

Traces of Jewish life in Ioannina, Greece

ROMANIOTE JEWS

The Jews that have lived in Greece since Hellenistic times (3rd century B.C.), were called Romaniote Jews. They used Greek as their everyday language of communication and were inspired by the local culture and customs and retained their religious identity.

With the arrival of the Sephardim in the late 15th century, things changed. Populations in most of the Romaniote Jewish communities, except those of Epirus, the Peloponnese and Crete, had dwindled because of migration and were therefore absorbed into the culture of the Sephardim, whose traditions held sway. Notable differences between Romaniote and Sephardim were in the language they used, their dress, food and form of religious observance. The city of Ioannina was definitely the centre of the Romaniote Jewish population.

Jews were treated reasonably under Ottoman rule. They were allowed freedom of religious observance, given special privileges in trade and work, and they were allowed autonomy within their own communities.

The Jewish population lived in their own quarter inside the city walls / fortification. This was by no means a ghetto; it was merely the Jewish quarter of the Ottoman city where, as in all Ottoman cities, each minority religious group had its own neighbourhood.

THE JEWISH QUARTER OUTSIDE OF THE CASTLE



JEWISH HOUSES

The Jews of Ioannina lived in the castle and around it. In the castle lived mostly low income Jews, whereas merchants and manufacturers (middle class) and the rich lived at the streets right outside the castle, close to the walls. So, there are three types of residence: The common people's house, the middle class one and the mansion. The Levi residence belongs to the third category.



THE COMMON PEOPLE'S HOUSE

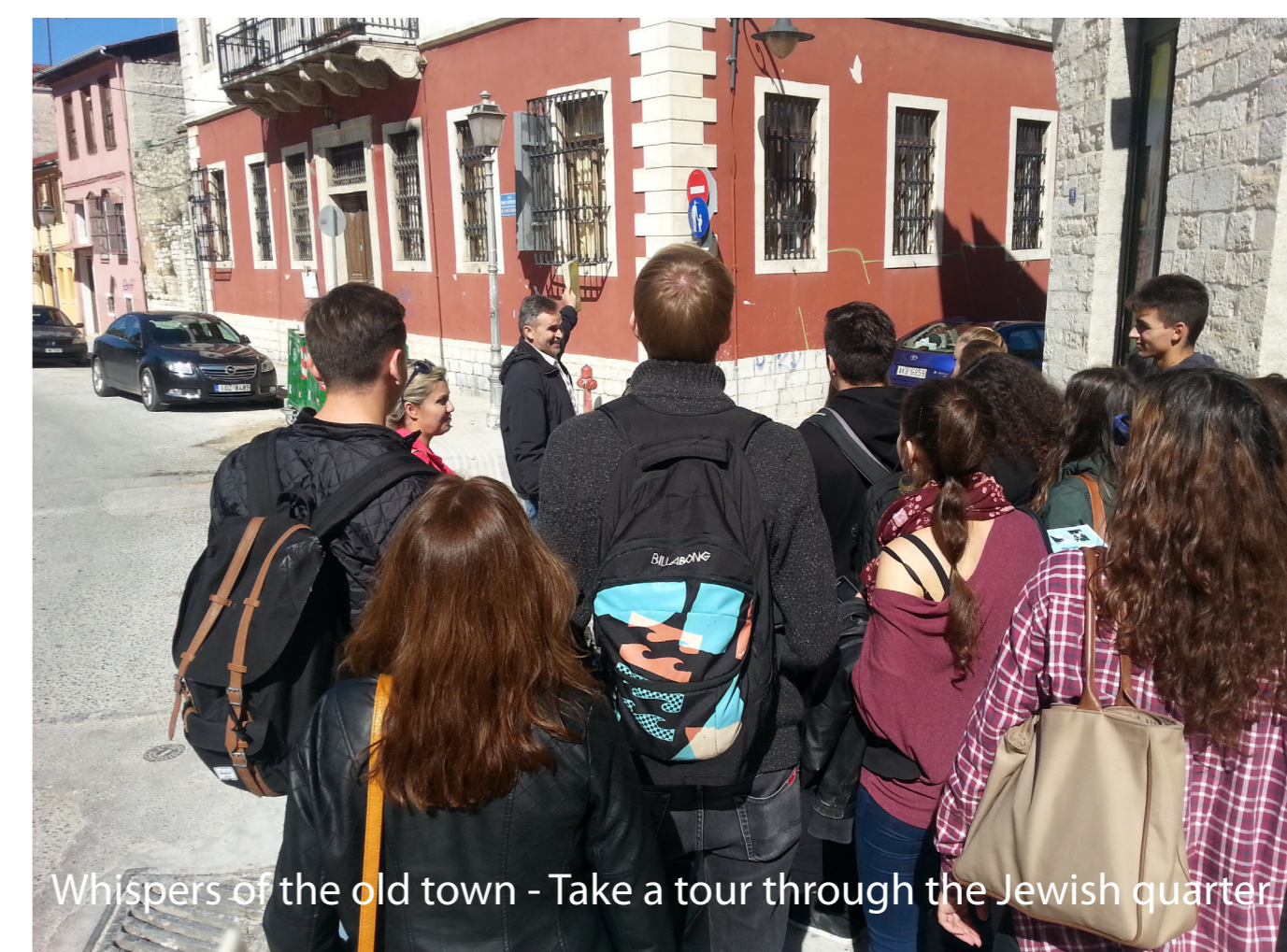
The common people's house is spartan and functional, built on a narrow and long lot. Its features are: the ground floor is the winter residence and the workshop, the upper floor is the summer residence, the yard is at the back of the house, the upper floor is typically overhanging, the ground floor has stone masonry, whereas the upper floor is made of wood.

MIDDLE CLASS HOUSES

Middle class houses are outside the walls and share the same features as mansions, only their ground floor is used as shop or workshop and the second floor is the residence of the family. It is smaller in size and the ground floor is not elevated from the street level.

THE MANSION

Typical features of Jewish mansions are a rectangular shape, a compact design, the ground floor is elevated compared to the street level, a street front façade, a back yard, stone masonry, iron bars protecting the windows and a balcony and iron bar frame.



Whispers of the old town - Take a tour through the Jewish quarter