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# The Construction of the House of the Jewish Church-School Community in Belgrade and the Process of Jewish Emancipation

Vuk Dautović and Vladana Putnik  
University of Belgrade

Through the construction of the House of the Jewish Church-School Community in Belgrade,<sup>1</sup> based on the project by architect Samuel Sumbul (1887–1947), the process of the emancipation of the Belgrade Jewry in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (SCS) (1918–29) was complete (Figure 1). This representative public edifice became a functional entity with the Bet Jisrael synagogue, to which it was physically connected. These spaces of Jewish religious and creedal practices, educational activities, social and communal manifestations, and political events were united as meeting places of representatives of the Jewish community and the state at the time. The House of the Jewish Church-School Community, being the head office of the Rabbinate and the public Jewish institution, is studied through its numerous functions and its importance in the lives of the Jewish population in interwar Belgrade. These observations are an examination of the school's visual shaping and artistic articulation. This important space has not been subject to comprehensive scholarly observation and interpretation, which is the aim of this article. Through a historiographic approach, this work analyzes the role of the House of the Jewish Church-School Community in shaping the Jewish community's identity

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<sup>1</sup> The expression “Jewish Church-School Community” was literally copied from the façade inscription made approximately when the House was built, and which is located on the tympanum of the façade. At the time the inscription was made, the notion of “Church” primarily denoted the religious function of the community building in a way that was understandable to the general public. This form of adaptation to the Serbian environment where Jews lived was also expressed in other places, such as on the tombstone of Rabbi David Š. Demajo, who passed away in 1898 in Belgrade and was buried at the Jewish Sephardic cemetery. On the tombstone, apart from the inscription in Hebrew, there is a Serbian translation in Cyrillic where beside the name of the deceased, there is the word “protá” (*prototereus*), indicating his clerical calling. This form of intertwining the Jewish-Serbian identity culminated in the creation of the assimilation formula “Serbs of Moses's faith” coined by David A. Koen; more will be discussed about this topic within this study.

in Belgrade. Through analyses of archives, periodicals, and field research, the history of the construction of the Community House will be unveiled, because it has not been explored meticulously until now. A study of its architectural morphology is included with this research.

The presence of Jews in Belgrade, in the area of Jaliija, mostly populated by the Sephardic population, was recorded as early as the 16th century.<sup>2</sup> As a visible minority, Jews functioned in Belgrade in accordance with the Ottoman cultural model, similarly to other major cities in the Balkans under Turkish rule, such as Sarajevo and Thessaloniki. The lives of the Jews in the Ottoman Empire, predominantly of Spanish descent, sharing a common Ladino language, and having mutually strong trade and family connections, determined the forms of representation and expression of the Jewish community's identity. In this way of life, the distant boundaries of exchange within the Ottoman cultural sphere facilitated the maintenance of ethnic identity.<sup>3</sup> The period after the national revolutions and the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire changed the position of Jews with the newly created Christian states in the Balkans. There, they fought for civil equality, establishing a trusting relationship with the new authorities and adjusting the representations of their Jewish identity to the new political situation.<sup>4</sup>

During the 19th century, the Jewish community in Belgrade was large and important. It owned several synagogues, a school, a ritual bath (mikve), and a cemetery.<sup>5</sup> This community predominantly consisted of merchants and craftsmen who actively participated in the life of the Belgrade trade bazaar, which served as a place for meeting other people and as a location of mutual cultural exchange.<sup>6</sup> The position of Jews was regulated by laws in the Serbian

<sup>2</sup> Ženi Lebl, *Do "konačnog rešenja" Jevreji u Beogradu (1516–1942)* (Belgrade: Čigoja štampa, 2001), 8–13. The book was translated into English in 2007. Jennie Lebel, *Until "The Final Solution": The Jews in Belgrade 1521–1942* (Bergenfield, NJ: Avotaynu, 2007); Ignjat Šlang, *Jevreji u Beogradu* (Belgrade: Štamparija M. Karića, 2006), 18–26; Bogumil Hrabak, "Jevreji u Beogradu do kraja XVII veka," *Godišnjak grada Beograda* 18 (1971): 21–52.

<sup>3</sup> Nenad Makuljević, "Sephardi Jews and the Visual Culture of the Ottoman Balkans," *EL Prezente: Studies in Sephardic Culture* 4 (2010): 199–212.

<sup>4</sup> Bogumil Hrabak, *Jevreji u Beogradu do sticanja ravnopravnosti (1878)* (Belgrade: Srpski genealoški centar, 2009), 315–441; Nebojša Jovanović, "Pregled istorije beogradskih Jevreja do sticanja građanske ravnopravnosti," *Zbornik Jevrejskog istorijskog muzeja* 6 (1992): 115–65.

<sup>5</sup> Nenad Makuljević, *Osmansko-srpski Beograd: Vizuelnost i kreiranje građanskog identiteta (1815–1878)* (Belgrade: TOPY, 2015), 136.

<sup>6</sup> Nenad Makuljević, "The Trade Zone as Cross-Cultural Space: Belgrade Çarşı," *EL Prezente: Studies in Sephardic Culture 7/Menorah Collection of Papers* 3 (2013): 233–45.



principality (1815–82) and later in the Kingdom of Serbia (1882–1918), moving from distrust to gradual integration into the new Serbian society. One of the important stages in this process was the participation of Jews in the Balkan wars and the First World War (1912–18), which was documented by their death toll and tales of heroism. Their sacrifices to their country were interpreted as proof of loyalty to the kingdom to which they were subjects.<sup>7</sup> This was exactly the reason that the phrase about Jews being “Serbs of Moses’s faith” was coined.<sup>8</sup> The wider currents of European Jewish emancipation and the Haskalah movement, equivalent to the Enlightenment currents, lasted from the last decades of the 18th until almost the end of the 19th century. Such movements facilitated the ways of including this minority into Serbian society, following the model of Central European Jewry.<sup>9</sup> The last stage of the integration of Belgrade’s Jewish community in the life and political structure of the Kingdom of SCS is considered to be the period beginning with the construction of the new synagogue Bet Jisrael until the completion of the House of the Jewish Church-School Community (1927). This complex was an entity which visually and symbolically articulated public Jewish institutions.

### **The Jewish Community in Belgrade after the First World War and the Construction of the Jewish Church-School Community Building**

The most important event for Belgrade’s Sephardic community in the beginning of 20th century was the construction of Bet Jisrael synagogue on Cara Uroša Street in Belgrade. The solemn ceremony of laying the foundation stone in 1907 was attended by the new Serbian ruler, King Petar I. Karađorđević, who was the most eminent figure at the event. The synagogue was built in accordance with the project of architect Milan Kapetanović (1859–1934), who

<sup>7</sup> *Spomenica poginulih i umrlih Srpskih Jevreja u Balkanskom i Svetskom ratu 1912–1918, Izdanje odbora za podizanje spomenika palim jevrejskim ratnicima, Beograd 1927* (Belgrade: Jevrejski istorijski muzej, Savez jevrejskih oština Srbije, 2014), 3–5; Vuk Dautović, “A Monument to the Fallen Jewish Soldiers in the Wars Fought Between 1912 and 1919 at the Sephardic Cemetery in Belgrade,” *Actae Historiae Artis Slovenica* 18, no. 2 (2013): 44–46.

<sup>8</sup> Aron Alkalaj, “Život i običaji u nekadašnjoj jevrejskoj mahali,” in *Jevrejski almanah* (Belgrade: Savez jevrejskih opština Jugoslavije, 1961–62), 96.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Shmuel Feiner, *The Jewish Enlightenment* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); George L. Mosse, “Jewish Emancipation: Between Bildung and Respectability,” in *The Jewish Response to German Culture: From the Enlightenment to the Second World War*, ed. J. Reinharz et al. (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1985), 1–16; Saskia Rohde, “Synagogendiskussion: Architekten und die Modernisierung des Judentums,” in *Judentum und Aufklärung: Jüdisches Selbstverständnis in der bürgerlichen Öffentlichkeit*, ed. A. Herzog et al. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2002), 194–215.

