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## KETUBBAH

Jews in the territory of the former Yugoslavia adhered to all customs, including those relating to marriage. There are mentions of arranged marriages in literature, as well as in the questionnaires of the Jewish Historical Museum asking members of the Jewish municipalities about what marriages looked like.

The memories of family life of Croatian Jews were published in the book *Obitelji* (*Family*, Zagreb, 1996). What follows are some examples.

„My Father’s brother was killed in the First World War, and his four sisters married one after the other, but none of them out of love. All these marriages were made through intermediaries, and, as our aunts told us, this made them very uncomfortable. However, as they lived in a small place, there were no other possibilities, while the *schatchen* knew that in Kutina or Dugo Selo, say, there was a good marriage opportunity. It is interesting, though, that they all had very good marriages and peace and harmony in their homes. My parents were the only ones in the family who married for love, and they got along very well and loved each other.” (*Obitelji*, p. 119, reminiscence of Mima Veber)

„When I married in 1945 in the Zagreb Temple, I was given a *ketubbah*, a marriage certificate according to the Jewish Law, signed by the groom and two witnesses. This marriage contract obliges the husband to take care of the wife, and the wife to take care of the husband.” (*Obitelji*, p. 95, reminiscence of Dragan Wollner)

„I met my husband while a student, in the Zagreb Jewish mass hall, in the cellar of the building in Palmotićeveva street. We were married in the beautiful temple in Koprivnica, and I was led to the marriage not by my father, but by my brother. My husband’s parents – the father a judge, the mother a daughter of a famous physician from Travnik who had been made an honorary citizen there – came for the occasion from Sarajevo. The *chuppa* was





decorated with flowers on all sides, and all the arches of the bridal canopy were of flowers, as well. The guests included nearly all my high school teachers, including the school principal, and the first to congratulate me was my former Croatian teacher, who kissed my hand and said, 'Madam, my congratulations'. I was very nicely dressed, as my aunt in Zagreb had made me a beautiful white dress, and the groom was also very elegant, in a jacket with a top-hat" (*Obitelj*, p. 125, reminiscence of Lizzy Kollomann-Nick).

Here are also some reminiscences from the answers to the questions in the survey of the Jewish Historical Museum:

„On the occasion of the *betrothal*, the groom's closest relatives were invited to the bride's house so the families could meet each other (*kumizer*), gifts were exchanged, *Oh ke Lekububor* was danced. The groom was given a gold watch and chain, the bride jewelry" (Flora Atijas, Sarajevo).

„Me and my wife were married by the chief rabbi Dr. Gavro Švarc on 30 June 1941 in Zagreb. It may well have been his last ceremony – the Germans and the Ustashas were already after him" (Dr. Isak Levi, Sarajevo).

After modern weddings, the newlyweds are left with a photograph. In times gone by, after the wedding a much more valuable document was left – a marriage contract, or, in Hebrew, *ketubbah* – what is written down. As old *ketubbot* are nowadays rare and valuable objects of art, we shall devote some space to their description here.

There is a large body of literature on the *ketubbah*. One of the most important researchers in this field is Dr. Shalom Sabar, two of whose studies I was able to consult.<sup>1</sup>

The oldest known *ketubbot* were found in the Judean desert. These are, actually, only fragments of texts which indicate they were once part of *ketubbot*.

Talmudic scholars paid great attention to the precise formulation of every clause in the *ketubbah*. Thus, the Talmud contains a whole section entitled *ketubbah*.

In the early stages of development of this interesting document, the term *ketubbah* related to the husband's obligation to reimburse his wife in case of divorce or widowhood. The *ketubbah* mentioned the sum of 200 *zuzim* which had to be paid in case the wife had been a virgin, or half that in all other cases. It was considered that the sum was high enough to dissuade people from unnecessary divorces. Formulations and demands changed with the times.

The first *ketubbot* which show signs of decoration date from the Middle Ages (10th-11th century), and were found in the Cairo *geniza*. They have decorations only around the introductory text, or „preamble“, usually con-





sisting of geometric or floral motifs, micrography or adornment of the letters themselves.

