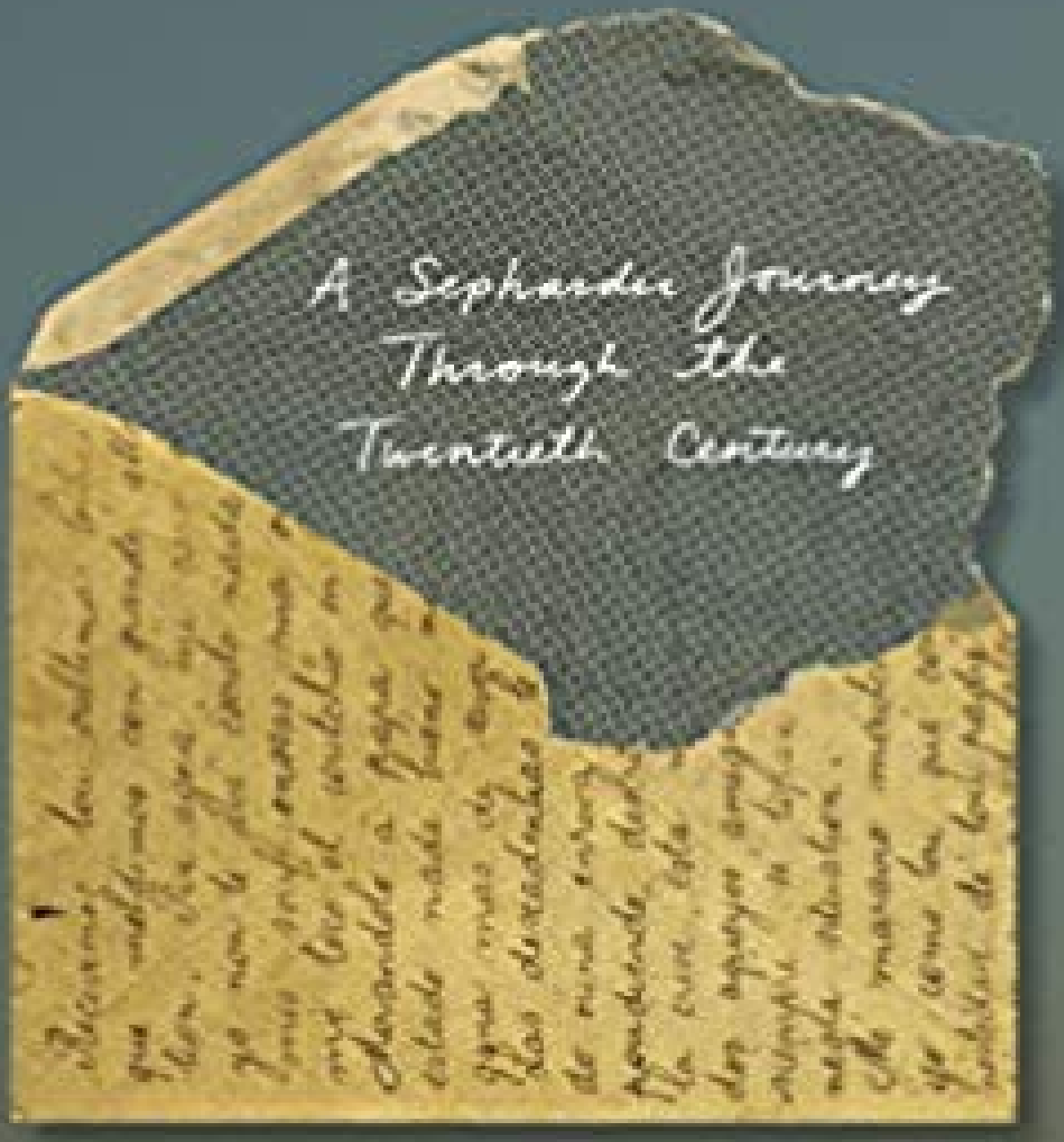
FAMILY PAPERS

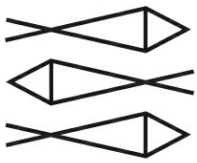


SARAH ABREVAYA STEIN

FAMILY PAPERS

A SEPHARDIC JOURNEY THROUGH THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

SARAH ABREVAYA STEIN



FAMILY PAPERS

A SEPHARDIC JOURNEY

THROUGH THE

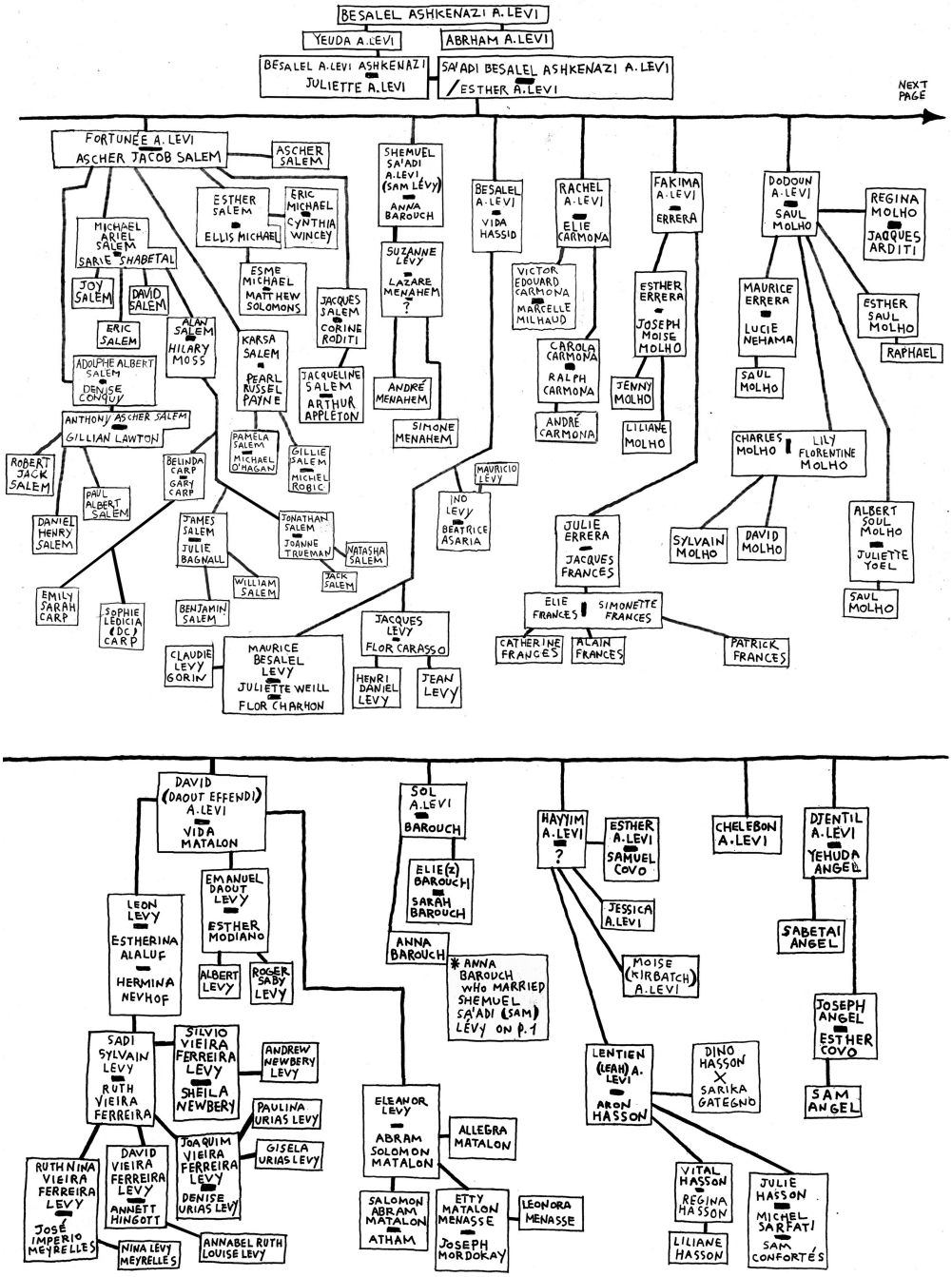
TWENTIETH CENTURY

SARAH ABREVAYA STEIN

FARRAR, STRAUS AND GIROUX • NEW YORK

To three good people I love to walk with: Fred, Ira, and Julius

Kamina kon buenos, te hazeras uno de eyos.
Walk with good people and you will become one of them.


BESALEL ASHKENAZI A.LEVI
YEUDA A.LEVI
ABRHAM A.LEVI
BESALEL A.LEVI ASHKENAZI
JULIETTE A.LEVI
SA'ADI BESALEL ASHKENAZI A.LEVI
ESTHER A.LEVI
NEXT PAGE
FORTUNÉE A.LEVI
ASCHER JACOB SALEM
ASCHER SALEM
SHEMUEL SA'ADI A.LEVI (SAM LÉVY)
ANNA BAROUCH
BESALEL A.LEVI
VIDA HASSID
RACHEL A.LEVI
ELIE CARMONA
FAKIMA A.LEVI
ERRERA
DODOUN A.LEVI
SAUL MOLHO
REGINA MOLHO
JACQUES ARDITI
ESTHER SALEM
ELLIS MICHAEL
ERIC MICHAEL
CYNTHIA WINCEY
MICHAEL ARIEL SALEM
SARIE SHABETAL
ESME MICHAEL
MATTHEW SOLOMONS
SUZANNE LÉVY
LAZARE MENAHEM ?
VICTOR EDOUARD CARMONA
MARCELLE MILHAUD
ESTHER ERRERA
JOSEPH MOISE MOLHO
MAURICE ERRERA
LUCIE NEHAMA
ESTHER SAUL MOLHO
JOY SALEM
DAVID SALEM
ERIC SALEM
ALAN SALEM
HILARY MOSS
JACQUES SALEM
CORINE RODITI
KARSA SALEM
PEARL RUSSEL PAYNE
ADOLPHE ALBERT SALEM
DENISE CONQUY
JACQUELINE SALEM
ARTHUR APPLETON
ANDRÉ MENAHEM
SIMONE MENAHEM
CAROLA CARMONA
RALPH CARMONA
ANDRÉ CARMONA
JENNY MOLHO
LILIANE MOLHO
SAUL MOLHO
RAPHAEL
ANTHONY ASCHER SALEM
GILLIAN LAWTON
PAMELA SALEM
MICHAEL O'HAGAN
GILLIE SALEM
MICHEL ROBIC
MAURICIO LEVY
INO LEVY
BEATRICE ASARIA
CHARLES MOLHO
LILY FLORENTINE MOLHO
ROBERT JACK SALEM
BELINDA CARP
GARY CARP
PAUL ALBERT SALEM
DANIEL HENRY SALEM
JAMES SALEM
JULIE BAGNALL
JONATHAN SALEM
JOANNE TRUEMAN
NATASHA SALEM
JACK SALEM
WILLIAM SALEM
JULIE ERRERA
JACQUES FRANCES
SYLVAIN MOLHO
DAVID MOLHO
ALBERT SOUL MOLHO
JULIETTE YOEL
SAUL MOLHO
EMILY SARAH CARP
SOPHIE LEDICIA (DC) CARD
BENJAMIN SALEM
ÉLIE FRANCES
SIMONETTE FRANCES
CATHERINE FRANGES
ALAIN FRANCES
PATRICK FRANCES
CLAUDIE LEVY GORIN
MAURICE BESALEL LEVY
JULIETTE WEILL
FLOR CHARHON
JACQUES LÉVY
FLOR CARASSO
HENRI DANIEL LEVY
JEAN LEVY
DAVID (DAOUT EFFENDI) A.LEVI
VIDA MATALON
SOL A.LEVI
BAROUCH
HAYYIM A.LEVI
?
ESTHER A.LEVI
SAMUEL COVO
CHELEBON A.LEVI
DJENTIL A.LEVI
YEHUDA ANGEL
EMANUEL DAOUT LEVY
ESTHER MODIANO
LEON LEVY
ESTHERINA ALALUF
HERMINA NEVHOF
ALBERT LEVY
ROGER SABY LEVY
ELIE (Z) BAROUCH
SARAH BAROUCH
JESSICA A.LEVI
SABETAI ANGEL
ANNA BAROUCH
* ANNA BAROUCH who MARRIED SHEMUEL SA'ADI (SAM) LÉVY on p.1
MOISE (KIRBATCH) A.LEVI
JOSEPH ANGEL
ESTHER COVO
SADI SYLVAIN LEVY
RUTH VIEIRA FERREIRA
SILVIO VIEIRA FERREIRA LEVY
SHEILA NEWBERY
ANDREW NEWBERY LEVY
PAULINA URIAS LEVY
GISELA URIAS LEVY
JOAQUIM VIEIRA FERREIRA LEVY
DENISE URIAS LEVY
ELEANOR LEVY
ABRAM SOLOMON MATALON
ALLEGRA MATALON
LENTIEN (LEAH) A. LEVI
ARON HASSON
DINO HASSON X SARIKA GATEGNO
SAM ANGEL
RUTH NINA VIEIRA FERREIRA LEVY
JOSÉ IMPERIO MEYRELLES
DAVID VIEIRA FERREIRA LEVY
ANNETT HINGOTT
NINA LÉVY MEYRELLES
ANNABEL RUTH LOUISE LEVY
SALOMON ABRAM MATALON
ATHAM
ETTY MATALON MENASSE
JOSEPH MORDOKAY
LEONORA MENASSE
VITAL HASSON
REGINA HASSON
LILIANE HASSON
JULIE HASSON
MICHEL SARFATI
SAM CONFORTÉS

WRITERS

This is the story of a single Sephardic family whose roots connect them to a place and community that no longer exist. The place was the port city of Ottoman Salonica, present-day Thessaloniki, Greece, one of the few cities in modern Europe ever to claim a Jewish majority. The community was made up mostly of Ladino- (or Judeo-Spanish) speaking Jews—Sephardic families who traced their ancestry back to Sepharad, medieval Iberia, from which they were expelled in the 1490s, but who, for the next five centuries, called the Ottoman Empire, southeastern Europe, and Salonica home.

