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# *Il Kal Grandi*—Sarajevo's Great Sephardic Temple

# At the Crossroads Between Orient and Modernity

*Abstract:*
The article's aim is to revisit Sarajevo's Great Sephardic Temple (*Il Kal Grandi*), a little known, short-lived twentieth century synagogue. Built between 1926 and 1930 in Bosnia and Herzegovina's capital, then part of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, it was the last such project before the outbreak of World War II in the region. The article explores this synagogue's oriental and specifically Sephardic identity as well as the politics surrounding the decision to build it. Although built by Sarajevo's Sephardic community, a number of *Il Kal Grandi's* sociological, architectural and aesthetic choices, as the article argues, originate in the Ashkenazic, German-speaking cultural sphere. German architects in the first half of the nineteenth century were the first to use an oriental style based upon the style of the Alhambra palace in order to stress Jewish oriental, non-European identity. The use of the very same style, along with modern innovations, enabled the Sephardic community in Sarajevo to be part of the united (Ashkenazic and Sephardic), predominantly Zionist Yugoslav Jewry while preserving its specifically Sephardic distinctiveness.

On September 14, 1930 the citizens of Sarajevo—then part of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia—witnessed an important celebration of their city's Sephardic community—the consecration of a monumental new synagogue.[1] A picture-postcard issued for this occasion shows the new structure, officially known as the Great Sephardic Temple (fig. 1). Its majestic, mosque-like dome took its place in the city's skyline, a proud symbol of the Sephardic community's three-and-a-half century-long presence in the city (Rajner 47; Gotovac 39–42). Called by the local Judeo-Spanish speaking Jews *Il Kal Grandi*, it was meant to replace a number of small synagogues scattered throughout several neighborhoods, as well as the old synagogue in use since 1581 (Bejtić 26); this building, the first *Il Kal Grandi* (Great Temple), was also known as *Il Kal Vježu* (The Old Temple).

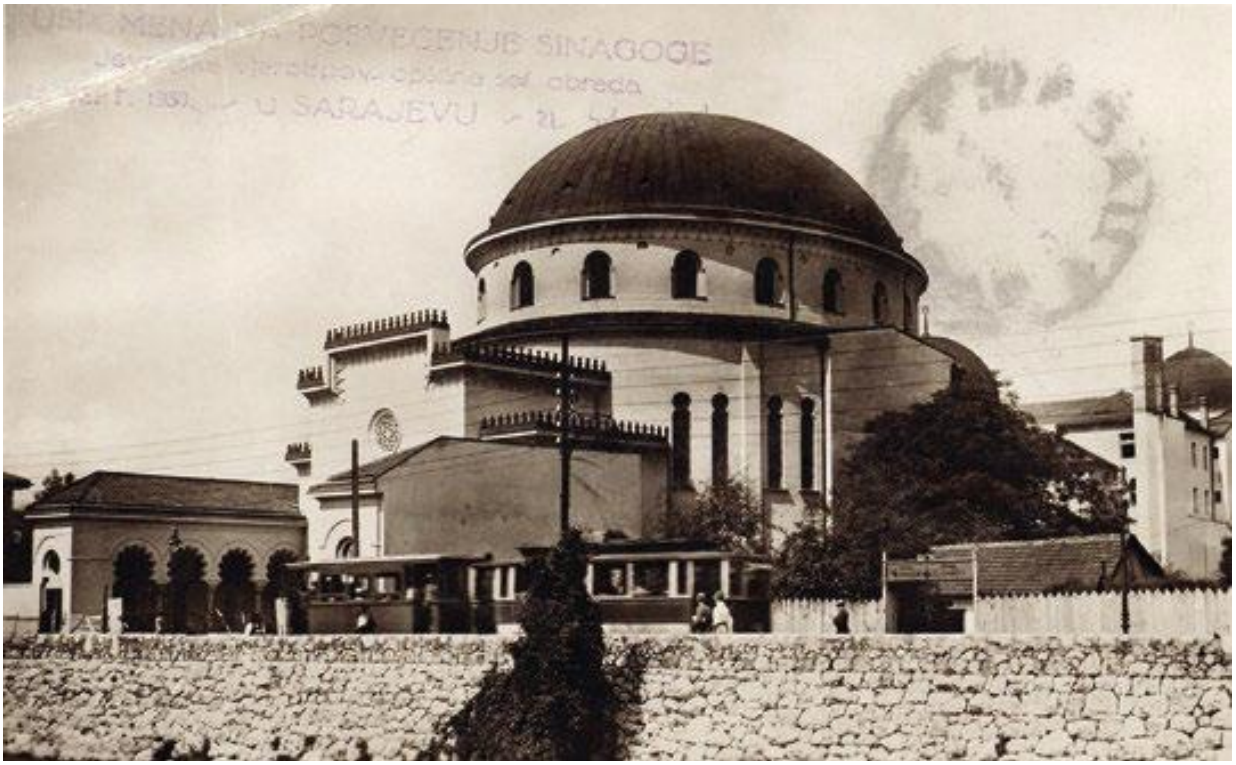


Fig. 1 The Great Sephardic Temple, Sarajevo, picture-postcard, 1930. Arch. Rudolf Lubynski. Private collection, Jerusalem.

