

CONSTITUTIONAL DOCUMENTS OF TWO SEPHARDIC COMMUNITIES IN LATIN AMERICA (ARGENTINA AND CUBA)

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This is a comparative analysis of the constitutional documents of the Unión Israelita Chevet Ahim of Havana and the Sociedad Comunidad Israelita Sefaradi de Buenos Aires. Both were founded in 1914 by Jews from Turkey coming from a similar background, where the Jewish community was structured as a centralized body and protected by the state. The constitutional documents of these two communities reflect their similar aspirations to revive the pattern of organization of their community of origin, but which were achieved through different patterns of historical development. While Chevet Ahim was founded from its very beginning as a comprehensive communal organization, the Sephardic organization in Buenos Aires began with a large number of small institutions limited in their scope. Only gradually were they centralized around the mother community, which became the united framework for the entire Judeo-Spanish-speaking sector.

Introduction

Emigrating to Latin America, Sephardic Jews from the Ottoman Empire substituted Moslem society, which recognized and protected their rights as an autonomous Jewish minority, with Catholic

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societies, in which the Church was separated from the state, and religious affiliation was a matter of private choice.

Confronted with the hardships of adaptation into new surroundings, immigrants in Latin American countries tended to create beneficiary and social institutions which were based on the kinship between natives of the same region. These fell under the jurisdiction of civil authorities and had to obtain legal recognition.¹

The founders of the Sephardic communal organizations were thus compelled to prepare constitutional documents as a prerequisite to the grant of legal recognition by the government authorities. These documents were formulated by local lawyers, who adapted the specific needs and requests of each organization to the model of similar immigrants' institutions.

The present article analyzes the constitutional documents of two Sephardic Communities founded in the year 1914 by Jewish immigrants from Turkey: *Unión Israelita Chevet Ahim* of Havana, and *Sociedad Comunidad Israelita Sefaradi de Buenos Aires*. The former's General Statutes were certified by the Governor of Havana Province in February 1918; the latter's were confirmed one year later, with the granting of *personería jurídica* (legal recognition) by Argentina's General Inspector of Justice.²

Coming from a similar environment, and sharing similar conceptions on Jewish communal organization, the founders of these two Sephardic organizations derived their inspiration from the structure of their communities of origin.³ The comparative analysis will, therefore, start with a short presentation of the common background, as illustrated by the by-laws of the Jewish Community of Izmir.

Communal Organization in Izmir

Izmir was the hometown of the largest group of Judeo-Spanish-speaking Jews who emigrated to Argentina. While the majority of Sephardic Jews who settled in Cuba came from Thrace (European Turkey), some of the founders of Chevet Ahim, who had participated in the formulation of the General Statutes, were also from Izmir.⁴ Emigration to Latin America started at the turn of the century, but mainly after the Young Turks revolution (1908), which strengthened Turkish nationalism, and decreed compulsory military service also for the non-Moslem population.

Like other Jewish communities under Ottoman rule, the community of Izmir formed part of the *millet* system, according to which non-Moslem religious minorities were autonomous entities, recognized and protected by the government. Political changes in the declining Ottoman Empire, as well as internal conflicts within the Jewish community, weakened the authority of Izmir's Chief Rabbi. In 1896 the community convoked a General Assembly, which represented all the synagogues of the city, and chose the Community Council, which became its central administration.⁵ In 1908, on the eve of emigration to Latin America, the Community Council of Izmir formulated its by-laws, some of whose articles are cited in Document I.

According to these by-laws, all the Jewish population of Izmir and its environment belonged automatically to the Jewish Community (see Document I, Art. 1, 2). The Jewish Community of Izmir was structured as a centralized body, administering all the synagogues, religious schools, and charitable institutions of the city and its environs (Doc. I, Art. 3, 122). The Community was represented vis-a-vis the government by the Chief Rabbi, but control of communal affairs lay in the hands of the Community Council, whose right to levy taxes was protected by the state authorities (Doc. I, Art. 100, 130, 131).

Coming from a centralized community whose authority was rooted in tradition, and protected by the state, the Sephardic immigrants were compelled to create their new institutions on a voluntary basis. In addition, they had to cope with the existence of other Jewish groups, and to define the limits of authority of each organization.

The Havana Sephardic Community

Unión Israelita Chevet Ahim was the second Jewish organization which was founded in Cuba. It was preceded by the *United Hebrew Congregation*, founded in 1906 by a group of American Jews, with the objective of acquiring grounds for a Jewish cemetery. An American Jew who resided in Havana during World War I estimated that out of the 1,000 Jews living in Cuba, 90 percent came from Turkey, Syria, and the Balkan Countries;⁶ when the constitutional document of Chevet Ahim was prepared, Sephardim were the largest Jewish group on the island.

Unión Israelita Chevet Ahim was founded in November 1914 as “a society whose character is beneficent, mutual and Hebrew” (see Document II, Art. 1). This definition was probably modeled after the *Centros Regionales* (Regional Centers), founded by the natives of the same region in Spain, which became the prototype of immigrant institutions in Cuba. The *centros* were based on the principle of mutualism, according to which payment of membership fees granted free use of services.