had been educated in Munich and was of Jewish decent.<sup>10</sup> The synagogue was built in the neo-Moorish style. This style was developed during the epoch of Historicism as one of its formal expressions, under the influence of the Orientalist interpretation of Jews as “others” or the “Asians of Europe.” It was thought that their religious and national identity could be visually expressed primarily through appropriation of Islamic architectural elements and decorative details.<sup>11</sup> Through the construction of the representative religious building in the neo-Moorish style as a main city synagogue, Belgrade Jews decided to express their identity through Orientalist discourse. By such visual means, the public identity of Jews was accepted in Central Europe.<sup>12</sup> It is exactly through this choice of style that Jewish people strove to integrate themselves within the Habsburg Monarchy and subsequently Austria-Hungary. The gradual de-Ottomanization of Belgrade as an oriental town during the second half of the 19th century also assumed a change in Jewish and Serbian cultural models.<sup>13</sup> Central European customs, brought into Belgrade during the beginning of the 20th century, included the acceptance of Orientalism, which was characteristic for areas of Ashkenazi rite. The typically Sephardic communities, like the one in Belgrade, accepted that style because the architects M. Kapetanović and S. Sumbul had been educated in Munich and Vienna, respectively. They were the ones who brought this kind of interpretation of Jewish visual identity into the Serbian environment.<sup>14</sup>

In the Balkan wars and the First World War, Jews participated together with Serbs, which provided an opportunity for them to prove their loyalty

<sup>10</sup> Svetlana V. Nedić, “Sinagoga Bet Jisrael—delo arhitekta Milana Kapetanovića,” *Zbornik Jevrejskog istorijskog muzeja* 8 (2003): 304–07; Divna Đurić-Zamolo, *Graditelji Beograda 1815–1914* (Belgrade: Muzej grada Beograda, 1981), 64–65.

<sup>11</sup> Hannelore Künzl, “Nineteenth-Century Synagogues in the Neo-Islamic Style,” *Proceedings of the World Congress of Jewish Studies* 8 (1981): 71–78; Rudolf Klein, “Oriental-Style Synagogues in Austria-Hungary: Philosophy and Historical Significance,” *Ars Judaica* 2 (2006): 117–34; Rudolf Klajn, “Secesija: Jevrejski (ne)ukus?” *Menora* 2 (2010): 138. A clear paradigmatic example of a synagogue space formed in such an oriental manner, and also a model for many subsequent ones, is the synagogue on Dohány Street in Budapest, designed by the architect Ludwig Förster (1797–1863). Cf. Rudolf Klein, *The Great Synagogue of Budapest* (Budapest: Terc Publishers, 2008).

<sup>12</sup> John M. Efron, “From Mitteleuropa to the Middle East: Orientalism through a Jewish Lens,” *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 94, no. 3 (2004): 490–520.

<sup>13</sup> Makuljević, *Osmansko-srpski Beograd*, 199–231; Nenad Makuljević, “Kulturni modeli i privatni život kod Srba u 19. Veku,” in *Privatni život kod Srba u devetnaestom veku*, ed. Ana Stolić and Nenad Makuljević (Belgrade: Klio, 2006), 17–53.

<sup>14</sup> Nedić, “Sinagoga Bet Jisrael,” 300–01; Divna Đurić-Zamolo, “Jevreji—graditelji Beograda do 1941. godine,” *Zbornik Jevrejskog istorijskog muzeja* 6 (1992): 234.

to the host country. The fact that Jews fought alongside Serbs earned them respect and merit, which facilitated their full civil integration. The first important public building for the Jewish community, which was created after the Bet Jisrael synagogue, was the building for the Jewish charity Oneg Šabat and Gemilut Hasidim between 1922 and 1923. It was in the heart of the Jewish Jališa, and it was under the protection of the House of Jewish Church-School Community in Belgrade. This building was the first one of several built by architect S. Sumbul for the Jewish population in Belgrade.<sup>15</sup> On the façade of the building, the architect Sumbul applied decorative elements adapted from Islamic architecture, continuing in a visual and conceptual sense upon Kapetanović's style of the Bet Jisrael synagogue. A characteristic element of Islamic decoration in the form of a stalactite work—muqarnas/mocárabe—was transposed on the façade of the Oneg Šabat building under a window in the central part of the façade.<sup>16</sup> On its roof cornice there are dentilated attic elements also inspired by Islamic architecture.<sup>17</sup> Parallels for the architectural models used on the Oneg Šabat building can be found in synagogue architecture displaying oriental concepts. They make a clear statement about a new way of expressing Jewish identity, in this case conveyed in the visual sense through the synagogue Bet Jisrael. The space of the Oneg Šabat building, apart from having the altruistic purpose of caring for elderly, also played other roles, for example, observing Jewish religious practices such as the solemn celebration of Shabbat and other important holidays, as well as the annual commemoration of deceased family members.<sup>18</sup> The spacious assembly hall of this edifice was the only representative public space exclusively serving the needs of the Jewish population. It was also used for assembly until the construction of the House on Dubrovačka Street.<sup>19</sup>

During the building of the House of the Jewish Church-School Community, architect Samuel Sumbul was also engaged in designing and constructing

<sup>15</sup> Đurić-Zamolo, "Jevreji—graditelji Beograda," 235–36.

<sup>16</sup> On the complex symbolic role and manners of constructing this ornament, see Yasser Tabbaa, "The Muqarnas Dome: Its Origin and Meaning," *Muqarnas* 3 (1985): 61–74; I. I. Notkin, "Decoding Sixteenth-Century Muqarnas Drawings," *Muqarnas* 12 (1995): 148–71; Vincenza Garofalo, "A Methodology for Studying Muqarnas: The Extant Examples in Palermo," *Muqarnas* 27 (2010): 357–406.

<sup>17</sup> In analyzing this building D. Đurić-Zamolo evaluated it as eclectic with "decorative elements which are very rare in the architecture of Belgrade." Đurić-Zamolo, "Jevreji—graditelji Beograda," 235.

<sup>18</sup> Lebl, *Do "konačnog rešenja,"* 373–74.

<sup>19</sup> Vladimir Živančević, "Beogradski Jevreji na Dorćolu—od Jališe do Vidin-kapije," *Zbornik Jevrejskog istorijskog muzeja* 6 (1992): 457.

a monument in the Sephardic cemetery in Belgrade honoring Jewish soldiers who had fallen in war from 1912 to 1918. This impressive monument and a mausoleum for the fallen Jewish soldiers were solemnly consecrated in 1927.<sup>20</sup> Some decorative elements on the monument itself are akin to the aforementioned Orientalist repertoire Sumbul had already employed elsewhere.<sup>21</sup>

Conducting the project of the House of the Jewish Church-School Community in Belgrade was entrusted to Sumbul as a practitioner of the Sephardic architectural style, since his work had already proven successful in his earlier accomplishment—the building of the charity Oneg Šabat.<sup>22</sup> Scarce data about Sumbul's life were gathered from oral statements from the surviving members of his family after the Second World War. According to family members—the only relatively trustworthy source on Sumbul—he was born in Sarajevo in 1887; his father was Jakov Sumbul, an apothecary, and his mother was Ester, who was a descendant of the Salom family. Sumbul had seven brothers and the same number of sisters. He was educated in Sarajevo and was later sent to study in Vienna, as were his brothers. After the end of the First World War he came to Belgrade, where he founded an architectural-civil engineering company together with engineer Haim Isaković. Sumbul was also interested in painting, and his studio was adjacent to the painting school of Mladen Josić. It was stated that after the construction of the House of the Jewish Church-School Community, Sumbul ceased his architectural endeavors and devoted himself to painting.<sup>23</sup> His fate during the years of the Holocaust, and also the fates of his family members, are documented in the records of Italian war archives. The beginning of the Second World War found Sumbul in the Croatian city of Split, together with two of his brothers, the older Isidor, born in 1878, and the younger Josif, born in 1889. As Jews and foreigners in Split, they were interned on 19 December 1941 in Sorbolo, Italy. According to the testimonials of foreigners who lived in the province of Parma, the three brothers remained in the intern camp in Sorbolo until 1943. During the war the brothers Sumbul were not deported, and Isidor and Jakov witnessed the liberation in Rome in 1944, while the whereabouts of Samuel at the end of the war remains unknown. Sumbul passed away in Parma right after the end of the war, on 23

<sup>20</sup> Dautović, “A Monument to the Fallen Jewish Soldiers,” 43–59.

<sup>21</sup> The tip of the obelisk, where there is a two-headed eagle, was formed by a stalactite and a dentilated ornament such as the one on the gable of the façade of the Oneg Šabat and Gemilut Hasidim charity building.

<sup>22</sup> Šlang, *Jevreji u Beogradu*, 126.

<sup>23</sup> “Saying of Majer Altarac,” in Đurić-Zamolo, “Jevreji—graditelji Beograda,” 233–34.

February 1947,<sup>24</sup> which is most likely where he had been living at the end of the war since he was imprisoned nearby in Sorbolo.