The need for a new synagogue had already become pressing by the turn of the century. Those advocating for the ambitious project claimed that there was not

[1] This article is a revised version of my article in Hebrew, "Ha shiluv bein ha'mizrah l'ma'arav: batei hakneset b'signon ha orientali ve – il kal grandi – beit hakneset ha sfaradi b'sarajevo" accepted for publication in *Pe'amim* (Hebrew, submitted 2019). I would like to thank Ivan Čerešnješ of Sarajevo and Jerusalem for his generous help and for enabling me to use his vast photo archives. I would also like to thank Fani Gargova for reading the article and for her helpful comments.

enough room in Sarajevo's synagogues for the burgeoning community, and especially for women and young people during the High Holidays (*Spomenica* 16). Moreover, some felt that Sarajevo, as a Sephardic center second in importance only to Salonica, had to have a proper central synagogue "which [would – M.R.] in its outer [...] and inner design be a true song, chiseled out from beautiful and noble marble" (*Jevrejski život* 1925).[2] The importance of the Great Sephardic Temple was underscored in a post-card printed during the 1930s, where it was juxtaposed with Sarajevo's famous sixteenth century Gazi Husrev-beg's Mosque; the parallel between the two domed structures symbolized the two religious communities which had lived side by side since Ottoman times (figs. 2–3).[3]

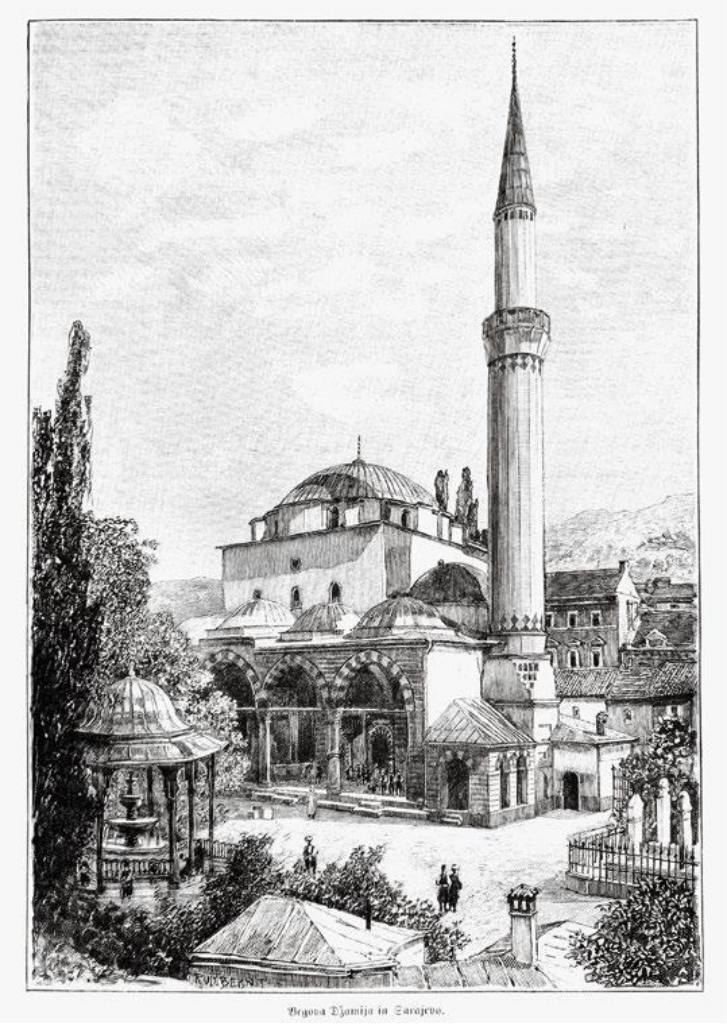

Fig. 2 Gazi Husrev-beg's Mosque, Sarajevo, 1900, print. Private collection, Jerusalem.

[2] "koji će svojom spoljašnosti [...] i nutarnjim uređenjem biti jedna pravcata pesma, isklesana sva u lepom i plemenitom mermeru". All translations, if not noted otherwise, are mine.

[3] Due to its large mosque-like dome, Sarajevo's synagogue was often referred to as the "Mošeja" (from German "die Moschee" – mosque).

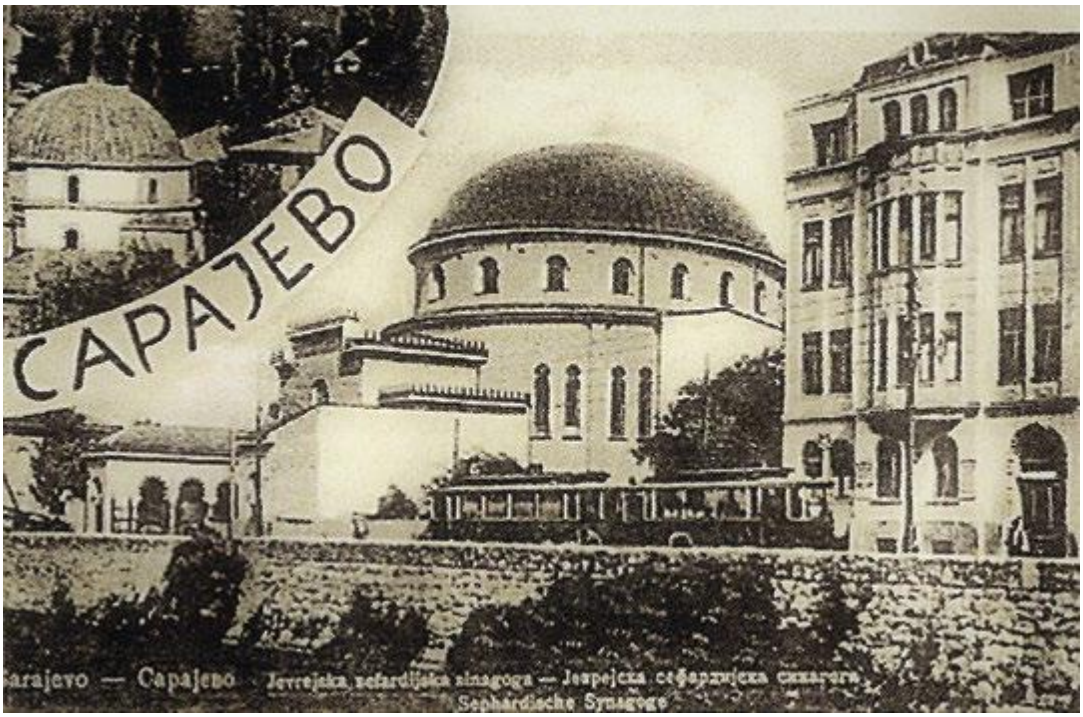


Fig. 3 The Great Sephardic Temple and Gazi Husrev-beg's Mosque, Sarajevo, picture-postcard, 1930s.

