



Kehila Kedosha Janina

Synagogue and Museum

June 2019 E-Newsletter

Dear Friends of Kehila Kedosha Janina,

From sundown on June 8 to sundown on June 10, Jews throughout the world will celebrate Shavuot, the giving of the Torah. Do join us for morning services on June 9 and June 10 at Kehila Kedosha Janina, where we continue to chant special holiday piyutim according to the Romaniote tradition. The traditional foods eaten are dairy products. Among Greek Jews, cheese bourekas are the favorite.



We are thrilled to announce the latest news from Ioannina: History was made on Sunday June 2, when Moisis Eliasaf, President of the Jewish Community of Ioannina, was elected Mayor of the city of Ioannina. This was the first time that a Jewish person was elected a Mayor in Greece. There are only 30 Jews left in Ioannina (from a pre-WWII population of 2,000). Now, in a city of 167,000, a Jewish mayor has been elected. Moisis is highly respected in Ioannina from his position at the University of Ioannina as head of Internal Medicine. His mother was born in Preveza (Lagaris family) and his father's family (Eliasaf) has a long history in the Jewish Community of Ioannina. Kehila Kedosha Janina has a long history with our sister city Ioannina and with Moisis Eliasaf personally. We wish him Mazal Tov, Συγχαρητήρια, and much success! Additional reporting follows in this Newsletter.



This newsletter, our 123rd will, as always, cover news regarding Kehila Kedosha Janina and news concerning Greek Jewry. We hope you find our newsletter interesting. Your feedback is of utmost importance to us. If you missed previous issues, they can be accessed on our website www.kkjsm.org.

We have now reach over 10,000 households worldwide. What an accomplishment for a little synagogue on the Lower East Side of New York City. Our community of 'friends' continually grow with each newsletter. If you know others who wish to be part of this ever-growing network, please have them contact us at museum@kkjsm.org

As always, you are all invited to attend our Saturday morning Shabbat services. Just give our Shamas, Sol Kofinas, a heads up by emailing info@kkjsm.org so we are sure that our Kiddush (traditional Greek Jewish Kosher foods) is sufficient. If you wish to sponsor a Kiddush for a special occasion or an Adara, contact Sol.

Passings

We, unfortunately, missed the passing of Robert Menashe on January 29, 2019. We thank his brother, Louis, for helping us to correct this. Robert was born Aug 8, 1928 in Greenwich Village in Manhattan, but grew up in Brooklyn. Robert Menashe died after a short illness. He came from a family from Salonika and was very proud of his Sephardic background. Born in Greenwich Village and growing up in Brooklyn, he was often known as "Smiling Bobby" from his sunny disposition and generosity to others, qualities he always carried throughout his long life. To his children Elaine, Ronald, and Linda, he passed on his love of Ladino and Sephardic culture.

Simchas

On June 14th we celebrate the 99th birthday of Mildred Negrin Froot. Born in Harlem into a proud Yanniotte family, Millie has always been a joy to the community. Millie is the daughter of Mollie Barouch and Abraham Negrin.



We celebrate the birth of Noah Eliyahu Varon, the first grandchild of Joseph Varon. The proud parents are Joshua and Danielle Varon. Noah continues the proud lineage of both Romaniote and Sephardic families. The great-grandparents are Esta Hazan Varon (soon to be celebrating her 94th birthday on June 21st) and Morris Varon (of Blessed Memory). Noah is the proud great-great-grandson of Sophie Dalven (O.B.M) and Morris Hazan (O.B.M.) born in Salonika and the great-great-great-grandson of Steroula Colchamiro (born in Ioannina) and Israel Dalven (born in Preveza), both of Blessed Memory and, finally (!) the great-great-great-great-grandson of Jessula ben Matathia Colchamiro and Rachel Galanos Colchamiro. As we say in Greek, na sas zisei (he should live for you, he should bring you joy!).

Our community is so proud of Jacob Colchamiro, grandson of Elliot and Gladys Colchamiro, for placing second in the world in the International Bible Contest for Youth (Chidon HaTanach) held in Israel. Read more about the contest [here](#).



ΔΙΚΟΙ ΜΑΣ – Dikoi Mas – Los Muestros

While all visitors are welcome, it is always a special occasion when “Our Own” visit. In May, in addition to all of “Our Own” who visited for the Greek Jewish Festival on May 19th, we had special visits from Sid Ganis and Matthew Yamali.



