

# **Beirut Jewish Cemetery**

Index prepared by  
**Nagi Georges Zeidan**  
(Wadi Chahrour, Lebanon)

## **The Lebanese Jewish Community**

Most of the Lebanese Jews lived in Beirut, the capital, but there were also several other communities in Saida (Sidon), in Tripoli, and in villages in the mountains. In 1911 Lebanon's population included 5,000 Jewish inhabitants, among them numerous Ashkenazim. All the Jews lived in good relations with their neighbors, but, with the outbreak of the civil war in 1958, they began to leave Lebanon. They found refuge in France, Israel and North America. The emigration increased with the renewal of the war in 1975. Today, 30 Jews still live in Beirut and only two sites recall the past Jewish presence there: the Magen Abraham synagogue and the Jewish cemetery.

## **The Beirut Cemetery**

The cemetery is located in the Ras El Nabe neighborhood. The first burial was that of Rabbi Moise Yedid Levy in 1829. That year can be considered as the opening date of the cemetery.

In 1857, the Ottoman ruler enlarged the road from Beirut to Damascus. As a result of these works the entrance and a part of the cemetery were damaged. A new entrance was built. The initial land was small in size, as the community then comprised only 150 souls. With the increasing number of Jews living in the capital, a larger burial land was needed. It is probable that at a certain moment coffins were piled up one above the other for lack of space. In time, the community bought new plots in the area surrounding the cemetery and some 3,300 persons are buried there.

During the second civil war, from 1975 till 1990, the Jewish cemetery was used as a boundary for the Christian Phalange forces that later became the Lebanese forces. They partially mined the cemetery in order to prevent their adversary from crossing it. At the end of the war, they completely cleared the mines from the burial land, but the cemetery was not cleaned up. Graves were damaged by the rockets and the bombardments, yet it has never been desecrated.

## **The Database**

The database includes the details of 3,184 tombstones, while some other 200 had illegible inscriptions or were destroyed. The period covered begins in 1829 and ends in 2009.

For each grave, the researcher will find the following details:

- The surname and the given name of the deceased.
- The name of the deceased's father
- The surname and the given name of the deceased's spouse
- The gender of the deceased
- The Hebrew date of death and its correspondent Gregorian date

- The age at death
- The material the grave is made of (concrete, stone, marble) and its state as it was in 2003
- Biographical notes

The major difficulty in that task was the deciphering of the inscriptions.

- The inscriptions on several graves made of stone were difficult to read
- Many marble graves were broken because of lack of care or because of bombs that fell on them.
- The inscriptions on graves made of concrete (beginning from 1904) are a mixture of Hebrew, French and Arabic.

Thanks to the data kept in the Lebanese civil registers it was possible to verify and complete the missing details.

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