



RAMAPO COLLEGE OF NEW JERSEY
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Family Letters and Auschwitz Memoir Tell Story of Sephardic Community of Salonica in 20th Century

MAHWAH, N.J. – On Thursday, February 11 at 7 p.m., Dr. Sarah A. Stein, professor of history at the University of California Los Angeles, and Dr. Joe Halio, physician and president of the Foundation for the Advancement of Sephardic Studies and Culture, will discuss “A Sephardic Journey: The Jews of Salonica from the Ottoman Empire to the Holocaust.” The Gross Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies at Ramapo College is sponsoring the event that will be delivered remotely; Gross Center Director Michael A. Riff will serve as moderator for the event.

Registration to attend via Zoom is at: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/the-jews-of-salonica-from-the-ottoman-empire-to-the-holocaust-tickets-136083949757>

For centuries, the Ottoman port of Salonica, or Thessaloniki (the Greek city it is known as today) was home to a large, diverse and influential community of mostly Sephardic Jews, whose ancestors found refuge there following the Spanish Inquisition. Among them was the Levy family. It is their journey that prize winning historian Sarah Abrevaya Stein explores in her highly acclaimed book, *Family Papers: A Sephardic Journey Through the Twentieth Century*. As the title indicates, the chronicle traces the movement of the Levy clan through the transformations of the twentieth century that took them from what was an Ottoman-Turkish city that became part of Greece to not only Western Europe, Israel, Brazil and India, but also the ramp at Auschwitz.

Nearly eradicating the Jewish community of Salonica, it is this final phase that is the subject of Dr. Albert Menasche’s *Birkenau (Auschwitz II: Memoirs of an Eyewitness How 72,000 Jews Perished)*, published in a new edition by the Foundation for the Advancement of Sephardic Studies and Studies under the direction of Dr. Halio. Menasche was a prominent figure in the Sephardic Community of Salonica. Before the war, he served as secretary of the Communal Council, and was the director of the Ben

Ouzilizio Maternity Hospital, the *Azilo de Locos/Kasa de Salud*, the Carlo Allatini Orphanage for Boys, and the Mair Aboav Orphanage for Girls. He was also vice president of the well-known Baron Hirsch Hospital. Dr. Menasche was deported to Birkenau on June 8, 1943; he survived as a member of the Men's Orchestra. His memoir was one of the first accounts of a survivor to be published. Upon returning to Salonica in 1945, he was elected president of the community, and director of the *Clinique Pinhas*. After emigrating to the U.S., he served as resident physician at the Sephardic Home for the Aged in Brooklyn, N.Y., where he became a mentor to Joe Halio. Dr. Menasche retired to Miami, Florida and passed away there in 1991.

Joe Halio is a geriatrician in private practice in Great Neck, N.Y. He is an officer of the Long Island Jewish and North Shore Hospital Staff Societies, the North Shore Medical Staff Society IPA, and is a clinical assistant professor of medicine at the Zucker School of Medicine at Hofstra/Northwell. The grandson of Albert J. Torres, publisher of the *La Vara*, a Judeo-Spanish (Ladino) language weekly newspaper, published 1922–1948 in New York City, as a national Sephardi Jewish newspaper in the United States and son of Hank Halio, author of *Ladino Reveries*.

A historian of Sephardic Jewry, Sarah Abrevaya Stein is professor of history, the director of the Alan D. Leve Center for Jewish Studies, as well as the Viterbi Family Chair in Mediterranean Jewish Studies at UCLA. She is the author and/or editor of nine books. Her books, articles, and pedagogy have won numerous prizes, including two National Jewish Book Awards, the Sami Rohr Prize for Jewish Literature, a Guggenheim Fellowship, and the UCLA Distinguished Teaching Award. Stein is also co-editor (with David Biale of University of California Davis) of Stanford University Press Series in Jewish History and Culture.

For information or to request disability-related accommodations for this event, please contact holgen@ramapo.edu or call 201-684-7409.

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Ramapo College of New Jersey is the state's premier public liberal arts college and is committed to academic excellence through interdisciplinary and experiential learning, and international and intercultural understanding. The College is ranked #1 among New Jersey public institutions by College Choice, has been named one of the 50 Most Beautiful College Campuses in America by *CondéNast Traveler*, and is recognized as a top college by *U.S. News & World Report*, *Kiplinger's*, Princeton Review and *Money* magazine, among others. Ramapo College is also distinguished as a Career Development College of Distinction by CollegesofDistinction.com, boasts the best campus housing in New Jersey on Niche.com, and is designated a "Military Friendly College" in Victoria Media's *Guide to Military Friendly Schools*.

Established in 1969, Ramapo College offers bachelor's degrees in the arts, business, data science, humanities, social sciences and the sciences, as well as in professional studies, which include business,

education, nursing and social work. In addition, the College offers courses leading to teacher certification at the elementary and secondary levels, and offers graduate programs leading to master's degrees in Accounting, Business Administration, Creative Music Technology, Data Science, Educational Technology, Educational Leadership, Nursing, Social Work and Special Education, as well as a post-master's Doctor of Nursing Practice.