

JEWISH HISTORICAL MONUMENTS IN SPLIT



The Jewish Cemetery in Split

First mention of the Jewish Community of Split (Spalato) is made in some documents dating to the XIV century. In the list of properties of the Archbishop of Split from 1397 there is mention of the Sinagogue named "Sdorium", which was located in the southern part of Diocletian's Palace. However, it is certain that there were Jews in Split much earlier, as we find traces of the existence of a Jewish Community in ancient Salona. According to some documents in Italian archives there were Jews in Split as far back as in the XI century. They had trade relations with Ancona and other Italian cities.

In the Archeological Museum of Split there are several objects and stone monuments of Jewish origin, from which it is possible to determine that there were Jews living in this part of the world in the very early days of Roman Salona (Solin near Split). Among items mentioned, prominent place is given to the text on a tombstone, where Jews are mentioned as a noted ethnic — religious community. This monument dates back to the end of the third or the beginning of the fourth century A. D. which also proves that at that time there existed in Salona a Jewish Community which had a separate graveyard.

Towards the end of the XV century the Jewish Community in Split was increased by the arrival of the Sephardic Jews from Spain and Portugal who were expelled upon refusal to be baptised. They were very soon assimilated by the Split Jews, but for the next two centuries they are referred to in the various documents as "Ebrei Ponentini"; to differentiate them from the older Split Jewry, which were referred to as the "Levantini". At that time, the Jews in Split were not burdened by any special obligations, although this was not the case in other European countries, but they also came under the regulations of the Venetian Government from the year 1423, as Split was under the Venetian rule at that time. These regulations contained the stipulation that Jews could not possess real-estate, but were permitted to work at various crafts and could function as small merchants.

Daniel Rodriguez occupies a special place among the Jews of Split in the XVI century. In 1577 he proposed to the Venetian Senate to make Split the biggest port on the Balkans through which all the trade would flow into the interior. As at that time Venetian trade with the East was getting weaker and weaker because of the constant pirating and the competition with Portugal and Spain, the Senate accepted Rodriguez' proposal and gave him land for the building of a lazarette, which he started building at his own expense (the lazarette, was a building where quarantine measures were taken). Due to some misunderstanding with the city elders, Rodriguez suspended construction and left Split. After this the Venetian rulers continued the work and invited Rodriguez to return to Split, appointing him the Jewish Consul in Split and conferred special honour and privileges on him and his family. In 1592 the lazarette was opened for trade. With its opening

trade developed to such an extent that it was found necessary to open a bank in Split. The Split authorities asked the Venetian Government to permit a Jew to open the bank and this was granted in 1592.

Rodriguez was succeeded in 1630 by Joseph Penso, who was noted especially for his travels into the interior of the Balkans in order to assess the political situation in the Turkish provinces and thus helped to defend Dalmatia and Split from the Turks. Throughout the period of the wars between Venice and the Ottoman Empire Jews were working for Venice and they especially distinguished themselves in defense of Split in 1657. On that occasion they were given the task of defending the north-western tower of Diocletian's Palace, which got its name at that time and has since been known as the "Jewish Tower". They also participated in the building of the city wall, the fortress at Gripe and were quick to fulfill all tasks and obligations assigned to them and prescribed by the city for its citizens. When, at the beginning of the XVIII century Split was ravaged by wars and the plague and the population was facing starvation, two Jews, Vito Levi and Isaac Penso, went to the Duke of Split and suggested the building of a granary in the town and thus to assure a reserve of food in case of famine. They also helped to finance this project. During the reign of the Doge of Venice, Alviso Pisani in 1738, a Decree containing 66 clauses was made public in which the rights and duties of Jews were prescribed on the territory of the Venetian Republic. These regulations applied to Jews in Split as well. This Law did not give them equal civic rights with other citizens but their life was secure and they had the right to work and trade freely. In spite of the new regulations they were obliged to continue to live in the Ghetto. Only after the fall of the Republic of Venice and the arrival of the French in Split were the Jews granted full civic equality (beginning of the XIX century).

