

## **In This Issue**



The articles in this issue deal with various aspects of Jewish communities in the East in the twentieth century.

The opening article by Naomi Liran concerns Jewish-owned or managed cinemas in Istanbul during the first half of the twentieth century. After the 'Young Turks' came to power in 1908 cinemas opened one after the other, mainly along the main street, the dynamic and cosmopolitan Grande Rue de Péra, now the pedestrian concourse *istiklal Caddesi*. Sumptuous halls sprang up along its length for the enthusiastic audiences. The cinema entertained and excited, but also formulated new desires, encouraging Western ways of thought, and even strengthening feelings of status and nationality. A group of Jewish businessmen, mostly immigrants, played a major part in introducing the cinema to Istanbul. They were involved in the operation of about a dozen cinemas in the Grande Rue de Péra and its vicinity, and cinemas in other quarters of the city. From the mid-1930s, following nationalistic legislation, political changes and demographic developments, the activities of the Jews (and other minorities) in entertainment and culture in the city declined. In 1945 the last two Jewish-owned cinemas went bankrupt, and their ownership passed to the Istanbul municipality. This study presents, for the first time, the contribution of these Jews to the Turkish cinema industry, urban culture and the culture of their community.

Naomi Liran is a research student in the Department of Jewish History at the University of Haifa.

The article by Hilda Nissemi discusses the influence of customs and religious behavior in a community comprised of Jews from Mashad living in the United States on the preservation of their separate ethnic communal identity. After returning to Judaism from their forced conversion to Islam, the community held only a few organized events to commemorate its past, but rather intensive involvement in religious affairs served that need. Regular participation in religious events and regarding them as communal ones, their celebration in a family framework even by members of the community who did not define themselves as religious, and also the close link of members of the community in the past and present between their ethnic identity and the religiosity – these were the primary means that changed the religious act to an act of communal memory. Synagogues also served as memorial centers, at least to the degree that they served as religious centers. Thus the community's past as a community of forced converts continued to have influence on it even after they left Mashad. Identifying the community's past with observance of Judaism transformed religious observance into a communal heritage. Moreover, endogamous marriage, which was originally intended to preserve the Jewish character of the community, enabled the family to be a venue for preservation of religious identity as a communal heritage. Both factors reinforce each other.

Dr. Hilda Nissemi teaches in the Department of General History at Bar Ilan University.

The article by Meir Sasson deals with Shmuel Hayyim (1888-1931), an exceptional figure among the Jews of Iran in the first half of the twentieth century – a proud Jew in a Jewish society that had been humiliated and oppressed by its Shi'ite Muslim neighbors for generations. Hayyim was elected to a key position and served as the Jewish Representative in the Majlis (the Iranian parliament) and as chairman of the Central Committee of the Zionist Organization of Iran. In both of these capacities he fought for the improvement of the situation of the Jews and preserving their rights as equal citizens. As chairman of the Central Committee he brought the problems of Iranian Jewry to the attention of world Zionist leaders and sought their interference on their behalf. Hayyim walked a thin line in his behavior toward Reza Shah, which led him to a bitter end. Revealing his character and activities teaches not only about the private case of a leader of a closed Jewish community. It also sheds light on the history of the Jewish community of Iran, on the internal dynamics that characterized it, on the relations between the Jewish leadership and the regime of Reza Shah and on the activity of Central Committee and its connections with Zionist leaders in the West. Dr. Meir Sasson is engaged in the study of Iranian Jewry.

Laura Papo "Bohoreta" (Sarajevo, 1891-1942) was one of the most active female figures on the cultural scene of the Balkan Sephardim in twentieth century. In a pioneering manner this energetic and strong-minded woman managed

not only to enter many of the fields, such as public activism, journalism or anthropology, that until her time were exclusively male activities – but even to conquer some of them (as, for example was the case with dramaturgy) and rule over them (becoming the most prolific and the most beloved Judeo-Spanish playwright in the interwar Bosnia and Herzegovina). Ideologically, Bohoreta belonged to the Sephardic Circle, a group of Sephardic intellectuals who saw in the ethnic language of the Sephardic Jews the most authentic expression of the "genius of the group", and looked for a way to preserve the language of the grandparents (with all its cultural values) and pass it over to the grandchildren's generation. Bohoreta was the most prolific author in this Circle and the present article examines her linguistic approach in different fields which occupied the minds of the intellectual elite that opted to stick to the ethnic language of the group, such as: the question of preferred orthography, of policy towards the languages of the surrounding society or the question of the language appropriate for literary creation.

Dr. Eliezer Papo teaches Judeo-Spanish literature in the Jewish Literatures Program of the Hebrew Literature Department at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev and is Deputy Director of the Moshe David Gaon Center for Ladino Culture at the same University.

Brief reviews of recent publications complete this issue.