

Publication News from The Foundation for the Advancement of Sephardic Studies and Culture

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Newly-published English-language edition of the classic work on the Traditions and Customs of the Sephardic Jews of Salonica by noted scholar Michael Molho

**Work focuses on the rich cultural traditions and heritage of the
largest Sephardic Jewish Community in the Balkans**

New York City, July 12, 2006 – The Foundation for the Advancement of Sephardic Studies and Culture (FASSAC) proudly announces the publication of an annotated edition on the Sephardic Jewish community of Salonica – TRADITIONS AND CUSTOMS OF THE SEPHARDIC JEWS OF SALONICA, by Michael Molho, translated by Alfred A. Zara and edited by Robert Bedford.

Appearing for the first time in the English language, TRADITIONS AND CUSTOMS is one of the most picturesque and colorful accounts of the heritage and culture of the Sephardic Jews of Salonica, written in 1940 by the late Rabbi Michael Molho, renowned writer and historian on the Jewish community of Salonica.

At the heart of this volume are centuries of colorful songs, proverbs, customs, games, religious practices, festivals, superstitions, and scenes of family life. A great number of these characteristic customs were brought to Salonica by the Sephardic Jews fleeing the Spanish Inquisition in the late fifteenth century: The fear of God, which dominated the Sephardic world and penetrated deep into their daily life; the ignorance which kept alive the superstition of the masses; the purity of their customs and the sanctity of the conjugal home; the patriarchal way of life carried on by the Jewish family in their modest dwellings; the demonstrations of joy expressed by the people during wedding celebrations, circumcisions and Jewish festivals, as well as the sadness occasioned by their tragedies; the old-fashioned methods of educating the young generation, and the games to which children eagerly applied themselves.

Initially written in French and published in Spanish, the manuscript was penned by Molho before the tragic destruction of the Salonica community, drawing upon a wealth of Hebrew and Judeo-Spanish literature, and incorporating memories and recollections from his personal experience and from the elderly generation in Salonica. The work is written with great passion and a deep appreciation and understanding of the Sephardic heritage, and the descriptions of the daily life of the Salonica Jews preserve a rich folklore and culture which tragically no longer exists. The book is highly recommended for anyone interested in Sephardic and Jewish studies and in the linguistic, religious and cultural history of the Sephardic Jews of Salonica and the Balkans.

For nearly five centuries, Salonica (Thessaloniki in present day Greece) had a sizeable Jewish community descended from the Spanish Jews who had been expelled from Spain in the late fifteenth century. Up until the early twentieth century, these Spanish Jews, or Sephardim, dominated the city's commerce and culture, making the port city the cultural, industrial and financial center of the Balkans. The colorful traditions, character and language of the Salonica Jews – which had changed little over the

BOOK INFORMATION

TRADITIONS AND CUSTOMS OF
THE SEPHARDIC JEWS OF SALONICA.
by Michael Molho
Edited by Robert Bedford
Translated by Alfred A. Zara

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**For more information contact:
info@sephardicstudies.org**

centuries – even after the transfer of the city to the Greeks in 1912, created a unique resistance to assimilation. Sheltered in their neighborhoods and grouped around their ancient synagogues, the Jews of Salonica were easy prey during the ruthless Nazi occupation of Greece from 1941-1944. In 1943, the entire Jewish community was systematically rounded up and sent to their deaths in eastern Europe. The destruction of the community was so complete that less than 4% of the population survived to return to Salonica at the end of World War II. Today, the Jewish population of Thessaloniki numbers under 1,000 – a mere fraction of the Sephardic presence which had once dominated the city so completely.

TRADITIONS AND CUSTOMS OF THE SEPHARDIC JEWS OF SALONICA is now available for purchase and is priced at \$29.95. It can be purchased direct from the publisher at www.sephardicstudies.org and will be shortly available at bookstores and on-line retailers.

About the Author

Michael Molho was born in Salonica, descended from a long line of eminent rabbis and scholars. Molho was rabbi of the Jewish Community of Salonica after it emerged from the destruction of the Holocaust, and later emigrated with his family to Buenos Aires, to serve as spiritual leader of the Sephardic congregation of Temple Chalom. Molho died in Buenos Aires in 1964, leaving behind a legacy of nearly one hundred works on the Sephardic Jews of Salonica and the Balkans.

About the Translator

Alfred A. Zara was born in Cairo in 1908, to Sephardi parents from Istanbul and Ismir, and was educated in Paris and London where the Zara family had settled in 1911. Zara became a founding member of the Holland Park Synagogue in West London, served as a member of the RAF Ground Staff during the Second World War, and worked as a retailer until his retirement in the early 1970's. Zara took it upon himself to translate Molho's work at the age of 89, as a memorial to his father, Robert J. Zara. Alfred A. Zara passed away in Vancouver, BC shortly after the publication of this volume.

About the Editor

Robert Bedford is the Executive Director of the *Foundation for the Advancement of Sephardic Studies and Culture*, NY, and author of several articles and books, including AN INTRODUCTION TO LITERATURE ON THE HOLOCAUST IN GREECE; PORTRAITS OF OUR PAST, THE SEPHARDIC COMMUNITIES OF GREECE AND THE HOLOCAUST, and the documentary film OTTOMAN SALONIKA, 1430-1912. Bedford lives and works in the New York City area.

About the Publisher

The *Foundation for the Advancement of Sephardic Studies and Culture* (FASSAC) is a non-profit organization dedicated to the promotion and preservation of the Sephardic culture, language and experience. The heritage and language of the Sephardim – descendants of the Spanish Jews who fled the religious persecution of the Inquisition five centuries ago – has diminished greatly and is in danger of vanishing completely. The Foundation's goals and interests are reflected in a wide variety of activities, historical exhibits, visual presentations, documentaries and book publications. It continues to conduct research and publish works in an effort to document and promote the culture and history of Sephardic Jewry. More information on the Foundation's projects and publications is available at www.sephardicstudies.org.