

# Albanian-American-Jewish Relations:

## Contributions of U.S. Ambassador to Albania, Herman Bernstein (1876-1935)

By Mal Berisha

RUTH GAY SEMINAR IN JEWISH STUDIES

YIVO Institute for Jewish Research

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- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NIQ7EH0Skjg&feature=youtu.be>

# A Journalist, Writer, And Diplomat



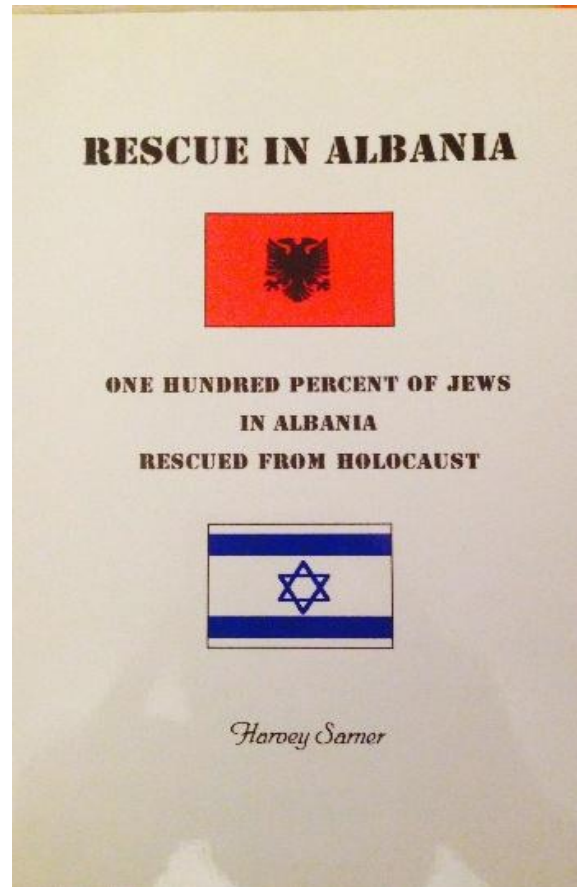
Herman Bernstein (1876 – 1935)

# US Ambassador to the Kingdom of Albania

“Tirana was to me for three and a half years a most fascinating listening and observation post. I found that though Albania has often been referred to as one of the most sensitive danger zones in Europe, the Albanians are a peace-loving people, and the policy of your government is unquestionably a policy of peace in the Balkans. I visited practically every part of Albania and learned to know and to love your people, whose simplicity, genuineness, hospitality and kindness have left an indelible impression upon me.

Herman Bernstein

# Rescue in Albania



# Posing with T. Scarlet Epstein – Jewish Survivor in Albania, 1938-1939



Debby, Prof T. Scarlet Epstein's daughter  
on the day of funeral:

Mom always kept telling us:

"Say whatever you like, do whatever you want, but don't touch me on this part of my chest [pointing to her heart], because there is a button there, and if you press it, it will automatically start speaking like a doll, saying:

**'Albania Saved My Life, Albania Saved My Life'**

# A Culture Of Rescue: Celebrating Jewish–Albanian Solidarity Amidst The Holocaust

November 22, 2012



On November 22, 2012, the Albanian Embassy and the Wiener Library in London hosted a special event, “*A Culture of Rescue: An evening celebrating Jewish-Albanian solidarity against the Holocaust,*” at The Wiener Library in London. *BESA* is a code of conduct that stands above religious differences. ...Professor Scarlet Epstein was decorated by the Albanian government

An aim...!

“During my tenure as the Ambassador of Albania I have tried to do my best to disseminate Albanian-Jewish history. This is not merely because I desire recognition for what the people of my country have done, but rather to present to the world a rare model of coexistence, peaceful cooperation, and the absence of anti-Semitism.

MB



“Such an example exists even today among Albanians in a troubled world split apart by hatred, war, and religious conflict. This is why one of the priorities of my job has been to promote this model as a unique example of human potential.”

MB

# Holocaust Memorial Service At Middlesex University : The Albanian Besa



On January 20, 2013, Middlesex University in the United Kingdom organized a Holocaust Memorial Service entitled “*The Albanian BESA and the History of Judaism in Albania*” (keynote speaker, Mal Berisha). Albania was the only country in Europe where the Jewish population had increased during the years 1939-45.

# Evening of Remembrance at Pinner Synagogue

April 17, 2013



On the 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, the theme of the evening was “Resistance and Rescue.” It was an evening of Yom Hashoah to commemorate the history of Albanian-Jewish relations.

# BESA – “THE PROMISE” Jewish Film Festival In London

November 18, 2013



A screening of the film “*BESA – The Promise*” took place at the Tricycle Theatre in Kilburn, London. It conveyed a strong message of Albanian decency towards Jews in a fantastic story of the reunion of a Jewish and an Albanian family after almost 60 years of lost connections. The Albanian Embassy in London was co-organizer of the event.

# Two Memorial Days In London — Albanian *Besa* Is Honored

January 16, 2014



The Pinner Synagogue in London also screened *BESA – THE PROMISE*, a film directed by Jason Williams with the contribution of Norman Gershman. Mrs. Gabby Glasman said: “A tree planted in Jerusalem symbolises the extraordinary gratitude for the brave acts of the Albanian people who sheltered and saved Jewish refugees during Holocaust.”