Today, the papers of the Levy family are spread across nine countries and three continents. The single largest collection, the papers of Leon Levy, is kept by his four grandchildren in a private vault in Rio de Janeiro. It consists of nearly five thousand handwritten and typed letters, telegrams, photographs, legal and medical documents, and miscellanea—address books, expired passports, and more: by far the largest private archive I have encountered as a professional historian and near obsessive document hunter.

In a suitcase in a spare garage, in a retirement village outside Johannesburg, there is another repository of Levy family papers. Smaller than the Rio collection, the South African one is nonetheless of immeasurable historical value. It includes such cherished souvenirs as a silhouette cut in Salonica in 1919 capturing the likeness of a young woman about to emigrate from her native city, never to return.

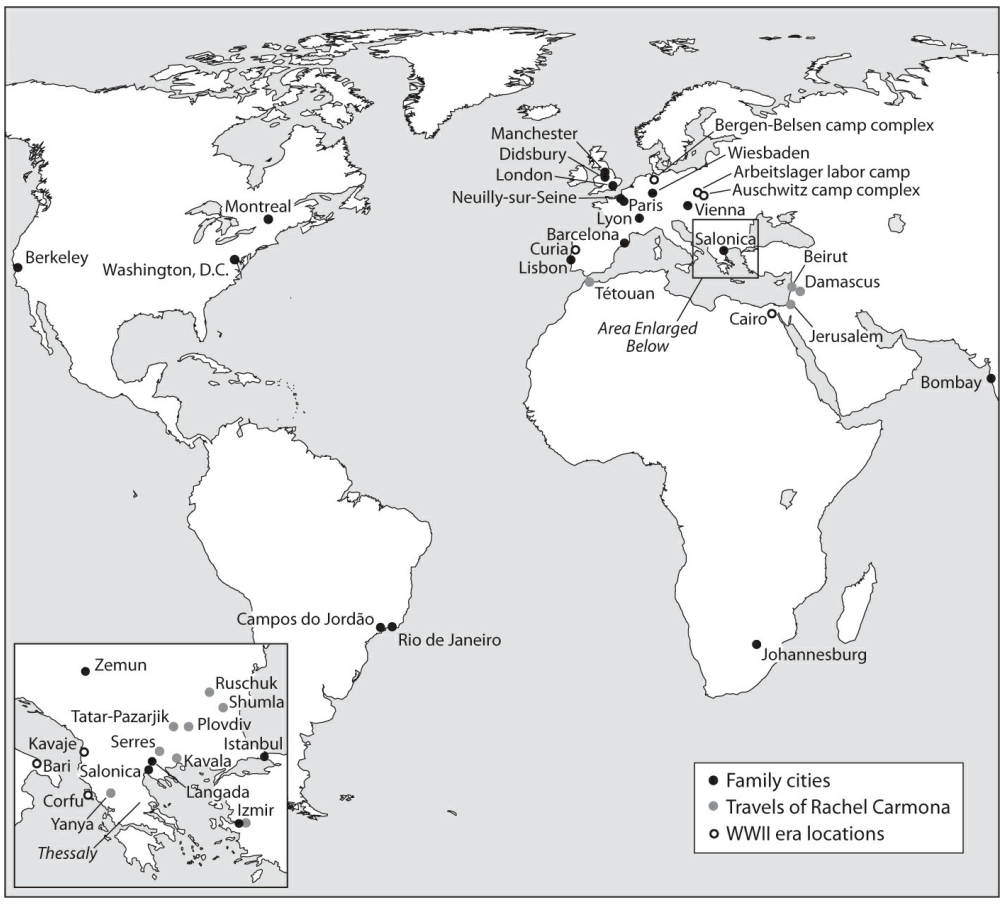
Other family papers have turned up in private hands in England. One collection, boxed up in a home in London, has survived multiple migrations, from Greece to Great Britain to Germany to India, back to Great Britain and on to the United States. Another, housed in a scenic village outside Manchester, contains fragile glass slides taken in 1917 in Salonica's Jewish cemetery, then the largest Jewish cemetery in Europe.

Yet more documents, photographs, and objects have materialized in Brazil, Canada, France, Germany, Great Britain, Greece, Hungary, Israel, Italy, Portugal, and the United States: not only family-owned papers, but documents and photographs held by thirty archives. Travel documents; naturalization papers; birth, death, and medical records; letters exchanged by relatives, lovers, and friends; business papers; even a baptismal certificate. All told, these scattered sources have allowed me to trace an intimate arc of the twentieth century.

The Levy family papers catalogue the lives and losses of multiple generations, contain papers written in eight languages, and reflect correspondence among members of a single family spanning the globe. This

is a Jewish story, an Ottoman story, a European story, a Mediterranean story, and a diasporic story, a story of how women, men, and children experienced wars, genocide, and migration, the collapse of old regimes and the rise of new nations. The Levy papers also reveal how this family loved and quarreled, struggled and succeeded, clung to one another and watched the ties that once bound them slip from their grasp.

As the first papers in the Levy family collections were amassed, around the time of the Balkan Wars (1912–1913), Salonica and its Jewish community were undergoing an irrevocable transformation. Nationalism provoked the transition of Salonica from an Ottoman city with a Jewish plurality to a Greek city with a Christian majority. Emigration drove the city's Jews, and the Levy family, across the globe.



Map of the Levy family diaspora

Ladino speakers began to abandon their language in favor of various adopted tongues. Genocide eradicated 98 percent of the Jews who remained in Salonica during the Second World War, leaving survivors crippled by one of the highest rates of annihilation to affect a single community in Europe.

The Levy family lived all this. They knew Salonica when one was more likely to hear Ladino on the street than any other language. As leading publishers and editors in the city, they helped chronicle and shape modernity

as it was experienced by Sephardic Jews. Wars redrew borders around them, transforming them from Ottomans to Greeks. Family members moved across boundaries and hemispheres, with some leaving in optimism and others in shame. The Holocaust eviscerated their clan, destroying entire branches of the family tree. The losses that so devastated those left behind disrupted intimacies and led to new relationships among survivors driven together by grief, seeking solace in one another and, in some cases, cooperating to file reparation claims from Germany. Slowly, agonizingly, they rebuilt.

My encounter with the Levy family has its roots in another book, one I coedited with my colleague, former teacher, and friend, Aron Rodrigue. In 2012, Aron and I published a translation of the first known Ladino memoir (Isaac Jerusalmi, *zikhrono livrakha* [z"l], of blessed memory, served as translator).[1] The memoir was composed by a Levy patriarch, Sa'adi Besalel Ashkenazi a-Levi (1820–1903), whom contemporaries called Sa'adi.

Sa'adi's memoir fills ninety-five pages of a humble notebook—the sort of ledger a small-business owner might use to keep track of expenses. Written in elegant *soletreo*, the unique cursive handwriting of Ladino, the pages are dotted with Hebrew words in calligraphic block letters. The margins show Sa'adi's meticulous additions and corrections, some in blue pencil. Sa'adi would revise and polish the document for a decade, until blindness overtook him. A lifelong publisher, Sa'adi made this notebook his last and most intimate creation.

Astonishingly, Sa'adi's notebook passed through four generations of his family, traveling from Salonica to Paris, from Paris to Rio de Janeiro, and, finally, from Rio to Jerusalem—somehow eluding destruction, even in the face of the dispersal of Sa'adi's descendants over multiple countries and the annihilation of Salonica's Jewish community. Later, after I spent years grappling with Sa'adi's words, I wondered what had become of this remarkable family from Ottoman Salonica.

The slenderest of leads enabled me to write this book. In 1977, Sadi Silvio (Sylvain) Levy, the great-grandson of Sa'adi Besalel Ashkenazi a-Levi, had donated the sole copy of Sa'adi's memoir to the National Library of Israel, then known as the Jewish National and University Library. Because Sephardic Jews tend to name children after living forebears, I reasoned that names would persist in the Levy family, even in the émigré outpost of Brazil. The hunch eventually led me to Silvio Vieira Ferreira Levy —Sa'adi's Rio-born great-great-grandson. In time, Silvio told me about the Levy collection in its vault in Rio and, with the blessing of his three siblings, shared his family's papers with me. The discovery began a decade-long historical journey.

The Levy family was known variously across the years. In nineteenth-

century Ottoman Salonica, when the Levys were among the city's cultural elite, they were called a-Levi. (A contemporary Hebrew speaker might render the name Ha-Levy, but this fails to reflect the pronunciation of Hebrew among Ladino speakers of the era.) Certain family members who went to France removed the prefix and added an accent, a stroke that would testify to their Frenchness: Lévy. Those who moved through Germany considered embracing Lewy, but, in the end, did not. The Brazilian branch favored Levy, which would be more recognizable to Portuguese speakers. Women in the family, meanwhile, adopted married names, all significant to Sephardic history: Amariglio (Amarilio), Carmona, Errera, Florentin, Hasson, Matalon, Molho, Salem, Sarfatti, and more.

In this family, as in every family, much remained unspoken, unwritten. There were facts family members could not know, secrets they would not tell. The most devastating drama of this book—the ghastly transgressions and ultimate trial and execution of a Second World War criminal who was also one of Sa'adi's great-grandchildren—makes no explicit appearance in family correspondence. Evidence of this person has also been left out of all the family trees I have encountered. In the immediate aftermath of the Holocaust, relatives hinted at the trauma in letters, alluding to conversations they had had or would have about their disgraced kin. But never did they put the offender's name (let alone details of his crimes) in print. This was a shared secret, not meant for the eyes of a historian.[2]

Of course, a historian is not charged with perpetuating or concealing her subjects' secrets. Still, the discovery of this dark chapter of Levy history has weighed heavily on me, presenting ethical dilemmas I have struggled to resolve. Few of Sa'adi's living descendants could be familiar with this tortured chapter prior to reading this book. For some, it may prove painful, for others, a distant scandal. In the end, my decision to tell this anomalous and disturbing story emerged out of a desire to write as complete and nuanced a family history as sources permitted. To do less would allow a sanitized version of the past to prevail over the messy, sometimes ugly, unshakably human one that resonates with truth.

The Levys wrote each other to give and ask for money, to share expressions of grief, to announce achievements, to conduct business, and to reveal secrets. They wrote to maintain connection over time and distance, to propose marriage, and to plan for divorce. They wrote because they had regrets and were lonely, at times simply because they were family. Papers held them together—until distance, time, and history finally tore them apart. So it is that after a diasporic Sephardic family frays, what remains is the fragile tissue that once held them together: neither blood nor belief, but paper.

DNA tests and genealogical websites have turned the search for ancestry

into a booming industry, with spit and computers its essential tools. Yet in an era of expanding family trees, digital relationships, and instantaneous communication, writing or receiving letters is something few of us do—or have ever done, depending on our age. It is uncommon, in today's world, to anticipate a letter, to relish its arrival, to stain it with tears, or to pass it to children or grandchildren as an inheritence. We have infinite ways to connect. But what have we relinquished, along with family papers?

OTTOMANS

Those Levys were dangerous. All they needed was an idea to come to them like a little birdie, and they'd start chasing after it. And this idea never rested until it became a reality.

***—The Memoirs of Doctor Meir Yoel*, 1900**[1]

SA'ADI

Does every generation believe it exists at a moment of transition? Looking around him, Sa'adi Besalel Ashkenazi a-Levi saw a world that scarcely resembled the one into which he was born. Young women and men dressed differently from their parents, maintained a looser relationship to religion. New train tracks connected his city, Ottoman Salonica, to Belgrade, and from there to all of Europe. His children, like so many Jewish youth, spoke languages a previous generation did not know. They were moving far from home, assuming new jobs, attempting to realize their own utopian dreams.

Sa'adi's city, Ottoman Salonica, was among the few cities in the modern world to have a Jewish plurality, if not a Jewish majority. Jews numbered between 60,000 and 100,000 of Salonica's residents in the nineteenth century, when roughly 50 percent of the city's residents were Jews.[1] The majority of Salonica's Jews were Sephardic, descendants of Jews expelled from medieval Iberia ("Sepharad" in Hebrew) in the late fifteenth century. Pushed from their homes, these expelled women, men, and children scattered northward to France and the Spanish Netherlands, and southward to Morocco. The largest number, however, moved east to the Ottoman Empire, an expanding state that would, at its height, reach across southeastern Europe, through the eastern Mediterranean and North Africa, and eastward to the border of what is today Iran. To the Ottoman lands the Iberian Jewish exiles brought their religion, their memories, their cultural practices, and their craft, including printing, which was the a-Levi family trade. So, too, did the exiles transport their tongue—a Judeo-Spanish language they sometimes called *muestro espanyol*, which today is known as Ladino.[2] Over the course of 450 years, Jews became an integral part of the Ottoman imperial social mosaic. They were particularly influential in cities like Salonica, where they constituted a large enough group to conduct affairs in their own language.

When Sa'adi commissioned a scribe to transcribe his memoir, Salonica was the third most important port in the Ottoman Empire and a link between Europe and the Levant. The cosmopolitan city, home to Jews, Muslims, Dönme (descendants of Jews who followed the self-proclaimed messiah

Shabbetay Sevi into Islam after he converted in 1666), and Greek Orthodox and other Christians, boasted more than fifty synagogues. The Sabbath was celebrated on three different days by Salonica's multisectarian residents. Still, to its early-twentieth-century Jewish residents, the city was hailed as a Jewish capital, the "Jerusalem of the Balkans."[3] So at ease were Jews in the city that they could be found praying on the quay, obstructing the path of pedestrians.[4]

A Jewish industrial-class, working-class, and middle-class workforce fueled Salonica's economy. Jews were prominent among both the stevedores who manned the port and the women and men, girls and boys who dried tobacco and shaped bricks in the city's factories. Jews owned many of the shops, cafés, and bars that lined Salonica's streets, and were teachers in the city's schools.[5] The city's most popular newspapers were also edited, printed, and written by Jews, including Sa'adi and his sons. Indeed, the a-Levi family introduced printing to Salonica, in much the same fashion as Sephardic Jews introduced printing to the Ottoman Empire.[6]

Ottoman Salonica, c. 1860s

Like most of Salonica's nineteenth-century Jews, Sa'adi counted Ladino as his mother tongue. It was the language in which he spoke to his wife and children, wrote his memoir, and published some of his newspapers and the ephemera that earned him a living. Still, his family line was the product of intersecting Jewish worlds that merged in Salonica, reaching back to Iberia as well as to Amsterdam and Italy. As culturally Sephardic as the family came

to be—and as influential to the shaping of modern Judeo-Spanish letters—the a-Levi line braided Sephardic (Iberian Jewish) and Ashkenazic (European Jewish) heritage. The family's Ashkenazi lineage was for a time preserved and even flaunted by the family through select customs and through their use of the surname Ashkenazi, a name common among Jews in the Balkans and Turkey, which in many cases signaled a non-Sephardic inheritance. Sa'adi's father, Besalel a-Levi Ashkenazi, his grandfather Rabbi Yeuda a-Levi Ashkenazi, and his Amsterdam-born great-grandfather, Besalel a-Levi Ashkenazi, went by this name, as did Sa'adi himself.[7] The next generation would not emulate this practice, probably out of a desire to simplify and Westernize their family names.

