left. We searched where the Jews used to live, tried to retrace steps taken 12 years ago, and asked many (perhaps too many) people if they had ever seen such a stone. Almost everyone assumed we were searching for treasure, specifically for gold. One man was in fact so convinced that we were treasure hunters, that after displaying characteristic hospitality and offering us tea in his home, he sent away all of his family members to ask us why we had "really" come to Başkale. Each time he inquired into our mission, and we responded the only thing we sought was a stone in an outer wall with "some foreign writing" on it, he would smile knowingly into his black moustache, put another sugar cube on his tongue, and take a swig of his tea. Finally, he told us he knew of the house, but because he was on bad terms with its owner we should not say he had sent us there. (In the meantime we had some time to look around at the one remaining fortress of Başkale whence the town derived its name. Originally it was Beşkale (Turkish for five fortresses or five castles), but

the "e" in the "Beş" eventually was transformed into an "a." There we met with three shepherd boys who offered us tea boiled in discarded military canisters, and told us they had seen a fox that day. They were pleased about this because they said the fox, whom they referred to as "Uncle Fox," brought good luck.)

When we finally found the house we had been looking for, there was a group of children and women standing around it. They showed us the stone set into the wall, partly hidden by a laundry line. After taking a few pictures, we walked down into the center of town in order to say goodbye to Ekrem Acar and to Kadri before we left. The day before Kadri had said, "after you're gone, there won't be anybody to tell the story of Başkale. With old people dying, and the young moving away, he and a few others were the only people who remembered Başkale's past."



Ekrem Acar had worked for a Jewish tailor who left his business to him.

As we were having a cold drink before going to say our good-byes, a policeman came into the shop where we were sitting. Two minutes after he entered, two plainclothes policemen came in, and asked us if we would accompany them to the police station for a few questions. At the station we were told that someone had reported that we were traveling with large sums of

money, intending to buy antiquities, clearly a continuation of the misconception that we were searching for treasures. Our biggest fear was that they would want to develop our film, delaying us for another day. After carefully explaining that Başkale was a very sensitive region because of its location near the Iranian border, and a region affected by terrorism until the recent cease-fire last year, the police chief from Ankara said that we would have to give an official statement explaining our intentions, and saying that we had not in any way been ill treated during our voluntary visit to the station. After all was said and done, we were allowed to leave the station after two hours, and said goodbye to Ekrem Acar. We missed our appointment to see Kadri.

On boarding the crowded minibus going back to Van, a group of disgruntled ladies complained that they had been waiting a long time to get on, and started arguing with the driver. He laughed them away, making one lady holding the end of her headscarf in front of her mouth even more angry, and prompting her to say, "Don't laugh at me, I'll fill your mouth with s---t!"

Turkey is little known in the West. Culturally and philosophically, she partakes of both eastern and western traditions. Visitors to the country describe it as one of the last “frontiers,” where people are kind and hospitable, and having a *misafir*, guest, is considered almost a sacred experience. The Jews who have been living among the Turkish people for at least five centuries have incorporated many aspects of the Turkish culture into their Judeo-Spanish tradition. Theirs is, no doubt, a syncretic culture, that is, one which melds together differing traditions and beliefs.

As Laurence and I traveled through the country, we realized that the Jewish populations which are still living in small towns functioned as an integral part of the larger society, even using local dialects of the Turkish language, women producing traditional lacework and embroideries for their house furnishings, exchanging foods on special holidays with their Turkish-Muslim neighbors. That was one of the distinct differences between these small communities and those living in metropolitan cities such as İstanbul and İzmir. There, the Jews function as separate social entities vis à vis the larger society, almost like “tribal” groups, although in the business world there is strong interdependence between the two. Both the small and the metropolitan communities, however, proudly adhered to their religion. The synagogue, be it a humble, one-room structure as the one in the town of Tekirdağ, or an expansive building which accommodated hundreds of congregants such as those in İstanbul, was well maintained and functioned as the focus of religious as well as social activities.

In the next decades, as more and more of the younger people leave small towns in search of higher education and better employment opportunities, Turkish Jews will probably be joining their relatives in metropolitan cities in Turkey, Europe or the U.S., not unlike many Turks engaged in similar pursuits.

Ayşe Gürsan-Salzmann



When the Jews left Spain, they followed two basic routes. Some went north to France, Holland, England, and eventually west to Central and North America. We call them Western Sephardim. In their writings, they continued to use the Latin alphabet, but soon they became linguistically acculturated to their adoptive countries. Until World War II, Amsterdam was their religious and cultural center.

Others went east to the vast domains of the Ottoman Turks (Memâlik-i Osmaniyye). We call them Eastern Sephardim. With their cultural ties to Spain and Europe severed, these Eastern Sephardim began to use the Hebrew alphabet in its cursive Rashi style for personal and business matters. Their script is called sole-treo. Its ingenious ligatures—ganços, “hooks”—are only surpassed by those of the Ottoman script —also called çengel, “hook.”

The cultural centers of Eastern Sephardim developed mainly in İstanbul and Salonika, with offshoots in İzmir, Edirne, Safed, Jerusalem and Rhodes. For their size—just a few hundred thousand souls at their peak—the Sephardim succeeded in maintaining a common language for scholarly as well as for daily discourse. This language which thrives on accurate translation—or Ladino—was rooted in, and dominated by their religious heritage which permeated and regulated every aspect of their lives, and was propagated by their printing presses whose output was out of proportion with their size as a minuscule community.