During the Middle Ages, the text of the *ketubbah* was standardized. At that time, differences arose in attitudes towards the *ketubbah* between two groups of Jews, the Ashkenazim and the Sephardim.

The Ashkenazim adhered strictly to the rabbinical rules and wrote their marriage contracts on square paper or parchment, without decorations, and always with the same codified text.

Unlike them, the Sephardim considered the marriage contract to be a personal document. They did not accept the ban on polygamy instituted by rabbi Geršom, nor did they standardize the sum of money. Decorated *ketubbot* existed in Spain before the expulsion of the Jews in 1492, and after they were dispersed, they continued this tradition everywhere they settled.

The form and disposition of text of the *ketubbah* produced in the territory of Yugoslavia was similar to those the produced in the Netherlands, Italy and Greece.

The earliest illuminated *ketubbot* date from the early 17th century Venice. The sources of the decorative elements which appear in early Italian *ketubbot* are works of applied art, illuminations in books and manuscripts, the architecture of Baroque and Rococo churches and towns. Especially popular was the motif of a gate with columns, borrowed from the cover pages of the first printed books. Family coats-of-arms also appeared as decorative motifs, along with various markings of state: flags, symbols, coats-of-arms.

There are several subjects which usually appear as illustrations in the *ketubbah*. First of all, Jerusalem and the Temple in Jerusalem. It is usually depicted as a miniature in an arch over the text. Illuminations may also feature portraits of the bride and groom, again as miniatures over the text. The most frequent motifs are flora and fauna. They are usually intertwined with motifs of the signs of the Zodiac.

There is little mention of *ketubbot* produced in the territory of the former Yugoslavia. That is why I shall take this occasion to attempt to give a survey of the *ketubbot* known so far (some of them mentioned in various texts, some of them shown at exhibitions).

The Sarajevo chief rabbi Moric Levi published an article entitled *Jewish Manuscripts in the Sarajevo Museum* in the March-April, 1940 issue of the magazine *Omanut*. The article mentions four *ketubbot* – three remained in the National Museum in Sarajevo until the Second World War, while the fourth one was given to Nahum Soklov on the occasion of his visit to Sarajevo. Of two of the *ketubbot* in the Museum, Dr. Moric Levi said they were





„without particular importance”, while the third one was described in detail and reproduced. A special characteristic of this *ketubbah* is that the same form was used for two weddings. A paper with the text of the *ketubbah* for the first wedding was pasted into the blank space in the middle of a *ketubbah* with a very finely ornamented border, and another paper for the second wedding was pasted over it. According to data given by Dr. Moric Levi, the first contract was made in Sarajevo, in the year 5505 (1744). The groom was Jakov, son of Jozef Papo, and the bride Rahela, daughter of Benjamin Cevi from Belgrade. The second contract was also made in Sarajevo, in the year 5598 (1837). The groom was Menahem, son of Jakov Papo, and the bride Estera, daughter of Cadik Haj-Danon. The priest at the first marriage was Jakob Almuli, at the second – Mojsije Perera. Dr. Moric Levi concluded that these contracts were from the same family. Also, he pointed out that he had seen identically ornamented *ketubbot* in the *Jiidisches Lexikon* – one from the Cluny museum in Paris, the other from Leningrad. Based on this, Dr. Levi concluded that the Sarajevo *ketubbot* were written on forms used in other Jewish communities as well.

Just as the *ketubbah* from Sarajevo given to Nahum Soklov will probably appear in some museum or collection, so the *ketubbah* illuminated in Belgrade in the late 19th century by the painter Samuilo Elić can now be seen in the *Beth Tzedic* museum in Toronto.