With the formation of the Kingdom of SCS, a need arose for uniting the Jews and creating the Federation of Jewish Religious Communities. Consequently, the founding congress was held in 1919 in Osijek, and two years later the first regular congress was assembled in Zagreb. The Federation, as the seat of the entire Jewry in the Kingdom, was an important governing body, representing the interests of individual communities and advocating for them through official mediation between the Jewish people and the government. The Federation was also concerned with religious, legal, educational, and humanitarian interests of the Jewish community in the Kingdom of SCS and subsequently in Yugoslavia.<sup>25</sup> This was one of the important social factors which influenced the need to build a representative seat for the Belgrade Jewish community. According to the data from 1925, there were 1,120 Sephardic and 274 Ashkenazi Jews living in Belgrade.<sup>26</sup> Several years after this, in 1931, Belgrade was home to the second-highest number of Jews in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, just after Zagreb, which attests to the good living conditions in the capital.<sup>27</sup> During the 1920s, Belgrade Jews actively participated in the city's public life.<sup>28</sup>

The House of the Jewish Church-School Community in Belgrade existed as a self-governed representative hierarchy since 1864 on Solunska Street,<sup>29</sup> while subsequent governance regulations were instituted in 1866.<sup>30</sup> In the 19th century, this Jewish community had the official right to appoint clergy and religious teachers, conduct marriage ceremonies and grant divorces, perform religious rituals, resolve disputes between Jews, and ultimately bury the de-

<sup>24</sup> Đurić-Zamolo, "Jevreji—graditelji Beograda," 234.

<sup>25</sup> Vidosava Nedomački and Ivo Goldstein, "Savez jevrejskih opština Jugoslavije," in *Židovi na tlu Jugoslavije* (Zagreb: MTM, 1988), 143–45; Šlang, *Jevreji u Beogradu*, 121–24.

<sup>26</sup> Marko Perić and Srećko Stanić, "Jevreji Beograda u popisima stanovništva 19. i 20. veka," *Zbornik Jevrejskog istorijskog muzeja* 6 (1992): 289–91; Arhiv Jugoslavije (AJ), Fond MV, f-69-56-90, Spisak mesta u zemlji u kojima postoje organizovane jevrejske veroispovedne opštine. (List of cities in the state with organized Jewish communities).

<sup>27</sup> Perić and Stanić, "Jevreji Beograda u popisima stanovništva 19. i 20. veka," 293.

<sup>28</sup> Harijet Pas Frajdenrajh, "Jevreji Beograda između ratova," *Zbornik Jevrejskog istorijskog muzeja* 6 (1992): 368.

<sup>29</sup> AJ, Fond MV, f-69-56-93, Molba Ministarstvu vera (Petition to the Ministry of Faiths).

<sup>30</sup> Lebl, *Do "konačnog rešenja,"* 197.

ceased at the Jewish cemetery in Palilula.<sup>31</sup> In the report of the administration of the Jewish Church-School Community in Belgrade for the years 1922–23, it can be seen that the initiative to build a community house was started because the old Mildar, i.e., the Jewish school on Solunska Street established in 1863, no longer fulfilled the needs of the community.<sup>32</sup> Therefore it was intended that the new community house should host the Jewish school for the Sephardic community.<sup>33</sup>

In October 1923 the rabbis of the Kingdom of SCS founded the Association of Rabbis of the Kingdom, and its assembly chose as their president Dr. Isak Alkalaj, who had until then been the Chief Rabbi of the Kingdom of Serbia, and afterwards, in September, became the Chief Rabbi of the Kingdom of SCS by King's decree.<sup>34</sup> Rabbi Alkalaj replied to the inquiries from the Ministry of Faiths during 1923 relating to the subject of spaces, with a few months of delay due to the repairs on the building that housed the office of the Chief Rabbinate. The office had been moved to two other houses, since Rabbi Alkalaj was unable to reply to the ministry in a timely manner.<sup>35</sup> Rabbi Alkalaj addressed the Ministry of Faiths in the fall of 1926 with a petition to form a commission which would assess the value of renting the space for the office of the Rabbinate. The Ministry of Faiths determined a sum of money insufficient for renting a premise for the Rabbinate, so Rabbi Alkalaj offered a part of his own apartment for that purpose. The Rabbinate had to be in the proximity of the largest number of Jews, had to house a spacious, specialized library, and had to be equipped with the necessary office furniture. The commission of the Ministry of Faiths established that the proposed part of the apartment, which consisted of two rooms and an anteroom on 48 Strahinjića Bana Street, was suitable for this purpose because it was located between two synagogues and it was furnished, so they allowed the use of this space.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Solomon L. Mošić, "Stanovnici jevrejske mahale u Beogradu u XIX veku," in Lebl, *Do "konačnog rešenja,"* 392.

<sup>32</sup> Vesna Rakić, "Jevrejske škole u Beogradu do 1941. godine," *Zbornik Jevrejskog istorijskog muzeja* 6 (1992): 342, 354.

<sup>33</sup> Rakić, "Jevrejske škole u Beogradu," 343.

<sup>34</sup> Lebl, *Do "konačnog rešenja,"* 187–88.

<sup>35</sup> AJ, Fond MV, f-69-59-93, Pismo glavnog rabina Kraljevine Srbije br. 328 od 17. Septembra 1923. godine (Letter of the Chief Rabbi of the Kingdom of SCS, no. 328, 17 September 1923).

<sup>36</sup> AJ, Fond MV, f-69-56-90, Prepiska rabina Isaka Alkalaja sa Ministarstvom vera povodom zakupa kancelarije Vrhovnog Rabinata (Correspondence of Rabbi Isak Alkalaj with the Ministry of Faiths, in the matter of renting the space for the office of the Chief Rabbinate).



The creation of the Jewish Church-School Community is related to the construction of the Bet Jisrael synagogue. First, Matatja-Mata Nahman Levi, through his legacy and will, left his property and a lot on Dubrovačka Street for the construction of his endowment, “Home of Mata Levi,” and the synagogue.<sup>37</sup> After that, the administration of the Jewish Community bought two lots, one on Dubrovačka Street (King Peter I Street no. 71) and the other one adjacent to it on 20 Cara Uroša Street. Thus, this plot of land provided access from two streets.<sup>38</sup> The choice of this location is also related to the fact that during the end of the 19th century, the uptown of Belgrade—Zerek—started being inhabited by wealthy Jews who were in the process of emancipation while leaving the traditional Jewish mahala (quarter).<sup>39</sup> New Jewish inhabitants of Zerek wanted to raise a representative synagogue in Belgrade.<sup>40</sup> Architect M. Kapetanović designed the first project for the synagogue on 71 Dubrovačka Street, although the Ministry of Education and Church Affairs did not approve of it. After a request was made to allow construction on Cara Uroša Street, a commission established that that position was appropriate, so plans were adjusted and the synagogue was built.<sup>41</sup> Therefore, the free lot in Dubrovačka Street was chosen as a construction site for the House. It proved to be a highly prominent place, surpassing all initial expectations.

The House’s construction began with the formation of the construction committee, which included engineer Leon Talvi, merchants Moša Naftali Levi and Solomon Koen, landlord Nahman Levi and deputy bank director Isak Levi.<sup>42</sup> A more complete source lists the members of the board in the following order: Josif Pinto, Menahem Koen, Dr. Rafail Margulis, Šemaja Demajo,

<sup>37</sup> “Juče je svečano osvećen kamen temeljac novog doma jevrejske crkvene opštine,” *Vreme*, 6 June 1927, 3; “Osvećenje doma crkveno-školske jevrejske opštine u Beogradu,” *Politika*, 22 April 1929, 6; Lebl, *Do “konačnog rešenja,”* 233–34. In order to avoid confusion about the street names, the following is provided for clarification: from 1872–1904, the street was named Dubrovačka; from 1904–46, the street was given the name of “King Peter I Street” (Ulica Kralja Petra I). In 1946, to the lower part of the street, the old name—Dubrovačka—was reinstated; the upper part of that street from Tsar Dušan to the cathedral was given the name “July 7th Street” (Ulica Sedog Jula). That date commemorated the day of the uprising against the German occupation in Serbia in 1941. In 1995, the upper part of that street (Dubrovačka) was renamed to King Peter I Street.

<sup>38</sup> Lebl, *Do “konačnog rešenja,”* 234.

<sup>39</sup> Alkalaj, “Život i običaji u nekadašnjoj jevrejskoj mahali,” 94–97.

<sup>40</sup> Nedić, “Sinagoga Bet Jisrael,” 299–300.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 303–04.

