

Zambian Jewish Community

A little over twelve decades have elapsed since the first Jews began settling in the area that would later become the modern-day Republic of Zambia. During that time the Jewish community grew, spread out to establish thriving centres in various parts of the country, reached its numerical peak in the years leading up to Zambian independence and thereafter went into steady decline. Today, only a few dozen Jews remain in Zambia, mainly in the capital, Lusaka, a modern-day African city that Jewish immigrants helped to found.

From one point of view, the story of Zambian Jewry, like that of colonialism itself, is just one episode in the unfolding history of the region, and a relatively brief one at that. It is a story that few are aware of and that could quite easily be forgotten over time. The purpose of this book, as well as that of the Gateway Jewish Museum in Livingstone on which it is based, is to record for posterity the significant role that Jews were able to play in the building of the young Zambian nation, despite their relatively small numbers. It further records how Jewish immigrants, despite the formidable challenges involved, succeeded in perpetuating the millennia-old heritage of their faith and culture in a part of the world where Jews and Judaism had hitherto been completely absent.

The Jews of Zambia today remain connected to the greater Jewish world through the African Jewish Congress (AJC), a body that since 1994 has provided a representative forum and coordinating body for the small, scattered Jewish communities in Sub-Saharan Africa and helped them in the maintenance of Jewish life in their regions. Leading members of the Zambian Jewish community were prominently involved both in the establishment of the AJC and in its subsequent activities, some of which feature in this book. In my capacity as CEO and Spiritual Leader to the AJC, I have been privileged to work with some of these outstanding personalities, as well as participate in various important community events in Zambia itself. In close consultation with the community, I oversee the maintenance of the various Jewish cemeteries around the country, and help to promote and safeguard the honourable heritage of Jewish Zambia. I am also gratified to have played a part in the production of this book, as well as the establishment of the Gateway Jewish Museum upon which it is based.

On behalf of Ann Harris, President of the AJC, I thank all those who contributed to the making of the book, which will hopefully provide an enduring record of this unique saga of Jews in Southern Africa and bring that story to a wider audience.

RABBI MOSHE SILBERHAFT