In his large monograph *ketubbah* (New York, 1990), the well-respected researcher Shalom Sabar gives a survey of *ketubbot* kept in the three largest and most significant collections in the United States: Hebrew Union College, Skirball Museum and Klau Library. The book also publishes three *ketubbot* created in the territory of the former Yugoslavia. The first one is a *ketubbah* from Dubrovnik, dating from 1762, very beautifully decorated with motifs of columns and a basket of flowers above the text. The second *ketubbah* is from Rijeka, from 1844, without too many decorations. The third one is from Zemun, from 1845. Unlike the other two, which were written on parchment, this one is on paper. Shabar compares this *ketubbah* with one from Vienna, dating from 1831. What gives the Zemun *ketubbah* special value is that it was signed – as a witness – by rabbi Jehuda Haj Alkalaj.

A *ketubbah* produced in Split in 1644 now, sadly, exists only in the form of a photograph. The decoration was intended to follow on Italian models, but was not executed very skilfully.

Duško Kečkemet's book *Jews in the History of Split* (1971) shows a reproduction of a *ketubbah* from the Morpurgo family. It was produced in Split, but no date is given. The text is in two columns, bordered with floral motifs.





A further two *ketubbot* from the Split family Morpurgo were shown at the exhibition *Language, Books and Writing of the Jews in Yugoslavia*, organized by the Jewish Historical Museum in Belgrade in 1979. Both dated from the 19th century, and were produced on parchment, without ornamentation.

At the exhibition *Jews in the Territory of Yugoslavia*, held in Zagreb in 1988, a *ketubbah* from the Jewish Museum of Bosnia-Herzegovina was shown. It was produced in Sarajevo, around the year 1900.

A collection of *ketubbot* is kept in the Jewish Historical Museum in Belgrade. The most significant one in the collection is a *ketubbah* made on parchment in Ancona in 1652 and preserved in the Split family Morpurgo. This *ketubbah* has a rich floral decoration filling a large arched area over the text. The text itself is in two columns and framed with representations of the Zodiac. Apart from this very valuable *ketubbah*, also of interest is one made in Sarajevo in 1746, on paper and without decoration, as well as a *ketubbah* from Zemun, from 1842, on paper and with simple decoration. Another high point of the collection are *ketubbot* produced on printed forms. These are lithographs designed by Jakov Haj Altarac, and printed by the lithographer P. Marković in the early 20th century in Belgrade. Apart from these Belgrade forms, *ketubbot* written in the late 19th and early 20th century printed forms from Vienna, Sofia and Sarajevo have also been preserved.

The Jewish cultural and educational association *La Benevolencia* published in 1937 in Sarajevo Jorje Tadić's book *The Jews in Dubrovnik*. This book carries several rare translations of marriage contracts into Serbo-Croatian; we shall quote one registered by Aron Koen in 1641:

„On Friday, the 12th day of the month of Tebeth of the year 5396 since the creation of the world, according to the count we keep here in Dubrovnik, which lies near the sea and drinks spring water, near the river Ombla, the young and illustrious groom, the honorable Josip Franko, son of the gentleman David Franko, may God keep him, told the virginal young lady Ester, daughter of the *haham* Aron Koen, may God keep him: 'Be my wife according to the law of Moses and Israel, and with God's help I will feed you, provide for you, take care of you, keep you and dress you so as the wives of the Jews are truly to be kept and dressed according to the Jewish canons, and I shall give you a dowry for your virginity of 200 pieces of silver, which shall be yours, and upkeep, and I shall unite myself with you according to the customs of the whole world'. And the lady Ester agreed, the bride, and became his wife according to the laws of Moses and Israel, and brought him in cash 2,800 Venetian ducats, in gold vases 300 ducats, in furniture, bedding and





clothes, 1,050 ducats, and he gave her a further 2,050 ducats, so that she had a total of 6,200 Venetian ducats. Their witnesses were Haim Abenun, Danijel Franko, Samuel Maestro, Mojsije Selem Kabiljo and Abram Beatar.”

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<sup>1</sup>Shaiom Sabar, ketubbah, New York 1990; Shaiom Sabar, Mazai tov, The Israei Museum, Jerusalem, 1993.