<sup>42</sup> “Osvećenje Jevrejskog Opštinskog Doma u Kralja Petra ulici broj 71,” *Pravda*, 20 April 1929, 6.

Dr. Solomon Alkalaj, esq., Rafailo Finci, Šalom Ruso, Mihailo Levi, Avram B. Hajim, Nahman Levi, engineer, Leon Talvi, engineer, Samuel Saks, Moša N. Levi, Mika B. Nisim, Rafailo Benvenisti, Jakov Kalef, Elijas Levi, engineer, Samuel Sumbul, engineer, Jakov Kozinski, Isak D. Levi, Jakov S. Davičo, Avram Levi, and Jovan Alkalaj.<sup>43</sup>

The actual start of construction was postponed for some time due to a lack of funds.<sup>44</sup> Sumbul finished the final project for the House in March 1927 (Figure 2).<sup>45</sup> A member of the board, engineer Jakov Kozinski, was chosen as a contracting engineer, while Sumbul provided expert supervision during construction.<sup>46</sup> The foundation stone of the House was laid on 5 May 1927. The ceremony was attended by the President of the Belgrade Community, Kosta Kumanudi, and head officials of the Ministry of Faiths. On that occasion a charter with the signatures of all prominent members of the Jewish community was built into the foundation.<sup>47</sup> The construction of the building officially started on 18 May 1927, and the official completion date of the work was 27 September 1928.<sup>48</sup> The labor on the exterior lasted until the beginning of November so that the work on the interior could be finished during the winter. The costs of this construction amounted to 8 million Serbian dinars.<sup>49</sup> The loans for construction were provided by an English company and the State Mortgage Bank.<sup>50</sup> The Ministry of Forests and Mining aided the construction through the donation of timber.<sup>51</sup>

After construction was completed, Chief Rabbi Isak Alkalaj sent a note to the Marchalate of the Court on 12 April 1929 requesting an audience with King Aleksandar I Karađorđević, together with the President of the Jewish Church-School Community, Dr. Solomon J Alkalaj, and Vice President Šemaje Demajo. They wanted to personally issue an invitation to the King to

<sup>43</sup> Lebl, *Do "konačnog rešenja,"* 233.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 343–44.

<sup>45</sup> Istorijski arhiv Beograda (IAB), Opština grada Beograda (OGB), Tehnička direkcija (TD), f-III-47-1927.

<sup>46</sup> Anonymous. "Osvećenje Jevrejskog Opštinskog Doma," 6; *Izveštaj o radu Uprave Crkveno-školske jevrejske opštine u Beogradu 1926–1929* (Belgrade: Planeta, 1929), 8.

<sup>47</sup> "Opštinski dom beogradskih Jevreja," *Politika*, 6 June 1927, 5; Rakić, "Jevrejske škole u Beogradu," 345.

<sup>48</sup> IAB, OGB, TD, f-III-47-1927.

<sup>49</sup> "Dom crkveno-jevrejske opštine," *Politika*, 3 April 1929, 6.

<sup>50</sup> "Osvećenje Jevrejskog Opštinskog Doma," 6.

<sup>51</sup> "Osvećenje doma crkveno-školske jevrejske opštine," 6; *Izveštaj o radu*, 8.



attend the consecration of the House. It was emphasized on this occasion that the constructed Community House was not just the seat of its administration, but also a symbol of everything patriotic, cultural, and ethical in Moses's faith. It was also stated that all representatives of civil and military authorities related to Jewish religious and social occasions were invited to the ceremony. To this request the Marchalate of the Court responded by sending a special envoy representing the King.<sup>52</sup>

The consecration of the House, in Hebrew *Hanukat a bajit*, was held on 21 April 1929.<sup>53</sup> On the evening before the ceremony, a performance by the Jewish Gymnastic Society was held.<sup>54</sup> The ceremony was attended by members of the government, the highest military personnel, and representatives from numerous institutions.<sup>55</sup> Religious services were conducted in the assembly hall, and after their completion, the Chief Rabbi of the Kingdom of SCS, Dr. Isak Alkalaj, nailed a mezuzah on the main entrance of the hall.<sup>56</sup> During his solemn speech before the audience, Chief Rabbi Alkalaj emphasized that two years prior, a monument to fallen war heroes had been consecrated, and that on that day a monument to the living had been erected.<sup>57</sup> Both of these representative monuments mentioned by Rabbi Alkalaj, which served to bolster the status of the Jewish community in the Kingdom, were the work of architect Samuel Sumbul.<sup>58</sup> After the opening ceremonies, in the assembly hall of the House, a concert and dance were held.<sup>59</sup> Several days after the opening, a member of the board for the construction of the House, Šalom Ruso, addressed the Minister of Faiths, Milan Srškić, with a suggestion. Ruso had already expressed a verbal request during the consecration of the building that Minister Srškić award appropriate decorations to those who were the most responsible for the construction of the House. For the commendation, he nominated Vice

<sup>52</sup> AJ, Fond Dvor—Maršalat, f-74-232-345, Dopis Maršalata Dvora, 12 April 1929; (Correspondance, Marchalate of the Court); AJ, Fond Dvor—Maršalat, f-74-232-345, Pismo Maršalatu Dvora Njegovog veličanstva kralja, 18 April 1929 (Marchalate of the Court, letter of His Majesty the King, 18 April 1929).

<sup>53</sup> "Doma crkveno-jevrejske opštine," 6; Rakić, "Jevrejske škole u Beogradu," 345.

<sup>54</sup> "Osvećenje Jevrejskog Opštinskog Doma," 6, 5.

<sup>55</sup> "Osvećenje doma crkveno-školske jevrejske opštine," 6.

<sup>56</sup> "Osvećenje Jevrejskog Doma u Beogradu," *Vreme*, 22 April 1929, 4.

<sup>57</sup> "Osvećenje Jevrejskog Opštinskog Doma," 5.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. Rabbi Dr. Isak Alkalaj and the unveiling of the monument to fallen soldiers: Dautović, "Monument to the Fallen Jewish Soldiers," 54–55.

<sup>59</sup> "Osvećenje Jevrejskog Opštinskog Doma," 5.

President of the Jewish Church-School Community Šemaje Demajo, members of the governing board Rafailo Finci, Menahem Koen, the cavalry Lieutenant Colonel Solomon Koen, Dr. Rafailo Margulis, industrialist and member of the administration of the Ashkenazi observance Marko Z. Štajner, and banker Isak D. Levi. The majority of the nominees were already the bearers of the St. Sava decoration or the White Eagle decoration of different grades. This suggestion was forwarded through the Ministry of Justice to the Office of King's Decoration, and it was recorded in the book of propositions.<sup>60</sup>

### **Architectural and Stylistic Challenges and Their Solutions in the Jewish Church-School Community Building**

When the original project was being designed, the slope of Dubrovačka Street caused an irregularity in the socle and the level of the stairs for the entrance hall (Figure 3). Therefore, it was necessary to level the soil.<sup>61</sup> The incline of this street also influenced the project of the Jewish Church-School Community and the look of its façade. This complex consisted of two buildings, the main one with its façade facing the street, and the second one in the yard, which faced the rear of the *Bet Jisrael* synagogue. These two buildings shared a central entrance hall. However, their uneven floor levels were connected only through the additional construction of a staircase. The spatial organization of these two buildings accommodated various needs. The basement of the main building contained one apartment for a superintendent and one for rent. The ground floor of the second courtyard building was reserved for representative purposes, such as the great assembly hall and a smaller hall adjacent to a lobby, a refreshment room, a dressing room, and a reading room. The ground floor also provided space for the Federation of Jewish Creed, the community and the Chief Rabbinate. From the first to the fourth floor there were two apartments on each level intended for rent. The rooms in these apartments follow the arrangement typical of residential architecture of the interwar Belgrade.<sup>62</sup> Apartments on the first floor were considered more luxurious because they had balconies. The first floor contained classrooms for the Jewish school. The second floor had spaces for the community, a hall for the governing board, a cash register, and offices for the president of the Jewish Community and the

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<sup>60</sup> AJ, Fond MV, f-69-59-93.

<sup>61</sup> Nedić, "Sinagoga Bet Jisrael," 303.

<sup>62</sup> Vladana Putnik, "Prilog proučavanju razvojnih tokova međuratne stambene arhitekture Beograda," *Nasleđe* 8 (2012): 153–67.

secretary. The third floor was reserved for cultural-educational and humanitarian societies. In the attic, there were utility rooms for laundry and ironing.<sup>63</sup>

The Jewish Church-School Community articulated its spaces based on similar solutions found in the region at that time in Austria-Hungary. As an example, one can cite the synagogue in Novi Sad, which was completed in 1909. Adjacent to it was a complex consisting of schools, community centers, ritual baths, poultry slaughter houses, and a cultural center which was added somewhat later.<sup>64</sup> The Belgrade building most resembles the complex in Novi Sad.

