

The Historical Archive of the Jewish Community of Thessaloniki: The era of extroversion*

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I. A Single Archive, Many Journeys

The laborious routine of archival research appeals with its promise of the sensation one experiences when coming across the remains of lives and the fragments of the past that are unearthed. Working with an archive seemingly generates an interaction between traces and silences, between the presence of the past and the absence of the information that can be gleaned between the lines of the documents and records.¹ In order to make profitable use of an archive, historical information must first be preserved. Events of the past leave a trail, which can be traced – *inter alia* – in the extant physical objects and written records. After they have been detected, these trails become evidence that can be used in historical research.²

An archive comprises the entirety of the records that an individual or organisation produce, receive and collect in the context of their activities. It also indicates the site where the evidence exists in its physical form and the archiving itself takes place (collection, safekeeping, classification, processing, access to researchers, etc.).

In many respects, organising, managing and presenting the Historical Archive of the Jewish Community of Thessaloniki (HAJCT) entail quite a few difficulties and challenges. Most probably, the greatest challenge is posed by the dispersal of the pre-war archive,³ which the Reichleiter Rosenberg Taskforce

* I owe my warmest thanks to Maria Kavala for her many years of support, assistance and cooperation, and to Yiorgos Antoniou for our crucial and important discussions. I would also like to offer many thanks to Marianna Kyritsi for her observations. I am very grateful to Philip Carabott for the time he so generously offers, for his patience and faith in me.

¹ Arlette Farge, *Le goût de l'archive* [Greek], translation and foreword by Rika Benveniste, Athens, 2004, p. 9.

² Yiorgos Giannakopoulos & Vasiliki Boudouri, *Introduction to Archiving* [Greek], Athens, 2016, *passim*, <http://hdl.handle.net/11419/6323> (accessed on 30 July 2017).

³ On the dispersal of the pre-war archive, see Devin Naar, "The confiscation and recovery of the Jewish communities' archives and libraries", in Eyal Ginio (ed.), *Greek-Jewish Communities in the East in the 19th and 20th Centuries* [Hebrew], Jerusalem, 2014, p. 40-42.

confiscated in 1941,⁴ as it did with the archives and libraries of all Jewish communities in occupied Europe, and sent them to the Institute for Research into the Jewish Question in Frankfurt am Main.⁵ Following Germany's defeat, the Soviet Army found a large part of the confiscated Jewish archives in a castle at Wölfelsdorf in Lower Silesia. It included the Greek archive, which was then sent to Moscow. Its existence at the Russian State Military Historical Archive came to light just eighteen years ago.⁶ It was then imprinted on microfilm and acquired by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) in Washington DC. Obtaining the originals is still the subject of long and protracted diplomatic negotiations between Russia and Greece.

The US Army, in turn, discovered two more parts of Greek Jewish archives in Germany. The first was found along with the archives of the Jewish Community of Vilnius and was sent, by accident, to the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research in New York. Following a request made by the Jewish Community of Thessaloniki (JCT) to the Foreign Ministry in Athens⁷, the second was sent to the Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece (CBJCG)⁸ in Athens.⁹ A relevant reference to the "discovery of part of the old archives and various books from the community's libraries taken by the Germans" appeared in the Jewish newspaper *Israilitikon Vima*.¹⁰ Initially, the CBJCG sent to the JCT seven crates containing "what had survived of the archive",¹¹ and then more shipments followed, containing records and books

⁴ See "Final report on the activity of the Rosenberg Special Assignment Detachment in Greece", <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B6Vpuw9GQ6A5WGI3eUFWdzF6WUU/view> (accessed on 30 July 2017), and Maria Kavala, *The Destruction of the Jews of Greece (1941-1944)* [Greek], Athens, 2015, p. 59, <https://repository.kallipos.gr/handle/11419/4437> (accessed on 30 July 2017).

⁵ See Naar, "The confiscation and recovery...", p. 40-42 and <https://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10007123> (accessed on 31 July 2017).

⁶ Naar, "The confiscation and recovery...", p. 40-42.

⁷ HAJCT file #00187, "1946 Ministries, 2/1946-11/1946", protocol #1778/30.7.1946.