Chevet Ahim was thus founded on a mutual basis, granting its members free services, in return for the monthly fee of one peso (which equalled one American dollar) for married members, and 50 cents for bachelors (Doc. I, Art. 8, 12). The danger of remaining unprotected, as well as the high cost of religious services for non-members, became the community’s weapons to enforce its authority on the Sephardi immigrant population (Doc. II, Art. 22, 24).

The two main objectives of Chevet Ahim were economic support for its needy members, and supply of religious services (Doc. II, Art 2, 3 A-E). The religious services offered by Chevet Ahim to its members included a synagogue, circumcisions, religious weddings, and Jewish burials. Some of these services were already functioning when the statutes were prepared, while others expressed the aspirations of the founders. The first religious service supplied by Chevet Ahim was the synagogue, which conducted daily services since the foundation of the organization in 1914.

According to Article 3-C, fathers of babies were responsible for the travel expenses of the *mohel*. At that time there was no resident *mohel* in Cuba; Sephardi immigrants, who could not cover by themselves the travel expenses of the *mohel* from Key West, Florida, used to accumulate six or seven babies. This problem was solved in 1923, with the arrival of Rabbi Guershon Maya, who became the spiritual leader of Chevet Ahim, serving also as a *mohel* and a *shojet*.⁷

As specified in Doc. II, Art. 3-D, Jewish weddings were conditioned upon a previous civil marriage, in accordance with the republic’s constitution. As for burial (Art. 3-E, 5, 6), Chevet Ahim was able to benefit from the existence of the Jewish cemetery owned by the United Hebrew Congregation. Since American Jews were not interested in having poor Sephardim among their members, they sold individual plots to Chevet Ahim, which became responsible for the burial expenses of their members, as well as for the religious funeral.⁸

Chevet Ahim was founded not only as the communal organization of the Sephardim in Havana, but all over Cuba. The statutes made provisions for the collection of fees from members residing

outside the capital, as well as for their participation in the elections for the community's board of directors (Doc. II, Art. 15, 36).

The community's obligation to embark sick or pauper members from the closest port, or to be responsible for the expenses of the immigrants during their first week in Cuba (Doc. II, Art. 4, 25), were probably requested by the authorities, whose immigration policy at that time was only limited by the condition that immigrants do not become public charges. With no consular representative to protect them, Chevet Ahim was made responsible for the Jewish immigrants from Turkey.

The administration of Chevet Ahim was composed of a General Assembly (Junta General) and a Board of Directors (Directiva). The General Assembly gathered regularly once a year (in addition to Extraordinary Assemblies convoked on special circumstances); it confirmed the Annual Report of the president and conducted the elections for the Board of Directors. The Board was composed of ten members (Doc. II, Art. 32), half of whom were renewed annually by the General Assembly, so that each director was elected for two years.

To accomplish the beneficiary objectives of Chevet Ahim, Bicur Holim was formed as a special section, functioning as a charity institution and not on mutual grounds. The Board of Directors of Bicur Holim was subordinated to that of Chevet Ahim (Document II.a); its revenues, however, derived from different sources — weekly contributions of two cents, collected by adequate receipts. Unlike Chevet Ahim, Bicur Holim was established as a philanthropic entity, and not on mutual grounds.

Bicur Holim's by-laws reflect the problems of the first immigrants, many of whom were single men, coming without their families. Bicur Holim was made responsible for sick persons, with no means, and no families to look after them; it also functioned as a *Chevra Kadisha* for the Sephardi sector.

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The mass immigration of the 1920s brought to Cuba thousands of Jews from Eastern Europe, and the establishment of many new Jewish organizations. Though the number of immigrants from Turkey increased considerably with the post-World War I immigration, Sephardim became a minority group within the Jewish population, which became predominantly Ashkenazi. Yet the basic characteristics of Chevet Ahim, as they were formulated in the General Statutes of 1918, remained unaltered.

Many of the new Sephardi immigrants dispersed throughout the island, founding local communal organizations and acquiring their own cemeteries. Chevet Ahim, however, continued to be regarded by all the Sephardim of Cuba as their supreme authority in religious matters, and the center of their social life.⁹ Chevet Ahim's religious centrality was strengthened by the personality of its *Haham*, Rabbi Guershon Maya, whose authority was respected by all the Sephardi population. Other religious functionaries, in Havana and in the towns of the interior, recognized his supremacy.¹⁰

Bicur Holim became an autonomous institution in 1931, though it continued to fulfill the two objectives formulated in the by-laws of 1918 — aiding needy members, and taking care of funerals. The small weekly receipts, collected by the directors of Bicur Holim, characterized this institution throughout its existence.

It is interesting to note that the General Statutes of Chevet Ahim do not mention, among their objectives, the development of Jewish education. Nevertheless, the Jewish day school, founded in 1924, was among the most important activities of the Sephardic communal organization.