# “BESA - The Promise” At the Pinner Synagogue. January 16, 2014



**THE UNTOLD  
HOLOCAUST STORY OF  
ALBANIAN RESCUERS**

*The remarkable story of two men - a renowned Jewish-American photographer determined to document first-hand accounts of Albanians who rescued Jews during the Holocaust and an Albanian Muslim, seeking to fulfil his father's promise to the Jewish family he rescued.*

**AN AWARD-WINNING DOCUMENTARY FILM**  
to be introduced by:  
**H.E. Mr MAL BERISHA**  
The Albanian Ambassador in London  
**PROFESSOR DR SCARLETT EPSTEIN OBE**  
A Jewish refugee rescued by Albanians

**Pinner Synagogue**  
**1, Cecil Park, Pinner HA5 5HJ**  
*Five minute walk from Pinner tube station*  
**Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> January 2014**  
**8 - 10pm** (Doors open 7.30pm)  
*Mail arrive 7.00pm*

Tickets £3 can be purchased on the night at the door or from  
[www.pinnerstul.org/BESAtthepromise](http://www.pinnerstul.org/BESAtthepromise)



Refreshments



Pinner Synagogue

Ambassador Herman Bernstein

The American Jewish writer Gertrude Stein once said, “History takes time; history makes memory.”

It has taken time to illuminate the remarkable history of Jews saved in Albania.

# Herman Bernstein

- A writer and a great intellectual
- A Jewish activist
- A courageous polemist
- A friend to President Woodrow Wilson and President Herbert Hoover
- A journalist and a traveller (the Russian Revolution coverage and the Paris Peace Conference).



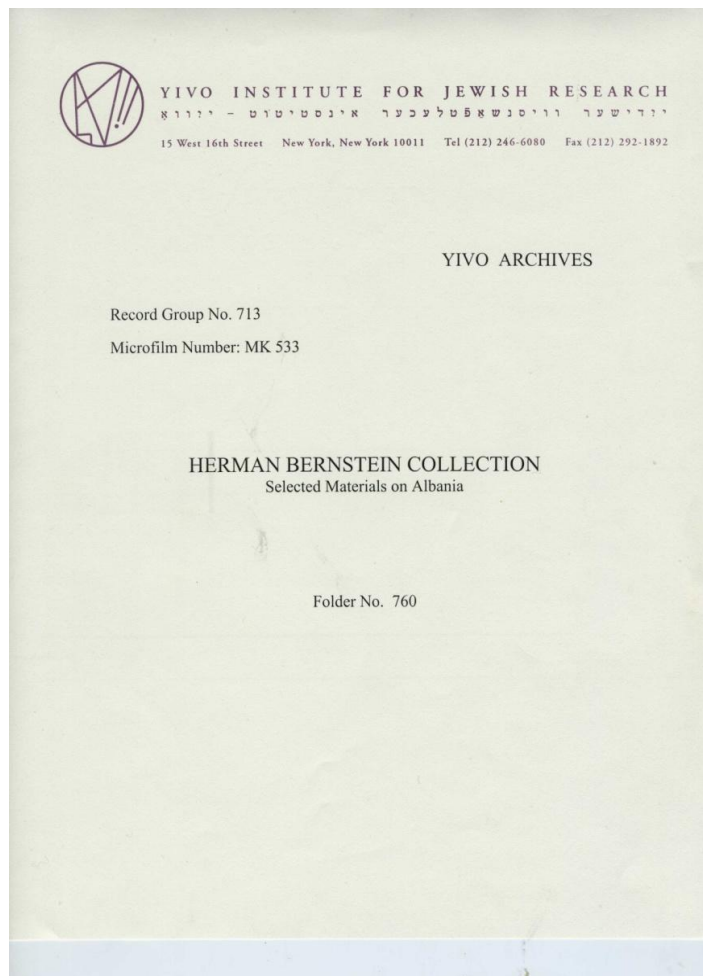
# Herman Bernstein: A great U.S. diplomat in Albania

- First American of Russian Jewish descent to become a U.S. Ambassador
- Relationship with Albanian King Ahmet Zogu.
- Correspondence with Albanian patriots.
- Relationship with Albanian religious leaders.
- Plan to establish a Jewish safe haven in Albania and discussions with Albanian King Ahmet Zogu.
- His forecast of Italy's dangerous policies towards Albania, published in *New York Times* in 1934. (Mussolini occupied the country five years after he wrote the article).

# Herman Bernstein: A great U.S. diplomat in Albania

- His discoveries about Jewish Life in Albania—the False Messiah Sabbatai Zevi and his death in Albania; the *Dönme* Jews of Sabbatai Zevi.
- His contribution to the history of Jews in Albania.
- His contribution to recording Albanian life, culture, religion, language, folklore, tradition, history, archaeology, and ethnography.

