

Conclusions and Recommendations for Future Work

The daily life of the Jewish community of Izmir (in the past and in the present) is a very important subject, as it supports and illustrates our historical knowledge. In this short project we tried to reveal part of the treasures it contains, and give an idea of the potential work that can and should be done.

As we saw, the historical research had mainly concentrated on the history of the community up to the beginning of the 20th century. During the second half of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century, many dramatic changes occurred in the community:

- Some changes were influenced by the general changes in the Ottoman Empire and later the Turkish Republic.
- Some were connected to the processes that occurred in the general Jewish world, such as modernism, the Haskala (Enlightenment), Zionism, etc.

The daily customs and habits, and how they changed, revealed other aspects of those processes and changes. Since the people we interviewed were born in the 20th century, we could get only a partial picture of previous periods, through the family stories of their ancestors. We believe that these personal stories should be part of the formal history, as these are some of only few sources documenting the life of the Jews of Izmir in the 20th century.

During the interviews we were exposed to marvelous objects owned by people, such as historical photos, Meggilot Esther, old books, etc. We think the personal stories and objects are part of the community's heritage, and it is very important to document and preserve them. It is especially important to preserve the personal story beyond the object. Continuing the documentation of what community members have in their homes, and making copies (when possible), is crucial for the establishment of the planned Izmir Jewish Community Museum.

It appears that there is a lot more documentation to be done on this subject. It is possible to interview and record (or videotape, if possible) the elders in the home for the aged at the Jewish Hospital, and other senior members of the community, as the first step, and then continue to others.

The aspects of daily life are a concrete way to try and connect the young generation to their Jewish heritage, and to strengthen their Jewish identity. This could be done using a program for the Jewish children such as "My Roots" - a research project dealing with each pupil's family roots and heritage, similar to what is done in Israeli schools. The research, which would include interviewing parents and grandparents, looking for pictures and other objects, etc., could benefit the community.



Jana Bonfil and Nadia Kaya, August 2002.