Sa'adi was losing his vision in the early 1880s when he began composing his memoir. The work suggests that he was sanguine about many of the changes that were transforming Jewish Salonica. The city had only recently spilled over its medieval walls, and its sea walls had been freshly demolished in favor of a waterfront promenade. New, wealthy districts were being built on Salonica's eastern edge, and within the city, water, electricity, paved streets, and tramlines were updating the urban landscape.[8] Sa'adi didn't dwell on these developments in his memoir. Nor did he seem terribly bothered that his children's generation did not cling to the laws and mores of the past, that they embraced new political movements and fashions, or that women and men were both increasingly defiant about traditional gender roles. None of this fundamentally seemed to disturb Sa'adi—or, at least, this is not what comes through in his memoir. For Sa'adi was something of a freethinker. What he could not abide was obstructionism on the part of the city's Jewish religious elite. Though religiously observant himself, Sa'adi believed that Salonica's rabbis were fearful leaders threatened by modernity.

Sa'adi battled with Salonica's religious elite throughout his life. He triggered their ire with words, both sung and written. By vocation Sa'adi was a printer and editor, by avocation an accomplished composer and singer. Like his grandfather Rabbi Yeuda a-Levi Ashkenazi, Sa'adi was a virtuoso of Ottoman Jewish music. His training had come at the feet of two Ottoman musical masters—one Muslim, the other Jewish—who taught him the full Ottoman and Jewish repertoires. Sa'adi also practiced and performed with the *maftirim* choirs of Salonica. Composed of Jewish, Sufi, and Muslim musicians, the *maftirim* performed mystical texts from a variety of traditions, blending their melodies and composition into a unique (and today almost lost) art form. The kind of musical blending that Sa'adi excelled at was quintessentially Ottoman, reflective of the cultural melding that was inextricable from Salonica's multiethnic, multisectarian, multilingual environment.[9] Music brought Jews and non-Jews together, allowing them to share a cultural voice. No wonder it proved an irritant to a rabbinical

leadership that wished to fortify the boundaries around Judaism.

While still in his teenage years, Sa'adi was commissioned by the head of one of Salonica's greatest yeshivas to sing at the wedding of his son. For the occasion, Sa'adi composed a melody based on a secular Turkish song, to which he set the kaddish, a traditional Jewish hymn of prayer to God. The day of the nuptials, the grand synagogue was packed—filled, in Sa'adi's words, with "the entire aristocracy of Salonica." Enter the groom, enveloped in turban and robes. Sa'adi intoned the words of the kaddish, sending his newly composed secular melody echoing throughout the sacred building. His voice had "the purity of crystal, a nuanced and captivating sweetness."[10] The crowd was overwhelmed. All except one. "When [Rabbi Shaul] went home accompanied by eight to ten of his friends, he removed his cape and sat on his elevated cushion for some rest." Asked if he had enjoyed Sa'adi's performance, "the *sinyor rav* hit the roof … saying 'What a wicked person to sing a Turkish melody in the synagogue!'"[11] To this antimodernist fearful of losing influence and control, the blurring of musical boundaries, a celebrated tradition in the Ottoman world, seemed threatening. In Rabbi Shaul's eyes, Sa'adi was less a budding maestro than a firebrand. It was not the only time Sa'adi was threatened with excommunication (or even corporal punishment) for singing "à la turka."

Sa'adi's work as a publisher placed him in a still more combative relationship with Salonica's religious elite. He entered the publishing world at the young age of thirteen, when he inherited a ramshackle printing press from his father, Besalel a-Levi Ashkenazi. Sa'adi's father, thirty-six at the time of his death, had inherited the press from his own grandfather, the first in Sa'adi's paternal line to migrate to Salonica, from Amsterdam, in 1731. Already the family line was being preserved in print: some of the titles Sa'adi's father published, presumably with his brothers, bore the Hebrew imprint "Sons of Besalel," or "Orphans of Besalel," in recognition of the Amsterdam-born patriarch who brought the family to publishing.[12]

Sa'adi's father died when Sa'adi was still an infant. The family printing house was run by employees—but barely. Revenues were low, the staff not very competent. With family finances shaky, Sa'adi's mother entered the workforce. The a-Levi matriarch is never named by her son in his memoir, despite the outsized role she played for her family. Born in the eighteenth century, she was a seamstress and early aficionado of clothing in the "European style," though she and her husband wore traditional dress. Sa'adi's memoir offers detailed depictions of men's and women's clothing. Traditional clothing in the Salonican Jewish context, his memoir teaches, entailed, for women, a *kofya*, head covering, and a *devantal*, a long silk shirt, tight at the bodice, covered by an *antari*, a close-fitting kaftan with wide sleeves or, for men, a turban, round cap, or fez, and a belted *antari*

with a long fur boa. European clothing such as Sa'adi's mother produced placed men in long trousers, a shirt with a high, stiff collar, and a frock coat. Women's clothing favored floor-length skirts, small tight waists, and high-necked blouses.

Sa'adi's mother had been taught to sew in the European style by her mother, who had in turn learned from her mother, an immigrant to Salonica from Italy. Sa'adi describes watching his mother conduct business out of the home, whisking her young daughters away from the peering eyes of male clients when necessary. Word of her skill spread rapidly through Salonica. "In an age when there were no sewing machines, all the work was done by hand," Sa'adi recalled. "All the consulates in Salonica and other high-placed personalities, as well as all the business people, wore her shirts, the outcome of her handiwork."[13] At the height of her business, Sa'adi's mother was employing three of her own daughters and three additional helpers. In four weeks' time, the seven could hand-sew eight dozen shirts.

Sa'adi may not have seen fit to record in his memoir his mother's name, or that of his maternal grandmother, who provided his mother with an informal education in the needle trade. Still, the impact of these women on the course of the family's history was deep. Sa'adi's mother's business acumen and skill as a seamstress saved Sa'adi and her other children from poverty in the early nineteenth century. Her talent then passed to her daughters, granddaughters, and great-granddaughters, one of whom would rescue her own family from financial ruin in the mid-twentieth century by using these same skills.

It is sometimes assumed that Mediterranean Jewish families were essentially patriarchal and hierarchal, with the father's word akin to law, and family honor sacred.[14] While there is some truth to this generality, the image painted by the Levys is more intimate and complex. As early as the eighteenth century, women took an active role in providing for the present and in charting a future course for this family. They continued to command authority in the centuries that followed, leaving a documentary trail that was unusually robust for women of their day.

Despite her pioneering ways, Sa'adi's mother was a creature of her times, prone to its ravages as well as its opportunities. Early mortality was the norm rather than the exception; Sa'adi's mother died before his teenage years were over. Barely educated, Sa'adi poured himself into that quintessentially Ottoman Jewish trade, printing, filling the hole in the family business his father had vacated years earlier, upon his death. Sa'adi learned to cast font and claimed to have produced personally 30,000 to 40,000 letters in Rashi script—the letters used in printed Ladino until the language was informally and inconsistently Romanized in the 1920s.[15] In time, Sa'adi acquired the press of a competitor, along with two handpresses, twenty molds with

matrices, and hundreds of sheets for casting. Over the course of sixty-five years the family press would produce a staggering quantity and range of printed works in Ladino, Hebrew, and French: everything from gilded wedding invitations to rabbinical commentary, the Zohar (a compendium of Jewish mystical writing), and Salonica's most popular fin-de-siècle newspapers, the Ladino-language *La Epoka* and the French-language *Le Journal de Salonique*. Much of this work Sa'adi did with his four sons, David, Besalel, Shemuel Sa'adi, and Hayyim—*Kitapçı* Hayyim, as he was known by the Ottoman Turkish nickname that associated him with his job: Hayyim the bookseller.

There were fourteen children in all, five with the unidentified first wife of Sa'adi's who died young, and nine with his second wife, Esther. Sa'adi's memoir offers shockingly little description of his wives, lavishing far more attention on the rabbis he enraged than on the women with whom he built a family. His memoir touches with an equally light hand on his children, who were adolescents, young adults, and adults at the time of his writing.

Studio portrait of Sa'adi Besalel Ashkenazi a-Levi and his unidentified second wife, c. 1890s

The fourteen children were born over roughly twenty-five years. The dating is imprecise because, as Sa'adi warns, like most Jews of his era, he "neglected" chronology. "That is why I failed to keep track of my children's birth dates," he confesses. Three of Sa'adi's children would not reach adulthood. Two boys succumbed to cholera at a very young age, the first passing while his father was sweating off the fever. By the time the disease reached the second son, it took only two hours to run its course. A third son died in his teenage years, after a botched surgery.

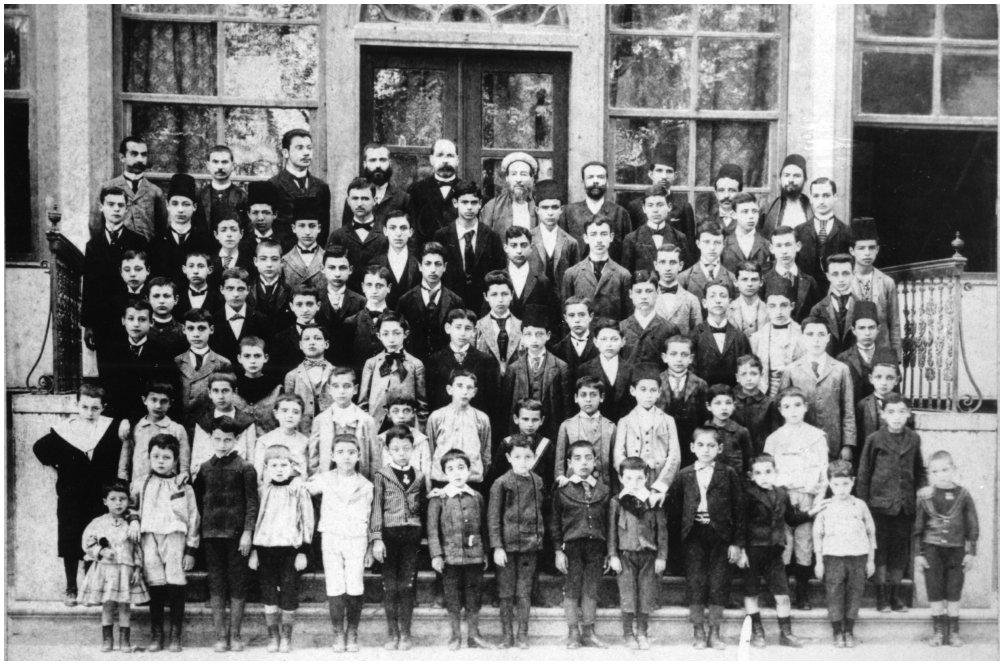
Sa'adi's children who came to maturity, like the children of Sholem Aleichem's fictional Tevye, walked down all the paths modernity offered Jews, for the centrifugal force was no less strong in turn-of-the-century Salonica than in Boiberik. If Tevye's six fictional daughters are caricatures of the possibilities that branched out before Russian Jews of the turn of the twentieth century, Sa'adi's children walked the byways favored by modern Sephardic Jews. One daughter, Rachel, worked as a teacher for the Alliance Israélite Universelle, a Franco-Jewish philanthropic organization that provided hundreds of young Mediterranean and Middle Eastern Jewish women with a secular education and an entrée into the formal workforce. One son, Shemuel Sa'adi, became an impassioned political commentator, throwing himself into his father's business, publishing, and using the family's (and, later, his own) newspapers as a mouthpiece for his eclectic opinions. Fortunée, another daughter, moved to Manchester, one of several Sephardic émigré centers abroad. Three more of Sa'adi's children would emigrate in turn. Another son, David, stayed behind, weathering the transition from Ottoman to Greek rule and serving first as an Ottoman bureaucrat and subsequently as a high-ranking official for the Jewish Community of Salonica. Not one of Sa'adi's children married a non-Jew, as did Tevye's Chava—yet the children gradually assimilated into various adopted milieus, such that their own children would grow up worlds apart even if still, for the most part, Jewish.

Loyalty to French culture; the embrace of innovative politics; emigration; an investment in Ottoman and post-Ottoman society; measured assimilation—these were the boulevards that beckoned Sephardic youth at the fin de siècle. There is, too, the undocumented path taken by Hayyim, Fakima, Doudoun, and Djentil, children of Sa'adi about whom I found very little. Like so many Sephardic lives, theirs remain obscure—though their descendants found a way into this book. Finally, two of Sa'adi's children—both in their advanced years—died in the gas chambers of Auschwitz. In this, too, they were typical of their community.