There can be no disagreement that the basic stock of this language was and remains Hispanic.

But soon it became a semitized version of Spanish, tailored by design to facilitate a thorough comprehension of the entire range of religious texts, from Bible to Mishna, from Talmud to Zohar, from legal responsa to historic or poetic writings, outside of which there was nothing else anyway.

In those pre-daily newspaper and pre-TV days, when the average synagogue-going individual knew literally hundreds of pages of Hebrew texts by heart, the vernacular of the Sephardim naturally molded itself for half a millennium around Hebrew/Aramaic patterns of derivation and composition culled from the vast areas of legal (halakhic) and homiletic (midrashic) expositions. Even story-telling or proverb-coining invariably imitated the many aggadot and the countless other clichés heard at synagogues and endlessly repeated at the meldados conducted in their homes. That is why the hundreds of books which have come down from those days invariably display, on their title-pages, the constant reminder that they have been written en Ladino klaro, in “clear Ladino” for everybody to understand!

Of late, and over the protest of knowledgeable natives who never called their language Judeo-Spanish, linguists seem to have reached their own, independent consensus. Through their efforts, the hyphenated term Judeo-Spanish—as an appendage to the Judeo-German, Judeo-Arabic, Judeo-Greek series—has been popularized as the only appropriate name for the language of the Sephardim. By the same token, Ladino has been devalued and declared a non-language. True, the word Ladino has been retained, but only after it was placed in a linguistic quarantine of sorts. Ladino’s niche is now

clearly delineated. The term may still be used, but only if applied to those slavish translations of biblical and liturgical texts. And there is a real “war” of terminology going on as to the appropriateness or the superiority of this term over that term in a given situation.

In reality, people who are knowledgeable in Hebrew and Aramaic have long felt that the criteria used to define Ladino, Judeo-Spanish or the tens of other names that have sprung up lately for this tiny area of linguistic inquiry, hinge around considerations of quantity, not quality. Translation and literalness being the norm, these may be expected to pop up at every possible corner. Indeed, some of the clearest and most obvious “Judeo-Spanish” words such as akeya madre, el aya, se esperto, se le aparesyo do reflect, upon close scrutiny, undercurrents of Semitic thought. And as such, they fall right back into the lap of Ladino!

As this beautiful language which displays the combined elegance of Spanish, Portuguese, Italian and French enters its final stage, it behoves us to leave its dissection and verdict of appurtenances to a later date, presumably better suited for theory building and ultimate categorizations.

Rabbi Isaac Jerusalmi  
Cincinnati, July 1991

#### A note on Turkish and Judeo/Spanish pronunciation.

The modern Turkish letters are pronounced more or less as an English person would, with the following exceptions:

- c – as j in jam
- ç – as ch in chapter;
- ğ – barely pronounced at all; tends to lengthen the preceding vowel.
- ı – distinct from i rather like the indefinite unemphasized vowel in English, e.g., tion in fraction
- ö – as eu in French veut
- ş – as sh in shop
- ü – as une in French

Judeo/Spanish words make use of the above Turkish letters.

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*Turkey's Sephardim: 500 Years* was shot originally in 16mm film and tells the story of Turkey's Sephardic Jews as they are today, against a background of 500 years of uninterrupted existence on the lands of the Ottoman Empire since 1492, the year when they were uprooted from the Iberian peninsula.

The viewer is gently led to discover the daily rituals of Turkish-Jewish life. Over and over again, the film weaves together images of ordinary people as well as the spiritual leaders—school-children, housewife, small tradesman, fishmongers, businessmen—to create the portrait of a community whose strength and color derive from its multicultural heritage. The film begins slowly, like the faint wailing of a muezzin (call to prayer), gradually transforming into a full orchestral crescendo...

A DVD version of the film included in the back of the book, *In Search of Turkey's Jews*, has two bonus features: hundreds of photographs made by Salzmann from his photo-documentary project.along with his commentaries—they offer the viewer a larger view of the culture of this little known-community in Turkey.

Original prints are available for purchase.  
Contact the photographer for details.  
[LaurenceSalzmann@gmail.com](mailto:LaurenceSalzmann@gmail.com)

Ayşe Gürsan-Salzmann, born and raised in İstanbul, was trained as an anthropologist at the University of Pennsylvania. Her interest in the study of man ranges from prehistoric cultures, to delineating living communities, particularly those on the margins of society. Her collaboration with Laurence Salzmann on projects in Mexico, Romania and Turkey reflect her attention to painstaking detail and keen observation of specific cultural/ethnic groups interacting as part of a larger community or nation. She has taught cultural anthropology and archaeology. She is a research associate at the University of Pennsylvania Museum and co-director of the Gordium Archaeological Project of the University of Pennsylvania Museum.

Laurence Salzmann, a native of Philadelphia, has worked as a photographer/filmmaker since the early 1960's. His projects include social commentaries on little known groups in America and abroad. They range from a study of the residents of Single Room Occupancy Hotels in New York City, Philadelphia Mummers, Mexican Village Life, Jews of Radauti, (Romania), Transhumant Shepherds of Transylvania. Wrestlers and dancers in Cuba His work has appeared in books co-authored with Ayşe Gürsan-Salzmann and articles in *New York Times Sunday Magazine*, *Natural History* and *GEO* magazines.

Currently he is completing a documentary film that tells the story of the life left behind by Mexican undocumented workers from Puebla in the United States.