In the Yugoslav national rebirth movement during the XIX century, an important role was played by Vid Morpurgo, a Jew of Split, who through his bookstore spread the idea of patriotism and was a founder of the First People's Bank of Dalmatia.

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Just before World War II the Jewish Community in Split numbered 282 members. During the Italian occupation a good number of Jewish refugees arrived in Split from other parts of Yugoslavia which were occupied by German Nazis and Ustashi Quislings. The Italians deported the greater majority of these refugees to the Islands of Korčula (Curzola) and Rab (Arbe) as well as to Albania and Italy. On their taking over in Split in September 1943, the Germans at the end of that year and at the beginning of 1944, effected mass deportation of the remaining Jews in Split. At that time about 400 Jews were sent to the camp on Sajmishte (near Belgrade) and Jasenovac (Croatia). From the number of deported it is clear that the Jewish refugees from various parts of Yugoslavia were also among the deported.

A good number of the Jews from Split took part in the Yugoslav National Liberation War against the fascist occupants and their collaborators. About 30 members of the Split Jewish Community gave their lives in this struggle. Of this number 23 were from the ranks of the Jewish youth and this, in relation to the total number of prewar members, represents an imposing figure.

Today the Jewish Community of Split numbers 135 persons.

Two important monuments of the Jewish past exist today in Split. One is the Synagogue in Zidovski prolaz (Jewish Passage) No. 1, and the other is the Cemetery at the top of first Mount Marian.

The first Jewish Synagogue in Split in the XIV century was located in the southern part of Diocletian's Palace, near the Golden Gate. Unfortunately there are no pictorial records of it and we do not know what it looked like. In about 1500 the Jews built a new Synagogue which has remained to this day. It is situated immediately at the entrance to the former Ghetto within the walls of the north-western part of Diocletian's Palace. The Blind Alley (Slijepa ulica) which today leads from the Bosanska street to the Jewish temple even today bears its ancient name "Židovski prolaz" — "Jewish Passage". The Synagogue was restored on several occasions and renovated so that there is little of the original architectural characteristics and style left.

The Synagogue stands east-west, and in the middle of the eastern wall is the "Teva", the altar with the marble edging, elevated and approached by several shallow steps. On the altar is the "Ohel" — the Holy Ark — which contains the Scrolls of Torah (Five Books of Moses). On both sides of the altar are richly wrought silver wall candelabra dating from the XVIII century, bearing the mark of the Venetian goldsmiths. The candelabra are a gift of the brothers Machiori, whose names are carved in Hebrew lettering. From the ceiling of the Synagogue hang several carved baroque cressets, also bearing the mark of the Venetian goldsmiths. On the northern wall of the temple is the gallery for women.

In 1942 the Italian occupation army demolished the Synagogue and took the archives, holy scrolls, books and other objects to the main square of the city and burnt the lot publicly. Even today, the broken and burnt stone paving bear witness to this event. Only a few items were saved from the fire. These are the silver decorations from the Torahs and the candelabra and cressets.

After World War II, the building of the Synagogue was again restored according to old photographs which were saved. However, unfortunately most of the works of art and other historical items are missing.

The Jewish Cemetery on Mount Marian in Split is one of the oldest of its kind in Dalmatia. The graveyard is mentioned in documents as early as in 1573. The ancient graves are to the right of the main path. They are covered by tombstones some of which are flat while others are triangular. All the old tombstones bear Hebrew texts.

One tombstone stands out especially, bearing the epitaph of the prominent Split physician and surgeon Joseph Hay Senior who rendered valuable service to the Split population at the time of the plague in 1732. In the center of the Cemetery are the graves of ancient Split Rabbis. The first is that of Rabbi Avram Papo, one of the first Rabbis, one of the Split Jewish Community. Here are also the graves of Chaim Isaac Musafia of Jerusalem and others. These tombstones have a special value as they bear the names of ancient Jewish families of Split, which no longer exist and therefore, they are an important document for studying the history of the Jews of Split. The mortuary at the Cemetery was built in 1892.

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