




The Jewish Cemetery in Gurcheshme

There are 4 sites that were used as Jewish cemeteries throughout the history of the Jewish community in Izmir. Each site holds unique stories and evidence of the people that lived in the city.

<u>Bahribaba Mezarlığı</u>	<u>Bornova Mezarlığı</u>	<u>Altındağ Mezarlığı</u>
		
Used until 1885 Today there is not much left. The site is used as a city park, a few schools and houses.	1881-1972 Built as the Sidi family plot, later used by the Jews living in the area.	1934-today Men and women buried separately. Fields are divided by boulevards of cypress trees.

We chose to focus on the Gurcheshme cemetery because the time period during which it was used was considered the “Golden Age” of Jewish Izmir. Another reason for our choice is the fact that Rabbi Palaggi is buried there and therefore people from all over the world come to pray at his grave. We believe that this site holds the past, present and even the future of the Jewish people in Izmir.

Gürçeşme Mezarlığı



On our first visit to the old cemetery in Izmir, we were struck by the physical condition of the cemetery as a whole and the neglect of the graves in particular. Many of the graves had been broken, by man or by nature, and the ruins are scattered in piles. Major parts of the cemetery are covered with thick undergrowth and debris, so it is hard to recognize the graves or even see them.

In the three weeks that followed that first introduction, we discovered that underneath the layer of wreckage, the Gurcheshme cemetery is not only a collection of ruined graves, but also an open book that reveals the history of a Jewish community that once was. All that we need to do is to flip through the “pages,” and read about the customs, the characters and the stories of the Jewish community of Izmir. We began searching and reading in Hebrew, Aramaic, French, German, Ladino and Ottoman. We interpreted symbols and met families, stories and tragedies.

Confronted with hundreds of graves, with not enough time to record each and every grave, it was necessary to map out the cemetery, in order to meet two main objectives: The first objective was to build a basic inventory for follow-up research, and as a basis for conservation and development. The second objective was to provide the visitor an easier way to locate a particular grave, by name or description.

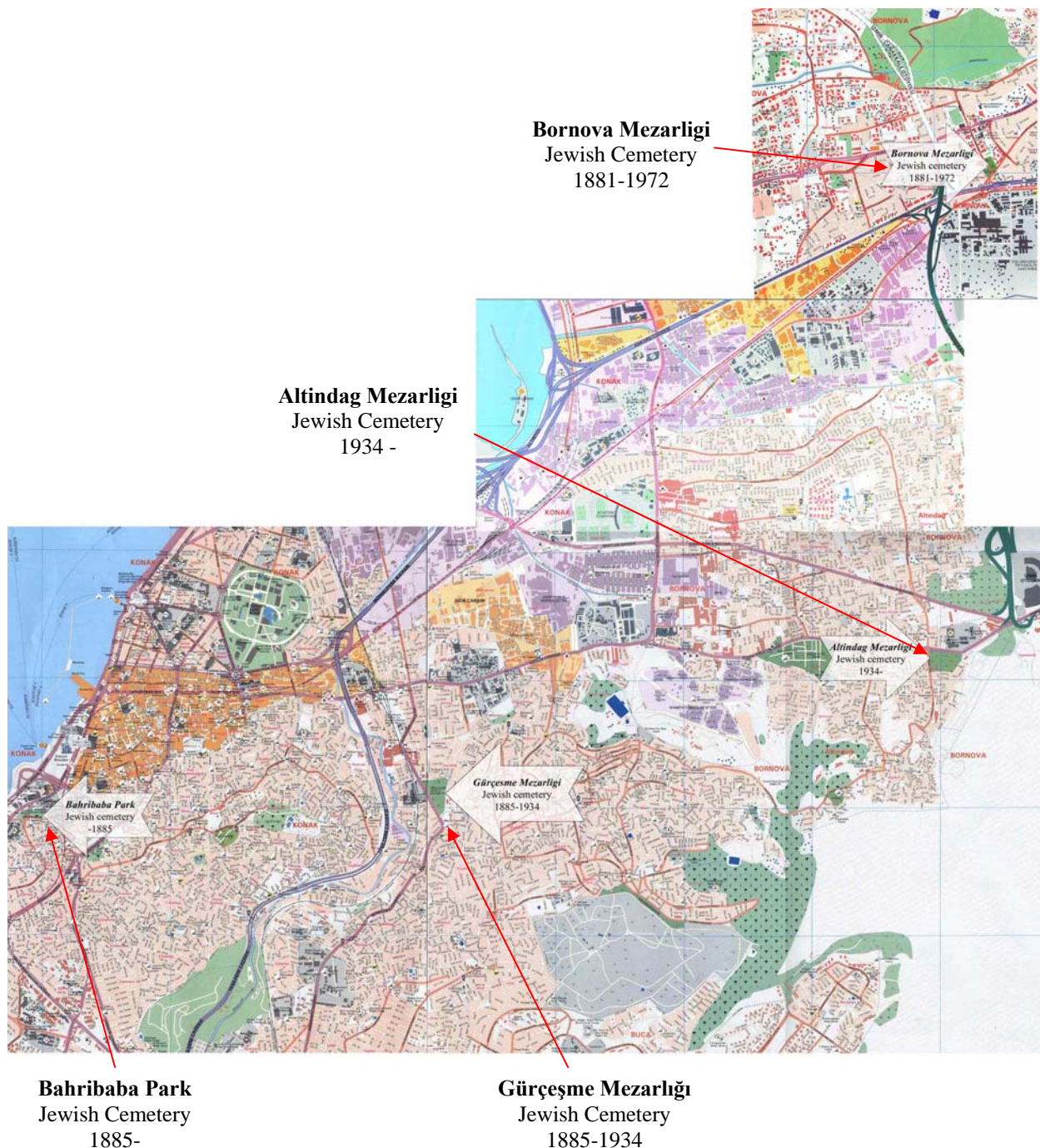
While mapping the area, we focused on a number of graves and recorded them, with the hope that future work would be done.