⁸ Established by law in June 1945, the CBJCG is the official coordinating body of Greek Judaism. Initially, its main concern was with the reconstructing of the communities that had been destroyed by the Germans and the Bulgarians.

⁹ HAJCT file #00187 "1946 Ministries, 2/1946-11/1946", protocol #31430/23.11.1946.

¹⁰ *Israilitikon Vima* (30 August 1946). I would like to thank Philip Carabott for bringing this reference to my attention.

¹¹ *Evraiki Estia* (2 January 1948). I would like to thank Marianna Kyritsi for bringing this reference to my attention

from and to the CBJCG.¹² Several years later, in 1970, and following a request by the Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People (CAHJP), most of these records and books were sent to Jerusalem for safe keeping.¹³ Part of the pre-war archive remained in Thessaloniki and is presently kept at the Jewish Museum of Thessaloniki (JMT).¹⁴

II. Recreating the Archive: Organisation and Digitisation

In July 2009, President David Saltiel and the Board of the JCT entrusted me with the challenging task of reorganising the postwar archival material, which had been gathered in a specially created space covering 260 square metres on Vas. Irakliou Street. To ensure proper conservation of the entirety of the archival material, dehumidifiers, air conditioning and ventilators are in constant use, while appropriate special procedures are implemented to maintain documents and books in good condition. The digitisation project of the JCT archives, the pre-war material held at the JMT and the postwar material at Vas. Irakliou Street, had been underway since 2007. It was completed in 2011 with funding from the USHMM and the Claims Conference. The digitisation of 2,240 “volumes” of documents dating from 1943 to 2007 has enabled the preservation, sorting and cataloguing to proceed at an even faster pace. At the same time, the minutes of the community’s Board and Assembly meetings from 1944 to 2011 were also digitised. In this way, the part of the archive that clearly records the difficulties attendant with the postwar reestablishment of the JCT has been preserved.¹⁵ The volumes of the Board’s minutes are not kept at the HAJCT, and access can only be obtained following special arrangements.

The digital archive of the JCT is not available to researchers and may not be reproduced. It is kept at the HAJCT and is used mainly for the conservation of the originals, e.g. for the production of a limited number of printouts on

¹² Naar, “The confiscation and recovery...”, p. 5.

¹³ Devin Naar, “Bushkando nuestros nonos i nonas. Family history research on Sephardic Jewry through the Judeo-Spanish language”, *Avotaynu* XXIII/1 (2007): 40-41.

¹⁴ As it is impossible to fully separate the pre-war and the post-war archival material, I will return to the pre-war archive and its contents below.

¹⁵ Indicatively, see Rika Benveniste, *Those who Survived. Resistance, Deportation, Return. Thessaloniki Jews in the 1940s* [Greek], Athens 2014, p.104 ff.

occasion or in order to consult individual files electronically, when deemed necessary.

The digitisation, archiving, and cataloguing of another five hundred handwritten volumes of protocols, community committee meetings, registers, ledgers, indexes, and the like have significantly facilitated the proper classification of all records, the day-to-day services offered by the community to its members, as well as academic and, more recently, genealogy research. A full catalogue of these volumes and of all archival material is available to researchers at the HAJCT.

III. The Collections

A. The pre-war archive

In 2005-2006, Devin Naar, a university student at the time, discovered at the community building on Vas. Irakliou Street processed and catalogued fragments of the pre-war archive, which had not been detected in 1970. This valuable material offers a representative picture of the main pre-war archive.¹⁶ Its content has been amply presented in the publications of, by now, Professor Naar.¹⁷ The physical body of the archive is kept at the JMT. A full catalogue of archived materials available to researchers there can be found at the HAJCT, where it is digitally managed and studied. Access is free, following approval of a request for archival research (<http://www.jct.gr/aithsh.pdf>).

Most of the pre-war material is in Ladino (djudeo-espanyol/Judaeo-Spanish), written in four different scripts: a) Ketav Meruba (Aramaic-style Square Hebrew); b) Rashi (the so-called rabbinical script); c) Solitreo (handwritten lowercase Hebrew); and d) Latin.¹⁸ Some material is also in French, evidence of the dominance of the language of commerce at the time, but also of the influence of the *Alliance Israélite Universelle* on the education of at least two generations of Salonican Jews from 1870 onwards. Some records are in

¹⁶ Catalogues of the contents of the pre-war archive held in Moscow, New York and Jerusalem are available at the HAJCT.