As Sa'adi and Esther's children came of age in mid-nineteenth-century Salonica, the parents made a crucial decision. Conformists offered daughters scant formal education and sent sons to receive religious training at a *meldar*

or Talmud Torah, schools for Jewish learning. "A *meldar* was a room with a couch in a neighbor's courtyard," noted a Ladino memoirist of the period. "On the couch, some benches, and the floor, sixty or seventy children sat or crouched … pushing, pulling, pinching, or biting each other, until the teacher would see them and yell, 'Scoundrels! Bastards! Rascals!'"[16] In Sa'adi's memoir, he condemned the Talmud Torah for cultivating self-indulgent young men committed to nothing but "months of merrymaking." The school's graduates, Sa'adi complained, awoke each day late in the afternoon and passed their time hunting and "going from coffeehouse to coffeehouse and from picnic to picnic on allowances they received from their parents."[17]

Sa'adi, culturally progressive, if traditional from a religious point of view, charted his own path. The a-Levis were not wealthy, even if the family was a visible part of Salonica's non-rabbinical Jewish cultural elite. Sa'adi leveraged this status to secure a bourgeois existence for his offspring. With his friend Moise Allantini, a wealthy philanthropist and freethinker, Sa'adi helped establish the first school of the Alliance Israélite Universelle in Salonica in 1873. The brainchild of the Franco-Jewish elite, the Alliance offered Mediterranean and Middle Eastern Jewish children rigorous instruction in French, according to the educational norms of the Franco-Jewish bourgeoisie. In hundreds of classrooms and schools segregated by gender, Alliance students, both female and male, studied secular subjects, including French and Hebrew, literature and math, as well as religion and Jewish history. They were also offered moral instruction—advised not to smoke or drink, and not to play backgammon or converse in Ladino, their native tongue, which the Alliance hoped they would abandon in favor of French.[18] Sa'adi enrolled at least four of his children—two daughters, Fortunée and Rachel, and two sons, David and Shemuel Sa'adi—in Salonica's new school. The siblings were among Salonica's first Alliance graduates.

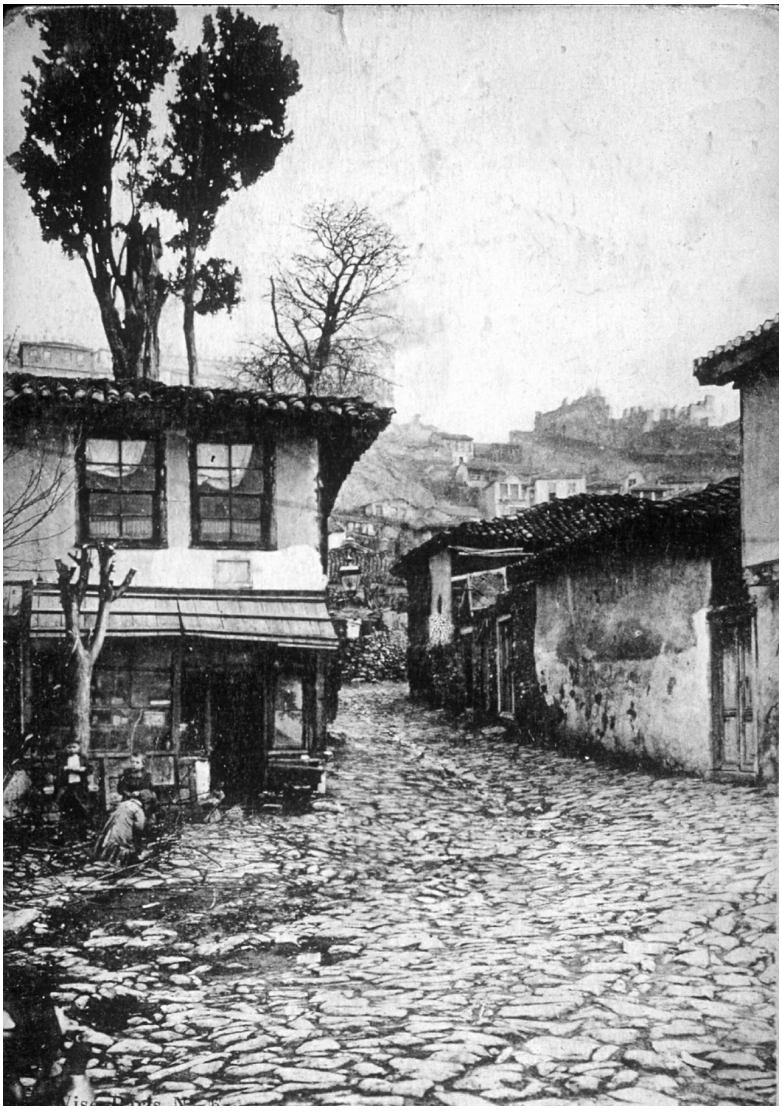


Alliance Israélite Universelle boys' school, Salonica, 1912

The imprint an Alliance education had upon the children is depicted vividly in their handwriting: or, at least, in the pen of three of the four—Shemuel Sa'adi, always in a hurry, had the most inelegant penmanship of his siblings. Their French is virtually native, the writing a touch formal. Each letter is dated in the upper right corner, with the place of writing named. Numbers appear in the French style, margins are even, punctuation is perfect, accents are precise. Were it not for the addition of Ladino phrases here and there—and, of course, the content—one could assume the correspondents had come of age in the French Republic. The a-Levi children were distinguished students, marked by drive and passion. At least three were invited, upon graduation from high school, to enroll in the Alliance's elite teacher-training college in Paris, the École Normale Israelite Orientale. The choice each made (or that was made for them) proved a tributary of sorts, carrying them on an ever-swifter current, toward different seas.

As his children came of age, Sa'adi sharpened his public persona, using the printing press he operated with his sons to denounce the rabbinical establishment of Salonica as abusive, fanatical, and exploitative of the poor. A frequent target was the rabbinical tax on kosher meat—the very same charge that the breakaway Hasidic movement of eighteenth-century Eastern Europe launched against the reigning religious establishment there. Threatened by Sa'adi's accusations, Salonica's religious elite, Chief Rabbi Asher Kovo at its head, fought with what remaining weapon it had, a writ of *herem* or excommunication. The writ was issued against both Sa'adi and his eldest son, Hayyim, in the child's case on trumped-up charges of smoking on the Sabbath in violation of Jewish law. On a climactic day in 1874, the

rabbi's henchmen dragged and chased Sa'adi and Hayyim through the streets of Salonica, a mob of five hundred at their heels. The city's streets were then narrow and labyrinthine, lined with buildings in the Ottoman style. One can imagine their wooden balconies alive with onlookers, witnesses to Sa'adi's humiliation. The a-Levi home was ransacked in the melee. Father and son were spared physical harm only after the intervention of a wealthy friend who succeeded in reasoning with the mob.



Children in Salonica's Upper Town, 1907

Though the throng dispersed, the *herem* remained in place. Technically a writ of excommunication was meant to cut off the accused from the Jewish community, preventing him from joining a minyan (Jewish prayer quorum) or engaging in commercial or social transactions with other Jews. In Sa'adi's case, members of the community were warned against patronizing the family press, employees left the family firm, and Sa'adi himself stopped attending synagogue for a time. And yet, the impact of the *herem* seems only to have

galvanized Sa'adi's supporters—and his own radicalism. Shortly after his excommunication, Sa'adi traveled to Vienna to obtain new letter blocks in Rashi and Latin fonts. It was the farthest he would travel in his lifetime. Upon his return to Salonica, Sa'adi inaugurated the city's first Ladino-language newspaper, *La Epoka.* With his sons at his side, he would publish the newspaper for sixteen years, using it to give voice to his progressive sensibilities and myriad grievances. "They fired a cannonball at me," he later wrote, "I fired back in kind."

If, in practical terms, the blow wrought by the *herem* was slight, psychologically its impact was heavy. Though a critic of rabbinical excess, Sa'adi observed Jewish law, and his excommunication disturbed him deeply. In fact, it was a trauma that stayed with him all his life. Out of anger and a desire to clear his name, Sa'adi began to compose his memoir. He could not have imagined how far the document would travel, let alone that it would inspire this history.

RACHEL

Sa'adi's daughter Rachel (1862–1948) favored violet ink. Her letters are lined with the vibrant color, their rhythms charted with a steady hand. I turn to her next not because she was Sa'adi's eldest—this honor went to Hayyim, who earlier had the alleged sins of his excommunicated father visited upon him—but because her writing is the oldest of the family's to have been preserved, save Sa'adi's own.

If Sa'adi's publishing legacy passed from father to son, the family's indomitable and sometimes headstrong spirit passed equally from mother to daughter. For decades, Rachel served as a teacher for the Alliance Israélite Universelle, compelled by terms of employment to narrate her career through letters. The Alliance meticulously preserved every letter it received from its students, principals, and teachers, storing them in folders neatly classified by person and place in its Paris archive. Rachel and her husband, Elie, wrote hundreds of letters back to the Alliance over their decades of service, their missives mailed from professional posts across the Mediterranean. The letters strike a surprisingly intimate tone. Rachel left home at an early age and the Alliance became a surrogate family, with which she was obliged to correspond.

Rachel was a dutiful daughter of the Alliance, and she traveled the farthest of any of her siblings—distances unimaginable to most Ottoman women of the time. Yet her professional life was marked by struggles with her employers, and though the Alliance awarded her a medal for her service, Rachel retired dissatisfied. Personality played a role in Rachel's ups and downs, to be sure: then again, her work placed her in a series of untenable situations. Rachel taught through epidemics and political turmoil and in the face of community upheaval. Her finances and marriage were both tested because of her service to the Alliance, and despite their advanced degrees the couple lived close to poverty. Rachel boldly embraced a modernist project, but the embrace proved chilly and unyielding.

Rachel was fifteen or sixteen years old when she graduated from Salonica's Alliance school. An excellent student, she was invited by the organization to pursue teacher training in Paris, at the École Normale

Israélite Orientale. Rachel's training there would have been expensive, putting a financial strain upon the family. To shoulder the burden, Sa'adi and his wife had to have believed strongly in the advantages of graduate education for their eldest daughter.

One might imagine that a late-nineteenth-century Jewish family would be loath to let a daughter travel so far. The a-Levis, however, were unusually open-minded. Like other progressive Jewish families of the era (including those in the Ashkenazi sphere), they were often more willing to expose daughters than sons to novel ideas, readings, and environments.[1] Ironically, this reflected their conviction that girls did not have the drive, ambition, or intelligence to stray. It also suggests how fully the a-Levi family had embraced the message of the Alliance, which promised education and social mobility. Paris, though geographically distant, had been offered up to Sa'adi's children as an intimate place—a cultural nursery.[2] When another Alliance student of the period learned that she had been selected to study at the École Normale Israélite Orientale in Paris, she wrote that while she would miss her childhood home, she would "jump for joy" upon seeing Paris, a "dear city" she had loved since childhood, despite never having visited it.[3] For this girl, as for Rachel, pursuing an education at the École Normale Israélite Orientale was at once bold and the natural result of choices she and her family had made years earlier.

It would take another decade before train tracks allowed a rapid, three-day journey from Salonica to Paris.[4] Rachel must have traveled by steamship when she arrived there in 1877, not yet married and prepared for two years of training. At the time, the French Third Republic was in its infancy: the city was preparing for the 1878 World's Fair, where Alexander Graham Bell's telephone, the head of the Statue of Liberty, and a human zoo of four hundred "indigenous people" were all on display. Rachel, who was in Paris to study, had modest funds, scant free time, and even less independence. There would be no World's Fair for her. The Alliance kept its protégés under strict supervision.

A photograph of Rachel at eighteen years of age, taken upon her graduation, pictures her holding what appears to be her diploma and betraying the sober, practical look of a teacher.[5] The studio portrait presents a one-dimensional story of an educated young woman. It does not tell of the strains of modernity, which both availed opportunities to Sephardic women and simultaneously imposed novel constraints upon them. Rachel's education liberated her from restrictions that had bound her mother's generation, releasing her, also, from the rabbis who had challenged her father. Nevertheless, the eighteen-year-old was now under a new, equally patriarchal authority: the Alliance, and with it, the ideals of the Western European Jewish bourgeoisie.[6] Despite the distance Sa'adi's daughter would

travel, her path was determined by her superiors, and she often chafed at this. Her dilemma was the need to struggle with the force that purported to free her.

Rachel a-Levi Carmona, 1880

Rachel's path took her to settings her father couldn't have imagined. Her first post was at a girls' school in Ortaköy, a poor Jewish neighborhood of Istanbul. Rachel's colleague Gabriel Arié, director of the neighboring Alliance boys' school, described Rachel as "very pleasant." The couple became close, yet Arié, by his own admission, was too young for marriage. He also found Rachel's ways "a bit too free." Nevertheless (or, perhaps, all the more) Arié considered the two years he spent in Ortaköy with Rachel as among the happiest of his life.[7] The very idea of premarital socializing between women and men was new to Rachel's generation. Sa'adi, by contrast, met his wife for the first time upon the marital altar, her face red and swollen from prenuptial waxing.[8]

Rachel's friendship with Arié sheds light on her independent spirit. Still,

much of her life followed a script set by her family and the Alliance. Before assuming her second post, Rachel married Elie Carmona, another graduate of the École Normale Israélite Orientale, a child of Istanbul who was a few years Rachel's senior. The pair had much in common, in addition to their educational background. Both came from publishing and writing families, with the Carmonas building a small empire of newspapers in Istanbul, much as the a-Levis did in Salonica.[9] With Rachel and Elie's union, a significant publishing alliance between the families emerged. Through marriage, Rachel found a way to honor the house of the a-Levis and the Alliance at the same time.

Over the decades that followed, Rachel and Elie would travel across the Levant in the employ of the Alliance, working as a teacher and school director (in Elie's case) and as a teacher (in Rachel's), in Tétouan (in Morocco); in Beirut, Damascus, and Jerusalem (in Ottoman Syria); in Shumen, Ruschuk, Plovdiv, and Tatar-Pazarjik (in Ottoman Bulgaria); in Izmir (in Ottoman Anatolia); and in Serres, Kavála, and Yanya (Ioannina) (in Ottoman Macedonia). In their first three years of marriage, they moved at least three times.