Despite the condition of the graveyard, some visitors do come, amongst them relatives looking for family members buried there. Another main visitor attraction is the grave of Rabbi Palaggi, which was moved to this cemetery from its original burial place, in the 1920's. In addition, the site holds a fresh water spring; a mystical connection has developed between the water and Rabbi Palaggi's grave. The fountain was channeled into smaller pools and a ritual purifying bath. A dip in the fresh water is enough to convince one of no better way to wash off the impurity of the graveyard.

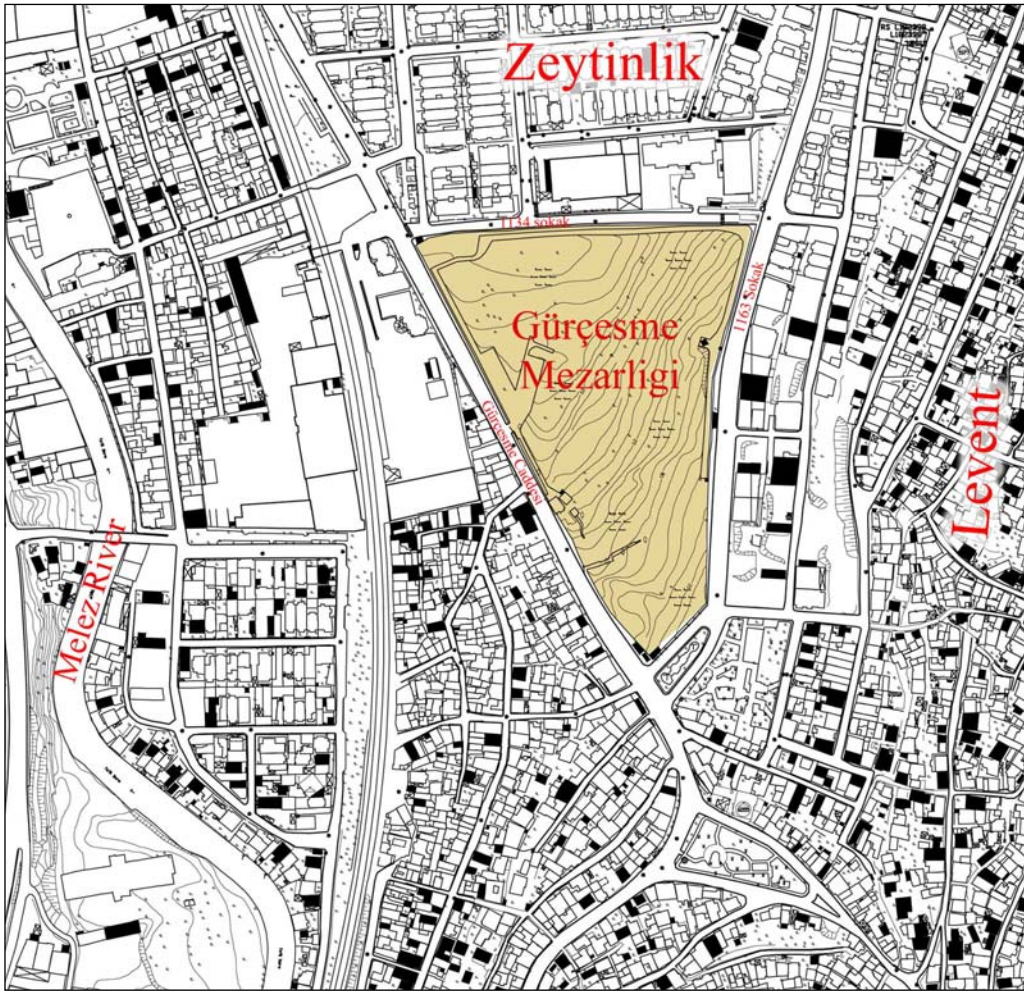
The Gurcheshme cemetery is located within a densely populated area, and we envision the site as a potential location for a green space in the heart of the neighborhoods. A few of the trees are as old as the graves that are shaded by them: fig trees, terebinths, tall cypresses and one big palm tree. The greenery and the water surrounding the area could be made into an inviting place that would enhance the site.

In light of the above, the Gurcheshme cemetery could be made into a site for visitors for different reasons: pilgrimage to Rabbi Palaggi's grave; visit of family graves; purification in the "mikveh" and reading the history of the Izmir community on the tombstones. We hope this essay will be a step towards the restoration and development of the old cemetery, for the honor of the deceased and for the stories that are yet to be told.