# Bernstein – A Model Diplomat – Preserving His Historic Legacy for the Future



# Herman Bernstein: The United States Ambassador to Albania, February 1930 to September 1933.



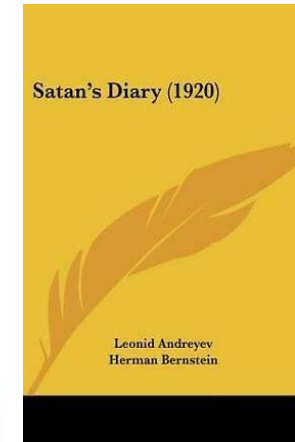
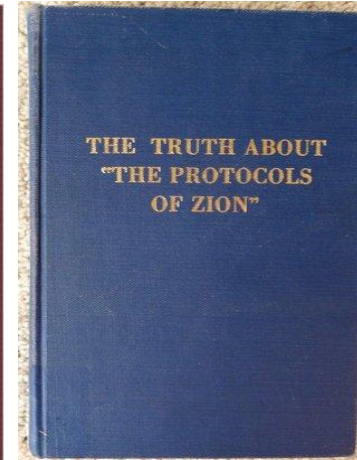
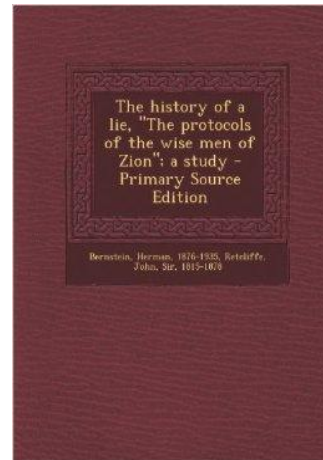
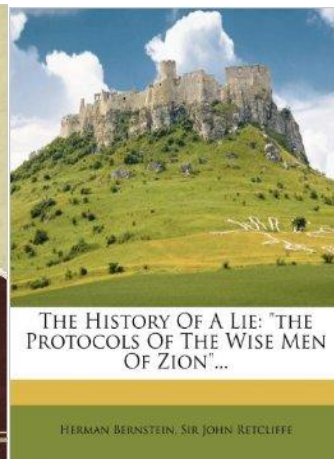
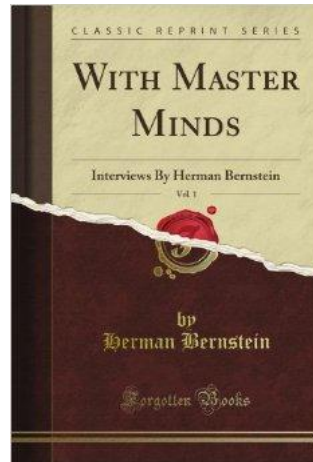
*Dielli* (The Sun) Albanian American Newspaper, Boston, Massachusetts, Friday, March 21, 1930

# Herman Bernstein – a great writer

- *The Flight of Time*
  - *In the Gates of Israel*
    - *Contrite Hearts*
      - *Celebrities of Our Time*
        - *The Road to Peace*
          - *The History of a Lie*
            - *With Master Minds*
              - *Willy – Nicky Telegrams*
                - *Herbert Hoover - The Man who Brought America to the World*



# Some of Bernstein's books

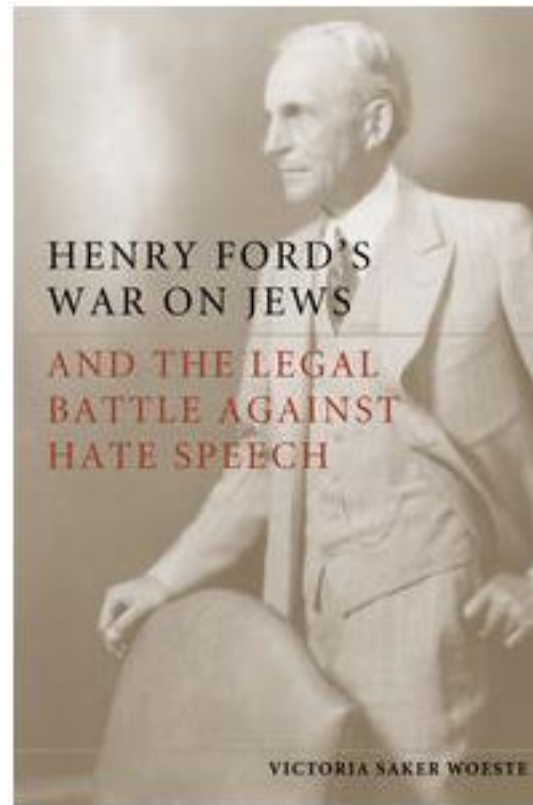


## *With Master Minds*

- **Bernstein & Leo Tolstoy**
  - **Bernstein & Premier Count Sergius Witte**
    - **Bernstein & Metchnikoff**
      - **Bernstein & George Bernard Shaw**
        - **Bernstein & Professor Henry Bergson**
          - **Bernstein & Auguste Rodin**
            - **Bernstein & Havelock Ellis**
              - **Bernstein & Maxime Kovalevsky**
                - **Bernstein & Sheik-ul-islam In Istanbul**