¹⁷ *Jewish Salonica. Between the Ottoman Empire and Modern Greece*, Stanford, 2016; "Bushkando nuestros nonos..."; "The confiscation and recovery..."

¹⁸ Naar, "Bushkando nuestros nonos...", p. 40-41.

Greek, for example, the preserved registers of the 3rd Jewish Primary School from 1939 to 1943.¹⁹ There are also documents in Italian, German and Ottoman Turkish.²⁰

Following the coordinated efforts over the last two years of Devin Naar, Professor Izo Abram and the author, the acquisition from the USHMM of the first metadata concerning part of the pre-war archive became possible. The community's pre-war registers of birth for the period 1924-1939 are an indicative example. They hold information on 10,175 children and each entry includes the family name, the parents' first names, the names of paternal and maternal grandparents, their home address, the name of the synagogue the family belonged to, as well as the birth certificate number of the infant at the Thessaloniki registry office. The transcription from Solitreo was carried out exclusively by Izo Abram, who sent us databases in Excel form. Access for researchers is not yet available, as the material has not been recovered in physical form (printouts).

B. The Postwar Archive – Classified Collections

The organisation and classification of the postwar archive began in 2011. To-date, approximately 20% of the material has been reclassified and six theme-based sections have been created.

➤ **Property Declarations (Vermögensanmeldung)**

The existence of the original property declarations handed in on the orders of the German authorities on 1 March 1943 was unknown until 2009. Researchers could consult them either on microfilm at the Bissell Library of the American College of Thessaloniki or from photocopies held at the JMT. The originals comprise 25 boxes of 4,114 four-page declarations. They have been sorted alphabetically by the surname of the family head that submitted the declaration, as can be seen in the instructions explaining how they were to be

¹⁹ Archive of the JMT file #02750.

²⁰ Naar, "Bushkando nuestros nonos...", p. 41.

filled in²¹. Each declaration concerns one household that consists of one or more members of a family. During the classification of other records of the archive, another 155 original property declarations were found, which were added to the material mentioned above, bringing the total to 4,269. As the classification of the postwar material has not been completed, the final number of original declarations that have been preserved at the HAJCT or elsewhere is not yet known. The 4,269 declarations that have been recovered represent approximately 25% to 30% of the total²².

The classification and thorough examination of the property declarations have brought to light unknown hitherto details. For example, the serial number that appears on the top left corner of the declaration is the same as that on the identity card community members were issued in mid February 1943, along with the yellow star that they were to wear on their clothes. Such findings, together with the metadata created during the reclassification, have contributed to the precise identification of victims and survivors alike, their movable and immovable assets, as well as their familial and socio-economic status. To-date researchers had not been able to thoroughly address such issues, most likely because of the very small number of identity cards and yellow stars that are extant, the dispersal of the pertinent material, and the inadequate classification of property declarations.

➤ **German Reparations**

This section comprises 86 boxes with material related to Community and individual claims on the payment of German reparations. Most records cover the period 1948-1967 and consist of:

²¹ Michael Molho & Joseph Nehama, *In Memoriam* [Greek], Thessaloniki, 1976, p. 94; "Explicaciones concernando las declaraciones de fortunas" (1 March 1943), personal archive of Leon Hagouel. I would like to thank Dr Paul Isaac Hagouel, who brought this document to my attention, and Izo Abram for translating it from Judeo-Spanish.