The new Sephardic synagogue, seating nearly a thousand worshipers (686 men and 298 women) was a majestic structure built in a mixture of oriental and artnouveau styles. The original building was heavily damaged during World War II and rebuilt during the era of Socialist Yugoslavia as part of a "workers' university;" in its original form it can be recognized nowadays mainly through an elaborate description written by its creator Rudolf Lubynski, a renowned German-trained Zagreb architect of Jewish origin, which complements its preserved architectural plans (figs. 4–5) (Lubynski 21–23; Čerešnješ). In this article, I wish to revisit this grand, little-known, and short-lived twentieth-century Balkan synagogue, to exploe its oriental character, stemming from both the Sephardi and Ashkenazi visual imagination, and to examine the politics surrounding the decision to build it.

Fig. 4 Worker's University "Đuro Đaković" (former Great Sephardic Temple), Sarajevo, photo 1970s. Private collection, Jerusalem.

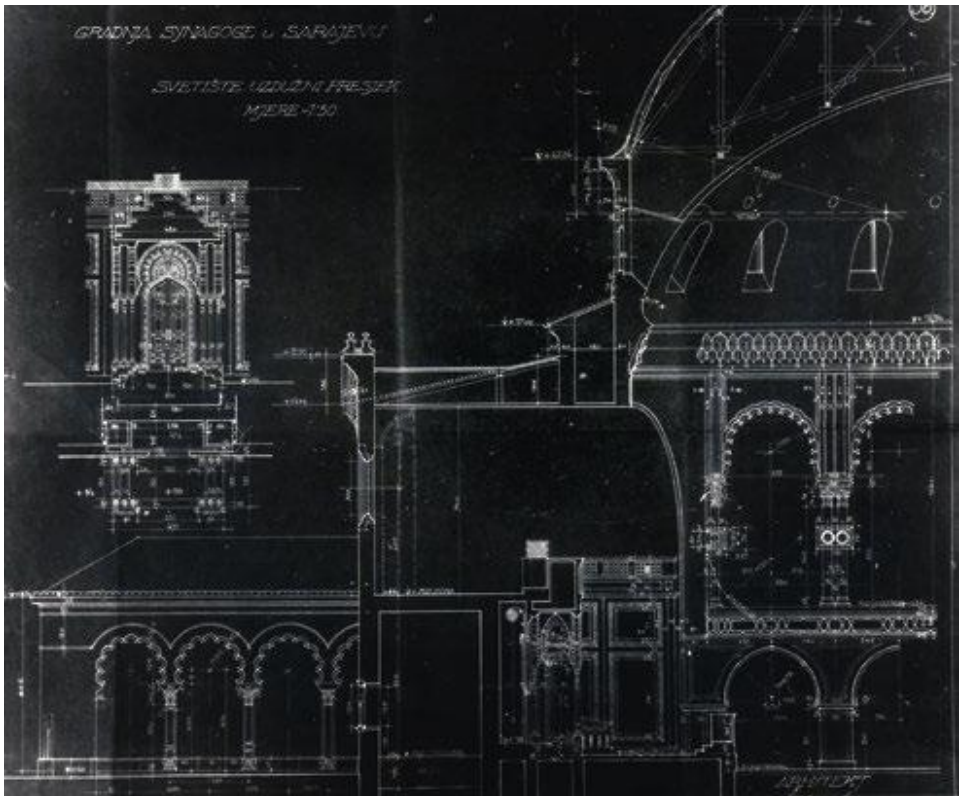


Fig. 5 The original plans for the Great Sephardic Temple, arch. Rudolf Lubynski, 1926 © The Center for Jewish Art, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

## The Turkish Temple in Vienna and Sarajevo's Sephardim

Many of the choices Sarajevo's Sephardic community made for their great synagogue had their origins in Vienna. Between 1878 and 1918, during the Austro-Hungarian reign in the region of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Empire's capital became an important cultural and educational center for Sarajevo's young Sephardic Jews. They, as well as other Jewish students who had come from Balkan countries to study in Vienna, were active in a student organization called *Esperanza*, founded at the end of the nineteenth century, which enabled them to build a unique Sephardic national identity in the midst of their German-speaking surroundings (Amor and Schmädel 83–102; Vučina Simović 2013: 341–360). Stemming from families that had until recently lived under Ottoman rule, the young newcomers likely felt close to Vienna's Turkish Sephardic community. Established primarily by Jews from Istanbul who had initially settled in Vienna for commercial reasons, by the end of the nineteenth century the Turkish Jewish community was successful and wellintegrated into the city's multicultural fabric (Gelber 359–396). An important sign of this community's presence in the city was its beautiful oriental synagogue that opened in 1887 (fig. 6). As the only Sephardic synagogue in the city, it must have been well-known to Sephardic students studying in Vienna.

Fig. 6 Turkish Temple, Vienna, interior, 1887. Arch. Hugo von Wiedenfeld. Illustrirte Zeitung 8 Dec. 1888: 596.

Among these students was Moritz Levy (1879–1942), a young man from Sarajevo who registered at the University of Vienna in 1901 and studied Semitic philology, philosophy and theology. In 1906, Levy attained his doctorate and a year later he passed the rabbinical exam ("Levy, Moritz"; Pinto 23–37; Šarić 151–153). Levy, who came from a religious family and was being trained as a rabbi and Sephardic cultural leader—tasks which he would enthusiastically fulfill upon his return to Sarajevo—would certainly have visited the Viennese Turkish Temple.