# Bernstein and Henry Ford and “The Wise Men Of Zion”

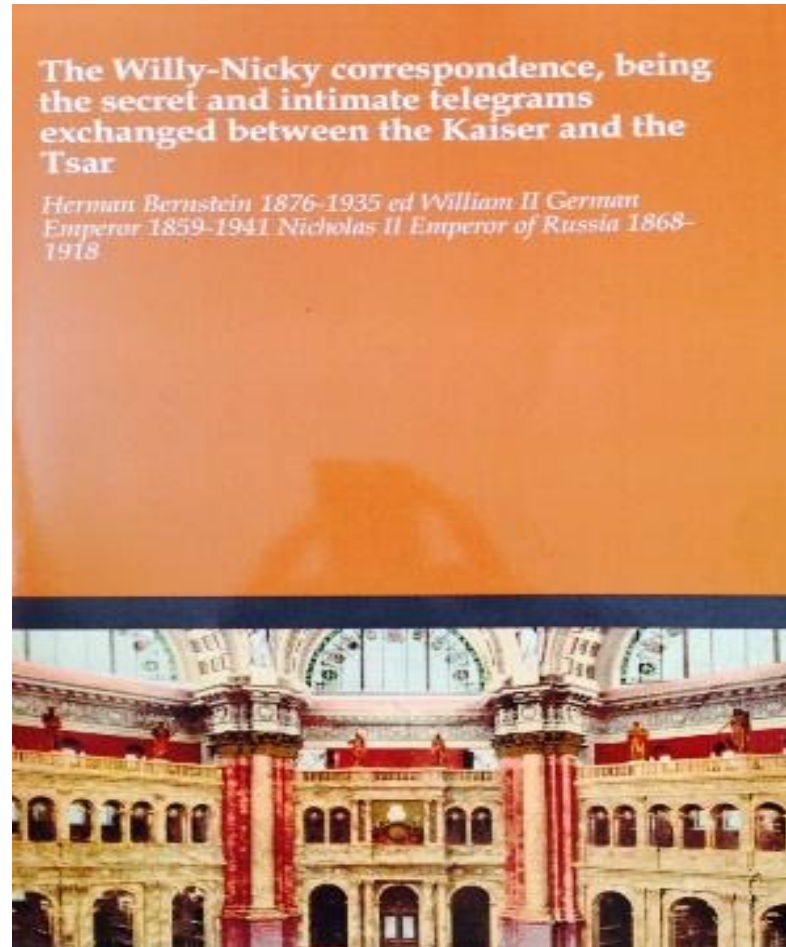
## Bernstein - A Great Polemist - Winner of a \$200,000 Fine against Ford



Protocols Of The Elders Of Zion



# Bernstein — A Courageous Journalist — The Willy Nicky Telegrams



# President Woodrow Wilson



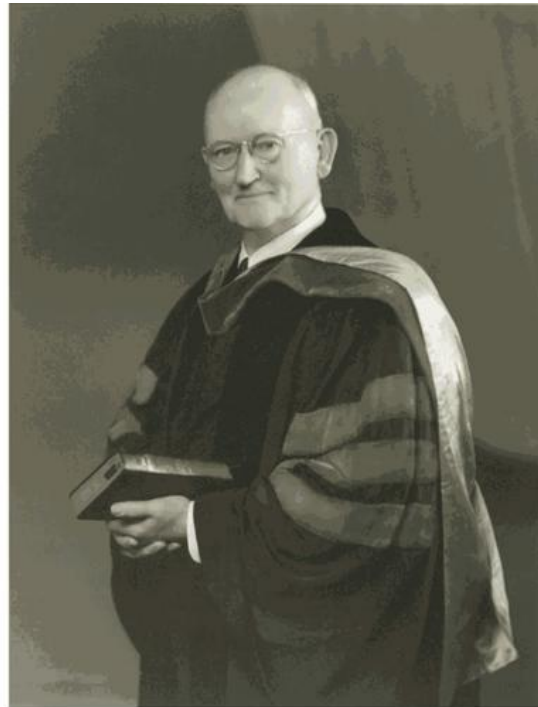
- In 1919 Bernstein went to Paris with the American Delegation as a journalist.
- He reported from Paris for many American newspapers.
- The story of the Paris Peace Conference is linked to the position of the United States represented by President Wilson and to the contributions of an American missionary, Charles Telford Erickson, later friend of Ambassador Bernstein.

# President Herbert Hoover

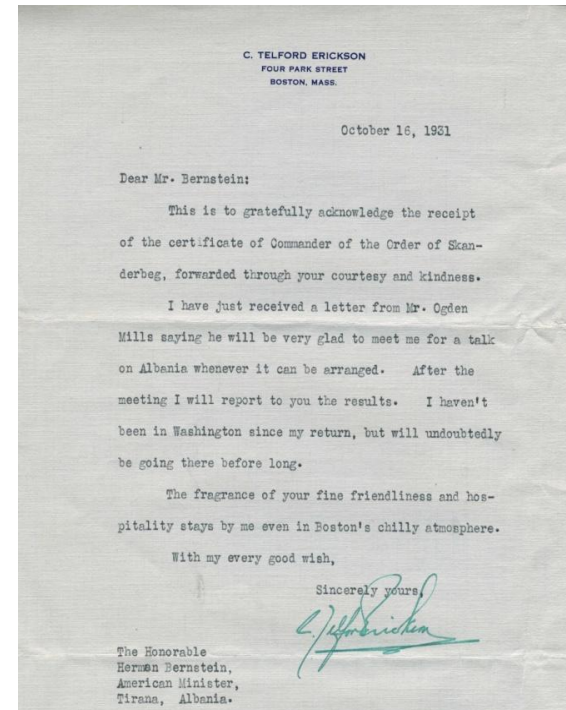
- Herbert Hoover was the 31<sup>st</sup> President of the United States, from 1929 until 1933.
- Secretary of Commerce from 1921 to 1928.
- In 1925 he gave a donation of 10,000 US dollars from his personal account, on the condition of anonymity, for the Agricultural School of Kavaja in Albania.
- It was discovered only after Erickson's death in 1966.
- Regarding Herbert Hoover a great man, Bernstein wrote his book *The Man who Brought America to the World*.