In essence, however, Chevet Ahim developed to be what its founders had envisioned. Its constitutional documents reflect the shaping of this organization as a general framework for all the Sephardic population of Cuba, structured as a comprehensive and centralized communal organization, whose functions are basically religious.

The Judeo-Spanish-Speaking Community of Buenos Aires

While the Turkish Jews in Cuba started as the largest Jewish group, and remained the largest Sephardi group after the mass immigration of the 1920s, their compatriots in Argentina were confronted not only with the existence of a large Ashkenazi population, but also with other Jewish groups who defined themselves as "Sephardim."

The first Sephardi communal organization in Buenos Aires was founded by Jews from Spanish Morocco in 1891; it was followed by other organizations, founded by Jewish immigrants from the various parts of the Ottoman Empire, mostly during the second decade of the twentieth century — when the Sociedad Comunidad Israelita Sefaradi (hence, ACIS) was founded.¹¹

Sephardi Jews, like other groups of immigrants, tended to cling together. Their organizations were based on two common factors: community of origin, and area of residence in Buenos Aires. Most of the institutions founded by the Sephardim in Buenos Aires were limited in their scope; they were divided between religious institutions, charities, burial societies, and social clubs. Only gradually they developed into four distinct communal networks of organization, each centered around its separate cemetery: Moroccans, Alepines (from Aleppo), Damascenes, and Judeo-Spanish-speaking Jews. The fourth group was composed mainly of Turkish Jews, but it included also Jews from Rhodes, Bulgaria and Salonica.¹²

The history of ACIS, which developed to be the central communal organization of Judeo-Spanish-speaking Jews, and thus the counterpart of Chevet Ahim in Buenos Aires, started in September 1914, with the foundation of *Kahal Kadosh y Talmud Tora la Hermandad Sefaradi*. As the name of the organization indicates, it was founded as a synagogue (Kahal Kadosh) and a religious school (Talmud Torah) for the immigrants from Izmir who resided in Villa Crespo. At the time of its foundation, Jews from Izmir residing in the *barrio Centro*, near the port, had already founded their own religious and social institutions; these included Templo Etz Hajaim, founded in 1910, and Hesed Shel Emet — a burial society founded in 1916 (see Document IV).

The policy of Argentina's government was to encourage the development of mutual aid societies, so that immigrant groups would be responsible for the health and economic welfare of their members. The Ministry of Justice refused to grant recognition to Kahal Kadosh unless it included among its objectives aid to needy members; it also requested that the society change its Hebrew name to Sociedad Comunidad Israelita Sefaradi de Buenos Aires.¹³ Though not ratified by the government authorities, the Statutes of Kahal Kadosh reflect the image and aspirations of the society's founders.

According to the Statutes of Kahal Kadosh, formulated in 1918, its main objectives were "to provide the necessary education to every child of Israel" and "to perform religious functions...on its own premises and grounds" (Document III, Art. 1). At that time Kahal Kadosh y Talmud Tora conducted religious services in a rented apartment, and imparted religious education after regular school hours.¹⁴ The statutes, however, refer to "necessary education," implying to both lay and religious (see Doc. V, Art. 3.b).

Membership in the society was entirely voluntary, and was conditioned only by the payment of monthly fees. The Internal By-Laws, however, reveal an attempt to monopolize religious services

in the quarter of Villa Crespo, probably inspired by the Kahal in their communities of origin (Doc. III.a, Art. 4, 7).

The Internal By-Laws show clearly that Kahal Kadosh did not view itself as a beneficiary institution (Doc. III.a, Art. 9). It was basically a religious organization, granting “ample powers” to the *Guisbarim*, or *inspectores de culto*, who were responsible for the synagogue’s administration (Doc. III., Art. 9; III.a, Art. 1; Doc. V, Art. 47). Religious services, including active participation in the worship, were the society’s only means to enforce membership (Doc. III.a, Art. 4, and Ch. III).

The main cause for the official organization of Kahal Kadosh y Talmud Tora was the intention to acquire grounds for a synagogue. The Minutes Book of the society reveals that while its Board of Directors was active in the formulation of the Statutes, as part of the procedure to obtain legal recognition, it negotiated the purchase of a building in Camargo Street, at the heart of Villa Crespo, which became the site of ACIS to this day.¹⁵

In order to obtain the necessary resources for the purchase of the building on Camargo Street, the directors of Kahal Kadosh turned to *Sociedad Israelita Sefaradi Hesed Chel Emet*, whose funds were dedicated to the acquisition of a cemetery. A special convocation, held on 9 February 1919, adopted the constitution of *Sociedad Comunidad Israelita Sefaradi de Buenos Aires* and confirmed the statutes of the organization — asking for legal recognition. The two societies — Kahal Kadosh and Hesed Chel Emet — were merged in the new institution.¹⁶

The Statutes of ACIS recognize its being the continuation of an earlier society — Kahal Kadosh — which was founded in September 1914 (Doc. V, Art. 1). The objectives start with a general commitment towards humanitarian doctrines, expressing the requirements of the government to undertake direct responsibility for the sick and the poor in the Sephardic sector (Doc. V, Art. 3.a, c, e). The fusion with Hesed Chel Emet added to the society’s objectives the purchase of a cemetery (Art. 3.d).