Like many other visitors, Levy would have admired the Turkish synagogue's outstanding design and rich orientalist decoration. Built by Hugo von Wiedenfeld, an Austrian architect, this prayer house successfully balanced its oriental character with modernity and functionality. The historian N.M. Gelber left a detailed description which stresses this duality:

> *The synagogue was built in Moorish style with motifs from the Alhambra... An arcaded yard decorated with marble columns led into the interior of the synagogue. On the left side of the vestibule there was a room especially adapted for weddings and on the right side there was a meeting-room. A passage, at the end of which stairs led to the women's gallery, led to the second floor. Three doors opened into the splendid hall. The walls were covered with marble, the marble columns and the magnificently decorated ceiling making an imposing impression. The interior was dome-shaped and had an octagonal cupola, while passages opened in semi-circle into many niches. Opposite the entrance rose the altar. The ark for the scrolls of the law was made of marble and ornamented richly with gold. Over the doors leading to the chamber itself rose a plate on which the ten commandments were inscribed. On the first floor there was a hall fitted for winter services and on the second story there were the offices. (Gelber 380)*[4]

In contrast to Gelber's detailed architectural description, the contemporary press was especially interested in the synagogue's Sephardic identity. In 1888, an *Illustrirte Zeitun*g journalist thus admired the "pure Moorish style" that "followed motifs from Alhambra", not because of the broadly popular "architectural eclecticism," but because it is "the style in which the Sephardim once built their synagogues in their Spanish home, [the style] they took with them as a memory of their lost fatherland to the distant lands, and also retained here" (qtd. in Hammer-Schenk 1: 439).[5] The author of an article in *Österreichische Wochenschrift* was even

[4] N. M. Gelber is probably Nathan Michael Gelber, an Austrian-Israeli historian, who studied and lived in Vienna until 1934, which made him familiar with the city's Turkish synagogue prior to its destruction in 1938.

[5] "[...] ist eben der Stil, in welchem die Sephardim ihre Synagogen einstmals in ihrer spanischen Heimat bauten, den sie als Erinnerungen an das verlorene Vaterland in die Ferne mitnahmen und auch hier festhielten."

more interested in the community itself and commented upon its members' self-image—he found it to be characterized by a proud, patrician self-esteem, and he concludes his article with an explanatory observation: "The Spaniards or Sephardim, who look back on a glittering historical tradition, are viewed as the elite among the Jewry." Hammer-Schenk, basing his assessment upon such contemporary comments, also concludes that the choice of an oriental style was a conscious one, which served to remind the community of former times, especially—as the German author, writing in the aftermath of the Holocaust, observes—the times in which the Jews of Spain, and later of Turkey lived peacefully without fear of persecution (qtd. in Hammer-Schenk 2: 636).

This "oriental style," emphasizing the community's Sephardic origin, was actually in harmony with a broader trend, characteristic of numerous synagogues erected throughout Europe in the second half of the nineteenth century, not by Sephardic Jews, but primarily by the Ashkenazim. Although often called "Moorish" by contemporaries, the style was actually an imaginative mixture of Moorish, Turkish, Indian and Byzantine elements, which to a Western mind symbolized the "Orient." Such a style, in contrast to the "autochthone" European architectural styles—classic, Romanesque or Gothic—was believed to be suitable for Jews, who throughout the centuries were considered to be "others"—the "Asians of Europe." Moreover, it did not resemble the architectural styles of the churches, thus clearly marking the difference between the two religions. Eventually, in the wake of emancipation, Jews underwent a process of "self-Orientalization," deliberately emphasizing their Oriental, non-European origins, by building magnificent "Moorish-styled" synagogues. Much has been written about these structures, which were indeed primarily inspired by the famous Moorish palace Alhambra in medieval Granada, whose designs were first applied to synagogue architecture in early-nineteenth-century Germany (Kalmar 68–100; Klein 117–131; Giese and Varela Braga 113–164). It was also initially among German Jews that the glorification of medieval *Sepharad* offered a base for developing a new, proud, integrated yet distinctive, modern Jewish identity (Efron). The oriental synagogue became its visual expression. Moreover, as pointed out by Gargova with respect to the Central Synagogue in Sofia, Bulgaria, the modern Sephardic synagogues, in adopting this Ashkenazic "oriental vogue," were expressing not only nostalgia for the community's (in this case actual) past tied to the Iberian Peninsula, but also its aspiration for acculturation, integration and modernity (131–134). This was the case with Sarajevo's Great Sephardic Temple as well.

## Sarajevo's Great Sephardic Temple as a token of reconciliation

Sarajevo's Sephardic synagogue was the last such project to be built prior to World War II in the region of Yugoslavia, a country where a number of other orientalist synagogues had already been built, as elsewhere in Europe, primarily by Ashkenazic *Il Kal Grandi*—Sarajevo's Great Sephardic Temple 183 communities (Karač). The first one had been erected in Zagreb, Croatia, in 1867 during Austro-Hungarian rule by the local Viennese-trained architect Franjo Klein (Knežević 121–148). This synagogue, built for Zagreb's Ashkenazic community, closely followed Ludwig von Förster's well-known Tempelgasse Synagogue, built in Vienna in 1858. Förster had drawn inspiration from the Temple of Solomon, as evidenced by the Tempelgasse's (and Zagreb's) inner division and tripartite façade, with slender side turrets; at the same time, he made abundant use of the German orientalist style of synagogue decoration and thus helped to spread the 'Moorish vogue' among Austro-Hungarian synagogues (Förster 14–15; Krinsky 81–85, 194).

The Ashkenazic community of Sarajevo, which had established itself after the Austro-Hungarian occupation of the city, had built its own oriental-style synagogue in 1902. It was designed by Karl Pařik, an architect of Czech origin who had settled in Sarajevo. Pařik based his design on earlier plans by Wilhelm Stiassny, a Jewish architect from Vienna specializing in synagogues (Gotovac 27–29; CJA).[6] Belgrade, too, had a new oriental synagogue, built for the Sephardic community by the local Serbian architect Milan Kapetanović and the Jewish, Viennese-trained local civil engineer and architect Victor D. Azriel. This Belgrade synagogue, known as Bet Israel, was inaugurated in 1907 (Nedić 299–308).[7] All of these synagogues, whether Ashkenazic or Sephardic (as in Belgrade), had in common the fact that they were planned by Viennese-trained professional builders. Paradoxically, they thus brought the West- and Central European imaginary vision of the Orient to Southeastern Europe, a region that was of course culturally and even physically close to the actual Orient.