The couple's first joint appointment placed them in the Ottoman port of Ruschuk. This was the city of Elias Canetti, future winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature, whose family was among the founders of Ruschuk's Jewish community. Canetti offers this description of the town: "Ruschuk, on the lower Danube, where I came into the world, was a marvelous city for a child, and if I say that Ruschuk is in Bulgaria, then I am giving an inadequate picture of it. For people of the most varied backgrounds lived there, on any one day you could hear seven or eight languages."[10] The cultural variety Canetti describes did not ease Rachel's arrival. Brought to Ruschuk to assume a position in the Alliance girls' school, Rachel found the school shuttered and Jewish families hesitant to enroll their daughters. Even as enrollment climbed (there were one hundred twenty girls studying in the Alliance school two years after Rachel's arrival), the majority of families proved unable to pay their fees and the majority of students were too young to study. Rachel persevered. She proposed that some of her pupils enter Bulgarian public school, so that they could learn the Bulgarian language and occupational skills. At the same time, Rachel wed her mother's ability with sewing to her own professional expertise, opening a vocational class in dressmaking for girls. The class turned a profit, but failed to find favor with parents. Alliance parents, it seems, hoped education would produce loftier options for their daughters. To her employers in Paris, Rachel complained that she was faced daily with threats and insults, and that all she was granted in return for her labor was disdain and ingratitude. Strained finances compounded the problem: both she and Elie received low and intermittent

wages.[11]

By the early 1880s, Rachel had given birth to a daughter. Whether due to the stress of her employment or undernourishment, she found herself unable to produce the requisite milk to nurse. Beside herself, Rachel demanded to be relocated. "I am a mother," she wrote her employers, "and though privation has become a habit for me, I do not want my infant to suffer."[12] When the Alliance acquiesced, moving the Carmonas to Tatar-Pazarjik (a backwater compared to the thriving Danube port of Ruschuk), Rachel called it a "miserable little place." The post extended to three difficult years, the time marked by Rachel with a flow of increasingly distraught letters. Typhoid racked the town, and the whole family became sick in turn. Matters reached a crisis point when Elie was accused of attempting to rape the daughter-in-law of the rabbi, a young woman who had become close to Rachel. Rachel declared the situation "totally insupportable."[13] The Carmonas had lost their professional credibility; their marriage, too, must have suffered. Elie and Rachel were relocated to the small Bulgarian town of Shumla. Rachel may have been relieved to distance herself from Tatar-Pazarjik. Still, she fretted that in Shumla, she was sure to perish from boredom alone.[14]

At least in southeastern Europe, Rachel's students were Judeo-Spanish speakers, and of a cultural milieu reasonably similar to her own. At her next post, in Morocco, Rachel shared no language with the bulk of her Arabic-speaking pupils, though she could communicate with some in Haketia, the particular form of Judeo-Spanish preserved in northern Morocco. Further, the family's arrival in December 1900 coincided with a famine and the outbreak of a civil war. In the spring of 1903, as violence raged in Tétouan, Morocco, Elie wrote his superiors a series of despairing letters and telegrams. Schools were deserted as families fled the city for the relative peace of the countryside. Tétouan's European population was being evacuated, panic was everywhere, violence raged just outside the Carmonas' Alliance residence. Ignoring the Alliance's rigid directive that they stay and render themselves useful to the Jewish poor of Tétouan, Elie, Rachel, and their young daughter fled to the port, only to be denied the chance to leave. "Our existence has become intolerable," wrote Elie.[15]

No sooner had tensions subsided in Tétouan than the Alliance central office fielded a letter of complaint against the Carmonas. The disgruntled writer claimed that the pair were eating non-kosher meat in their home and beating their students in school. Rachel, the letter confided, had applied pepper oil to the mouths of those who misbehaved.[16] The letter reeked of paranoia and its lurid accusations undermined its own credibility. Still, the Alliance could ill afford a whiff of scandal, and Rachel, at least, sensed that her employers were not on her side. Within the year, the Carmonas were

reassigned to Yanya (Ioannina), in Ottoman Macedonia, and, some years later, to Beirut, where Rachel facilitated a visit of the chief rabbi of the Ottoman Empire.[17]

Trials were a through line of Rachel's many decades with the Alliance. When the Carmonas arrived in Damascus with their young children in 1891, it was in the midst of a cholera epidemic like the one that had killed Rachel's half brothers some decades earlier. Decades later, they were in the Ottoman town of Kavala through the violent Bulgarian occupation that attended the Balkan Wars.[18] Rachel and Elie were trapped in conflict-ridden Tétouan when Rachel would have received the news that her father, Sa'adi, had died. Given the distance and slow pace of communications, she must have missed his burial in Salonica and the shiva that followed. Across their varied posts, Rachel and her husband lived a spare existence, particularly after Elie's father's death left him to serve as father to his seven younger siblings.[19] Rachel and Elie survived from paycheck to paycheck—and at times even this was not enough. When Elie temporarily lost his job with the Alliance, the meager monthly stipend the organization paid Rachel did not cover the couple's rent. When Elie died in 1932, he apologized to Rachel for abandoning her without resources. "At least I leave you with two children," he wrote in a final letter, "and [our son-in-law] Ralph is so good and so solicitous that he will take care of you."

At the time Rachel retired, she lamented that she had never received the full respect of her superiors in Paris. Even when the secretary of the Alliance Israélite Universelle attempted to soften his tone, his words to Rachel were sharp, as in this crudely edited letter of 1906: "~~Whether out of negligence or inceptitude~~/For one reason or another, the schools where you practiced have almost always collapsed under your direction and never progressed."[20] The secretary's choice not to retype the handwritten missive was unkind. The organization preferred to pin its failures on individual teachers rather than concede the burden it placed upon them. Though Rachel did eventually receive a medal of recognition from the Alliance, she found this recognition slight, given her lifetime of service.[21]

Yet Rachel was treasured by her family for some of the very same reasons she seemed to irk her employers. She was direct to a fault, her criticisms unvarnished. In family letters, Rachel could skillfully encapsulate a character in a line or two, with a preference for the unflattering. "Suzanne is louche," "Besalel is always suffering." Rachel's supervisors bristled at her tone: her professional letters are dotted with the marginal comments of her superiors noting occasional pique at her suggestions, complaints, and demands. But family members admired Rachel's straightforward nature. Rachel's brother Shemuel Sa'adi described his and his siblings' affection for her as exceptionally deep, conveying that he viewed her as a maternal figure.

Her sister-in-law Renée spoke of her as a "true mother."[22] Rachel's nephew Leon celebrated her vibrant spirit. Rachel's daughter Carola was extremely close to her mother, faithfully nursing her through various bouts of illness. In his will, Rachel's husband, Elie, addressed her as "My much loved wife." Rachel was distinguished by her plainspokenness and candor. She was inclined to articulate what no one else could perceive, or was willing to say.

SHEMUEL SA'ADI / SAM

Rachel and Fortunée's brother Shemuel Sa'adi (1870–1959) was the Zelig of the a-Levi family, capable of adjusting to a staggering array of historical events in the course of his long life. Fittingly, he was the first a-Levi to modify the prefix of his father, adopting the surname Lévy in place of the more traditional formulation, and later going by Sam in place of his given first names. Though he altered the family name, Shemuel clearly inherited his father's hot blood. Fearless, politically passionate, frequently outraged by perceived slights, the self-proclaimed hero of all his own stories, Shemuel could ruffle feathers. But his relentlessness was also a force in the life of the family.

His education began conservatively, in a Jewish middle school where he studied the Bible and Jewish liturgy. This was followed by a six-year stint at Salonica's Alliance school, where Shemuel delved into the study of French, Italian, Greek, Turkish, and Hebrew. Shemuel was invited by the Alliance to continue his education in Paris. This was an honor for boys as well as for girls and Shemuel's path could have followed that of his sister Rachel, who spent so many decades working for the institution. Family finances were tight, however, and Sa'adi strove to keep his sons in the family business. With the help of his elder brother David, Shemuel obtained entry as a boarder in the newly opened Ottoman imperial lycée of Salonica.

This was an usual choice for a Jew of his generation. Fluency in Ottoman Turkish (let alone in the Ottoman literary canon) was rare among Jews at this time. At the Lycée, Shemuel was one of five Jewish students out of a total of three hundred. And none of the Jewish students boarded at the lycée, as opposed to the Muslim students, who did live there.[1] Shemuel was given the Ottoman Turkish nickname Kemal, and "learned classical Turkish literature better than my Muslim peers," so much so that he was mistaken for a Muslim Turk by a delegate of the minister of education.[2] Had his temperament been more mellow, Shemuel would surely have graduated with high honors. But disagreements with classmates and teachers interrupted his studies, and Shemuel was forced to finish his education elsewhere.

Upon graduation from high school, Shemuel balanced work for the family

firm with a job at the state-financed Anatolian Railway Company, a position he bitterly disliked. He would have dressed for work each day like a family friend, who wore "a starched collar, a melon hat, peg-leg trousers and a fitted jacket buttoned up to the neck, as was the fashion."[3] Certainly his clothing would have been quite unlike that of his more traditional father—or, for that matter, his brother David, whose service to the empire required a fez. At the Railroad Office, Shemuel's company sought to link Salonica to other regional centers, including Edirne, Istanbul, and Sofia—but his eyes were on Paris, a city he visited for the first time in 1893.

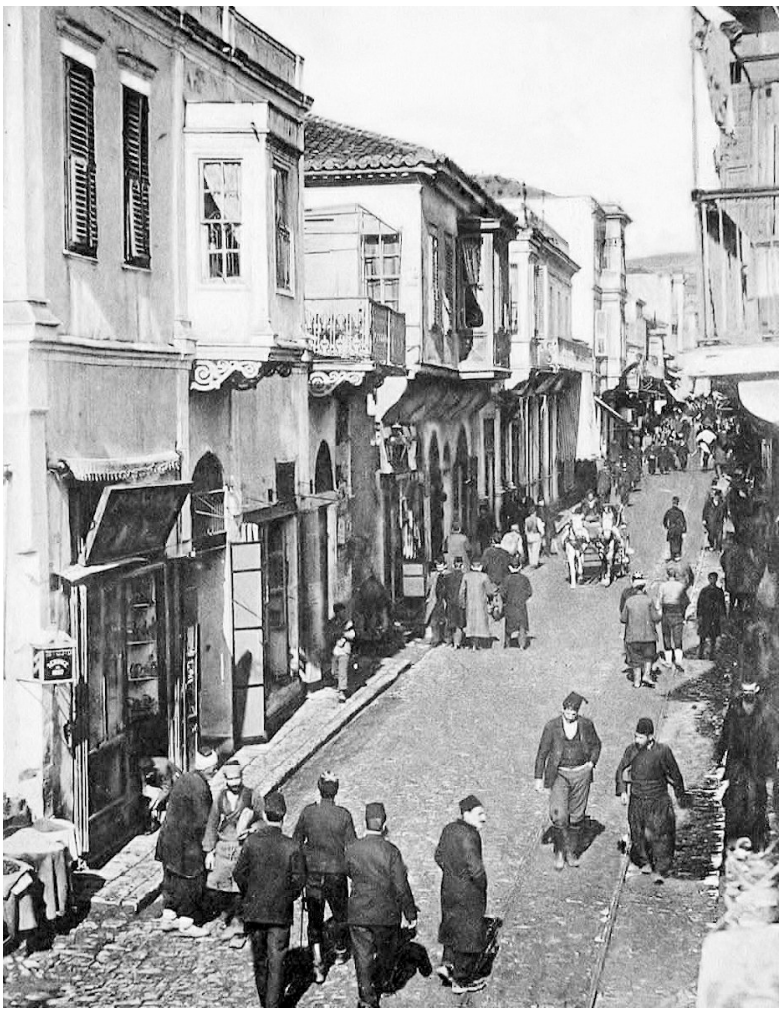
Shemuel's second visit coincided with one of the most important episodes of turn-of-the-century European Jewish history, the Dreyfus Affair. The cause célèbre arose after Captain Alfred Dreyfus, a young Alsatian officer of Jewish descent, was falsely accused in 1894 of passing secrets to the German Embassy in Paris. At the time of Shemuel's arrival, Dreyfus had been tried and convicted and was languishing in prison on a sweltering island in French Guiana. France roiled in his absence, dividing in two over the question of his guilt or innocence. Dreyfus supporters argued the captain had been framed, while his critics fanned the flames of anti-Semitism. Shemuel, who was studying law at the Sorbonne, lived with a friend in a cheap storeroom, subsisting on crusts of bread and *pommes frites*.

"We entered the fray head-on, especially Shemuel," remembered his roommate. "He couldn't sleep at night if he hadn't come to blows that day with some anti-Dreyfusard. There were many times when we returned to our twelve-francs-a-month storeroom with blackened eyes, bloody noses, and impressive bumps on our foreheads."[4] Shemuel left Paris with a renewed passion for French Republicanism, and an embrace of that which his Alliance teachers (and father) held dear: the redemptive value of the liberal ideal, the practical advantage of a French education, the sense that Jews should support other Jews even as they aspired to be model citizens of modern nations.

Throughout the Paris period, Shemuel continued his collaboration with his father and brothers, though his diary suggests that distance and experience left him judgmental of his brothers' intellect and the informal style of Ladino journalism.[5] But on the occasion of his father's retirement in 1898, Sam allowed himself to be pulled home (he had not been back for two years at this point) to take a more active role in the family business. Once more in Salonica, he assumed editorial direction of the family's flagging Ladino-language newspaper *La Epoka* and, a few months later, the French-language *Le Journal de Salonique*. On the masthead of *La Epoka*, he introduced himself as Sam Lévy—the name by which he would be known for the rest of his life.

The Salonica to which Sam returned was increasingly prosperous and

modern. The stores were well stocked, the quay crowded with pedestrians. Carriages rolled by, the streetcar's call was loud and frequent. Outdoor tables were crowded at the many cafés where one could order a raki, nibble meze, debate politics—and riffle through a well-thumbed French- or Ladino-language newspaper for news of the world.[6]



Sabri Pasha Street, 1910

Ladino-language journalism was a relatively young institution at the turn of the century, and Sa'adi and his sons were among its pioneers. The Ladino- and French-language newspapers they edited were improvisational in style. Until the early twentieth century, editors frequently composed letters to the editor under pseudonyms. Contributions by "correspondents" from distant cities and countries were often written by the editors themselves. Exclamation points abounded. Yet the notion that ordinary readers could acquire the day's news in a language they understood was still radical. And newspapers provided more than news. Full of advertisements for the latest fashions, scientific and health exposés, serialized fiction translated from numerous world languages—newspapers were, then as now, an education.[7]

Ladino and French newspapers were, additionally, among the most important places for Ottoman Jews to debate the welter of political considerations that confronted them at the turn of the century. In the pages of *La Epoka* and *Le Journal de Salonique*, as in the pages of rival newspapers, editors and letters to the editors defended and decried a staggering number of political alternatives, particularly after the lifting of censorship that followed the Young Turk revolution of 1908. Would Jews' security and future be best served by socialism, Zionism, the bourgeois and reform-minded goals of the Alliance Israélite Universelle, or regional nationalism of one form or another? Ought they to cast their lot in with Ottomanism and affiliate with their multireligious empire?