The House of Jewish Church-School Community was built using a reinforced concrete construction, while the façade was made of artificial stone (Figure 1).<sup>65</sup> The roof was covered with tiles and sheet metal, i.e., tinplate. In the building there were two public elevators and one freight elevator.<sup>66</sup> The House underwent some adaptations in 1936 when wooden stairways were erected between the fourth floor of the building facing the courtyard, and the third floor of the building facing the yard so that public places could extend to the building facing the street as well. The work was conducted by the engineer Samuilo Zaks.<sup>67</sup>

In the inner courtyard there were stairs adjacent to the outer wall of the ceremonial assembly hall. The staircase from the courtyard level led to a spacious terrace, in the middle of which were the doors leading to the lobby of the assembly hall; on the other side, there was another flight of stairs that led to the entrance of the Bet Jisrael synagogue.<sup>68</sup> The staircase was fenced with a large decorative balustrade. At its lower level were arched windows of the basement rooms (Figure 4). Today, this staircase serves as the only remaining witness to the destroyed Belgrade synagogue because its adjacency to the Western façade. This façade of the destroyed synagogue had the upper part gable-shaped, with a Magen David, blind arcades, and elongated windows.

<sup>63</sup> IAB, OGB, TD, f-III-47-1927.

<sup>64</sup> Pavle Šosberger, *Jevreji u Vojvodini: Kratak pregled istorije vojvođanskih Jevreja* (Novi Sad: Prometej, 1998), 32–33; Pavle Šosberger, *Novosadski Jevreji, iz istorije jevrejske zajednice u Novom Sadu* (Novi Sad: Prometej, 2001), 28–34, 65–68.

<sup>65</sup> “Osvećenje Jevrejskog Opštinskog Doma,” 6; *Izveštaj o radu*, 9.

<sup>66</sup> IAB, OGB, TD, f-III-47-1927; “Budući centar javnog života beogradskih Jevreja,” *Politika*, 8 February 1928, 7.

<sup>67</sup> IAB, OGB, TD, f-III-47-1927.

<sup>68</sup> Nedić, “Sinagoga Bet Jisrael – delo arhitekta Milana Kapetanovića,” 307.

Behind the gable there were three turrets, with a stone Decalogue placed on the middle one.<sup>69</sup>

As noted by the press of the time, Sumbul designed the Community House in the “pure Byzantine style.”<sup>70</sup> The question arises of why the Jewish community and Sumbul chose this visual expression. Sumbul’s accomplishments until that time imply a clear stylistic orientation towards the neo-Moorish style as identity-determining factors for Jewish communities throughout Central Europe and the Balkans. The Oneg Šabat building clearly reflects Sephardic synagogue architecture, while an eclectic variation of the Byzantine style was exhibited for the first time on the House of Jewish Church-School Community. This kind of departure in Sumbul’s work and representation of identity of Sephardic Jews sent a clear message portraying Jews as accepted and well-adjusted Yugoslav citizens.<sup>71</sup> During the 1920s, the Serbian-Byzantine style was still present as the official state style, although it was exhibited more in competition projects than in most completed works.<sup>72</sup> Aware of this, Sumbul chose to design the exterior of the most important secular building for the Sephardic Jewish community in the capital of the Kingdom of SCS in visual concordance with the state style. Therefore, he chose the more politically appropriate Serbian-Byzantine style, yet he maintained his individual touch (Figures 1 and 3). Contrary to the contemporary standards of applying polychromy to façades, he avoided that trend and executed both the exterior and the interior in a monochromatic style, represented by the artificial stone of the façade and in the plaster works in the interior. In his solution, Sumbul also avoided decorative elements characteristic for the Serbian-Byzantine style, especially intertwining designs typical for the so-called “Morava School.” In this building he consistently followed a concept which was more eclectic than medieval. Even though the structure was not erected completely in accordance with the project,<sup>73</sup> the changes that were made were insignificant. The façade followed the academic concept of a three-tier elevation consisting of the rusticated zone on the ground level, above which rose the central zone consisting of three levels (Figure 2). The three levels of the windows are vertically framed by pilasters, which in turn are connected with an arcade. The decoration of the arcade

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 305.

<sup>70</sup> “Budući centar javnog života beogradskih Jevreja,” 7.

<sup>71</sup> Milan Koljanin, *Jevreji i antisemitizam u Kraljevini Jugoslaviji 1918–1941* (Belgrade: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 2008), 70–84.

<sup>72</sup> Aleksandar Kadijević, *Jedan vek traženja nacionalnog stila u srpskoj arhitekturi: Sredina XIX–sredina XX veka* (Belgrade: Građevinska knjiga, 1997), 73.

<sup>73</sup> IAB, OGB, TD, f-III-47-1927.

consists of ornamental intertwining patterns. The uppermost zone is visually separated via decorative moulding, is lower in height, and is perforated by a series of small windows which balance out the lower zone. Two small domes flank the pediment within which the above-mentioned inscription is found. The dome carries the Magen David. Overall, the harmonious appearance of the façade was achieved through the combination of horizontal and vertical elements. The shallow façade decorations show some Byzantine influences, but also those from Romanesque and Gothic architecture. The use of acanthus leaves on the capitals and in the decorative intertwining ornaments on the lunette arches above the main portals show Byzantine influences. An exception to this influence is that the use of animals or any anthropomorphic motifs was omitted. This kind of neo-Medieval stylistic variation was a common occurrence in the architecture of the second half of the 19th and the first half of the 20th century.<sup>74</sup>

The entrance portal is formed by arched double doors with fanlights. One of these ingresses leads to the residential section, while the other serves to enter the premises of the Community House (Figure 5).<sup>75</sup> A central pilaster separates the two doors, the sides of which are flanked by two other pilasters. These pilasters are topped with capitals from which spring a semicircular arch. The lunettes within the arches are glazed. The emphasis of Jewish identity in designing the facade is found in the representation of the symbol of the Magen David, incorporated in the lunette of the main façade and seen surmounted on the flanking domes. This symbolic choice of the Star of David, frequently present in synagogue buildings, has appeared in Central Europe since the 16th century. It was actualized only when the Zionist movement was created, which in turn adopted this symbol as a sign of Jewry.<sup>76</sup> Between the domes with Magen David, there is a trilobed gable with the inscription in Cyrillic: “House of the Jewish Church-School Community,” (ДОМ ЦРКВ[ЕНО] ШКОЛ[СКЕ] ЈЕВР[ЕЈСКЕ] ОПШТ[ИНЕ]) (Figure 1). The above-mentioned symbols suggest a connection between the synagogue’s architecture and the façade of the Community School. It is also worth mentioning the usage of pilasters or colonnettes as a form of evocation of the pillars of Jachin and Boaz, which once existed in Solomon’s temple in Jerusalem. On the floor of the main entrance hall, another representation of the Magen David can be found, which is made up of various colored tiles. It is interesting to mention that the selec-

<sup>74</sup> Kadijević, *Jedan vek traženja nacionalnog stila*, 223.

<sup>75</sup> Vladana Putnik, “Portali i ulazni holovi stambenih zgrada u Beogradu (1918–1941),” *Nasleđe* 16 (2015): 44.

<sup>76</sup> Cadik Danon, *Zbirka pojmova iz Judaizma* (Belgrade: Savez jevrejskih opština Jugoslavije, 1996), 195–97.

tion of colors reflects the style of the period. During the opening ceremonies, the school building was festooned with the state and Serbian flags. However, the Jewish flag was lacking, as a journalist reporting from this event noticed.<sup>77</sup> These flags emphasized the double identity of the Jews, one associated with their religion and the other with the nation in which they lived. This was an established tradition in the Jewish visual practice in the wider sense, and it was also employed on Serbian soil in the beginning of 20th century.<sup>78</sup>

The writings published in periodicals of that time state that the interior was designed in the Moorish style, which is considered characteristic for Jewish architecture. However, the decorative motifs Sumbul used in interior design resemble an Arabic rather than a Moorish ornamental tradition (Figure 6). While the Moorish ornaments are comminuted, with numerous details and a complex combination of floral and geometric patterns, Arabic-style ornaments are somewhat simpler. Some designs of leaves that appear in Sumbul's decorations are typically Arabic.<sup>79</sup> The two halls, the lobby, and the premises of the club, according to Sumbul's drafts, were richly embellished with embossed plaster decorations (Figure 7). The ceiling in the reading room was enhanced with two zones of plaster trimmings and rosettes above the hanging chandeliers. However, the quadruple-glazed doors of the reading room directly recall the neo-Moorish solutions with the motifs of trilobed or horseshoe arches above the rectangular fields. These types of openings originated in Moorish architecture,<sup>80</sup> and are typical for many Sephardic synagogues in Central Europe, like the synagogue in Prague. Above the entrance doors of the lobby, there is a plaster lunette decorated with floral intertwining. The ceiling of the lobby was adorned with polysegmental trimmings typical for classical and oriental solutions. The monumental trilobed arch in the lobby is also characteristic of the neo-Moorish style.