In contrast to these new "oriental" yet westernized synagogues, Sarajevo's Sephardic community, as mentioned earlier, had its own old synagogue, *Il Kal vježo* which had been built in 1581, during the Ottoman reign. Enlarged in 1821 to hold

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[6] Stiassny's plans prepared for the 1895 competition are preserved at Sarajevo's city archives and documented by the architect Ivan Čerešnješ, Center of Jewish Art, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem.
See http://cja.huji.ac.il/browser.php?mode=set&id=21240 .

[7] My thanks to Miloš Jurišić of the Museum of Science and Technology, Belgrade, for additional information about this synagogue and its builder Victor D. Azriel.

500 seats and with two stories of galleries for women, it had served the community continuously for more than three and a half centuries. One of the oldest synagogues in the region, still standing today and housing Sarajevo's Jewish Museum, it was a source of community pride. "The dignity of this first Sarajevan place of worship radiates from each of its ancient walls and permeates each of its visitors", wrote Atijas in a nostalgic article dedicated to the "atmosphere of Sarajevan synagogues" (Atijas 66; Gotovac 17–21).[8] Atijas' article, which describes with emotion other smaller prayer houses scattered through Sarajevo's poor neighborhoods and colorfully depicts an array of traditional Sephardic characters praying in them, was published in 1924. The same year, members of a special committee announced an international competition and invited architects to submit their ideas for a new central synagogue. This duality—the wish to preserve and cherish the distinctive character of Sarajevo's old Sephardic community on one hand while striving to embrace modernity by building a large new synagogue like those in Zagreb and Belgrade (and other European cities) was characteristic of the changes being undergone by Sarajevo's Sephardim.

After their studies in Vienna and active involvement in the Esperanza academic society, a number of Sarajevo's young Sephardic intellectuals continued to be involved in the Sephardic nationalist movement upon their return home and were eager to preserve and promote Sephardic distinctiveness. The foundation of Sephardic cultural institutions and the study of Judeo-Spanish language, literature, folklore and music, as well as the strengthening of cultural ties with Spain, which supported such endeavors, became central to their activity. However, by the early 1920s, they found themselves part of the newly-founded multi-ethnic and multi-confessional Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (in 1929 renamed the Kingdom of Yugoslavia). Now, Sarajevo's Sephardim were expected to conform and integrate into the country's mainstream Jewish organization and ideology, which favored Yugoslavism and Zionism, both of which were less interested in local, ethnic identity. Moreover, since the majority of the Zionists in the new Kingdom were Croatian Ashkenazim, the Sephardim, even if they supported Zionism, felt excluded (Freidenreich 148–149; Loker 72–79; Papo 348; Vučina Simović 2012: 55–56). This tension, ultimately expressed through the so-called "Sarajevo dispute" was well expressed by Dr. Vita Kajon (1888–1942), one of the leaders of Sarajevo's Sephardic movement. In a report sent to the central committee of the Federation of Jewish Religious Communities of Yugoslavia, Kajon wrote: "We do not see in Jewry only two poles, nor do we recognize on the one side Zionism and on the other side assimilation. Our life is full-blooded. For us, the center and pivot of Jewish life is not

[8] "Dostojanstvo ove prve sarajevske bogomolje proizvire iz svake njezine starinske stijene i obuzima svakog njezinog posjetitelja."

to be found within the Zionist organization. Also, outside of it there is a Jewish national life" (3).[9] Dr. Moritz Levy, by then the chief rabbi of Sarajevo's Sephardic community, was more inclined to reconciliation and sought a middle path: "It is our duty to unite hand in hand with our brothers, the Ashkenazim, in this great effort for the Renaissance of the Jewish spirit," wrote Levy, "But why should we neglect all that is specifically Sephardic which we inherited from our forefathers?" (Levy 42).[10]

One of the major symbols of this path of reconciliation, which also desired recognition on the basis of equality, was precisely, I would like to argue, the building of the New Sephardic Temple. Although attempts to build a new Sephardic synagogue had been made since 1900, all of the efforts to raise money for the costly project were unsuccessful due to an apparent lack of interest and energy (*Spomenica* 16). It was only in 1923, during the height of the dispute and efforts to resolve it, that a newly-founded committee for building the synagogue went into action. It included the chief rabbi Moritz Levy and the chief rabbi of the entire Kingdom, Dr. Isaac Alcalay, along with Sephardic dignitaries from Sarajevo, Zagreb and Belgrade, as well as from Baden and Vienna. The committee, headed by Avram Mayer Altaraz, the president of Sarajevo's Sephardic Jewish community, immediately initiated fundraising by turning to each and every member of the community—"to Jews and Jewesses, to poor and rich, to do everything in one's power for the building of the new temple," because "it is upon us to fulfill our holy duty [...] to erect in our city a worthy temple, a monumental building, which will do honor to God and be a source of pride to the Jews of Bosnia's capital" (Leaflet 1923).[11]

Their efforts soon bore fruit. The very next year, a long and narrow piece of land (95 x 25 m), stretching between the main street and the River Miljacka, was bought from Josef Baruh (*Jevrejski život* 1924). Simultaneously, a competition for the projected synagogue was publicized internationally and yielded forty-five projects designed by architects from many European countries, lending the project a breath of cosmopolitanism. A jury comprised of three professionals and four laymen chose eleven projects, which were finally narrowed down to Rudolf Lubynski's proposed

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[9] "Mi ne vidimo u Jevrejstvu samo dva pola, niti ne priznajemo s jedne strane Cijonizam a sa druge asimilaciju. Naš život je punokrvan. Za nas centralni stožer jevrejskog život nije unutar cijonističke organizacije. I izvan nje postoji jevrejski narodni život."

