

The Rabbinical College



1933 - View of the entrance to the Italian Rabbinical College in Rhodes

Senator Mario Lago became the third civilian governor of Rhodes in February 1923. It was Lago's idea the founding of a Rabbinical College in Rhodes. He knew the decline of rabbinical studies in Italy, the Levant, and the Balkans. To bolster Italian influence among the Sephardim of Rhodes and the Mediterranean region, the Italian government sought to establish a rabbinical seminary under its auspices.

Alhadeff's family (the richest in Rhodes) offered a large villa in the Jewish quarter to house the College.

It was inaugurated on January 1, 1928. Isidor Kahan, a Talmudist who had studied in the most renowned yeshivot of Europe, was invited to direct the College, and staff of excellent teachers were assembled around him.

The Rabbinical College attracted not only students from Rhodes but also Turkey, Palestine, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, Egypt, and even Ethiopia.

A complete course of studies was programmed: it would last ten years, the minimum age to enter the College being thirteen. Upon receiving diplomas as rabbis, hazzanim, shohetim, or teachers the students had played significant roles in various Jewish Communities. The College quickly acquired an international reputation, much to the satisfaction of the Italian authorities.

In 1929 the College had moved to the medieval building that had been the Hospice of Saint Catherine built by the Knights of the Tongue of Italy.

In 1932 Riccardo Pacifici succeeded the first principal of the Rabbinical College. That year the Rabbinical College moved from the Hospice of Saint Catherine to a modern building outside the walled city, in the quarter known as Brussali, on the western coast of the island. It was a spacious villa surrounded by a garden, the property of Ruben Capelluto, a Rhodian Jew.

At the end of 1935, the College moved once more, this time permanently. The Italian administration had chosen for it the residence of a former Turkish governor, dated from 1894, in the Mount Smith area and it had adapted it to the needs of a modern college.

In the first half of December 1936 Mario de Vecchi di Val Cismon, a Fascist, was appointed governor of the Dodecanese Islands. The first of the racial laws against the Jews bears the date of September 5, 1938. Among them was the closing of the Rabbinical College.