<sup>77</sup> "Osvećenje Jevrejskog Doma u Beogradu," 4.

<sup>78</sup> Cf. Vuk Dautović, "Sefardske štampane ketube na Balkanu: Vizuelna dekoracija kao odraz ideja bračne harmonije i privatno—javnog jevrejskog identiteta," *Zbornik MPU* 8 (2012): 65–70.

<sup>79</sup> Owen Jones, *The Grammar of Ornament* (London: Dorling Kindersley, 2004), 155–73, 185–221; Cf. Künzl, "Nineteenth-Century Synagogues in the Neo-Islamic Style," 76–77. Künzl, having in mind exactly this form of differences as an argument, proposes the term neo-Islamic or neo-Oriental synagogue architecture, rather than neo-Moorish, noticing as the basic trait of this style the European architectonic structure with Islamic ornaments and details originating from different countries and traditions.

<sup>80</sup> This type of opening is evidenced by the Great Mosque in Cordoba, and it is characteristic for the area of Andalusia; Leicester B. Holland, "The Origin of the Horseshoe Arch in Northern Spain," *American Journal of Archaeology* 4 (1918): 378–98.

The assembly hall, as the focal point of public life in the Jewish Sephardic community, was sumptuously embellished with numerous plaster details that combined elements from Arabic and Moorish styles (Figure 8). The coffered ceiling contained large panels from which hung the chandeliers providing additional lighting. Longitudinal and traverse beams of the ceiling are connected with the lesenes using decorative plaster consoles (Figure 8). The stage space was framed with a complex polysegmented arch, representing a variation on the typical polysegmental arches in Moorish architecture.<sup>81</sup> Special treatment was given to the design of the windows and doors of the assembly hall by using two zones. The lower zone was divided into three fields that end in a simplified resemblance to the dentilated roof attic that appears on the Oneg Šabat charity building. It is also featured on many synagogues and is based on well-known examples of Arabic and Moorish architecture, such as the mosque of Sultan Al-Mansur Qalawun in Cairo or the Great Mosque in Cordoba.<sup>82</sup> The upper zone of the windows contained octagonal rosettes (Figure 9), corresponding to the hexagonal plaster rosettes in the decorative fields above the assembly hall doors. Such rosettes were positioned above the entrance and the portal of the now lost Bet Jisrael synagogue.

The halls of the school complex were decorated with wooden parapets and somewhat simpler ceilings. Equal attention was paid to the treatment of woodwork, which was entirely made using engraving techniques (Figures 10 and 11). The only polychromatic segment in the entire interior consisted of convex-concave floor tiles in five colors. These patterns resembled carpets, and in one case were inspired more directly by the symbol of the Magen David, as was the case in the entrance hall leading to the residential part of the building (Figure 12). The interior decoration of the House of the Jewish Church-School Community is similar to the interiors of numerous European synagogues. There was no consistency of style; instead, according to the eclectic taste, decorative elements from different sources were combined. Ornamental intertwining does not always directly reflect the Arabic models; rather, they can be understood as an eclectic synthesis of the Arabic and Moorish styles. Even though it has stylistically different templates in the exterior and the interior, it can be concluded that the overall design of the House of the Jewish Church-School Community reflects eclectic variations and interpretations of different historical styles, fusing them into a unique and visually rich solution.

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<sup>81</sup> Marianne Barrucand and Achim Bednorz, *Moorish Architecture in Andalusia* (London: Taschen, 2007), 72–73.

<sup>82</sup> Jones, *The Grammar of Ornament*, 166.



## Social Importance and Function of the House of the Jewish Church-School Community in Belgrade

After the construction of the House of the Jewish Church-School Community was completed, the Federation of Jewish Religious Communities in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, the Chief Rabbinate, classrooms for religious instruction, as well as all cultural-educational and humanitarian societies were settled in the building.<sup>83</sup> In this way an administrative and cultural whole was achieved, which could answer the needs of the emancipated Jewish community in the capital of Yugoslavia in a representative way.

The great, meticulously decorated assembly hall was a public space where the Jewish community showed itself to be sophisticated, and integrated into the society of the time. This was achieved through numerous activities primarily concerned with the work and organization of the Belgrade Jewish Community but also the Federation of Jewish Religious Communities in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. Through the marshalate of the court, the king's envoys were invited to attend the openings of regular congresses of the Federation of Jewish Religious Communities in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, such as the one held in April 1933. These kinds of public gatherings were important for the ties between the royal house and Jewish subjects. This relationship is reflected by the presence of the king's envoys on those occasions.<sup>84</sup> Meetings of the administration of the Jewish religious community of the Sephardic rite were documented in photographs, such as the one from 1934 in which there are members of the administration with President Dr. Jakov Čelebonović. In the background of the assembly hall of the House, in the front of the stage, a large painting of King Aleksandar I Karađorđević was hung.<sup>85</sup>

It is also important to mention that the building of the House was connected with the synagogue via balustraded stairways, thus facilitating public celebrations of important Jewish holidays during their annual cycles. Numerous photographs of specific holidays also attest to this function of the school building, such as the photograph of a festively decorated assembly hall with dining tables in several parallel rows and transverse tables (Figure 13). At this head table, prominent members of the Jewish Community, such as Chief

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<sup>83</sup> "Dom crkveno-jevrejske opštine," 6.

<sup>84</sup> AJ, Fond Dvor—Maršalat, f-74-232-345, Pismo Saveza jevrejskih veroispovednih opština, 27 March 1933; AJ, Fond Dvor—Maršalat, f-74-232-345, Prvom adutantu, odgovor Maršalata, 31 March 1933 (Correspondence, Marshalate of the Court).

<sup>85</sup> Lebl, *Do "konačnog rešenja,"* 204–05.



Rabbi Dr. Isak Alkalaj<sup>86</sup> and the Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi Ignjat Šlang,<sup>87</sup> sat together with other important members of the community (Figure 13).<sup>88</sup> The number of guests, their attire, and their celebratory gestures, such as raising their glasses to toast, speaks to the multitude of people and also documents their civic self-consciousness in interwar Belgrade. During this period, their complete emancipation and integration was realized.

Another photograph taken in the 1920s during a ball illustrates how this space of the school functioned for the celebration of the Jewish holiday Purim.<sup>89</sup> The assembly hall had been transformed in accordance with the carnival character of the holiday. It was decorated with ribbons and garlands, while the participants were formally dressed in evening attire or wore masks related to the joyful practice of celebrating this holiday (Figure 14).<sup>90</sup> Photographic documentation, preserved by chance, shows better than the written sources the life and customs of the Jewish community at that time. Meticulous attention was paid to the speeches delivered; numerous large paintings, in gilded frames, decorated the walls of the assembly hall in the House. This is yet another visual element positioning the Jewish community within the civil framework.<sup>91</sup> However, the most important function of the House was related to the public display of Jewish religious identity. The existence of this kind of educational institution was considered by patrons to be “a long-standing ideal of the Jewish community.”<sup>92</sup>

The House of the Jewish Church-School Community in Belgrade was also connected with secular activities within Belgrade’s Jewish community, showing an active cultural life under its roof. Lectures by well-known scholars were delivered here. For example, guests included mathematician Mihailo Petrović Alas, geophysician and astronomer Milutin Milanković, biologist and physician Ivan Đaja, among others. The Jewish community demonstrated and sustained its tradition of interest in scientific accomplishments. In this type of intellectually fertile environment, as well as in the global framework of world

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 187–88.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 189–90.

<sup>88</sup> JIM, Verski život, K. 3, F, 1; 2; without an inventory number.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Danon, *Zbirka pojmova iz Judaizma*, 63–67.

<sup>91</sup> In some paintings that were in the assembly hall of the House, figural compositions can be distinguished in which the contents can be identified as religious or historical. With a lack of more precise data, we leave this phenomenon as a possible future research topic.