As in other Jewish societies founded in that period, new members were admitted only after verification that they had no contact with the *tmeim* (impure — white slavers) (Doc. V, Art. 5.). This condition was cancelled from the 1935 version of the statutes, since the organization of the *tmeim* had been destroyed (Doc. VI, Art. 5).

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Membership in ACIS increased considerably during the 1920s, as the Villa Crespo quarter became the center of settlement for many

new immigrants from Turkey.¹⁷ The most important event in the history of ACIS at that time was the acquisition in 1929 of a cemetery from *Hesed Chel Emet Sefaradit de Alepo*, in the district of Ciudadela. The cemetery was destined not only for the natives of Izmir residing in Villa Crespo, but for all the Judeo-Spanish-speaking Jews living in Buenos Aires. The acquisition of the cemetery was the first important step in turning ACIS into the central communal organization, but it was also the beginning of a conflict between two opposing trends: the old leadership who wished to maintain the supremacy of the synagogue, and new leaders, many of whom were natives of Rhodes, who aspired to transform ACIS into a comprehensive communal institution that would unite all the Sephardim from Turkey and the Balkan countries.

A new Board of Directors, elected in 1934, prepared a project of reform in the statutes of ACIS (Document VI). The three changes suggested by this project were a new formulation of objectives, a new system of taxes, and a different structure of administration.

If the statutes of 1919 reflected the aspirations of the founders of ACIS, the version of 1935 reflected the balance of accomplishments: the institution had its own synagogue and cemetery, but it renounced its plans to found a day school and a clinic (Doc. V, Art. 3, compared with Doc. VI, Art. 3). The reformed statutes were more specific in their reference to the Sephardic community; their humanitarian and altruistic doctrines were related directly to the "Sephardic Jewish Community," and the cemetery was destined for "the members of the community" (Doc. VI, Art. 3 a, d).

The reform project suggested replacing the monthly fee of one peso with a fee that would be based on the contributive capacity of each member (Doc. V, Art. 6; Doc. VI, Art. 6). The purpose of this reform was to increase the revenues of the communal organization, in order to increase social assistance, which was proportioned by the revenues of the institution (Doc. VI, Art. 3.e).

According to the proposed statutes, the Board of Directors had to decrease in number from 29 to 17, and the administrators of the synagogue had to be appointed by the Board (Doc. VI, Art. 42, 52; Doc. V, Art. 47). The reformers aspired to turn ACIS into a communal organization for all Judeo-Spanish-speaking Jews, and they wished to subordinate the synagogue, which continued to be a neighborhood institution, to the central administration of the community.

The members of ACIS were divided in their attitude towards the project of reform of the statutes; the project, however, was confirmed by the General Assembly and sent to the Ministry of Justice.¹⁸ The Ministry's reply was based on a new law, which was then in

preparation, according to which philanthropic societies had to reform their statutes in order to be structured as mutual aid associations.¹⁹ The authorities demanded that ACIS change its name from *Sociedad* to *Asociacion*, and refused to confirm the new system of taxes (see Appendix to Document VI).

The refusal of the General Inspector of Justice to authorize unegalitarian fees struck at the core of the reform project. A General Assembly convoked for that purpose decided to cancel the whole project, and reelected the old leadership for the Board.²⁰ A few years later, between 1940 and 1942, ACIS carried out a far-reaching project of reorganization, which turned it into a centralized and comprehensive communal organization, uniting all the Judeo-Spanish-speaking sector in one organizational framework.

The reformers of ACIS learned their lesson from the dispute over the statutes, and decided not to alter the original statutes of 1919. They created a new system of taxes, based on the model of the *Aricha* in their communities of origin, according to which the monthly fee was fixed individually, on the basis of the economic capacity of each member. Officially, however, each member continued to pay the fee of one peso and the individual fees were defined as "contributions." Though unratiied by the authorities, the reformed statutes of 1935 should be viewed as the legal program of ACIS as the counterpart of Chevet Ahim.

Conclusion

The constitutional documents of the two communal organizations of Turkish Jews in Havana and Buenos Aires reflect the interaction between the communities of origin and the countries of settlement.

Jewish organization under Ottoman rule was based on the conception that every Jew belonged to the community, whose authority was legally protected by the state. The community was basically a religious entity, structured as a centralized and a comprehensive framework.

Integrating into Latin America, Sephardic Jews had to accept the concept of mutualism as a basis for their organization, taking upon themselves the responsibility for their destitute members. Without the legal recognition of the state, the Sephardic, as well as other Jewish organizations, were essentially voluntary frameworks, whose source of authority derived from monopolizing religious services.

Being the largest Jewish group, and unrivaled by other Sephardic groups, the founders of Chevet Ahim in Havana were able to apply the traditional conceptions of Jewish communal organization to their General Statutes. The constitutional documents of the Judeo-Spanish-speaking Jews in Buenos Aires reflect the historical process in which an internally divided Sephardic population emerged as a distinct Jewish group, centralizing its institutions around one communal organization, and applying traditional conceptions.