²² According to a February 1943 order sheet of the Thessaloniki-based Gatenio printing office, the community had requested that 20,000 copies of the declaration should be printed; personal archive of Paul Isaac Hagouel. It is estimated that 15,000 to 18,000 declarations were handed in, a figure that roughly corresponds (with an average of three to four members per family) to the city's Jewish population at the time; Kavala, *The Destruction...*, 88-89, and Maria Kavala, "The scale of Jewish property theft in Nazi-occupied Thessaloniki", in Dirk Moses & Yiorgos Antoniou (eds), *The Holocaust in Greece*, Cambridge (forthcoming).

a) 472 Indemnification applications (Bundesentschädigungsgesetz – Federal Indemnification Act BEG, 1953) for the loss of freedom, health, career and education.

b) 869 Indemnification applications (Bundesrückerstattungsgesetz – Federal Restitution Act BRüG, 1957) for the loss of property.

c) 4,462 Indemnification applications (Law 4178/1961 “On the ratification of the agreement between Greece and Germany regarding provisions in favour of Greek citizens affected by national socialist measures of persecution”) for loss of life of first degree relatives.

d) JCT material and correspondence on German reparations, such as:²³

- Studies and lists on the Community’s pre-war assets.
- Consultation responses and instructions on how to fill in relevant documents.
- Circulars, relevant laws and amendments thereof.
- Greek Press articles on Law 4178/1961 (e.g. from *Makedonia, Avgi, Estia Apogevmatini*).
- Correspondence of lawyer G.S. Constant with the JCT.
- Minutes of the meetings of the Extraordinary Reparations Committee with representatives of the Jewish Communities of Athens and Thessaloniki (1960).
- Minutes of the meetings between the CBJCG and the JCT (1960).
- Statements by survivors and witnesses to the district attorney upholding their lawful entitlement to indemnification.
- Protest letters by survivors on not having received compensation (1970s).
- Minutes of the meetings of Special Parliamentary Committees on Reparations (March-May 1961).
- Correspondence between the JCT and the American Jewish Committee (1959).
- Letters of Saul Kagan (president of the Claims Conference) to the JCT (1959).
- Correspondence of the JTC with the Jewish Community of Amsterdam (1959).
- Reports by the head of the German Reparations Department of the CBJCG Joseph Lovinger (1963).
- Memoranda of the CBJCG to the Greek government (1959).
- Statements by Greek State Railway employees during the occupation on the transport of Jewish assets to Germany.
- Letters of the JCT to the World Jewish Congress (1963).

²³ I would like to thank Dr Anna Maria Droumbouki for assisting me in describing this material.

These materials are complemented by eight special handwritten volumes, indexes and protocols.

➤ **Communal Elections**

This section comprises 43 boxes with material on communal elections from 1946 to-date. It includes applications by Community members for acquiring electoral registration booklets; the minutes of the meetings of electoral committees; the ballot tickets of participating parties; and pre-election speeches and programmes. In certain cases, such as the first postwar communal elections in 1946, the material is of fragmented character. For example, not all electoral registration booklets are extant, as can be easily discerned by their non-consecutive numbering. The material of this section is supplemented by 24 special handwritten volumes, indexes, electoral lists and protocols.

➤ **Register**

Classifying the register of the JCT constitutes an on-going challenge, as the archival material on the survival and daily life of Community members after the Holocaust is rich and scattered throughout the post-war archive. For example, the files on marriages were reconstituted from material of various other unclassified files, which included documents in four different languages: Greek, French, Judeo-Spanish in Latin characters, and Solitreo. Every such new file includes the marriage licenses with identity card-style photographs of every bride and groom to be, various certificates issued by the Community prior to and after the wedding, and the Ketubah (prenuptial agreement) in Hebrew and Greek. To-date, four register boxes on births have been classified, eleven on marriages, fifty on certificates of kinship, and 136 on information certificates, while death certificates are being sorted at present. This important section also contains fifty special handwritten books, indexes and ledgers, including those on the 1945 census.²⁴ In light of the significance of the latter, a brief description follows.

The material on the census, which commenced on 6 August 1945, comprises nine bound ledgers with data on Holocaust survivors registered with the

²⁴ HAJCT files #02701-02709. Nine, out of a total of sixteen, census ledgers are extant.

Community. Each entry includes the following information on adult male and female survivors and/or adult male and female survivors as heads of families (where applicable): Surname and first name; paternal and maternal names; paternal surname of spouse; place and year of birth; registration number at the municipality (for adult men with Greek citizenship); registration number at the Aliens Bureau (for adult men with non-Greek citizenship); date of arrival at Thessaloniki; date of registration at the JCT; citizenship; residence address (street name and number, number of police precinct); occupation prior and after the persecution; identification number of ration and identity cards; date of first or second or third marriage; level of education; state of health; manner of rescue; list of deported family members; name of community registered with before the war; list of damages due to the German persecution. Each “head of the family” undertook to “solemnly confirm the accuracy of the statement” and, then, signed it.