Sid Ganis holding a Torah scroll from Ioannina. Sid is a proud member of the Jacob and Julia Ganis branch of the Ganis family.



Matthew Yamali (Center) and his friend Edwin visit with Matthew’s aunt, Stella Yamali Bacolas. Matthew is the grandson of Mike Yamali of Blessed Memory.

Visitors Flock to Kehila Kedosha Janina

As always, visitors from around the world came to Kehila Kedosha Janina. There were school groups, family groups, tour groups and interested individuals.



Joseph Gootenberg & Susan Leibenhaut. Joseph and Susan will be joining us on our Tour to Jewish Greece from July 17-31. They found out about our tour from Belle Negrin Davis, our dear friend. Thank you Belle.



Consul Emanuel Serrano Espinoza is visiting from Spain and Dr. William Ledebor from Athens



Consul Emanuel Serrano Espinoza of Spain



Family visit



Israelis have made Kehila Kedosha Janina a favorite place to visit.



Delegation of Israeli Municipal Leaders



Israeli Students

Past Events at Kehila Kedosha Janina Greek Jewish Festival – May 19

Our fifth annual Greek Jewish Festival was a tremendous success. Newspapers both in the U.S. and Greece covered our celebration, along with a Greek TV show! Our Facebook page [here](#) is loaded with pictures. We more than 10,000 people and all had a great time. As always, the weather was with us. We hosted a special delegation from Cyprus, including Consul General of Cyprus in New York, Alexis Phedonos-Vadet, along with the Cyprus team from the American Jewish Committee chapter of Westchester/Stamford. In addition, we were honored to welcome Consul General of Israel in New York Dani Dayan and Consul General of Greece in New York Dr. Konstantinos Koutras, who made a joint statement from our stage during the Festival. Their remarks emphasized the close friendship of Israel and Greece and how our festival exemplifies that. We could not agree more!





AJC Delegation with Consul General of Cyprus in New York

Consul Generals of Greece and Israel in New York

Past Events of Interest in New York

Celebration of Judeo-Spanish in Forest Hills



Past Events of Interest in Seattle

Seattle, the third largest Sephardic community in the United States, hosted the international Erensyia Conference, beginning with an exhibit on the Jews of Rhodes by Aaron Hasson.



JOIN CONGREGATION EZRA BESSAROTH AND
THE INTERNATIONAL ERENSYA CONFERENCE

JEWISH LIFE ON RHODES & DESSERT RECEPTION

A Special Evening of History, Culture, & Art

**MONDAY MAY 27 BEGINNING 7PM AT EZRA BESSAROTH
EVENING IS FREE & OPEN TO THE COMMUNITY**

Join us as we welcome Aron Hasson of the Rhodes Jewish Historical Foundation and delegates from Sephardic Communities around the world to a special evening in honor of the International Erensyia Conference

News from Jewish Greece

Ioannina

Ioannina, Home to Unique Jewish Community, Elects Greece's First Jewish Mayor

Moses Elisaf elected with 51% of vote in city that was once heartland of country's Romaniote Jewish tradition
Full article by Gavin Rabinowitz in the Times of Israel available [here](#)

Moses Elisaf, the head of the tiny Jewish community in the northern Greek city of Ioannina, was elected mayor in local elections on Sunday, reportedly becoming the country's first-ever Jewish mayor.

Elisaf received 50.33 percent of the vote, narrowly beating incumbent mayor Thomas Bega, who got 49.67%, the Ekathimerini newspaper reported. According to the paper, this is first time that modern Greece has seen a Jew elected mayor.

Elisaf, a professor of pathology at the local university, has been the head of the local Jewish community for 17 years, and formerly also served as the head of the Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece.

"Today, Ioannina made a huge change, a big leap of progress. I feel deep emotion and heavy responsibility towards all my fellow residents," Ekathimerini quoted him as saying.