Jewish Cemeteries in Izmir



Site Description



Location;

Zeytinlik , Konak İzmir.
Area; about 34 Dunham.

General Description;

The cemetery is located on a slope of the Gürçeşme hill towards the Melez river. Highest point in the site; south-east – 37 m. a.s.l., lowest point in the site ; north-west corner-16 m. a.s.l - a 21 m. drop on a 260 m. distance.

The orientation in the site is complicated due to the scattered graves, covered by wild and thick vegetation.

Accessibility;

Three main entrances are located in the west wall, on Gürçeşme Caddesi; the lower entrance is wide and accessible for vehicles. In the middle is a pedestrian entrance used both by visitors and the guard, whose home is connected to the nearby wall. The south entrance is wide enough for vehicles, and the path inside the cemetery leads close to the famous Palaggi grave.

Boundaries;

- **North** – about 2.5 m. concrete wall, beyond it 1134 Sokak (street); 5-6 stories high housing, and in the north east a textile factory.
- **East** - about 2.5 m. concrete wall, beyond it 1163 Sokak; 3-5 stories high housing. Beyond, viewing from above, Levent residential quarter.
- **West** – metal-fenced wall, beyond it Gürçeşme Caddesi; 1-2 story high commercial and industrial buildings. Beyond a facade to the cemetery, seen at a distance Pagos hill (Kadifekale), and particularly Kosova and Ballıkuyu residential quarters.
- **South** - about 2.5 m. concrete wall, beyond it 1163 Sokak, commercial and canteen shops.