Notes

1. For the legal framework of the documents dealt with in this article, see Eduardo B. Busso, *Código Civil Anotado* (Buenos Aires, 1944), Vol. I. Art. 33, pp. 268, 286-290; E.F. Camus, *Código Civil Explicado* (Habana, 1944), Art. 35-39, pp. 70-72.
2. Unión Israelita "Chevet Ahim," Estatutos Generales (Habana, 1918), Sender Kaplan Archives, Miami Beach; Kahal Kadosh y Talmud Tora La Hermandad Sefaradi, Minutes, February 9, 1919, from the *Minutes Book of the Asociación Comunidad Israelite Sefaradi de Buenos Aires*, Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People, HM2/1422b (hence: ACIS, Minutes).
3. In 1934 the Board of Directors of the Sociedad Comunidad Israelita Sefaradi de Buenos Aires asked for copies of the general statutes of the Communities of Istanbul, Izmir and Rhodes, as a model for reform, ACIS, Minutes, February 11 and 14, 1934; May 13, 1934.
4. George Weinberger, "The Jews in Cuba," *The American Hebrew and Jewish Messenger*, vol. 102, no. 14 (February 1918); Harry Sandberg, "The Jews of Latin America," *American Jewish Yearbook*, vol. 19, 1917, pp. 84-86; Interview with Moise Bensignor, Miami 1984, Oral History Division, Institute of Contemporary Jewry.
5. Abraham Galante, *Histoire Des Juifs d'Anatolie, Les Juifs d'Izmir (Smyrne)* (Istanbul, 1937), pp. 18, 274-289.
6. Weinberger, *op. cit.*
7. Interviews: Moise Bensignor, Cali Maya, Rabbi Nissim Gambach, Miami 1984, Oral History Division, Institute of Contemporary Jewry.
8. United Hebrew Congregation, Minutes, June 27, 1915, July 11, 1915, November 18, 1915, Archives of Adath Israel, Havana.
9. Margalit Bejarano, "The Sephardim as Pioneers of Jewish Immigration to Cuba and their Contribution to the Jewish Life on the Island" (Hebrew), *Society and Community*, Abraham Haim, ed. (Jerusalem, 1991), pp. 122-123.

10. *Ibid.*; Interviews with Rabbi Nissim Gambach, and Alegra Fins (daughter-in-law of Rabbi Moises Fins), Miami 1987.
11. Víctor A. Mirelman, *En búsqueda de una identidad* (Buenos Aires, 1988), pp. 31-44; *idem*, "Sephardic Immigration to Argentina Prior to the Nazi Period," in *Jewish Presence in Latin America*, Judith Laikin Elkin and Gilbert W. Merkx, eds. (Boston, 1987), pp. 13-32.
12. Iaacov Rubel, Daniel Bargman, and Leonor Slavsky, *Presencia Sefaradi en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires, 1992), pp. 56-75; Margalit Bachi-Bejarano, "Sephardic Jews in Argentina" (Hebrew), *Bitfutzot Hagola*, 85/86 (Summer 1978):124-142.
13. Kahal Kadosh y Talmud Tora, Minutes, February 4, 1919, in *ACIS Minutes Book*, Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People, HM2/1422b.
14. Interview with Marcos and Rafael Emanuel, Buenos Aires, 1988.
15. Kahal Kadosh y Talmud Tora, Minutes, January 19, 1919.
16. Kahal Kadosh y Talmud Tora, Minutes, February 9, 1919, March 3, 1919, March 16, 1919.
17. The number of members (families) grew from 284 in 1920 to over 1,000 in 1932. ACIS, Minutes, October 17, 1920; *La Luz*, November 11, 1932.
18. ACIS, Minutes of General Assemblies, July 28, 1935.
19. Tzvi Schechner, "'Kehile,' Un Concepto Común Heredado," in *Judaica Latinoamericana*, AMILAT, eds. (Jerusalem, 1988), p. 121.
20. ACIS, Minutes, October 25, 1936; *La Luz*, November 6, 1936.

Document I

BY-LAWS OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITY OF IZMIR (1908)

Cited by Abraham Galante, *Histoire des Juifs d'Anatolie*,
(Istanbul, 1937), pp. 275-289

Art. 1. The Community is composed of all the Jews, Sephardim and Ashkenazim, Ottoman subjects and aliens, who live in Izmir and its environment.

Art. 2. Any alien, alone or with a family, living more than a year in the city or its environment, will be considered as a member of the Community.

Art. 3. The different organs which compose the community are: the General Council (*medjlissi-i-oumoumi*), the Chief Rabbi (*haham bachi*), the Community Council (*medjliss-i-djismani*), and, when needed, an additional rabbi (*rabbin-adjoint*).

Art. 100. ...[The Chief Rabbi] will represent the Community in front of the local authorities....

Art. 122. All the societies and institutions subventioned by the community and aided by the public, have to be administered by a committee named by the Community Council and approved by it....