Nowhere did these debates rage as boisterously as in Salonica, where, under Sam's watch, *Le Journal de Salonique* and *La Epoka* emerged as voices of progress. The newspapers' broad agendas embraced the idea that Ottoman Jews ought to modernize themselves and their culture and emulate Western educational norms, the French language, and a secular worldview—all the while remaining Ottomanists, faithful citizens of their multiethnic empire. Sam's temporary penchant for socialism left its fingerprints on the family newspapers, too. His affiliation with the Worker's Federation of Salonica and his labor organizing for Salonica's enormous tobacco industry translated into a flurry of articles on the needs and rights of the working class. Sam would soon abandon this position, defending employers' rights and lambasting the Federation.[8]

Brief as Sam's socialist period was, it led him to a position he would maintain all his life—his defense of Ladino, the language of Salonica's Jewish masses. In the Ottoman Balkans, as in Eastern Europe and the United States, Jewish socialists learned to appreciate the power of the Jewish mother tongue for organizing and activism.[9] Sam's respect for the Ladino language rendered him unique among Ladino editors of the day, as the Judeo-Spanish language was an object of ridicule for many other Ottoman Jewish newspapers. In the pages of *La Epoka*, by contrast, the Sephardic language was celebrated and championed as a modern language on par with any other.

Sam's most effective means of communication was the editorial. He always had a point to make, and his editorials, like his letters, are emphatic if repetitive and unruly. He once described himself as having "an impulsive and argumentative character," which strikes me as a just self-assessment.[10] I imagine him writing feverishly in a bar or café, his pages stained with traces of coffee, his fingers spotted with ink.

Publishing in the Ottoman Empire was often a family affair, and the Levys (like other publishing families) were susceptible to the business's strains. Income from paying subscribers always lagged behind what was

needed to keep a newspaper afloat. And the Ottoman censor's hand was always felt, even if a bit more lightly in the world of Ladino letters than in Ottoman Turkish, French, or Greek. Nevertheless, in 1905, two years after the death of his father and shortly before the birth of his daughter, Sam temporarily relocated his young family to the small Austro-Hungarian town of Zemun (Semlin, now a suburb of Belgrade), in order to evade the censor's reach.[11] There Sam founded two new newspapers, the Ladino-language *El Luzero* and the French-language *Le Rayon*, both intended primarily for readers in Salonica.

Sam Lévy, from* El djiro del mundo kon sinko metalikes *(Salonica, 1905)

At the time of his move to Zemun, Sam was newly married to his niece Anna Barouch, daughter of his father's sister Sol. Marriage among close relations was common at the time for Sephardic Jews. Sam, seventeen years older than his wife, had been called upon to serve as Anna's escort on various trips across Europe (some of which included extended stays in foreign capitals) when she was still a teenager. Anna's mobility is a sign that her parents were broad-minded and reasonably well-off. Anna's own mother had "traveled the world, from Istanbul to Alexandria, and from Cairo to Jerusalem." Sam and Anna's daughter Suzanne later remembered her grandmother as a magnetic raconteur who favored Stendhal's *The Red and the Black*, half singing, half telling the story of love and betrayal over the course of many nights in order to make her way to the end.[12] Anna, one can infer, was every bit her husband's equal.

Though Sam had moved to Zemun to avoid the Ottoman censor, he

would find the Austrian one still more meddlesome. His new newspapers were shut down soon after they opened, and this propelled Sam, Anna, and their first and only child back home to Salonica just months after they had left. This meant they were in the city to celebrate the Young Turk revolution of 1908, with whose reformist leaders, the Committee of Union and Progress, Sam allied himself. Once it had assumed power, the Committee of Union and Progress reinstated the thwarted Ottoman constitution of 1876 and legislated new freedoms for Ottoman citizens, including a lifting of censorship. Celebrants flooded Salonica's streets after the pronouncement, with Jews, Armenians, and Greek Orthodox citizens all parading in turn. Sam's brother-in-law Ascher Salem was among them, speaking before the chamber of commerce and the multiethnic Club Commercial. *Le Journal de Salonique*, which Salem served as a commercial editor, declared his speech "superb," without offering further details.[13]

Using his newspapers as a platform, Sam expressed his patriotism for the Ottoman state. The empire's new leadership, Sam believed, would benefit Jews and other minorities. "There are no more Bulgarians, Greeks, Serbs, Romanians, Jews, Muslims," ran one of his editorials, repurposing the words of Committee of Union and Progress leader Ismail Enver Pasha: "We are all equal, and can boast of being Ottomans!"[14] Sam's fervor for the Ottoman state drove his opposition to Zionism, a movement that had little support among Ottoman Jews prior to 1908, but that gained popularity after the lifting of censorship laws. Jewish nationalism, in Sam's view, ran counter to Ottoman patriotism, while Zionists' interest in Jewish settlement in Ottoman Palestine directly threatened the empire's sovereignty. "I am an anti-Zionist," Sam declared in *La Epoka* in 1908. "I was always one under the previous regime and there is even more reason for this now."[15]

Like every patriot, Sam loved a parade. In 1911, Sultan Mehmed V visited Salonica as part of a summer tour of Ottoman Macedonia. The occasion was an opportunity for various political factions of Jewish Salonica to compete for the attentions of the ruler, as well as everyday Salonicans. When Sultan Mehmed arrived in the port, he was met by rows of local dignitaries. Chief Rabbi Jacob Meir was present, as was Sam's brother David "Daout Effendi," now an Ottoman representative and president of the Grand Cercle Israélite, an organization of prominent Jewish merchants.[16] Upon leaving the port, the sultan was led on horseback through a series of decorative arches erected specifically for the occasion.[17]

The pageantry was splendid, and who better to memorialize it than the city's most tireless editor, Sam Lévy. Over the twenty-four hours of the sultan's stay, Sam prepared on behalf of *Le Journal de Salonique* a lavish commemorative album of the sultan's visit illustrated with photographs of the celebratory arches erected by the citizens of Salonica. The morning after

the sultan's tour, Sam presented the album to Sultan Mehmed V. The gesture sprang from Sam's own Ottomanist sentiments—and paid tribute to his father, who, half a century earlier, composed Hebrew and Ladino songs in honor of Sultan Abdul Medjid's visit to Salonica.[18] The sultan, for his part, awarded a pair of diamond cuff links to Sam's brother Daout Effendi, a partner in the newspaper that produced the album, and an Ottoman official. No one could have imagined that in less than three years Salonica would be lost to the Ottomans, and that in less than two decades, Jews would cease to be the dominant thread in the city's fabric.

Soon after the sultan departed Salonica, Sam, too, took leave of the city. By the end of 1911, Sam, Anna, and Suzanne were living in Belgrade because, according to one account, Sam's incendiary writing had earned him enemies at home. Prior to his departure from Salonica, Sam had folded both *La Epoka* and *Le Journal de Salonique*, which his father, Sa'adi, had created decades earlier, and which Sam had edited since 1898. A new newspaper, *El Liberal*, was created in the void, its masthead announcing that it was the result of the editorial collaboration of the "*ijos de Sa'adi Levi*" (sons of Sa'adi Levi), the Ladino phrasing echoing the Hebrew (sons of Besalel) used by Sa'adi's father's press a century and a half earlier.[19] This new newspaper would run for a decade—yet, despite its success, with the closure of the family's original papers, a chapter in the history of Jewish Salonica closed, as did a chapter in the history of the Levy family. In the Kingdom of Serbia, Sam wove his political views into an elegy called *The Decline of the Crescent.* He dedicated the volume to Sa'adi.

DAVID / DAOUT EFFENDI

A skilled linguist and a gifted mathematician, David (1863–1943) was, from a young age, charged with creating and printing calendars on his father's press. This task demanded the complex synthesis of lunar and solar, as well as Jewish, Muslim, Greek Orthodox, and Roman, time. It required one to be punctilious, numerate, and highly organized—skills that would serve David well once he left the family business to become a student of law, a high-ranking official in the Ottoman bureaucracy, and, in time, interwar head of Salonica's Jewish Community.

Like his siblings Rachel and Shemuel, David was invited to enroll in the teaching college of the Alliance Israélite Universelle in Paris upon his graduation from high school. But Sa'adi was unwilling to sacrifice his able junior partner, and compelled David to dedicate himself to the family business. Among his tasks, at fifteen years of age, was to translate into Ladino Italian, French, Greek, and Hebrew writings for publication in *La Epoka*. Working alongside his brothers Besalel and Shemuel, and in collaboration with his brother Hayyim, a bookseller who brought a-Levi products to a wider market, David helped Sa'adi shape an autonomous family business. Members of the a-Levi family controlled all aspects of production, from the creation of movable type to the writing of copy to printing and sales.

David a-Levi (Daout Effendi), 1880

David, however, had grander ambitions. In 1881, at eighteen years of age, he began to study law with two other young Jewish intellectuals. Scarcely had he begun his legal studies when his mentor, a distinguished jurist, recommended him as director of the Ottoman Passport Office. He assumed the post in 1882 under his new name, Daout Effendi, Daout being a Turkified version of his given name, David, and Effendi being an Ottoman honorific for a distinguished, well-educated man. David would be known by this august title for the rest of his life.

Daout Effendi's post with the Ottoman administration, like his brother Sam's first desk job, carried considerable symbolic significance. Working for the Anatolian Railway Company, Sam helped link Salonica to the wider region—and the world. In his professional capacity, Daout Effendi oversaw the legal transformation of the Ottoman population as Sultan Abdülhamid II reimagined the empire as a modern state. Salonica, like the empire as a whole, was rapidly changing, to the roar of trains and the rustling of legal documents.

In the nineteenth century, few residents of the Ottoman Empire—whether Jewish, Christian, or Muslim—carried legal papers of any kind. Birth certificates were rare and, when they existed, were acquired by women and men only when absolutely necessary, such as in the case of foreign travel. Most Jewish women and men were more inclined to register newborns with the Jewish Community than with the state—however, many, including Daout Effendi's father, Sa'adi, had no record of their children's births whatsoever. Those Jews who did travel abroad often carried a single legal document—a

temporary travel or residency permit. It was not unusual for a man of Daout Effendi's generation to carry, fold, and unfold a sheet like this for years, or an entire lifetime.[1]

Yet over the course of the nineteenth century, the Ottoman bureaucracy, like those of the European states, was increasingly interested in identifying who belonged and who did not—who was officially Ottoman, and who was a visitor, foreign resident, migrant, or refugee. Meanwhile, individuals like Daout Effendi and his children were coming to appreciate that legal papers—and especially the right kind of legal papers—were a crucial asset. They facilitated travel and trade, dictated whether a son was eligible for military service, and, more abstractly, came to seem like a form of insurance required by the modern world. "You must know that the question of a passport is very serious. With what passport are you traveling? What is your nationality?" Daout Effendi addressed these questions to his daughter-in-law Estherina in the frantic lead-up to the Second World War. Though the circumstances of their exchange were unique, Daout Effendi's sentiments were honed through service to the empire. He knew firsthand that life-changing opportunity could hinge on the possession of a passport. For years, he was the Ottoman official empowered to grant or deny the possession of this document to others.

As head of a passport office and personal secretary to the provincial governor, Daout Effendi was no ordinary bureaucrat. He was required to maintain contact with his superiors in Istanbul and to meet frequently with the many consular officials in Salonica. He needed to constantly test, and anticipate, the prevailing political winds. He possessed the right to judge the legal identity of women, men, and children. When Theodor Herzl wanted an audience with the Ottoman sultan to discuss the future of Ottoman Palestine, it was on Daout Effendi's door that he knocked.

Jews of more modest stature also valued Daout Effendi's wisdom and power. When a close friend of his siblings wished to attend Istanbul University at age sixteen, he knew how to circumvent the university's required age of twenty. In the young man's telling: "That's what we had Daout for." A stickler for rules, Daout Effendi at first refused the would-be student's request. But because the legal maneuver would facilitate his education, Daout Effendi relented. "So when I went to him for a travel permit, without looking at my face and acting like he didn't know me, [Daout Effendi] asked me: 'How old are you?' 'Nineteen going on twenty,' I answered as advised. 'Good.' And so Daout wrote '20 years of age' in his beautiful script on the *tezkere* [Ottoman travel papers]."[2]

In whatever language Daout Effendi wrote, he wrote elegantly. When he signed his name on official documents, in French, he added an elongated flourish beneath: a paraph (perhaps intended to thwart forgery) that could

command as many as five looping curves.[3]

Fittingly, given his position, Daout Effendi tended toward greater political circumspection than his brother Sam. While Sam trumpeted the Young Turk revolution and flirted with socialism, Daout Effendi was hopeful that a robust Jewish working class, if properly integrated into the larger Jewish community, would be able to compete with a growing body of Greek Christian competitors. He was, additionally, among a small group of powerful Jewish leaders who, in response to the revolution, created a mutual aid society that offered self-help to Salonica's Jewish working poor.[4] The Young Turk revolution—and with it the rise of mass politics—had brought the brothers' divergent personalities into sharp relief. Sam, impulsive, one might even say a firebrand, while Daout Effendi was measured and in full command of himself at all times. Happily, each found a professional niche to match his nature.

In 1910, Daout Effendi assumed a new position as the Jewish Community of Salonica's director of communal real estate. An official body created by the Ottoman state in 1870 and granted a degree of legal, social, and economic authority, the Jewish Community governed all aspects of Jewish religious and secular life, managing the dispersal of charity, the care of orphans, widows, and the poor, and the control of extensive property. It collected taxes, oversaw the designation of *kashrut*, the accordance with Jewish dietary laws, and employed the chief rabbi.[5]

Daout Effendi's new position was not necessarily a step up for an Ottoman bureaucrat, but it was nonetheless imposing. In his new post, Daout Effendi oversaw a formidable economic portfolio—a measure of the power and influence of the Jewish Community of Salonica, and of the Levy family within it. It is no surprise that 1910 also brought Daout Effendi's election to the council of the Grand Cercle Israélite, a prestigious association of Salonica's Jewish upper class.[6] Though the Levys were not wealthy, Daout Effendi acquired a level of recognition that far exceeded what previous generations of the family had attained. Soon he would become the most influential official of the Jewish Community aside from the chief rabbi. Beginning in 1910, Daout Effendi's private life and the life of Salonica's Jewish Community bled into one another, so much so that many of his personal letters were written on the Community's bilingual French-and-Ladino-language letterhead.