[10] "Es nuestro ovligo de aunarnos mano kon mano kon nuestros ermanos los ashkenazim en esta grande ovra por el renasimyento del djenio djudio. Pero, por kualo neglijar todo akelyo spesifiko sefardi ke eredimos de nuestros avuelos? [...]" (translation Ivana Vučina Simović)

[11] "[...] svaki Jevrej i Jevrejka, siromah kao i bogataš, da učini sve što je u njegovim silama za gradnju ovo novoga hrama"; "Na nama je da izvršimo svetu dužnost [...] da u našem gradu podignemo dostojan hram, jednu monumentalnu zgradu, koja će služiti Bogu na Čast, a Jevrejstvu glavnog grada Bosne na diku."

design.[12] But, with all its good intentions and professionalism, from the very beginning the grandiose project proved to be far too costly. Augmented by a growing economic crisis, it was often criticized, especially by younger members of the community; increasingly assimilated, they did not feel the same commitment as the community elders, who had hoped that the new and attractive synagogue would curb the assimilatory trends. Nevertheless, determined not to give up on their efforts to place Sarajevo's Sephardim on an equal footing with other Jewish communities in the country, they persisted in their endeavors. The fundraising and appeals for financial help continued throughout the years that the temple was under construction, and were directed not only at members of the community itself, but also to Jewish organizations in the city, the municipality, other Jewish individuals and communities around the country, and finally to the royal government itself, which helped with the lumber necessary for building. Some of the mortgages and loans raised for completing the building were left unpaid until 1941 and the outbreak of World War II in Yugoslavia (*Spomenica* 19–20; Gotovac 39–40).[13]

Rudolf Lubynski (1873–1935), whose project won the competition, graduated with a degree in architecture in Karlsruhe, Germany; before opening his own firm in Zagreb in 1907, he had worked on building projects in a number of German cities (Radović Mahečić).[14] In designing the Great Temple in Sarajevo, he, as I have noted, combined the innovations in synagogue-building characteristic of early twentieth-century German synagogues with the nineteenth-century oriental style. Aware of this somewhat anachronistic combination, he wrote: "While thinking about the style of the future temple which I am about to build in Sarajevo, a city on the crossroads of Eastern and Western culture... I came to the conclusion that only a temple designed in the spirit of Moorish style, with an appropriate use of materials, modern construction and division of spaces, will fully answer [the needs of – M.R.] the city, locality, mentality and goals" (Lubynski 21).[15] The long and narrow plot, and the future synagogue's position on a north-south axis required a deviation from the

[12] The other projects were shown in an exhibition that aroused the interest of professionals and the broader public (*Spomenica* 17–18).

[13] The ensuing accusations and conflicts became especially painful and continued many years after the tragedy of the Holocaust. The surviving members of the community and their descendants claimed that the building expenditures had left the community's bank accounts empty and, therefore, unable to help its members at the onset of the persecutions in 1941, while the committee members' descendants' defended their predecessors' decisions ("Još o gradnji novog ...").

[14] See http://hbl.lzmk.hr/clanak.aspx?id=11902.

[15] "Razmišljajući tako o stilu budućeg hrama, koji bi se imao podići u Sarajevu, u gradu na raskršću istočne i zapadne kulture [...] došao sam do zaključka da će jedino hram, zasnovan u duhu maurskog stila, sa odgovarajućom upotrebom materijala, modernom konstrukcijom i rasporedom prostorija, potpuno odgovarati gradu, mjestu, mentalitetu i svrsi."

traditional, east-west orientation; as a result, the main entrance faced north, and the Torah Shrine was placed on the southern side (fig. 7). Nevertheless, the interior division followed the traditional plan of German Reform synagogues, with a vestibule, central hall, and area surrounding the Torah Ark. As was customary in other contemporary cities' central synagogues, Lubynski added additional spaces to serve the community's needs. Thus, adjacent to the entrance in the north, a small prayer-hall to be used during the week, along with offices and an apartment for the temple's caretaker, were planned. In the anteroom of the central area was a men's cloakroom, the entrance to an adjacent wedding hall and stairs leading to the upper-floor women's gallery. The area behind the Torah Ark included a genizah, a space designed for storing holy books and religious artifacts that could no longer be used, rooms for the rabbi and a *hazzan*, as well as stairs leading to a platform planned for a choir and an organ (which was ultimately never realized). Within the building there was also a hall for meetings, with a library, administrative offices and an archive. The entire complex was thus meant to serve not only as a synagogue but also a community center (Lubynski 22–23).

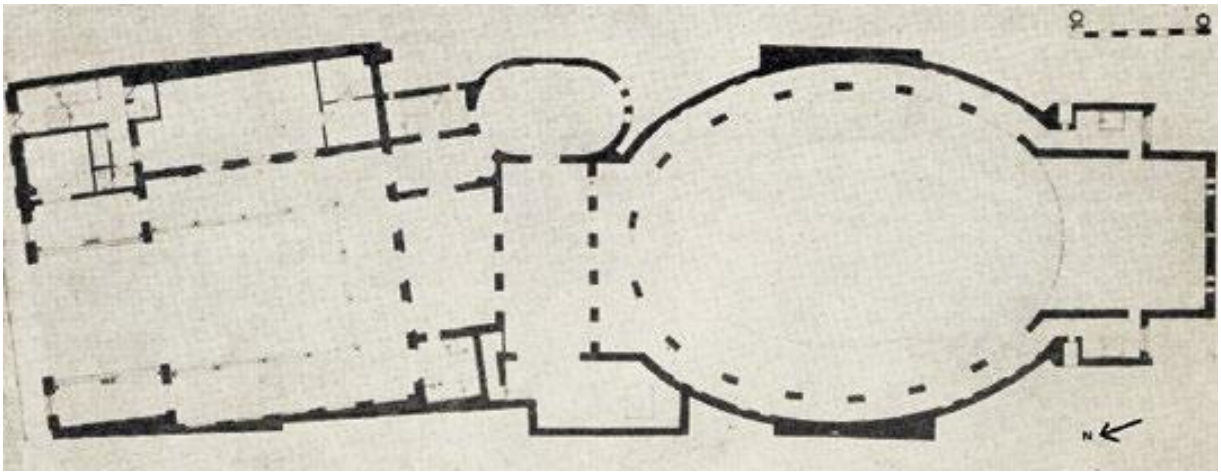

Fig. 7 The Great Sephardic Temple, Sarajevo, ground plan, 1926. Arch. Rudolf Lubynski. ARH II/8. Sarajevo, 1964: 29.