Art. 130. All the members of the community are obligated to pay the direct and indirect taxes, which are fixed by the Community Council, on the basis of the budget voted by the General Council.

Art. 131. When a member of the Community owes taxes and does not pay them, he loses the right to choose and be chosen. Moreover, the Community Council has the right to deny him all the religious formalities....If needed, the intervention of the authorities will be requested.

Document II**GENERAL STATUTES OF THE
UNIÓN ISRAELITA CHEVET AHIM**

Havana, 1918

Chapter I. Name.

Article 1. — In the month of November of 1914, under the name of Unión Israelita Chevet Ahim, was founded in this capital, with residence in the same, a society whose character is beneficent, mutual and Hebrew.

Chapter II. Objective.

Art. 2. — The society will be engaged in beneficial work for its members and in various matters concerning the Jewish rite.

Art. 3. — In order to carry out its aim, the society resolves to fulfill the following objectives:

A. Aiding any member who might be in need.

B. Maintaining a synagogue.

C. Taking care of circumcision of Jewish boys born in Cuba, provided that the fathers are members and that the Mohel is resident in Havana, leaving to the responsibility of the father the travel expenses from abroad or to the interior of the Republic.

D. Preparing the Ketuba (Jewish wedding contract according to the Jewish rite), provided that the couple will show the Board of Directors the documents issued by the Civil Government of this Republic, signed by the Judge of the district to which they belong.

E. Arranging the burial of any Jewish member that would die in Cuba.

Art. 4. — In case of illness or of bad financial situation of any member, the society will be obligated to embark this member at the closest foreign port, giving him, in addition, five pesos in cash.

Art. 5. — In case of death of any member, the society will cover the expenses of the burial, in accordance with Article 3, paragraph E; but the cost of the stone for the grave will remain the responsibility of the deceased's relatives.

Art. 6. — In the case of death of any member, outside this Capital, the society engages itself to cover the burial expenses only from any corner of Havana to the cemetery.

Chapter III. Of the members.

Art. 7 — There will be four categories of members: active (single or with family), honorary, of merit, and protectors.

Art. 8 — An active member is any person, single, older than 18, who contributes the monthly sum of fifty centavos, or, being married, the sum of one peso.

Chapter IV. The privileges of the members.

Art. 12 — The member has the right to enjoy the following privileges, under the condition that his inscription dates at least three months. This condition will not be necessary in the cases of a sudden death.

A. Privileges marked in Article 3, paragraphs A, C, D and E.

B. Participation in the services which will take place in the synagogue.

C. Participation in the General Assemblies, with voice, vote and the right to be elected.

Chapter V. Duties of the Members.

Art. 15. — Members residing outside the capital will have to pay their fees to the delegates of the society.

Chapter VII. About the Non-Members.

Art. 21. — The Board reserves itself the right to come to an amicable agreement for any petition made in favor of a Jew who is not a member, without having to give any reasons.

Art. 22. — Any Jew who does not form part of the society after four months of having arrived in this Republic will be considered as nonmember, and the Board reserves itself the right not to protect him though he might be in need.

Art. 23. — The society will be in charge of circumcision to children whose parents are not members, provided that they pay in advance the sum of \$50 and the travel expenses of the Mohel, if there should be any.

Art. 24. — The society will be in charge of burial of any Jew who is a non-member, collecting in advance the sum of \$150 for an adult and \$75 for children under thirteen.

Art. 25. — In the case of a recently arrived Jew who has no means, the society takes charge for disembarkation, paying his expenses of food and lodging during the first eight days, and giving him five pesos.

Chapter IX. Elections.

Art. 32. — The Association will be directed by ten members: A President, a Vice-president, a General Secretary, an Accountant-Secretary, a Treasurer, an Inspector and four members of the Board (*vocales*).

Art. 36. — Members residing outside of Havana will vote in the following procedure: Sending the ballot in a special envelope which the Board will send to each person independently, which will have the name and address of the society and the word "elections." This envelope will be opened separately from the elections in Havana, in full assembly, in order to check the number of assisting voters with those arriving from the interior of the Island.

Chapter X. The Board.

Art. 48. — The Board will be helped by a section called "Bicur Holim Chevet Ahim," formed by ten members appointed among the members by the Board of the Society, which will have its Board independently.

Habana, 7 February 1918. Signed by the Governor of the Province and registered in the "Registro de Asociaciones."

Document IIA

Bylaws of the Section
"Bicur Holim Chevet Ahim"

I. The Board of the Section Bicur Holim Chevet Ahim will be appointed by the Board of the Society "Unión Israelita Chevet Ahim" for the term of one year.

IV. The collections will be made once a week by receipts of two cents, and its funds will be deposited twice a month in a bank in the capital.

VIII. It is the duty of its members to visit the sick in the first hour of having been notified, and to make the expenses they should judge necessary, provided that these do not exceed the limit of five pesos; for higher sums they should notify the Board of the Unión Israelita.