➤ **Judicial Material**

Currently under classification, this section comprises so far 58 boxes with copies of first instant court decisions dating from 1945 to 1968, which certify the death of thousands of community members;²⁵ and seven boxes with material on the trials of collaborators at the Thessaloniki Special Court for Collaborators and the so-called “honour courts” of the Community.

➤ **Private Collections**

This section of the archive mainly comprises material donated by Community members. It includes the personal archives of Ilan Karmi, Leon M. Carasso, and Dr Emmanuel I. Arouh; and the professional archives of the lawyers Rofel M. Cohen and Daniel S. Alhanati.

C. Unclassified material

To-date most of the material held at the HAJCT has not been classified. Yet, through a typewritten catalogue and other finding aids, researchers can explore the categories of interest to them. The boxes are stored by date from 1945 to

²⁵ The material was donated by the lawyer Frateli Nachmia.

2006 and to a certain extent follow a thematic sequence. *Inter alia*, the unclassified archive includes:

- Correspondence with ministries, the Municipality of Thessaloniki, Jewish Communities throughout Greece, and Jewish bodies in Greece and abroad, such as the CBJCG, the Organisation for the Relief and Rehabilitation of Jews in Greece, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, and the American Jewish Committee.
- Correspondence with the Community's members.
- Correspondence with the Etz Ahaim foundation regarding the publication of books.
- Documents on the internal administration and operation of the Community.
- Documents and material of the Community's committees and bodies on synagogues, the cemetery, the rabbinical court (Beth Din), the Pinhas Clinic, the children's centre, kindergartens and schools, the youth summer camp, the Maccabee Sports Club, the Saul Modiano Old People's Home, the Fraternity Club, the utilisation and management of property and bequests, etc.
- Press and periodical clippings on the JCT.

D. The Archive of the Jewish Community of Kavala

Thanks to the intensive efforts of the former president of the Jewish Community of Kavala, Victor S. Venouziou, part of the community's extant archive is being kept at the JMT and the HAJCT. The material is unclassified and accessible to researchers upon approval of relevant application, and one of our future goals is to unify, classify and digitise it.

IV. Services and Research: A Living Archive

A. The HAJCT Research Centre

The archival material research application form was created in 2012 (<http://www.jct.gr/aithsh.pdf>), a fact that was considered a pioneering step for Greek standards. One of the most significant problems encountered by archive researchers in Greece is the time consuming bureaucratic procedures required for a permit to carry out research, a problem that the HAJCT managed to overcome with the unwavering support of President David Saltiel and the Community Board.

In recent years, the presentation of the archive at university workshops and meetings and seminars in Greece and abroad has led to a substantial increase in the number of researchers working on the archive and fruitful collaborations with reputable historians, who have generously contributed new archival material and copies of their publications. The HATJC has often served as a place for people to meet and exchange research findings, opening up new prospects for the creation of study networks and groups on Judaism in Greece.

By sheer coincidence, third grade pupils from the Jewish Primary School of Thessaloniki were the first to visit the HAJCT with their teacher Eva Saoulidou-Sevi, who guided them in following all the formal procedures to the letter. They then researched material concerning the Maccabi Sports Club, completing a special study that was presented at a school event.

B. Archival Metadata and Its Importance to Research

Early on during the archive's reorganisation, it became evident that all the material could not be tamed unless further processing took place alongside the classification. Thus the need for the creation of metadata arose. The production of metadata in database form (excel lists) for each classified section became a priority. These lists have become essential for carrying out research at the archive. The databases that support the classified part of the archive concern:

➤ Property Declarations²⁶

13,738 entries with the following information: last name, first name, father's name, spouse's name, address, identity number (yellow star) and year of birth, mainly of the head of the family but sometimes of all the members and the children too. A special column records the number of the digitised file where the statement is located.