But, the true uniqueness and grandeur of this synagogue was provided by the mixture of traditional and modern architectural design, the materials used, and its lavish decoration. Consequently, the northern façade had a tripartite division recalling Vienna's Tempelgasse and, according to its builder Förster, Solomon's Temple; even though the building was surmounted with the customary Tablets of the Law, its small side domes, Moorish crenellation, and the horse-shoe arches surrounding the windows lent it a distinctively oriental, even Islamic character. The building's entrance was novel: it featured a majestically broad (9 m) elliptical arch, reminiscent of an art-nouveau arch at the 1913 synagogue in Essen, Germany,

probably known to Lubynski (Wischnitzer 229–230) (fig. 8). On passing through this entrance, one entered a rectangular peristyle surrounded by an arcade of multifoil arches resting on elegant columns, clearly recalling the Alhambra's "Patio of Lions" (fig. 9). Similar arcades graced the southern side, behind the Torah Ark area. A similar arcaded yard is mentioned by Gelber in his description of the Turkish synagogue in Vienna (380); this would have been well-known to many of the committee's members, and may well have served as a direct inspiration for the design.

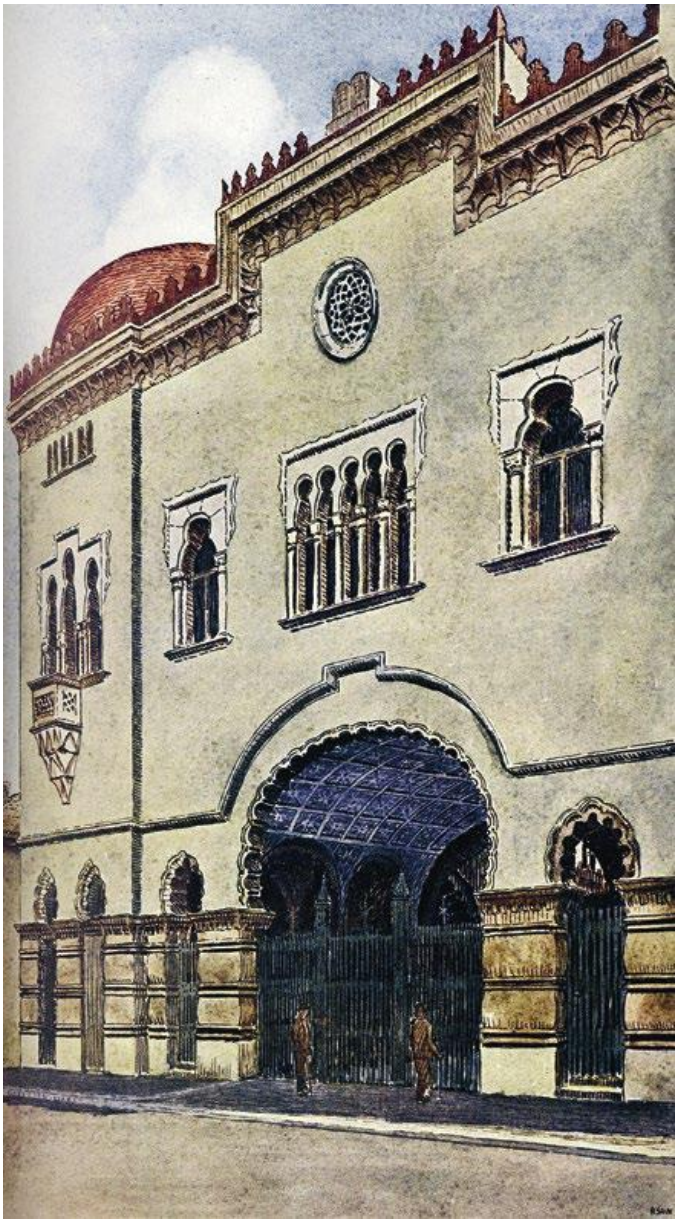

Fig. 8 Petar Šain, *The Great Sephardic Temple in Sarajevo*, whereabouts unknown, reproduced in *Spomenica Jevrejske vjeroispovjedne opštine sefardskog obreda prigodom osvećenja Novog Hrama*. Sarajevo, 14 September 1930: n.p.

Fig. 9 The Great Sephardic Temple, Sarajevo, peristyle on the north, photograph, before April 1941. Arch. Rudolf Lubynski. Private collection, Jerusalem.

However, the most breathtaking experience a visitor to Sarajevo's temple must have had, was upon entering the main prayer hall; this was elliptical in plan and covered by an immense dome, spanning 30.8 m lengthwise and 22.3 m in transverse. Once again, the Essen synagogue comes to mind; its central hall was round and featured a dome of 30 m in diameter. In contrast, the oval plan may have been inspired by the shape of the main hall in the Seitenstettengasse Temple, an early 19th century synagogue in Vienna (Krinsky 188–190). In Sarajevo, the curve of the upper gallery accentuated the beautiful, untraditionally-designed space. The dome and the fourteen columns that supported it (square on the ground floor, round and doubled on the gallery) were built from reinforced concrete (fig. 10). The modernity of the architectural design was complemented by the oriental horse-shoe-arched windows, and most importantly—by an abundance of colorful wall decorations based on designs from the Alhambra (fig. 11). The wall decorations were designed by a certain Kemerer, an artisan from Stuttgart. Apparently a member of Sarajevo's Sephardic community was sent to visit a number of European synagogues; he was most impressed by the synagogue in Stuttgart and "sought out its artisan" (*Jevrejski*

*glas* 1930: 2).[16] In an interview given to the local Jewish newspaper, Kemerer explained that his starting point had been Moorish design, with some free stylization—color designs, gold and an imitation of green marble that would offer "the dignity of a temple, tranquility and grandeur" (*Jevrejski glas* 1930: 2).

Fig. 10 The Great Sephardic Temple, Sarajevo, interior, photograph, before April 1941. Arch. Rudolf Lubynski. Private collection, Jerusalem.