IX. In case of the death of any member, it will be responsible for paying the expenses of the Jewish rite.

Document III

**Statutes of the
SOCIETY KAHAL KADOSH Y TALMUD TORAH
LA HERMANDAD SEFARADI**

Buenos Aires, November 24, 1918

(From the *Minutes Book of ACIS*, Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People, HM2/1422b)

Chapter I: Seat, Objective and Duration

Art. 1. The objective of the association is to provide the necessary education to every child of Israel.

a. To perform religious functions according to the law, tradition and according to the Sephardic rite, on its own premises and grounds.

Chapter II: Admission of Members

Art. 4. Will form part of the society: all the Jews (Israelites) who promise to pay a monthly fee of one peso, or, in its defect, the minimal weekly fee of 20 centavos, which would be presented in the form prescribed in the by-laws.

Chapter IV: The Board of Directors

Art. 8. The society will be administered by a Board of Directors elected in Regular General Assembly among the eligible members. It will comprise of: A President, a Vice-President, a Secretary, a Vice-Secretary, a Treasurer, a Vice-Treasurer, 8 members of the Board and four Substitutes.

Art. 9. The Board of Directors will appoint two *Guisbarim* (*sacriotanes*) with the object of arranging the internal matters of Kahal Kadosh (*Templo*) and at the same time will appoint an honorary commission to direct the Talmud Torah (school), which will be comprised of three members.

Chapter VIII: The Members

Art. 19. Members of the society will be all the Jews who will fulfill the conditions specified in articles 19 to 31 of these statutes, who will have reached the minimum age of 18.

Art. 20. The co-religionists who wish to enter the society will have to apply in writing, and their petition will have to be supported by two active members who will guarantee their honorability and good behavior.

Document IIIA

Internal By-Laws
of the Society

Kahal Kadosh y Talmud Torah la Hermandad Sefaradi

Art. I. The Board of Directors gives ample powers to the *Guisbarim*, señores Israel Calomite and Samuel Guini, for the control and administration of Kahal Kadosh during the days in which religious services are being conducted, with the exception of the days of Rosh Hashana and Yom Kipur.

Art. 4. Inside our district (*barrio*), the *Haham* señor Samuel Buchuk and the *Mohel*, Sr. Abraham Arditi, will not provide the functions of weddings or circumcisions to any person who is not a member of our association, for which our members will carry a receipt accrediting them as such, signed by the Treasurer.

Art. 7. The services that this society renders are exclusively for the Jews of our district, except in cases in which a co-religionist would present himself asking our services, in spite of the fact that he lives in a different district which has a society of the same kind as ours; an investigation will be conducted for the reasons which compelled him to take such a resolution, before rendering him the assistance of this society.

Art. 9. The society will never be able to help, out of its own funds, any co-religionist. Nevertheless, if anyone should find himself in such a precarious situation that would need some financial support, the members of the Board of Directors might raise a fund which in no way would imply the direct assistance of the Association.

Chapter III.

Art. I. It is decisively prohibited for the *Guisbarim* to sell *misvot* or *afarot* or call up to the *Sefer Torah* to all those who are not members.

Document IV

Statutes of the
SOCIEDAD ISRAELITA SEFARADI HESED CHEL EMET
December 19, 1917

Art. 1. The object of the Association is:

a. Take care of everything related to funerals and burials, according to the Jewish laws and traditions, of contributors who may die in this capital.

b. To help destitute co-religionists, for the same purpose, in the limits of its revenues.

Document V

**Statutes of the
COMUNIDAD ISRAELITA SEFARADI DE BUENOS AIRES
February 9, 1919**

Chapter I: Preliminary Dispositions

The Name, Seat and Objective of the Society:

Art. 1. In the City of Buenos Aires is definitely constituted a society entitled **COMUNIDAD ISRAELITA SEFARADI DE BUENOS AIRES**, which was founded in this Capital in the month of September 1914.

Art. 2. Its seat and legal dwelling will be in the Federal Capital.

Art. 3. The principal objectives of the Society are:

a. To practice the beneficial doctrines, humanitarian and charitable; taking care of and defending their co-religionists who are sick, abandoned, and needy.

b. To provide lay and religious instruction, founding schools according to the laws of the State and subject to plans, programs and other dispositions in force, or which will be dictated by the national public authorities.

c. To found a clinic in order to render assistance to the sick and poor, sheltered as such by the society.

d. To purchase grounds for a cemetery for the society in the capital or in a nearby town.

e. To promote and maintain Jewish ritual in accordance with the Sephardi rite, and the spirit of association for the common good, among all the Jews residing in this republic.

Chapter II: of the Active Members

Art. 5. In order to be an active member it is requested:

a. To be Jewish and possess a good reputation.

b. To be presented by two active members, and admitted by the Board of Directors, decided on its first ordinary session by secret vote.

Art. 6. The obligations of the active members are:

a. To pay a monthly fee in advance, of one peso.

b. To pay an admission fee, determined in each case by the Board of Directors.