Daout Effendi was by this point married to Vida and father to three children, Eleanor, Emmanuel, and Leon, now in their early twenties. The family must have been very proud when Daout Effendi stood, among all the dignitaries of Salonica, to welcome the Ottoman sultan Mehmed V to their city: how thrilled to hold in their hands the diamond cuff links with which the sultan honored their husband and father. In the face of so much pomp, it

was unthinkable that war would soon fray the ties that bound the family and the city to the empire.

Daout Effendi had only been in his new position with the Jewish Community for two years when the First Balkan War (1912–1913) filled the streets of Salonica with Jewish, Christian, and Muslim refugees, as well as tens of thousands of Turkish, Bulgarian, and Greek soldiers. The conflict pitted the Balkan League—Greece, Bulgaria, Montenegro, and Serbia—against the Ottoman Empire, with each of the Balkan states intent on wresting territory from the Ottomans and claiming control over ethnic subjects they felt belonged within their national boundaries. For Salonica's residents, the wars ground daily life to a halt. The port was obstructed, shops were forced to close, traffic ceased, and trains stopped running.[7] The first of the Balkan Wars resulted in the Ottomans' loss of the bulk of their European holdings, including the city of Salonica—territory the empire had held for centuries. In June 1913, the Second Balkan War, which lasted only a month, dramatically altered the fate of Salonica. The once Jewish city came under Greek control.[8]

The Balkan Wars brought changes on the grandest and also the most intimate scales. The new Greek administration was eager to banish all evidence of Ottoman society and to efface the city's Jewish and Muslim characteristics. Suddenly, Greek signs replaced those in other languages and Greek flags outnumbered other nations'. Streets were renamed to reflect the city's Hellenistic past. Sabri Pacha Street, where Daout Effendi's brother-in-law Ascher Salem's store was located, now honored Eleftherios Venizelos, the prime minister who negotiated Greece's entry into the Balkan League and secured its triumphal expansion in the Balkan Wars. Of course, Salonica's Ottoman sensibility did not disappear overnight—minarets, mosques, and multilingual street signs remained in place until the 1920s, if not later—but a process of Hellenization had begun that would never be reversed.

Daout Effendi and the Levy family were longtime Ottoman patriots who experienced the end of Ottoman rule as a calamity—at least initially. In this, they were not alone. Many young Jewish men and women in Salonica were fearful about the onset of Greek rule. Much of their anxiety sprang from the fact that, relative to the Ottoman Empire, Greece, a Christian Orthodox nation, would give preference to the Greek Christian mercantile rivals of the Jews.[9]

For centuries Salonica had been the hub of a large trading network radiating outward from the city in all directions—to Europe, to the regional countryside and the Ottoman interior, to the Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire and the wider Middle East. Now, as Jewish businessmen were acutely aware, Salonica (renamed Thessaloniki only in 1937) was to become

the second city—next to Athens—of a small country. The city remade by the Balkan Wars was, in the eyes of many Jews, doomed to financial strangulation by Orthodox Christian and Greek rule. "The prosperity of Jewish Salonicans is greatly compromised," wrote one Jewish intellectual in the course of the conflict.[10] And who would have understood the stakes better than Daout Effendi, who had the finances of the entire Jewish Community at his fingertips?

As their empire and economy frayed, the Levys, like all the city's Jews, were destined to become nationals. What kind of nationals they became was a matter of choice. They could accept the state that formed around them; they could emigrate; or they could seek the protection of a foreign power.

Daout Effendi pursued the first course. With his wife and daughter, he remained in Salonica, helping the city's Jews meet the new demands of community and state. The job wasn't easy. Under Greek rule, the official Jewish Community of Salonica continued to function like an Ottoman *millet* (a non-Muslim, self-governing religious community with a degree of autonomy), but it now existed within a modern nation-state that ostensibly elevated the rights of citizens over those of any given religious group. Inevitably, there were points of friction, as when the state introduced the Sunday-closing law of 1924, which ended the long-standing custom by which all of Salonica rested on the Jewish Sabbath.[11]

While Daout Effendi, his wife, and daughter remained in Salonica, his sons, Leon and Emmanuel, chose departure. Both young men left for France, with Leon subsequently following his brother-in-law to Brazil. In moving abroad, Daout Effendi's sons were a bellwether of change for the community as a whole. Jewish emigration from Salonica began to increase with the Balkan Wars and would continue to mount with the outbreak of the First World War, and in the aftermath of a terrible fire that swept through the city in 1917. During this relatively brief five-year period, many Jewish citizens left. In addition to Daout Effendi's sons, three of his siblings were among the émigrés: Sam, Fortunée, and Besalel, each with their own families.[12] Rachel and Elie Carmona were the rare few to undertake a brief reverse migration, returning to Salonica temporarily in 1914, after their thirty years' service to the Alliance Israélite Universelle.[13]

While some Levys remained in Salonica and others left, a third group pursued the legal protection of a foreign power. Hundreds of Jewish families in Salonica embraced this option, among them Daout Effendi's son Leon, Leon's new bride, Estherina, and Daout Effendi's nephew Ino (the youngest son of Besalel). These Levys became citizens of nations they had never lived in, without ever leaving their homes. A foreign passport cost little yet enabled travel, the evasion of military service, the shirking of taxes, and, in general, insulation from the Greek authorities. Then, as now, the right

foreign passport also seemed a hedge against an uncertain future.[14] Leon, Estherina, and Ino would use their new documents to travel and emigrate, renewing their passports in consulates across Europe and as far away as Rio de Janeiro. In time, this documentation would spare Ino deportation from occupied Paris at the hands of the Nazis and the French police.

CONSULAT de PORTUGAL
à SALONIQUE.

PASSEPORT.

SIGNALEMENT.

AGE 26 ans
TAILLE Im 80 cm.
CHEVEUX chataine
YEUX "
VISAGE regulier
NEZ "
BOUCHE "
BARBE nulle
SIGNES PARTICULIERS:
Néant.
SIGNATURE et PHOTOGRAPHIE DU PORTEUR:

Nous Consul de la Nation Portugaise à Salonique, faisons savoir à tous ceux qui verront le présent passeport, que le sujet portugais:
----------LEVY LEON----------
agé de 26 ans, né à Salonique, de profession Comptable, fils de DAOUT, dont signalement et signature en marge part de cette ville à destination de PARIS(FRANCE) voie d'ITALIE.-

Prions en conséquence toutes les autorités civiles et militaires auxquelles ce passeport sera présenté de laisser passer librement le porteur et de lui donner toute aide et protection en cas de besoin pour son voyage.-

Le présent passeport est personnel et valable pour un an.-

CONSULAT de PORTUGAL à SALONIQUE
le Quatre Octobre Mil Neuf Cent dix sept.-
Le Consul:

Vu pour l'authenticité de la signature et de la photographie ci-dessus.-

CONSULAT de PORTUGAL
à SALONIQUE.
N° 9

PASSEPORT.

SIGNALEMENT.

AGE 26 ans
TAILLE (MOYENNE) Im70
CHEVEUX chataine
YEUX "
VISAGE regulier
NEZ "
BOUCHE "
SIGNES PARTICULIERS
Néant
SIGNATURE ET PHOTOGRAPHIE DU PORTEUR:

Nous Consul de la Nation Portugaise à Salonique faisons savoir à tous ceux qui verront le présent passeport, que la citoyenne portugaise:
----------LEVY ESTHERINA----------
femme de LEON LEVY, agée de 26 ans, dont signalement et signature en marge part de cette ville à destination de PARIS(France) voie d'ITALIE.-

Prions en conséquence toutes les autorités civiles et militaires auxquelles ce passeport sera présenté de laisser passer librement le porteur et de lui donner toute aide et protection en cas de besoin pour son voyage.-

Le présent passeport est personnel et valable pour un an.-

CONSULAT de PORTUGAL à SALONIQUE.
le QUATRE Octobre Mil Neuf Cent Dix Sept.
Le CONSUL:

Vu pour l'authenticité de la signature et de la photographie apposées ci-dessus.-

Pour Neuf timbres en sus.

Travel papers issued to Leon and Estherina Levy by the Portuguese consul in Salonica, 1917

Between Jewish emigration and acquisition of foreign papers, the Levy family, like Salonica as a whole, was rapidly losing a vital population. As the Salonican Jewish intellectual Joseph Nehama put it, the city was being decapitated, and the Jewish community was being starved of its collective voice.[15] In the face of this dire challenge (and many more to come), Daout Effendi worked ceaselessly to keep Salonica's Jewish Community financially stable. This endeavor, combined with personal hardships, would demand a great deal of Sa'adi's gifted son.

FORTUNÉE

In 1899, Sa'adi's second daughter, Fortunée (1877–1936), was twenty-two years old, married, a mother, and firmly middle class. A photograph shows her in front of her house in Salonica, her husband, Ascher Jacob Salem, by her side. Three children, immaculately dressed, are posed with the emblems of middle-class leisure—a hoop to roll, barbells to lift, a tall tricycle to ride. Fortunée sits in an elegant rocking chair. Behind the group, face blurred, stands a domestic, posed as if to lend credence to the family's bourgeois existence.[1]

Fortunée's story must be told in the absence of her words, for if she wrote letters or a diary, none have been preserved. Her character assumes shape through various traces: the photographs and portraits for which she posed, the homes and gardens she maintained, the manner in which she raised her children, the routes she traveled, the memories of her descendants, the grave that would, in time, mark her death.

When she married Ascher Jacob Salem, son of a successful local merchant, Fortunée was only eighteen years old, a recent graduate of Salonica's Alliance school. The Salem family grew rapidly. Fortunée had six children over eleven years, five of them (Jacques, Esther, Karsa, Michael, and Adolphe) living to adulthood. One could easily mistake Fortunée's path for a traditional one: she wed young, married a Jewish merchant from Salonica, created a family. Yet like her sister Rachel, Fortunée embraced a distinctly modern lifestyle. She and her husband moved within a new circle of elite, forward-looking Salonicans, rejecting the traditions of their parents. For example, Fortunée and Ascher gave their children non-Jewish names, enrolled them in Christian schools, and left Salonica's historic Jewish neighborhood for a posh new suburb. *Le Journal de Salonique* noted the Salems' comings and goings in its column "Arrivées et départs [Arrivals and departures]." This was a family to watch.

Salem family at home, 1899

Fortunée's husband, Ascher, thrived as an importer-exporter. He partnered with his brothers David and Elie and traveled to Manchester, England, for weeks at a time to buy and sell goods, mostly textiles. At the time, Manchester was a great industrial city and, like Salonica, a center for textile manufacturing. For this, and because the city boasted England's second largest Sephardic community, the British port was a powerful magnet for Ottoman Jewish émigrés. Salonica afforded an entrepreneurial exporter access to partners in Vienna, Paris, or Alexandria, while Manchester unlocked trade with Britain—and the Atlantic world. So Manchester was home, by the early twentieth century, to a thriving Sephardic community, second only to London as a British center for Ottoman Jewish émigrés.

Ascher's brother Elie was the first Salem to move to northern England, establishing a branch of the family firm in Didsbury, just outside Manchester. Elie, it was said, knew "the taste of Salonicans by experience" and adeptly supplied his brothers in Salonica with "English articles … of the latest style, which the tailors and above all the elegant socialists tear from the shelves … fabrics for suits, overcoats, etc., of an elegance without compare."[2]

In addition to collaborating with his brothers, Ascher worked with both Jewish and Muslim merchants and firms in Salonica.[3] It was rare for a Jewish merchant of the time to partner with a Muslim, yet Ascher's relations with his non-Jewish business partners were close, so much so that he and Fortunée gave their second son the name Karsa. The choice broke with

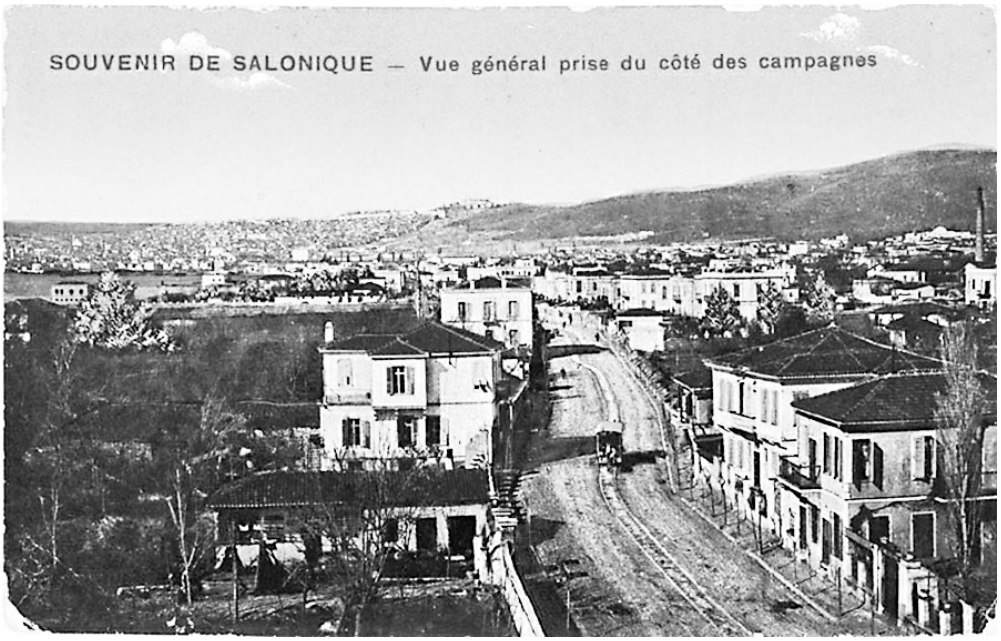
Sephardic naming practices, which dictated that a boy carry the name of a living relative—and a Jew. Charting their own course, Fortunée and Ascher named their son for Ascher's business partner Karsa Frères, an Ottoman Muslim family import operation with bases in Manchester, Izmir, Alexandria, and Beirut, and with which Salem & Co. had collaborated since at least the late nineteenth century. The young Karsa's particular namesake may have been Mustafa Karsa, who served as Ottoman consul general in Manchester, as well as representing the family firm in that city, and was hosted by the Salems in Salonica in 1907.[4] Fortunée and Ascher's homage holds a clue to the young couple's way of thinking about life: they honored loyalty in business—at least in this particular relationship—over fidelity to Jewish tradition. Their son Karsa would do the same in adulthood. The Salems wholeheartedly embraced secular, middle-class culture, at least as practiced in their Ottoman city.