The local vote was held five weeks before national elections and saw Greece's conservative opposition New Democracy party winning in nearly all regions and the cities of Athens and Thessaloniki, routing Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras's ruling party. Elisaf ran as an independent

Ioannina's Jewish community numbers just some 50 people today, but was once the center of the unique 2,300 year-old Romaniote Jewish tradition. The Romaniote Jews, neither Ashkenazi nor Sephardic, emerged from the first Jewish communities of Europe. Records indicate the first Jewish presence in Greece dating back to 300 BCE. These Jews became known as the Romaniotes, speaking their own language, Yevanic, or Judeo-Greek, a version of Greek infused with Hebrew and written with the Hebrew script.

By the start of the 20th century, some 4,000 Romaniote Jews lived in Ioannina. But amid the economic hardship and the turmoil that accompanied the breakup of the Ottoman Empire, many joined their Greek compatriots and emigrated. Most went to the United States and Palestine, setting up Romaniote synagogues in New York City and Jerusalem. Later, a third was established in Tel Aviv. At the start of World War II, about 2,000 Jews remained in Ioannina.

On March 25, 1944, the German Nazi occupiers rounded up the Jews of Ioannina and sent them to Auschwitz. Only 112 Ioannina Jews survived the death camps. Another 69 escaped the roundup, hiding with Christian families or fleeing into the mountains, where some fought with the Greek resistance. Only some 5,000 Jews remain in Greece today, with around 90% of Greek Jews having been killed in the Holocaust.



Election Night on June 2

Additional news coverage of the election is available from The National Herald [here](#) and Ekathimerini [here](#).
Read the statement from the Central Board of the Jewish Communities in Greece (KIS) [here](#).

Athens

Our Jewish Athens

Full article by Georgia N. Gleoudi in Ekathimerini available [here](#)

Three years ago, I visited the Synagogue of Athens on Melidoni Street in the capital's Thiseio district for the Jewish Passover (Pesach) service. I had never been before. Everyone seemed to know each other. I may have been the only one who did not belong to the community, but that didn't mean that I was not welcome. The lady next to me asked, "Are you a Jew?" "No," I replied. "I am a Christian." She said, "We may sit together if you want, so I can explain to you what Rabbi says, since everything is in Hebrew." Mrs Rosa stood beside me and did not leave until the end of the service.

Three years later I sat down for a chat with Taly Mair, director of the Jewish Community of Athens (JCA), and Iakovos Atoun, its programs coordinator, at the headquarters of the JCA. "It is strange, but the Jewish population of Athens was smaller before the Second World War. On the eve of World War II, the Jews of Athens amounted to about 3,000. At the same time, the number of Jews in Thessaloniki was over 50,000," Mair told me.

According to the JCA, in the census of 1928, the Jews of Athens numbered 1,578, the vast majority of them Romaniotes. The first synagogue of Athens, the Etz Hayyim (meaning Tree of Life), was built at 8 Melidoni Street in 1904. The most affluent Jews were merchants, while the rest were mainly street vendors and retailers selling fabric and other goods at the bazaar. At the time the majority lived in the center of Athens, in Plaka, Kolonaki and Mets, with others in Patission, Kypseli and Pangrati, and a small number in the suburbs. In 1935 the Beth Shalom Synagogue was built across the road and continues to operate today. In 1943 many Jews from Thessaloniki and other cities flocked to Athens. It is estimated that the incoming Jewish population reached some 4,000 to 5,000. The total Jewish population in Athens at that time was around 8,000.



Etz Hayyim, the Yanniotiki Synagogue in Athens

In Athens, a large part of the Jewish population survived due to factors such as the large size of the capital, the language spoken by the Jews in the city (which was Greek, not Ladino), and the mobilization of partisans, authorities and the Greek Orthodox Church. The actions of Athens Police Chief Angelos Evert, who saved several Jewish families by providing them with Christian identity papers, and the decisive attitude of Rabbi Elias Barzilai are widely known. "After the war, the Jewish community in Athens grew instead of getting smaller due to the fact that the remaining Jews in other Greek cities moved to Athens. Other Jewish communities in Greece either shrank dramatically or disappeared completely," Mair said. "Today there are about 3,000 Jews in Athens."

Milestones

1960: An important moment for the Jewish community of Athens was the foundation of the Jewish Community School in 1960, 15 years after the rebuilding of a diverse and multifaceted community. The school was built on a 3-acre plot in Psychico with the aim of hosting 300 children. "This was an important milestone because we have always attached tremendous importance to the role of education," Atoun said.