# Charles Telford Erickson



Telford in his attire as a clergyman of the Congregational Church



The relations between Hoover and Erickson, between Hoover and Bernstein, and—after Bernstein assumed his position in Tirana—between Erickson and Bernstein, have all had a long-enduring, positive influence on American-Albanian relations

# Bernstein - American Ambassador in Albania

- Bernstein assumed his position as American Ambassador to the Albanian Kingdom on February 17, 1930.
- Bernstein was the first American of Russian Jewish descent to be appointed US Ambassador.
- Upon his appointment he received congratulatory letters from various prestigious Jewish personalities and institutions.

# Bernstein and the staff of the US Legation in Tirana, Albania



**Bernstein's Contribution  
in Enlightening the  
The World About The Albanian Question**

# Albania, The Belgium Of The Balkans

“Albania has been called ‘Europe’s Forgotten Land,’ ‘Cinderella among the Nations,’ ‘Land of the Paradox,’ ‘Key to the Adriatic,’ and ‘the Belgium of the Balkans.’”

“Even the five hundred years of Turkish rule, during which they were forced to embrace Muhammadanism, did not thwart the indomitable spirit of independence among the North Albanian mountaineers”

**Herman Bernstein**



## Reasons Why Albania Lost Faith in Italy in the 1930s

On September 5, 1939, Bernstein remarked “Why is Italy so eager to restore cordial collaboration with Albania, to pour vast sums of money into the little country?”

**The answer is that Albania, by its geographical position, holds the keys to the Adriatic.**

In the Balkans people still believe in Mussolini’s imperialist ambition of reconquering the famous Roman Via Egnatia, which leads through Albania to Salonica and Constantinople.

## Bernstein On Albanian Religious Tolerance — A Pilgrimage To Elbasan

- Bernstein rightly ascertained that Albanians all share the common faith of Albanianism.
- This fact was reconfirmed on September 21, 2014 when Pope Francis visited Tirana.
- More than three hundred thousand Albanians rushed down in the streets of their capital to greet the Holy Father, half of them being Muslims.

# Albania – A country of religious tolerance



Callaghan standing among the clergy

## 1933 – King Zog Tells His Story To Herman Bernstein



- The first history of King Zog is the thirty-page document serving as his autobiography.
- It was recorded in English in 1933 by Herman Bernstein, the American Ambassador in Tirana.
- It is considered the life story of the Albanian ruler, told by himself in the third person.
- It provides an insight into how King Zog viewed himself and his country's history and development

# King Zog of Albania

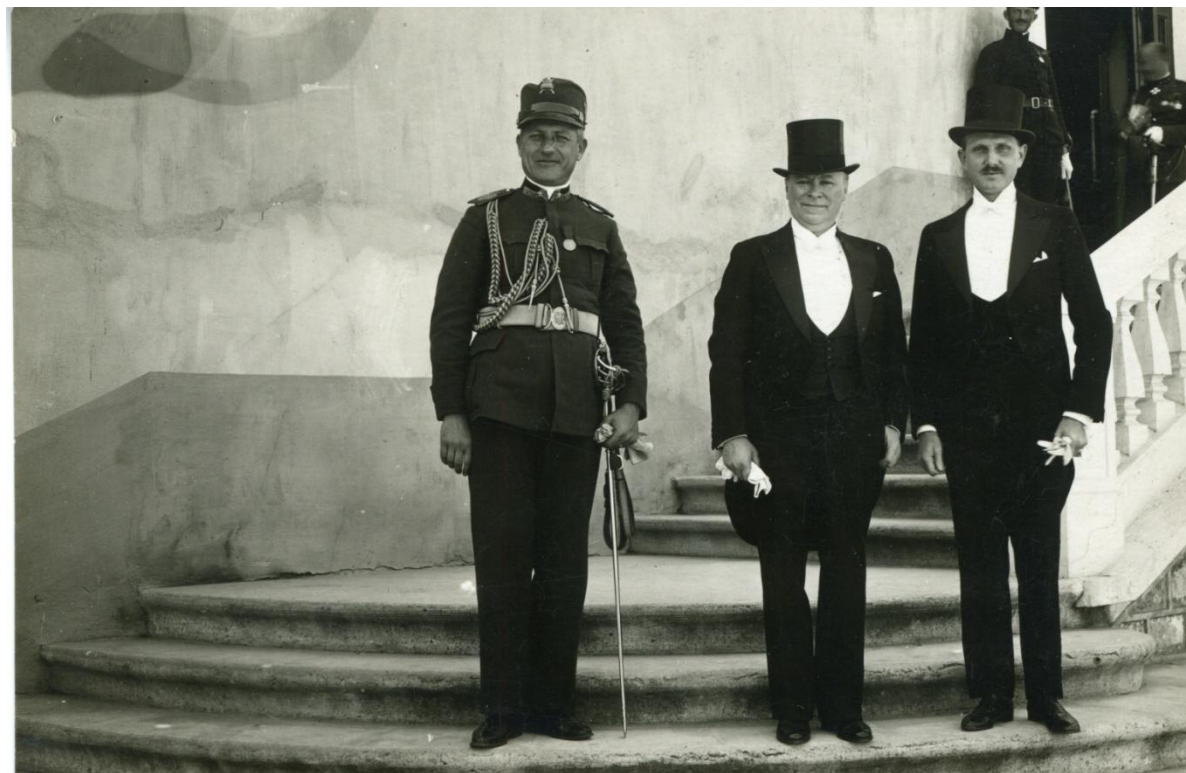
A signed portrait of the  
Albanian King Ahmet Zog, to  
Ambassador Herman  
Bernstein



## Bernstein: A Great Diplomat

- During his appointment, he worked on negotiation of naturalization and extradition treaties between the U.S. and Albania.
- Two of these treaties were bilaterally signed during his time as Ambassador in Tirana, Albania.