As Ascher's business expanded, he negotiated a deal for Adolphe Nolté, a prominent photographer from Belgium. In appreciation, Nolté gave the Salems exquisite, hand-tinted portraits of Fortunée and Ascher. Today the portraits hang in the home of the couple's grandson Alan Salem in a posh village south of Manchester. The likenesses show Fortunée in an elaborately brocaded dress, her hair swept up, and pearls in her ears. Ascher sports a tuxedo jacket, his mustache waxed into a handlebar. They are elegant, refined, Salonica's quintessential bourgeoisie.

Fortunée and Ascher Salem, 1900

To clinch their lofty social status, the Salems moved to a house by the sea on the spacious outskirts of Salonica—the home, at 64 rue Reine Olga, that is shown in the 1899 family photograph. The various neighborhoods in Salonica's center were made up of narrow, meandering, partially paved streets, typically lined with open sewers. Fortunée and Ascher rejected them

in favor of a verdant neighborhood known as Las Kampanyas (the Countryside), located east of the city, near the bay.



Postcard featuring view of Salonica from La Kampanyas, 1900

Newly connected to Salonica by tram, the suburb was a magnet for the city's Europeanized bourgeoisie, whether Jewish, Christian, Muslim, or Dönme. Those who settled in Las Kampanyas invested in large estates with extensive gardens that would convey their bourgeois sensibilities. This is the neighborhood where the Jewish Allatini family, with whose patriarch Sa'adi had allied to create Salonica's first Alliance school years earlier, built their grand villa, surrounded by pine trees, at the end of the tramline. It was to this palatial estate that Sultan Abdülhamid would be exiled after the Young Turk revolution of 1908.[5]

The Salems' house was in the style of an Italian villa: stone, its modest balconies lined with iron fretwork, its windows framed with heavy wooden shutters. The family inhabited a flat on the building's lower level, while a sweeping, interior marble staircase led to a second flat upstairs. The garden, with its meandering path of crushed stone, was planted with lavender, rosebushes, pine and citrus trees, with a fig and mulberry tree adjacent to the front courtyard. "The front garden was very large with several trees," Fortunée's son Adolphe remembered, "and to my young eyes it was like a forest."[6] Behind the house, a hill sloped down to the Gulf of Salonica, bordered by a low wall from which the children could fish. The garden was where the children could be found during the summer months. Family parties happened here, weather permitting, and sometimes culminated in an unusual party trick—Ascher throwing his son Michael into the water fully clothed, and the boy gleefully soaring through the air and into the gulf below.

The joyous, showy act captures something of the Salems' ease in their home life in Las Kampanyas.

The same bold impulses that drew Fortunée and Ascher to Las Kampanyas drew them to enroll their children in neighborhood Catholic schools in which French was the sole language of instruction. Here, the children knelt "on the form in front of our desk [as] we recited in chorus the Lord's prayer." Ladino remained the language of the home, however—a sign that modernity in Salonica and its environs was still expressed in a distinctly Jewish tongue.[7]

In 1912, Fortunée's eldest, Jacques, moved to Manchester to create a British base of operations for the family business, becoming the first of Sa'adi a-Levi's grandchildren to emigrate overseas. In Manchester, eighteen-year-old Jacques began working for another Salonican-born Jew, a shipping merchant, as well as for his father's brother Elie, with whom he collaborated in shipping goods to his father in Salonica for resale to a Mediterranean market.[8] That Jacques would have no head for business was as yet unknown.[9] The family, eager to reap the economic opportunities a move to Britain could bring, hoped to follow him to Manchester two years later.

Studio portrait of Esther and Jacques (back), Karsa, Michael, and Adolphe Salem (front), 1909

But the outbreak of World War I so soon after the conclusion of a violent regional conflict thwarted the Salems' plans for departure. The First World War racked Salonica, filling it with hundreds of thousands of Allied soldiers, riddling it with German bombardments, and shredding its economy for all but a few wartime profiteers, a member of the Levy family among them.[10] Fortunée's son later recalled that wartime food rations forced the normally prosperous Salem children to eat "some stodgy concoction" in place of bread. The children, picky rather than starving, made sport of haunting the perimeter of a hospital for Allied soldiers with whom they could swap cigarettes for bread.[11]

While Fortunée coped with the indignities of war at home, Jacques, the child who was meant to facilitate his family's move, faced a different sort of insult abroad. Jacques had left Salonica before it became Greek, and had entered Britain with an Ottoman passport. With the Ottoman Empire and

Britain at war, Jacques—along with thousands of Ottoman-born, German-born, and Austrian-born Jewish men—became, overnight, a foreign national of an enemy nation.[12] As a Jew from Salonica, Jacques was particularly vulnerable, for British authorities were aware that Salonica's Jews had resisted the transfer of their city from Ottoman to Greek rule during the Balkan Wars. This history led Anglo officials to conclude that Salonican Jewish émigrés in Britain were Ottoman loyalists who posed a high risk to the state: a threat higher, in their view, than that of British-dwelling Sephardic émigrés from other Ottoman hubs such as Istanbul or Izmir. Jacques's political leanings only confirmed the officials' fears. The eldest Salem child was ardent in his Ottoman nationalism, and was known for his impassioned speeches in support of the cause.[13] In 1915, the British authorities took Jacques from his newly adopted Manchester home and imprisoned him in Douglas Alien Detention Camp, an internment camp on the Isle of Man.[14]

In Douglas Camp, Jacques was probably housed within a Jewish camp. From here, he would have been allowed to receive and send mail (though not easily to his family in Salonica), join a makeshift minyan, request kosher food, and possibly even leave camp periodically for work. Still, it was said that "nobody gets anything at Douglas that he does not pay for, either in money or work."[15] Fortunée's brother Sam, the fiery editorialist who always responded to an insult with a protest, wrote British officials from Paris pleading for his nephew's release. Jacques, too, lobbied on his own behalf, marshaling testimonies in favor of his honorable character from the grand rabbi of Salonica Jacob Meir and chief rabbi of the Spanish and Portuguese Congregation in London Moses Gaster. But the British administration was unmoved. Jacques would remain at Douglas Camp for three and a half long years.[16]

Portrait of Esther, Asher, and Fortunée Salem, sent as a postcard to Jacques Salem while he was interned in an enemy aliens camp on Britain's Isle of Man, 1916

For Fortunée the First World War surely represented a dreadful limbo. Her city had been transformed into a military camp teeming with soldiers. Her son was imprisoned far from home, her dreams of emigration thwarted. Now, even as the war raged, another tragedy rocked the family, a horrific fire that engulfed their city. This third trauma solidified the Salems' desire to emigrate—but also compelled them to leave from a position of weakness rather than strength. This story of destruction, departure, and rebuilding is the next generation's to tell.

NATIONALS

Today, my dear son … has returned to the barracks to continue his military service. We hope that the time will pass quickly. It's been eight months since he began and we do not know how much longer it will be. With the changes of government all the laws have changed, in time it may be twelve months, now they say eighteen, [but there is] nothing official for the moment. Whoever hopes, despairs. The thing is, this military service takes its toll on the rest of us.

—Eleanor Matalon to Leon Levy, 1936

ESTHER

One month after Greece entered the First World War on the side of the Allies, on a hot, windy August afternoon in 1917, the Salem family was enjoying a restful Sabbath in the delightful suburb of Salonica where Fortunée and Ascher, the parents of Esther (1895–1998), had settled some decades earlier. Las Kampanyas was known for its grand vista, and the Salem home offered a generous view of Salonica's red tile roofs, the bay, and Mount Olympus beyond. On this particular August day, Esther's father's enjoyment of the view was marred by the sight of flames in the distance. He called to the family to come quickly. "I went to look," wrote Esther in a letter to her brother Jacques, "and indeed a large part of the city appeared to have fallen prey to the flames. After this we couldn't stop watching the fire. We wanted to pull ourselves away but as if magnetized, we were drawn to the small corner of the terrace on the water, where we saw the whole city."[1]

Esther's brother Karsa arrived from town, frantic. Newly renamed Venizelos Street, where the family business was located, had burned to the ground. "Oh, the images that I have seen!" Karsa sobbed. "Children, women, all fleeing, and despite the horror, the city is calm; the exodus is happening in a mournful, heavy silence. A woman gave birth on the pavement! People surrounded her as she shrieked!… Oh, I am broken! Papa, go and see what must be done!" In a panic, Ascher rushed out, taking the keys to his store and leaving his wife, Fortunée, and the children at home.

Spectators watch the port of Salonica engulfed in flames, 1917

As the hours passed, Esther and her family watched Red Cross and British trucks race by. Among the fleeing masses, the "parade of ghosts" that Esther saw stumble by the home was a number of family members, including her cousin Eleanor (Daout Effendi's daughter) and her husband and children.[2] Eleanor's family, and a good number of strangers, took shelter with the Salems. The garden, courtyard, and house were quickly transformed into a makeshift refuge as closets were emptied to provide clean clothes and sheets for the victims.

At last Esther's father returned, "his eyes swollen in his sockets and very red, his face pale as candle wax." Unable to save the family store, Ascher managed to rescue only a handful of account books before fleeing to the smoky streets. Despite the chaos, he had located his father- and mother-in-law, Daout Effendi and Vida, and their son Emmanuel. As the night wore on, the flames spread. Even the sea was burning, dotted with blazing sailboats. "In vain did I close my eyes in the dark," Esther wrote later, "for my imprinted retinas still saw the burning ships on the trembling sea."

Emanating from a neighborhood adjacent to the crowded port known to Salonica's Jews as Agua Nueva (New Water), the fire wrought catastrophic damage in the city's historic Jewish quarter, in the commercial district, and in the port, where most of the city's Jews lived and worked. When the fire began, the movie theaters were packed, and an Italian marching band was performing in Liberty Square. As the flames spread, the French military strategically bombed a number of buildings (including Salonica's new Talmud Torah), hoping to arrest the fire's course.[3] These efforts were futile. The fire only grew in intensity, ultimately raging for thirty hours, and covering a square kilometer thick with urban life. Thirty-two synagogues burned, along with nine rabbinical libraries, six hundred Torah scrolls, and

eight Jewish schools. Though no deaths were recorded, fifty thousand Jews were left homeless, along with ten thousand Muslim residents of the city and somewhere between ten thousand and fifteen thousand Christians. The damage was estimated at a billion French francs, 75 percent of which was Jewish-owned property.[4] The city, already transformed into a wartime refugee hub, became a smoldering landscape of displacement overnight.

By morning, firefighters had managed to contain the conflagration. From the Salem home in Las Kampanyas, the city was obscured by clouds of black smoke. "Salonica has forever perished!" mourned Esther. Some weeks after the fire, as Esther closed a letter to her brother Jacques, she sent him a tender embrace, saying, finally, "I hope to go and join you, for life is becoming impossible here." This was as much despondency as Esther would allow herself. With time, she proved more resilient than her city.

Aerial view of Salonica after the fire of 1917

It would take years for Salonica to recover. One Salonican Jewish schoolteacher, writing in 1923, bemoaned the fact that the synagogue in which he taught lacked a roof to replace the one burned in 1917, leaving him to instruct his students with snow and rain lashing their faces. "Most of all," he fretted to his superiors, "we have suffered from darkness. Many days the darkness was such that a student could not see enough to read the book he had in front of his face."[5] For the Levy family, too, the impact of the fire

was profound and long-lasting. Esther's father's business had burned to the ground, and insurance could not begin to cover the losses. Her uncle Daout Effendi wrote that the fire had deprived him of "all my things and personal property," including precious papers and a collection of rugs he had been preserving for his children's inheritance.

The Salem family home had been spared by the flames, but the family's beautiful garden—site of so many joyous gatherings—was soon requisitioned by the municipality, which was desperate to house the displaced.[6] Citing a Ladino proverb drawn from musar, rabbinical ethical literature, Esther lamented: "The house of the rich empties out and still the house of the poor does not fill up; how well we understand this sad truth."[7] Esther was twenty-two years of age, unmarried, and suddenly facing depleted family coffers just as she was meant to be propelled into a new life. For her and the rest of the Salem family, as for so many others, the fire of 1917 sent them, at least for a time, on a sharp downward trajectory. Esther would, nevertheless, follow her brother Jacques to Manchester a year after the war's end, emigrating with her brothers and their parents—though not in the position of economic strength they had anticipated.

Before the Salem family left Salonica for Manchester, photographs reveal that they participated in the tradition of *ziyara* (a visit) to Salonica's Jewish cemetery. The sun is low in the sky: it is early morning or late afternoon, roughly 1919. The women wear broad-brimmed hats and are bundled in overcoats adorned with fur stoles. Esther's hat is trimmed with a large silk flower, her mother Fortunée's topped with egret feathers. Michael, thirteen years of age, wears a fine suit and tie under a wool coat, a bowler on his head, no doubt an outfit made for his bar mitzvah a few months earlier. His younger brothers sport youthful caps, wool coats, and, in Adolphe's case, the short pants befitting his age. Esther and Jacques stare directly at their photographer. They are in their twenties. Jacques couldn't have been released from captivity on the Isle of Man more than a year earlier. Understandably, their parents, Fortunée and Ascher, look somber, as they prepare to leave their homeland under difficult circumstances. Fortunée's face is drawn, her lips are pressed tightly together. She does not look at the camera.

Esther and her family visit a number of tombs. She stands at her paternal grandfather's grave.[8] The family then visits another, larger grave: the tomb of the Levy patriarch, Fortunée's father, Sa'adi a-Levi. There, the Salems gather to pray and pose.

Several photographs capture the moment. This in itself is an unusual occurrence, for cameras were considered an indulgence in those years. Today, glass plates documenting the excursion are preserved in England by Esther's nephew Alan.[9] The plates are yellowed; one is stained. Still, they

offer an extraordinary glimpse of a family in transition.

Salem family visiting the Sa'adi's tomb in the Jewish cemetery of Salonica, 1917