Chapter III: Social Funds

Art. 18. The capital of the society will be composed of:

a. The property situated in Camargo Street number 870 in this city.

b. The product of the rent of the above mentioned property, when it is rebuilt.

c. The payments received from the cemetery, when it will be purchased.

d. The membership fees, legacies, and general contributions.

e. Other possible revenues.

Art. 46. Any reform of these statutes will be made only by an extraordinary assembly, which requires the vote of at least a third part of the active members.

Art. 47. The direction and administration of the *Sociedad Comunidad Israelita Sefaradi de Buenos Aires* will be the duty of the Board of Directors, composed of 29 members, with the titles of: President, Vice-President, two Administrators of Religion and Education, Secretary, Vice-Secretary, Treasurer, Vice-Treasurer, 8 Board Members, 4 Counselors, 4 Substitutes. The review of accounts of the social administration will be the duty of a committee of accounts, composed of 3 Reviewers of accounts, and an Inspector of Accounts.

Art. 74. Sr. Don Samuel de A. Levy is authorized to make the adequate arrangements required in order to obtain from the Government of the Nation the legal recognition (*personería jurídica*) of the society, as well as to accept the modifications that the same government might introduce in these statutes for their approval.

Signed:
President Irigoyen J.S. Salinas

Document VI

Project for the Reform of the Statutes of the SOCIEDAD COMUNIDAD ISRAELITA SEFARADI DE BUENOS AIRES September 22, 1935

Art. 1. In the City of Buenos Aires was definitely constituted a society entitled "Comunidad Israelite Sefaradi de Buenos Aires," which was founded in this capital in the month of September 1914, and which had functioned under this name, or under the names of "Kahal Kadosh y Talmud Torah" or "Comunidad Sefaradi."

Art. 3. The objectives of the society are:

- a. To practice the Hebrew doctrine within the Sephardic Jewish Community, in its charitable, humanitarian and altruistic aspects.
- b. To provide Jewish religious education, culture and instruction of Hebrew, by establishing schools in accordance with the laws of the State and subject to orders and dispositions in force, or which will later be dictated by the national public authorities.
- c. To promote and sustain Jewish ritual in accordance with the tradition by maintaining a synagogue.
- d. To sustain and administer a cemetery, where the members of the community may be buried, subject to the municipal laws and orders.
- e. To provide assistance, in proportion to its revenues, with subsidies to widows and orphans of poor and unprotected co-religionists, as well as to members of the community who are extremely destitute.

Art. 5. In order to be an active member it is required:

- a. To be Jewish and older than 18 years.
- b. To possess a good reputation.

Art. 6. The duties of the active members are:

a. To pay a monthly fee that may not be less than one peso, and may not exceed 20 pesos, leaving the fixation of the fee to a mixed committee composed of members of the Board of Directors and other members, that will determine the contributive capacity of each member.

Art. 7. The rights of the active members are:

c. To obtain free burial in the society's cemetery, which will have to pay all the expenses, when the deceased members or their direct relatives have no means.

d. To apply for a free admission of their children in the society's school, when they have no means.

Art. 19. The capital of the society will be composed of:

a. The property situated in Camargo Street number 870/74 in this capital, and the rent that may be received for it.

b. The property of the ground destined to serve as a cemetery for the community, situated in the town of Ciudadela, Province of Buenos Aires, and purchased from the Society "Hesed Chel Emeth Sefaradi de Alepo," and the revenues that will be received for the burials.

c. The fees of the members.

d. The payments that the society will receive for providing the different ritual services.

e. The legacies and donations which, for any reason, may be received by the society.

Art. 20. The social funds are destined exclusively to the objectives specified in these statutes.

Art. 42. The direction and administration of the Sociedad Comunidad Israelita Sefaradi de Buenos Aires will be the duty of a Board of Directors composed of 17 members, as follows: President, Vice-President, Secretary, Vice-Secretary, Treasurer, Vice-Treasurer, nine members of the Board and two Reviewers of Accounts.

Art. 52. In its first session, the Board of Directors will appoint two Inspectors of Religion and a General Inspector.

The Inspectors of Religion will be in charge of the administration of the synagogue and the direction of religious services, according to the "Internal By-Laws of the Temple."

Art. 66. The functions of the members of the "Committee Hessed Chel Emet" is to take care of everything which is related to funerals and burials, after each death of a co-religionist, as well as to watch over the fulfillment of the internal by-laws of the cemetery which refer to the municipal orders and to the religious dispositions, everything in accordance with the contract that the Sociedad Comunidad Israelita Sefaradi has signed with the sister society "Hessed Chel Emeth Sefaradi de Alepo," which possesses the concession of the cemetery.

Appendix to Document VI

Facsimile copy of the reply of the General Inspector of Justice to the petition for Reform of the Statutes (March 22, 1936)

Art. 1. In this and other dispositions in which the same terminological error may fall, substitute *Sociedad* with "*Asociación*."

Art. 6. According to the given version, it seems that the monthly fee varies in accordance with the contributive capacity of each member, and that this capacity will be estimated by a mixed committee. This is unacceptable.

Art. 63 y 67. The different organs and committees should have Spanish names.