# Bernstein at the King Zog's Palace



# Bernstein and King Zog Speak About a Jewish Safe Haven in Albania

- King Zog and Ambassador Bernstein spoke about the possibility of establishing a Jewish safe haven in Albanian territory.
- In a time when Jews all over Europe were being faced with Nazi racism, Bernstein wanted to do something to create a place of refuge for a significant number of Jews.
- King Zog was ready to support him



## Bernstein Discovers the History of Jews in Vlorë

Herman Bernstein recorded the testimony of Joseph Matattia, member of the City Hall of Vlorë. Among other things, he says that “based on hearsay, a Jewish colony emigrated here from Venice during the first Venetian occupation about five centuries ago”.

“At the present time, Matattia says that the Jewish community there consists of ten families or sixty souls.”

# False Messiah Sabbathai Tsevi



Herman Bernstein unveiled the fact that Sabbatai Tsevi is supposed to have died at the river bank of Osumi, Berat, Albania, after years of being interned by Ottomans in Ulqini, at that time part of Albanian territory.

He left a legacy of *Dönme*, and an Islamic sect which does exist still today in Albania.

# Bernstein's Interest In Archaeology

## The Synagogue in Saranda, Albania

- Remains of the 5th century Synagogue of Saranda – South of Albania.
- 12 such Synagogues are supposed to have had existed in the Balkans
- One of them is in ruins in Plovdiv, Bulgaria



# Eloquent Speeches Of Herman Bernstein

“Skanderbeg was one of the world’s greatest personalities both as a leader of men and as a champion of his people’s independence...

...To celebrate the bicentennial birthday of George Washington it is my honor and pleasure to dedicate the seeds of trees brought from Mount Vernon, the home of Washington, and plant them in Albanian soil, on the grounds of American Legation...”

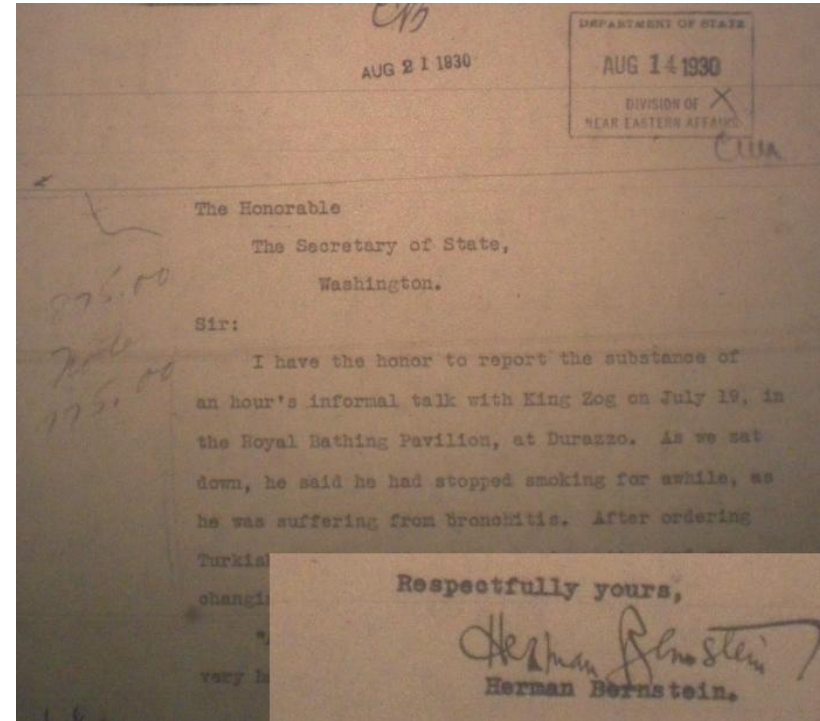
# Bernstein —Ambassador To Tirana



Bernstein and King Zog  
on the day of the  
inauguration of the US  
Legation in Tirana,  
November 27, 1930.



# Herman Bernstein: A day of work



- The US Embassy in Tirana has historical significance
- It was the first embassy building to have been erected by the American government in the world.
- It was inaugurated on the Day of Thanksgiving on November 27, 1930.

# Herman Bernstein during a ceremony in Tirana



(second from the right)