➤ German Reparations²⁷

A total of 12,936 entries on Jews deported from Thessaloniki and murdered at Auschwitz-Birkenau and 5,310 names of their surviving first degree relatives. On numerous cases, names of victims and survivors alike appear twice, as at

²⁶ HAJCT files 00001- 00025.

²⁷ HAJCT files #00030 to 00067.

least two statements were submitted on different dates from 1961 to 1963. The list records the victim's surname and first name, the father's name, the wife's family name, the year of birth, the number of the statement and its date, and the special file number where it is located. Information on survivors also includes their place of residence when the statement was submitted.

➤ Communal Elections of 1946 & 1950²⁸

A total of 485 entries on those who applied for an electoral card in 1946, and another 657 on those who applied in 1950. The 1946 list records last name, first name, father's name, year of birth, occupation, address, registry number and application serial number. The 1950 list includes last name, first name, father's name, year of birth, and place of emigration in cases when the applicant no longer resided in Thessaloniki.

➤ 1945 Census

Entries on the 1,352 community members registered in the nine extant ledgers. Each entry consists of the following basic information: surname, first name, father's name, mother's name, wife's maiden name, year of birth, date of arrival, date of registration, citizenship, address, occupation prior and after the persecution, date of marriage, educational level, health condition and comments.

These digital metadata lists are available to researchers at the HAJCT on a case-by-case basis.

C. Special Victim and Survivor Databases

Motivated by an interest in the history of my family and having already created the databases mentioned above, in 2012 I began research on the numerous victims of the Holocaust who were members of the JCT. Inspired by the earlier work of Heinz S. Kounio, I created a database²⁹ from scratch in which every

²⁸ HAJCT files #01618-01619.

²⁹ Apart from the archival material of the HAJCT, databases such as the following were used: "The experience of the Jews of Greece in audio-visual testimony" <http://gjst.ha.uth.gr/el/theproject.php>; "I nomi della Shoah Italiana", <http://www.nomidellashoah.it>; *The central database of the Shoah Victims* <http://yvng.yadvashem.org/index.html?language=en>; *List of names of Thessaloniki Jews who were deported to Nazi concentration camps* ,

entry initially included the following information: family surname name, first name, father's name, mother's name, wife's name, wife's family name, occupation, address, year of birth, place of birth and death.

The essential criteria of each entry are: a) That the survivor has not been recorded in other post-war archival material; b) That there is at least one document that confirms the death of the victim; and c) That the surname, first name, father's name and a fourth piece of information – whether that is the mother's name, year of birth or address – is included. Entries with fewer than four pieces of information are not included so as to prevent errors and duplicate entries.

The serial number of each document that concerns the victim is entered into different columns depending on the archival material from which it originates. This insistence on detail contributes to the identification of each individual and situates them into their broader familial context, neighbourhood, school or synagogue.

While creating the database on victims, I very soon realised that the existence of a database on survivors was required. Thus, based on the survivor metadata list, I created a more extensive list of Community members who had survived, enriching it with entries from other sections of the archive. The database on survivors was initially complemented by metadata from the 1946 and 1950 electoral roll, later registers and indexes, from the names found in the claims for German reparations, and from the reorganised material in the marriage and birth registers. It was then supplemented with information from other archival sources on each individual separately.

For example, the name of my paternal grandfather Raphael Arouh, son of Solomon and Palomba, does not appear in the 1945 census, but in the 1946 register of the Jewish Community of Athens (entry serial number 234).³⁰ The entry into the database was also supplemented with pertinent information located in other archival sources: the judgement of the Court of the First

http://research.jmth.gr/index.php?MDL=pages&Alias=MENU_30_10; and relevant material that I was generously provided with by researchers working at the HAJCT.

³⁰ HAJCT file #02631.

Instance (serial number 1496/62)³¹ to which he had applied requesting confirmation of the death of family members at Auschwitz; his application (serial number 131)³² for loss of life of first degree relatives under the German reparations scheme; and family material in my possession.

As work on the databases continued, new channels of cooperation with researchers working on the archive opened up, which in turn led to the discovery of new archival material. After gaining access to such new material, I cross-referenced it with all previous evidence and created the relevant metadata.