[16] This claim has the character of an anecdote: Stuttgart's synagogue was consecrated in 1861 and Kemerer could not be the same artisan appearing almost seventy years later in Sarajevo. Nevertheless, the designs applied in Stuttgart's synagogue were based on the Alhambra's designs (Hammer-Schenk 278–279; Eschwege 113–114).

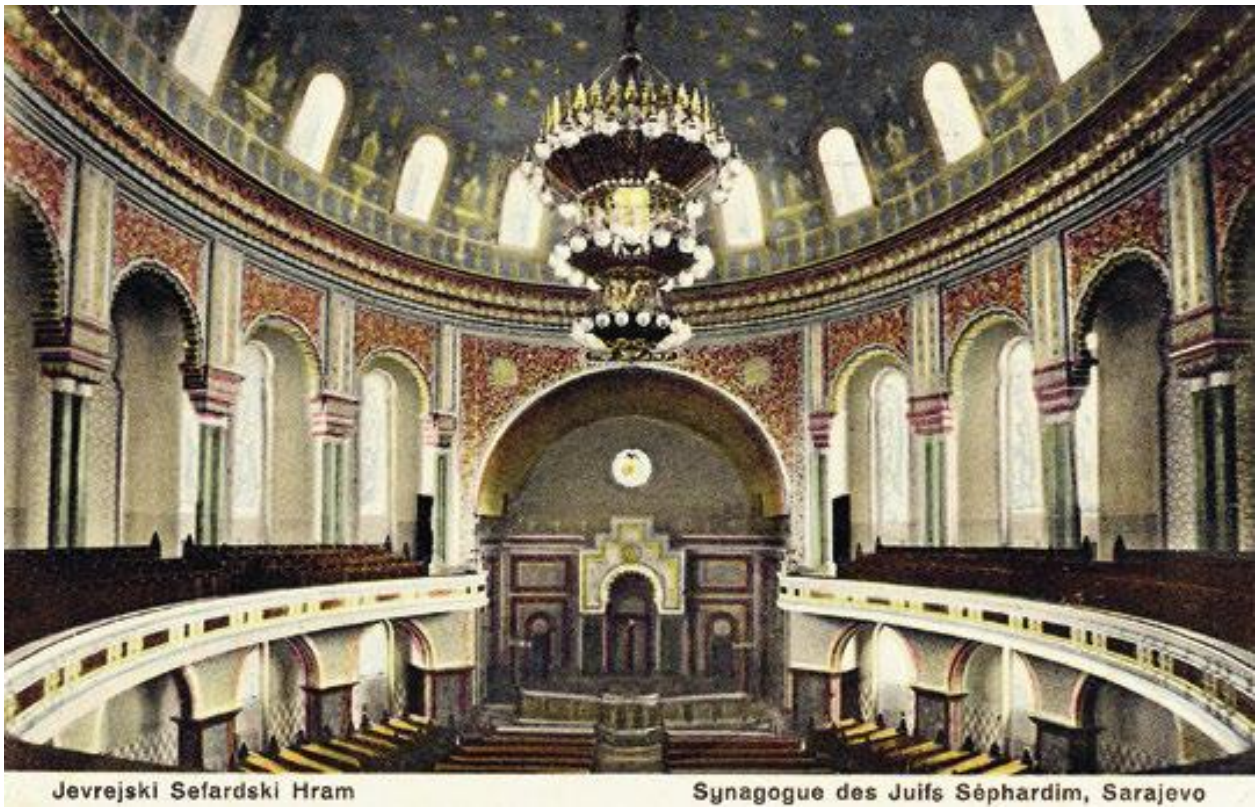


Fig. 11 The Great Sephardic Temple, Sarajevo, interior, picture-postcard, 1930. Arch. Rudolf Lubynski. Private collection, Jerusalem.

The ceremony of laying the foundation stone on June 13, 1926 exemplified what Sarajevo's Sephardic community leaders had aimed for—respect, recognition and inclusion. Those present included an impressive array of distinguished guests, including representatives of the royal government, Sarajevo's mayor and members of the municipal government, representatives of the city's cultural, educational and humanitarian societies, civil and military dignitaries, the country's chief rabbi, and delegates of all Jewish communities, including the Sephardic community of Vienna (*Spomenica* 18). The writer of the commemorative text was careful to distance himself and the community from old-time "Turkish rules and limitations," and professed complete loyalty and thankfulness for the "unlimited freedom of religious confession and full equality which reigns in our liberated and united fatherland, under the wise and happy reign of our glorious King Aleksandar the First Karadjordjević" (*Spomenica* 15). In 1930, when these lines were written, the Kingdom of Yugoslavia was in the first year of a dictatorship ruled by Aleksandar I; the Ottoman period, remembered by the Sephardic Jews of Bosnia as benevolent and welcoming, especially after their expulsion from Spain, had to be disavowed, in contrast to their full recognition and acceptance of the current ruler.

Four years later, in 1930, the new Temple was consecrated in ceremonies attended by all three rabbis—the chief rabbi of Yugoslavia, Belgrade-based Dr. Isaac Alcalay, the chief rabbi of the Sephardic community of Sarajevo Dr. Moritz Levy, and the chief rabbi of the Ashkenazic community of Sarajevo Dr. Hinko Urbach. The ceremony took a reconciliatory and integrationist approach—envisioning the union and equality of Sephardic and Ashkenazic Jews in one Yugoslav Jewish society (fig. 12).

Fig. 12 Consecration of the Great Sephardic Temple, Sarajevo, photograph, 14 September 1930. Private collection, Jerusalem.

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Sarajevo's Great Sephardic Temple was probably the last European synagogue to intertwine Jewish oriental otherness, stemming in this case from genuine Sephardic historical ties with Moorish Spain, with modern efforts to adapt and integrate. Sadly, the synagogue—the symbol of an effort to embrace the future while retaining ties to the past—was to be brutally ransacked by the Nazis and local looters in April 1941 at the onset of World War II in Yugoslavia. It was the prelude to the destruction of Sarajevo's entire Jewish community (fig. 13).

Fig. 13 Looting of the Great Sephardic Temple, photograph, 16–18 April 1941. Ghetto Fighter's House Museum, Israel, ©Photo Archives.

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