# Bernstein—Friend of Albanian Intellectuals

Alexander Moisi, Lef Nosi, Gjergj Fishta, Faik Konica, Terenc Toci

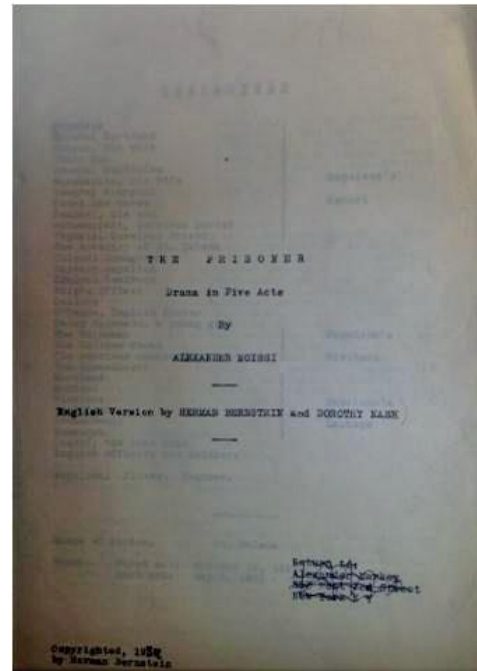
SHKALLË, 27 Maj 1933

Shkallësi,

Vetëm për me të sifitue, se spini  
tualisht gjinëu përherë i shoqëruem  
me shkallësi të vë, po të shqis  
ket kops të komunit të Lekë D  
qazjinit", që aser kës hit tëht kye  
rë botuemi në shqyphkrojen t'one,  
e që është mō para vepër shqyph  
nbi ket komit.

Me lexime të porqme

A. Gjergj Fishta



ALBANIAN LEGATION  
WASHINGTON

January 10, 1934

Dear Mr. Minister:

I spent a few days in New York but thought all the time that you were still in Sheffield, Massachusetts. I found your letter on my return here, and deeply regret that I missed the opportunity of seeing you.

The Boston "Dielli", in its issue of January 5, 1934, published from Albania the news that the Grand Cross of the Order of Skanderbeg has been bestowed upon you. However,

up to now, I have received no official notice of the event. You know how slow the Albanian bureaucracy can be: I expect to receive the papers in a couple of weeks or so. I will let you know immediately, and we shall arrange for a meeting to be held here at your earliest convenience.

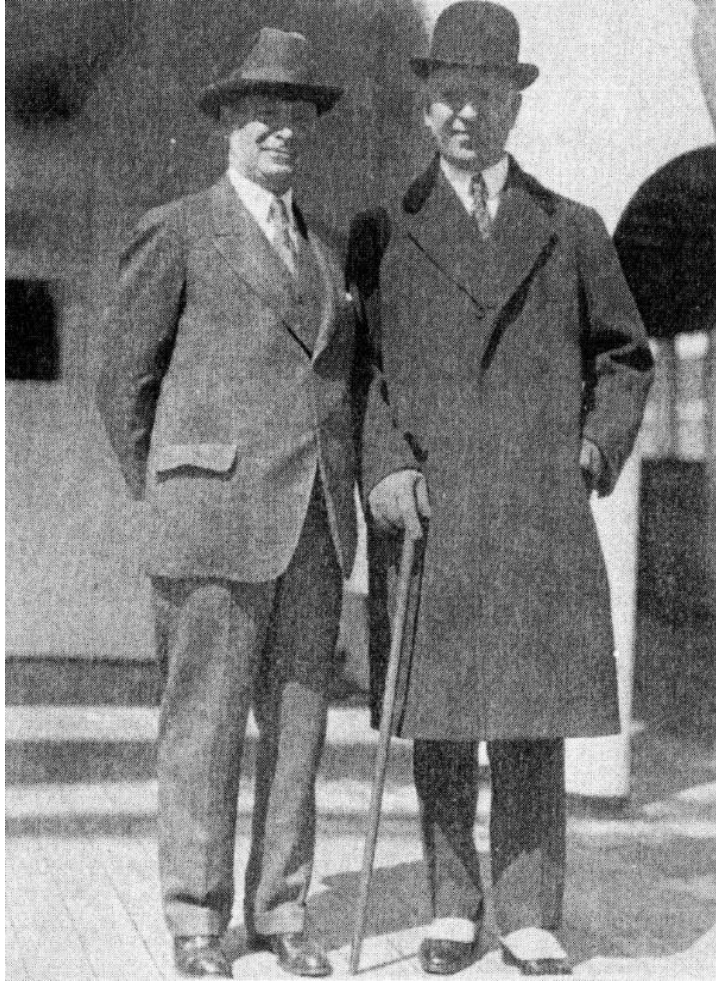
Wishing you and Mrs. Bernstein a happy New Year, I remain yours very sincerely,

Faik Konica

Minister  
The Honorable Herman Bernstein



# Bernstein and Faik Konica, Albanian Minister



Two peers of the diplomatic corps: one from Tirana, the other one from Washington, DC

# Bernstein Never Ceased Working For Albania Even After He Left That Country

- ***“Albania A Pawn of the Main Powers”*** - *The New York Times*, New York, 28 January 1934
- Bernstein’s article in *The New York Times* was a predictive narrative of Albania’s future, which less than six years later would be invaded by Italians.
- This shows Bernstein’s brilliance as a diplomat, whose knowledge about the country made him able to predict the future.

# Why was Bernstein loved so much by Albanians?

- He is an important figure for Albanian–American Relations.
- He advocated for the small country, learning about its history and culture, writing articles about its history, helping to open schools
- He warned the world about its tragic future.