<sup>92</sup> *Izveštaj o radu*, 6.

science, the above-mentioned scientists made an indelible impact. Dances and social activities for young people were organized in the House as well.<sup>93</sup> As Rabbi Isak Alkalaj said at the opening ceremonies for the House: “This strong roof will be for us a synthesis of all the ideals that we are striving to achieve.”<sup>94</sup>

Another function that transformed the appearance of the assembly hall of the House was related to funerary rituals. It provided a place in which the Jewish community was able to express their respect for an outstanding individual after the person’s death. In that way, the most important community members were honored through a public funeral, and their value to the community was emphasized through traditional forms of posthumous panegyrics. After the death of Dr. David M. Alkalaj, long-time President of the Jewish Church-School Community in Belgrade, on 4 February 1933, his body lay in state in the assembly hall of the Jewish House until the funeral.<sup>95</sup> According to photographic documentation, his displayed coffin was draped with an embroidered cloth. They were surrounded with wreaths of flowers. Two massive candle holders with lit candles were placed at the head and foot of the coffin, while the young Belgrade Zionists served as the guards of honor.<sup>96</sup> Later on, member of Parliament and banker Bencion Buli, another prominent member of the Jewish community, was given the same solemn honors. A news report about his funeral states: “The assembly hall of the Jewish House was completely draped in black. In the middle of the hall there was the coffin with citizens serving as guards of honor.”<sup>97</sup> Funerary ceremonies started with a prayer accompanied by the Serbian-Jewish Singing Society and ended with speeches, after which the funeral procession moved from King Peter I Street no. 71 toward the cemetery. The king’s envoy, Lieutenant Leko, and court ministers were present. Funerals commemorated or described in this manner correspond to the civic concept of a public ceremony in which a community celebrates the life of one of their important individuals. Thus, the person’s merits were publicly recognized. This individual’s accomplishments were attested through the presence of various representatives of professional, political, military, and religious institutions. The public character of these funerals represented a strong manifestation of Jewish identity and its place within society in general.

<sup>93</sup> Živančević, “Beogradski Jevreji na Dorćolu,” 457.

<sup>94</sup> “Osvećenje doma crkveno-školske jevrejske opštine,” 6.

<sup>95</sup> AJ, Fond Dvor—Maršalat, f-74-232-345, Osmrtnica Dr. Davida M. Alkalaja, 4 February 1933.

<sup>96</sup> Lebl, *Do “konačnog rešenja,”* 200–01.

<sup>97</sup> “Sahrana Bencionia Bulia,” *Politika*, 25 August 1933, 16. We wish to kindly express our gratitude to our colleague Milici Rožman, who pointed out this source to us.

By following numerous actual events and vital transformations of the most important public space of the House—the assembly hall—one can measure the extent of public interactions that the Belgrade Jewish community accomplished by using their designated space. In a certain way, this hall was a public stage on which different events and manifestations of Jewish identity were displayed, and in which representatives of the highest state authorities participated. Through such actions, a mutually loyal and respectful relationship was affirmed between the Jewish subjects of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and the representative bodies of the Federation and the Jewish Church-School Community and their sovereign.

After the conclusion of the Second World War in Yugoslavia (December 1944), Moric Albuin was appointed as the superintendent of the school building. It housed the quarters of the National Front of the Third Department. At the same time, the Serbian-Jewish Religious Community settled in a part of the building on King Peter I Street, no. 71, while the Federation of Jewish Religious Communities moved into its first and the second floors in 1946. The part of the building from the same street (number 71a) housed the National Front of the First Region.<sup>98</sup> Somewhat later it housed the Women's Antifascist Front school "Janko Veselinović." In 1948 The Ministry of Education wanted to adapt the assembly hall into a puppet theatre.<sup>99</sup> At the end of the 1940s the building was used by social enterprises: "Silos" and "Naše Dete." During 1957, due to the lack of premises for the Jewish Community of Belgrade together with the Federation of Jewish Religious Communities, the question of ownership and use of the great hall of the House was raised (Figure 15). In the beginning of November 1958 the Federation was moved into premises in the building facing the yard on the third floor, with the entrance from King Peter I Street, no. 71a. It was also decided that the sites of the Federation on the July 7th Street, no. 71 (currently King Peter I Street),<sup>100</sup> should be used to serve as the Historical-Museum department of the Federation together with the museum collection and the library of the Federation. This included the archives which were no longer in active operation. In March 1961, nationalization of the building no. 71 on July 7th Street (King Peter I Street) was ordered by the executive board of NSNR Serbia.<sup>101</sup> Several years later, in 1965, the Jewish

<sup>98</sup> IAB, OGB, TD, f-III-47-1927.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> On the changing names of the street, see fn. 37 above.

<sup>101</sup> JIM: Dokumentacija pravnog odeljenja, podaci o zgradama u ulici Kralja Petra 71 i 71a; Pererine arhive, omot 9c; Zapisnici sednica 1955–1959. Chronologically interpreted due to the kindness of Ms. Branka Džidić, archivist of the Jewish History Museum in Belgrade, to whom

History Museum was moved to first floor of the still nonadapted premises in no. 71a July 7th Street (King Peter I Street).<sup>102</sup> On the occasion of celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Federation on 7 and 8 October 1969, a new exhibition of the Jewish History Museum was officially opened.<sup>103</sup> Today, besides the Jewish History Museum this building contains the Jewish Community of Belgrade, which occupies the second floor, and the Federation of Jewish Communities of Serbia on the third.

## Conclusion

The process of emancipation of Belgrade's Jews happened gradually and in several stages. Leaving the traditional boundaries of the Jewish *Jalija* and settling in the part of the city called *Zerek* was the beginning of the transformation and modernization of the Sephardic community in Belgrade. Jewish society borrowed this process from the Central European cultural model, seeking and defining the frames of their own identity. Given their circumstances, with the arrival of the new ruling dynasty of *Karadorđević*, a foundation stone was laid and *Bet Jisrael* synagogue was built on *Cara Uroša* Street. Having been a Munich student, architect M. *Kapetanović* constructed this edifice in the neo-Moorish style as one of the variants of *Historicism*. The choice of this form of representation was in accordance with the Central European currents and understandings of expressing Jewish visual identity. After the First World War, the Belgrade Jewish community found itself in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, and for its needs, the first building that was constructed was for the charity *Oneg Šabat i Gemilut Hasidim*, followed by the monument to Jewish soldiers who had fallen in wars from 1912 until 1918 at the Sephardic cemetery in Belgrade. Both projects were executed by architect *Samuel Sumbul*, who had been educated in Vienna. For these two monuments, he applied *Orientalist* concepts that had been introduced by *Kapetanović* through construction of the *Bet Jisrael* synagogue. The establishment of a new state entity also resulted in the formation of new organizations that also represented Jews. With the seat in Belgrade, these were the Federation of Jewish Religious Communities and the Association of Rabbis of the Kingdom. The economic growth of the Belgrade Sephardic community and the participation of its prominent members in state politics and the public sphere also influenced the need to

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we wish to express our kind gratitude for the help in collecting materials, but also to her parent institution for collegial help and cooperation.

<sup>102</sup> Anonymous, *Bilten*, no. 5, May–June 1965, 28.

<sup>103</sup> Anonymous, *Bilten*, no. 9–10, 6 September–October 1969, 17.

articulate a space for Jewish activities, which organized religious, educational, and cultural life.

These circumstances with the Bet Jisrael synagogue and the existence of the preselected building lots resulted in the construction of the House of the Jewish Church-School Community in Belgrade. Sumbul started the work on this building in 1927 and completed it in 1929 when it was solemnly consecrated. It is important to emphasize that for almost two decades after the end of the First World War, there was a change in the paradigm through which Jewish identity was expressed, so this representative public edifice was raised in an eclectic variation of the so-called Byzantine style. This was noted by the press at the time, and it was confirmed by the author of the House himself. The meaning of this choice was connoted by ideas of Yugoslavianism and confirmation of Jews as loyal subjects within the Kingdom. The aforementioned style was defined by the Kingdom as the official state architectural style. This was due to the need to unify the appearance of public architecture and assimilate Jews within the heterogeneous strata of Belgrade and Yugoslavia as a whole. The previously popular model, which belonged stylistically to the oriental style, remained present in the interior decoration. This was especially evident in the assembly hall of the House, which also exhibited eclectic concepts with elements of neo-Islamic ornamentation. The construction of the House of the Jewish Church-School Community as a representative functional entity with a synagogue depicts, in the visual sense, the final stage of Jewish emancipation in the Kingdom. For almost a decade, all of the important public events and manifestations related to the religious, political, educational, and cultural life of the Jewish community in Belgrade took place in that building. This structure survived the tragic destruction during the Second World War, to achieve a revival with a different function in the time of peace.