Foot and Vehicular Traffic:

- Surrounding the graveyard is a pedestrian path that is accessible from the entrances and reaches the pergola at the east side. The path is paved between the guardhouse and the north piazza. The north part of the path is paved with gravel. Between the guardhouse and the southern path there is a narrow path between the graves.
- The north entrance leads to a piazza designed for ceremonies that is accessible to vehicles.
- Throughout the rest of the cemetery, there is no accessible path or walkway! In order to get to the graves that are further into the terrain, it is necessary to climb over other graves and walk through vegetation.

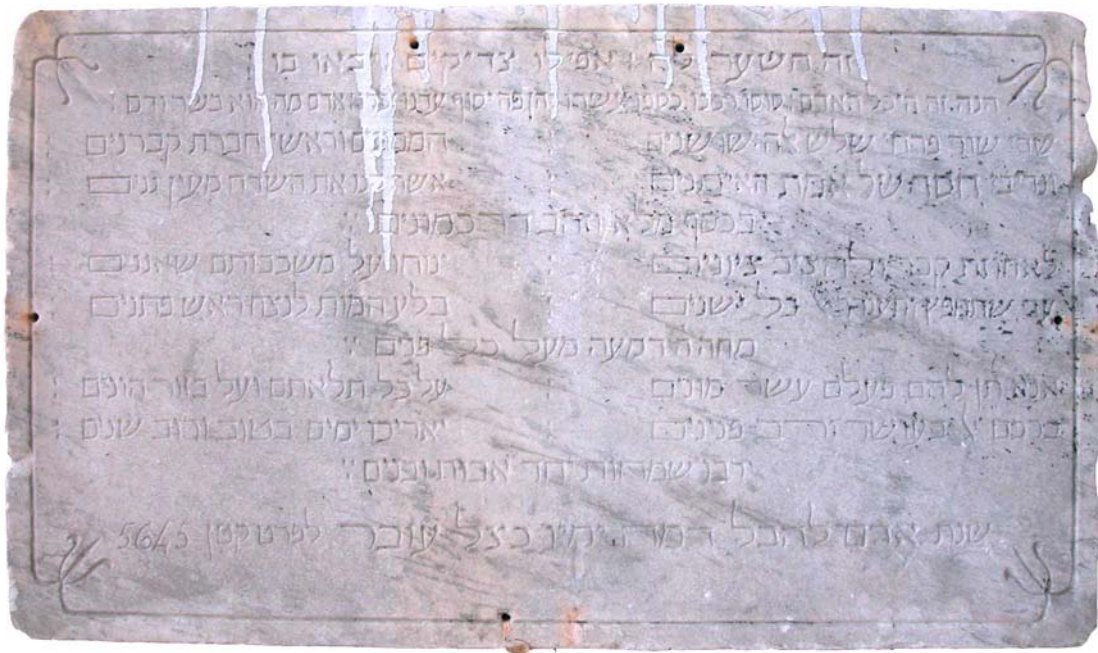
Existing Buildings and Physical Objects:

- Entrance compound; includes the guard's house, a vegetable patch, a shaded sitting area and the Mikveh – a purifying pool. In the middle of the complex there is a spring that flows into a small pool.
- In the south corner of the cemetery there are three little huts that are open to the street from the other side.
- Attached to the eastern path is a pergola with four benches and a spring in the center.
- There is an ancient water system running underground. There are two shafts connecting to underground canals: one at the north part of the site, close to the piazza, and one at the south area. These shafts are 5-7 m. deep.

Historical Background

1885 (5645)

The beginning of burial in Gürçeşme.



A marble plate with a Hebrew inscription mentioning the cemetery and the year 5645 (1885).

1914 -1928 (5674-88)

Replacement of the first tombstones from Bahribaba to Gürçeşme. Since the municipality began building on the grounds of the old cemetery in Bahribaba, it was necessary to rescue the graves by moving them to the Gürçeşme cemetery.

1924 (5674)

Replacement of Rabbi Palaggi's grave.



The reverse side of marble plate: "Jewish cemetery 1928"

1934 (5694)

The end of burial in Gürçeşme; since the area became a residential area, the municipality banned burials at the site and established the Jewish cemetery in Altendağ.



Grave from the last burial: Hebrew Year – 5694 (=1934).