Recording and documenting the members of the Community on databases is a time consuming and on-going enterprise, which requires patience and persistence, as well as constant communication and cooperation with other bodies, archives, libraries, historians and researchers. The two main databases are updated on a daily basis and are now the main and essential tools in all the work that is carried out at the HAJCT.

As the number of entries into the two databases increased, the initial thought that each person had a name and a story, which ought to be recorded with care and respect, took on a clearer form. At the same time, the urgency to unearth and record the details of Holocaust survivors' lives during a period that has indelibly marked the JCT becomes all the more imperative; as indeed is the need to record the names of the thousands of victims which have not yet been commemorated.

With information drawn from these databases, I have been able to create a detailed bio of each Holocaust survivor. The drafting of the bio and the identification of the individuals in the databases is exclusively carried out by the author, and it is one of the most important services that the HAJCT offers. One of the main aims of most researchers who visit the archive is to search for

³¹ HAJCT file #00706.

³² HAJCT file #00031.

the paths that survivors took and highlight major aspects of their so-called “difficult return”.³³

D. Genealogical Research

The project of composing family trees, which began on a trial basis in 2013, has been strengthened by cooperating with other archives and bodies in Greece (e.g. the Registry of the Municipality of Thessaloniki and the Historical Archive of Macedonia). The successful building of more than 250 family trees was based almost exclusively on the existence of the databases mentioned above and led to the further development of the service. Genealogical research is carried out by appointment at the HAJCT from Monday to Friday.

Contact with descendants of Community members, whether they reside in Greece or have migrated abroad (even before the Holocaust), has proved fruitful not only to those searching for their roots through the trail left behind in documents, but also, and perhaps to an even greater extent, to the archive itself, which is further enriched as they, in turn, often donate digital copies of family documents, photographs and heirlooms. Thus, another valuable source of material on the pre-war history of the community gradually becomes available.

IV. The Present and the Future of the HAJCT

The new era of extroversion centres on the archive’s dual function: a) The classified and unclassified collections; and b) The services of processed information – such as identification, genealogy, victim and survivor databases.

In recent decades, the rapid development of the internet, the volume of information available and the need to manage it, as well as the digitisation of an ever increasing number of sources have made the contribution of the HAJCT imperative in many fields of research and in the most effective way possible. Data and information feedback, cooperation and combined research raise new questions and lead to new conclusions. Nowadays, the HAJCT is a very important and useful source of knowledge and research for all sorts of visitors:

³³ Benveniste, *op. cit.*, p. 97.

pupils and students, historians and anthropologists, writers, and even politicians searching for fragments of the city's history and memories of its past.

The HAJCT will continue to operate driven by the goal of unearthing the history of the Jewish presence in Thessaloniki and recording its contribution to all aspects of the city's life. With its focus on facilitating archival research and on the utilisation of metadata and its further enrichment, the HAJCT will continue contributing to our knowledge on an important historical period and, ultimately, to a better understanding of the present through the past.

Seventy six years after the confiscation and theft of the archives and libraries of the Community by the Reichleiter Rosenberg Taskforce and their dispersal over three continents,³⁴ today, more than ever before, David Saltiel's vision of creating a Holocaust Museum in Thessaloniki and his coordinated efforts with Mayor Yannis Boutaris towards its realisation make us hope that the archives will one day return "home" – to *Ir Va' em be' Israel*.³⁵

"We still have not lost our hope, because hope will be lost with the last Jew".³⁶

³⁴ Naar, "The confiscation and recovery...", p. 6.

³⁵ "A Mother City in Israel". The phrase first appeared in the Old Testament (Samuel 20, 19). I would like to thank R' Joseph Benjamin Serfaty for pointing out this and for his help in better understanding its meaning. See also Iakov Benmayor "Thessaloniki Ir Va' Em Be' Israel", *Cultural Forum of the Jewish Community of Thessaloniki Ir Vaem Beisrael*, Thessaloniki, p. 31-39.

³⁶ Excerpt from an unsigned letter by the Jews of Athens to the representative of the Jewish Agency in Istanbul in the summer of 1943, reproduced in Katerina Lampsas & Iakov Simbi, *The Rescue* [Greek], Athens, 2012, p. 197.