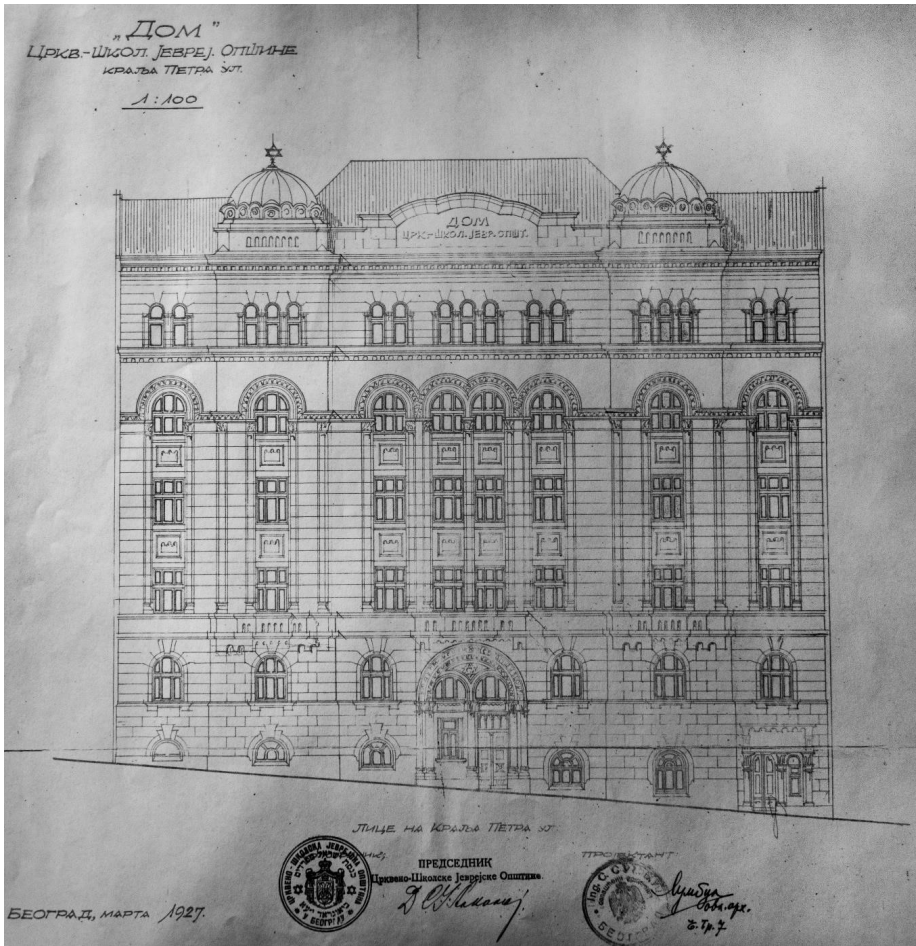
vukdau@gmail.com  
vladanaputnik@gmail.com







**Figure 1.** Exterior Elevation of the House of the Jewish Church-School Community, Belgrade, with inscription on the pediment of the façade.  
(<http://www.novosti.rs/vesti/naslovnadruštvo/aktuelno.290.html:568738-Jevrejskoj-zajednici-nicija-imovina>)



**Figure 2.** Façade Drawing of the House of the Jewish Church-School Community, architect Samuel Sumbul, Belgrade 1927. (IAB, OGB, TD, f-III-47-1927)





**Figure 3.** The House of the Jewish Church-School Community in Belgrade after its completion in the 1930s, showing the street's slope.  
(Photo from the Collection of Miloš Jurišić)



**Figure 4.** Ballustrated stairway connecting the synagogue Bet Jisrael and the hall in front of the ceremonial hall of the House of the Jewish Church-School Community.  
(Photo by Putnik and Dautović)





**Figure 5.** Entrance Portal of the House of the Jewish Church-School Community  
(Photo by Putnik and Dautović)



**Figure 6.** A detail of the plaster decoration from the ceremonial hall of the School.  
(Photo by Putnik and Dautović)







**Figure 8.** View of the ceremonial hall of the House of the Jewish Church-School Community  
(Photo by Putnik and Dautović)





**Figure 9.** Window frame with rosette, a detail of the ceremonial hall.  
(Photo by Putnik and Dautović)



**Figure 10.** A detail of the stairway of the school's library.  
(Photo by Putnik and Dautović)





**Figure 11.** Stairway leading to the hallway between the library and the ceremonial hall, detail.  
(Photo by Putnik and Dautović)



**Figure 12.** Main entrance hall of the House of the Jewish Church-School Community from King Peter's Street no. 71. On the floor is a stylized decoration of the Magen David. (Photo by Putnik and Dautović)

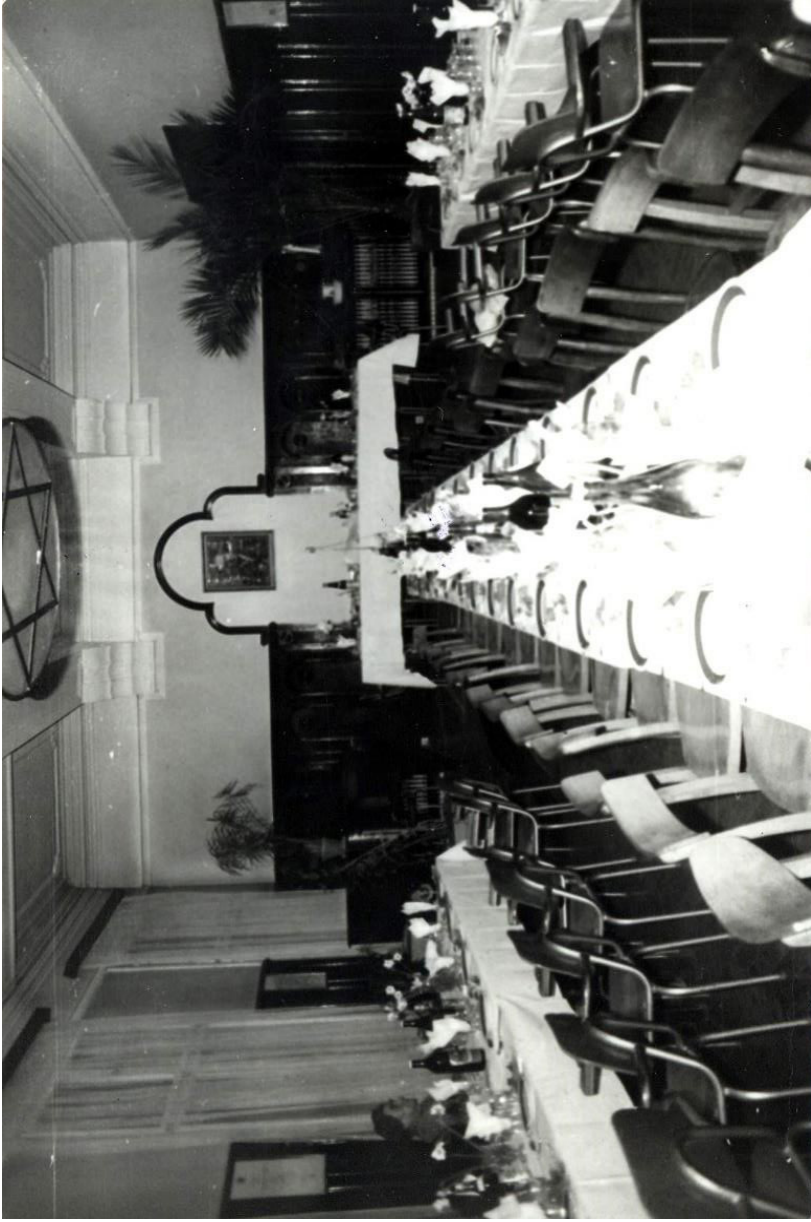


**Figure 13.** A celebration of a religious holiday in the ceremonial hall, from the 1930s.  
(JIM Beograd, Verski život, K. 3 f. 1,2)





**Figure 14.** Celebration of the Purim holiday, ceremonial hall of the House, 1930s.  
(JIM Beograd, Verski život, K. 3 f. 1,2)



**Figure 15.** Ceremonial Hall of the House of the Jewish Church-School Community, second floor in the building on King Peter's Street no. 71a. Appearance after the Second World War. (JIM Beograd, *Verski život*, K. 3 f. 1,2)