

**ANATOLIAN RELIGIONS AND BELIEFS PLATFORM/
CULTURAL HERITAGE CARRIERS/VANGUARDS OF OUR CULTURAL HERITAGE/ Part 5**

Turkish Jews and the 500th Anniversary Museum with Silviyo Ovadia and Nisya Isman Alovi

TOPICS: Establishment and promotion of the 500th Anniversary Museum, Turkish Jews from past to present

How much do we know about the Jews of Turkey/Türkiye? How much do we know about the Jewish faith? In this episode of "Those Who Back Our Cultural Heritage/Vanguards of Our Cultural Heritage," my guest Nisya İşman Alovi, director and curator of the 500th Year Foundation Museum of Turkish Jews, and Silvio Ovadya, President of the 500th Year Foundation, will give us information about the mMuseum.

"It was necessary to promote the Jews of Turkey/Türkiye more."

Silviyo Ovadya - Jews in Turkey/Türkiye have always been known as introverts. Their history, language, and traditions are little known. It was necessary to promote the history of the Jews who have lived in Anatolia and Istanbul for centuries, perhaps even before Jesus Christ. And since this could only happen through a museum, the 500th Year Foundation decided then to found one. They succeeded in making it happen under very difficult circumstances and by bringing together some very difficult things, they made it happen. Since then, we have constantly tried to make it a very large museum, both by borrowing and by buying. We even try to take even seemingly simple items and try to improve the environment's creativity of this place.

Nisya Isman Alovi - Our museum is open 6 days a week. It is closed on Saturdays, Shabbat/Shabbat days and, if there is a holiday, it will be closed during those periods/days as well. It is always published. The opening hours are always announced on the website. When you come to the museum, you have the chance to see not only the museum but also the Neve Shalom Synagogue. If there is a prayer, a wedding, or a circumcision ceremony downstairs, the museum visitor can witness this moment from inside the museum. The tour guides know, when it is taking place and they usually come to watch weddings. Since 2015, we have continued to provide museum services here.

Silviyo Ovadya - Downstairs, in the Neve Shalom Cultural Center, we constantly open/display exhibitions. There are exhibitions that we change every month and a half. We have a large-scale exhibition in preparation. Mrs. Nisya can give you information about it.

Nisya İşman Alovi - There is a general perception of/about the 500th Year Museum. We want to break it down/alter it. Turkish Jewish history does not actually start with the Sephardic Jews. Rather, there is a history going back 2,600 -years history here. There were Roman/Romaniote Jews, and Mizrahi Jews who came/arrived after the first and second destruction of the Temple of Solomon. They have a very wide/extensive culture.

Our current aim is not to not forget them, and in order to remember the past pieces of the past, we want to make the synagogue structures in the archaeological sites three-dimensional again, to explain and showdisplay them. Çiğdem Ener is doing the dimensioning. We sendhave sent the excavation chiefs archeologists to the universities of Harvard University and Princeton University in the USA. They are also helping to improve the museumimproving it by giving their feedback.

The reconstruction continues here. So it hasn't stopped statically. One of them the projects is that we have created an open warehouse, so we have unearthed many pieces that were in storage, that were and preserved in the archive. Hamambaslik The Chief Rabbinate is helping us in this regard. The collection is constantly expanding.

Nükhet Everi- We do not know how many Jews there are in TurkeyTürkiye. Ashkenazim, SafaradsSephardi, what kind of groups are there?

Silviyo Ovadya- 10 years ago, we were talking about 20,000 thousand, but today the number is around 16,000 thousand. Apart from this, there is a community of 1,000-1,200 people living in Izmir,. There are 60-to 70 people living in Bursa,. There are and very small communities living in Ankara and Antakya. Among those in Istanbul, I estimate that there are around 300 Ashkenazirazic Jews. Even though they are not considered to be part of the same community, there are Karaite Jews, but today their numbers are very smallfew, I don't not think there are more than 100 people. There are 15 active synagogues in Istanbul. All of them and all of which are open on Saturdays. Apart from Istanbul, there are two synagogues in Bursa, Antakya, and Izmir which are fully functioning.

Nisya Isman Alovi- Every year during Pesach, (Passover), we cook and explain the rituals. We light Hanukka candles together for peace.

Silviyo Ovadya- Now, for example, let me takerelate a very sensitive issue. During the Second World War, there were many ambassadors or consular officials in Europe in particular who were especially helped bythe Jews. There were some incidents that we have never seen before. For example, there is an honorary consul of Lyon, and he is not a Muslim. But this man has saved many lives. Yad Vashem University gave him an award. We did not include this in our organization, but we want to do so at the first opportunity. There is a Sephardic Culture Research Association in Istanbul, and I am the president of it. The aim there is to keep the Judaoe-Spanish Espanol language and culture alive. In the 75-80s there was talk were rumours that this language was dead. Today, it is much brighter than it was then. Especially during the coronaCovid-19 periodpandemic, there were almost 3- to 4 video programmes a week. Thanks to Zoom, the relationship with the world has increased and incredible work has been done. Last week, I wrote in Spanish: "Don't worry, maybe I won't see it, but this language will definitely be carried into the 22nd century." In the last few months, people in their 20s have started writing articles. We were not expecting this at all. When we see this, our hopes increase. Of course, communication is not at the forefront of the language.

Turkish Jewish society is not a very religious society. However, it prioritizes traditions.

Now, to give an example As a case in point, the Shabbat meal is important. Now it's there only a religious aspect to the Shabbat meal, no there is not. It is a morning when the family comes together. Now in the summer you see a lot of Jewish families living on the islands. Even if they don't have their children of a certain age anymore, they go and have dinner with their families on Friday evening and then return the next morning or evening. So therefore, they do it in order to continue this Shabbat tradition.

Nisya Isman Alovi- Every year we celebrate the European Day of Jewish Culture at the same time with 35 countries. Last year we hosted 2,300 people. On that day, there are cooking workshops, information about Turkey/Türkiye, music, sefardic music and many other topics are shared. Galata-Jewish tours are also organized within the scope of our museum. Our friend Moiz Gabay is the most regular on-tour guide. He also organizes Balat tours.

Nükhet Everi- The Jewish community has a great cultural heritage. The museum already conveys this, what else can be done, what are you planning to do?

Nisya İşman Alovi- We are working on a project about Jewish neighborhoods that no longer exist. We are organizing an oral history project with 65 people. When we say oral history, we also include words from the Judeo-Spanish language. It includes experiences. What was life like in Balat, Hasköy, Ankara, and Kuledibi in the past? What were their lives like? We are preparing a documentary by recording testimonies. We will also turn it into an exhibition and a book. It is extremely important to get collect and record those testimonies.

Silviyo Ovadya- There may be a few people living in Edirne, Mersin, Urfa, Gaziantep, Gallipoli, and Çanakkale. We invite them and conduct interviews. We will create a movie, an album, and an exhibition.