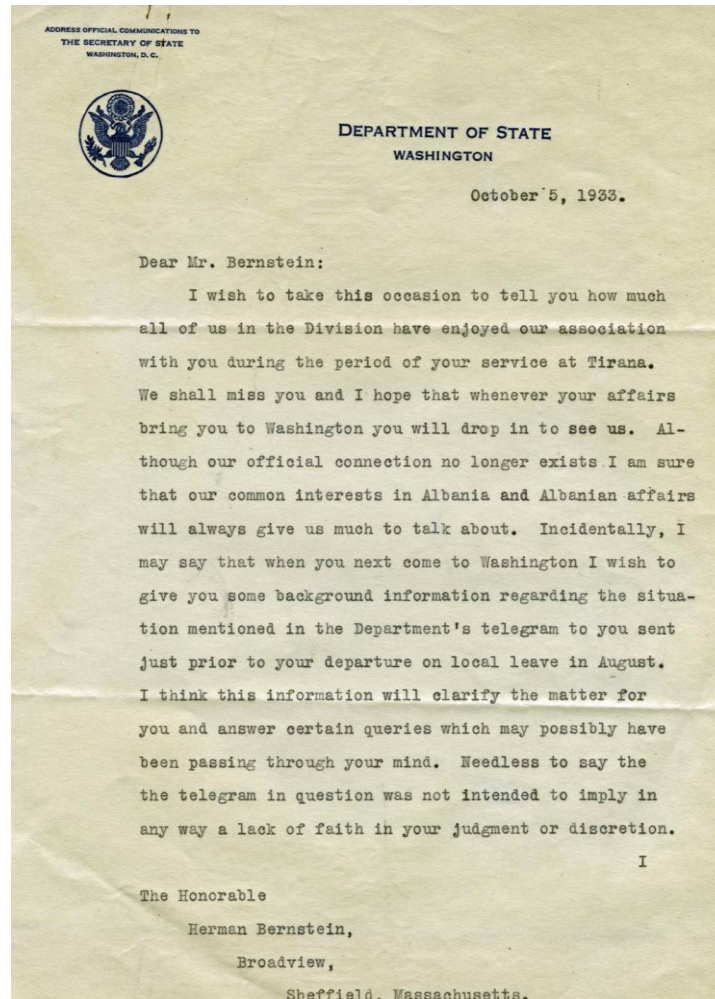
# The End of Mandate and a Joke by Bernstein

# Bernstein Decorated By His Majesty, King Zog of Albania

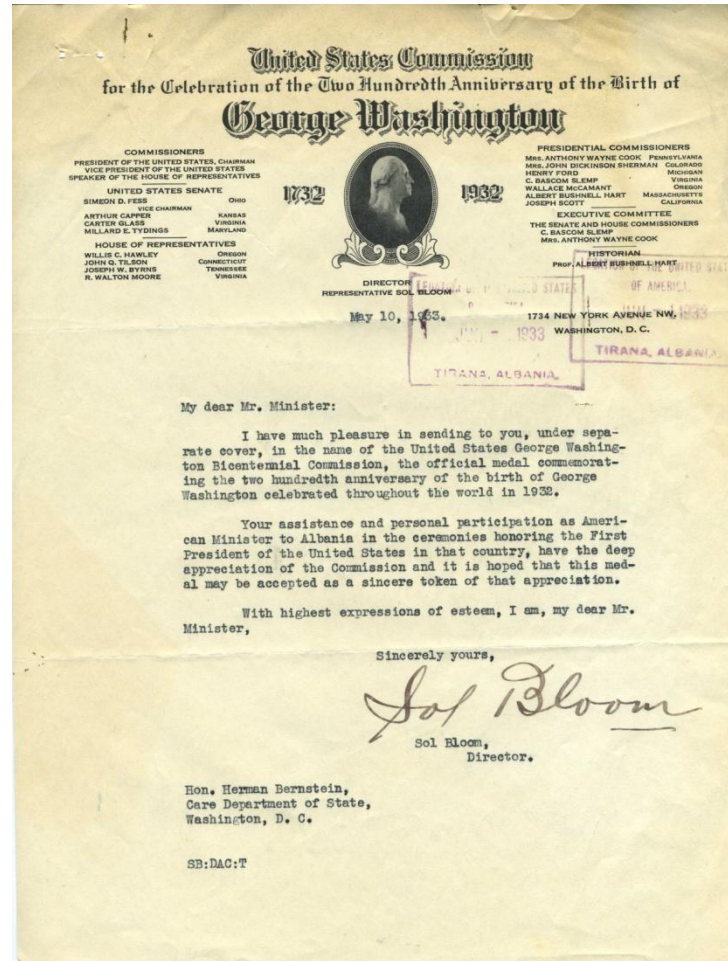
For his contribution on strengthening US American Relations he was decorated by His Majesty, King Zog of Albania with the Star and Knight's cross of the Order of Skanderbeg.



# A Farewell Letter of Thanks for Service Rendered, from the U.S. State Department



# Bernstein Honored by the U.S. George Washington Bicentennial Commission



# Quotes from Pan - Albanian American Federation VATRA

“Herman Bernstein is in himself a personality that captures the people’s hearts. There are persons who are the typical representatives of their [..] nation...



# Quotes from Pan - Albanian American Federation VATRA

...We speak of the distinguished type of our titled European lord, the English gentleman: the American sportsman....

Mr. Bernstein is the universal man. He is a member of a race renowned for great mental aptness and high ideals, but persecuted and tortured by the blind fanaticism and wild chauvinism of demented nations...

...Bernstein was experienced with the difficulties of this harsh life and then was brought up in the circles of his times' most distinguished intellectuals and was nourished with the liberty-loving principles of the nation of Abraham Lincoln...

## Additional Quotes from Pan-Albanian American Federation, VATRA

“...He knows the world with its two sides, the dark and the bright. He is one of the pioneer citizens of the world” (September 19, 1933).

# Herman Bernstein



A great man of a great nation and a great people

Thank you for your attention