2004: Another important moment was the recognition by the Greek state of World Holocaust Day, which took place on January 27, 2004. January 27 is the anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz concentration camp. In recent

years, the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs has issued an annual circular which recommends that schools of all levels devote two hours to teaching children about the Holocaust.

2010: In 2010, the Holocaust Memorial was set up in Thiseio, a few meters from the Synagogue at the point where Melidoni, Ermou and Evvoulou streets meet. "We are the last capital in Europe to have acquired a Holocaust memorial," Mair pointed out. The monument has been vandalized on several occasions, mainly by far-right and neo-Nazi groups.

2016: Outside the Synagogue there is a huge black book full of names. This is the Monument of the Righteous among the Nations.

"So far, the book contains the names of 328 Christians or Christian families who saved their Jewish friends or even Jews who were totally unknown to them," Mair explained.

The debate over the Holocaust has broadened in recent years. The Ministry of Education has made a significant contribution. The fact that several ceremonies to bestow the Righteous Among the Nations title have taken place in schools opens the way for raising awareness. "Children are now getting in contact with this part of history," Atoun and Mair proudly told me.

"Our community wishes to be open to society. In this context of extroversion, for a number of years we have been implementing activities aimed at opening up to society. One example is the Open Shabbat, where we invite people to come and watch the Sabbath ceremonies. Rabbi, in particular, recites prayers in Greek that day, so that everyone can participate. Also, in the last three years we have been doing the Open Hanukkah, which is one of the most important Jewish holidays. Schools also constitute a big chapter. About 25 schools visit us every year," Atoun told me.

Who is the Athenian Jew?

"Let me ask you a question – how would you respond to the question: Who is the Athenian Christian?" Mair said, smiling. "There are some who have no financial problems and others who need the support of the community for their survival. The rich Jew stereotype does not hold water."

Most children in the community attend the Lauder School of the Jewish Community of Athens. "The school only covers kindergarten and primary education. After that children go to other schools. We follow the official curriculum of the Ministry of Education and our students are taught also English and French. In addition, pupils have Jewish language lessons and learn about Jewish traditions," Atoun said.

"Last year, in partnership with Pierce – The American College of Greece and the Lauder Foundation, we started a pilot educational program for the children of the Jewish community finishing primary school. These are optional afternoon lessons aimed at further familiarizing students with Jewish culture and language," Mair added.

Actions may have expanded the dialogue but they haven't stopped anti-Semitic attacks. In 2017, the Heinrich Boll Foundation conducted a survey on the levels of anti-Semitism in Greece. The survey examined the relationship between politics and anti-Semitism, the level of education in relation to anti-Semitism, and the Greek Orthodox Church's treatment of Jewish communities. Additionally, in December 2018, a report on incidents targeting religious sites in Greece in 2017 was published by the Ministry of Education. Out of the 556 incidents, 11 targeted Jewish places of worship and were characterized as racist or anti-Semitic.

"The Holocaust Memorial is often desecrated. Every time, the municipality cleans it, but we do have such incidents and we have to be alert," Atoun said. Of course what was most shocking was the attack on the Jewish cemetery in May 2018, when strangers broke burial slabs and desecrated people's graves. The Jewish Community of Athens condemned the act by staging a silent protest a few days later, holding banners displaying just one word: "Why?" Next to the Jewish Community there was a crowd comprising politicians, officials, and representatives of embassies and consulates, but mostly ordinary citizens. "How can dead people hurt you?" we asked ourselves.

In 2015, Rabbi of the Jewish Community of Athens Gabriel Negrin succeeded Rabbi Isaac Mizan, who had been serving the Jewish Community of Athens since 1971. "The Jewish Community of Athens is a 'new' community. It was founded in 1890 as an Israeli brotherhood of Athens and in 1912-13 it became a Jewish community. There is

evidence of a Jewish presence here from the ancient period and of course during the Roman era. There was an absence of Jewish life in Byzantine and Ottoman times, but with the coming of King Otto the presence of the Jewish element increased. A small Jewish population also means small religious needs. For this reason, the service of religious needs took place in smaller places. It is essential to mention that, beyond a place of prayer and worship, the synagogue also functioned as a meeting place and a place of caring,” Rabbi said.

How do the different Jewish communities coexist in the synagogue?

“After the Second World War the Athenian Jewish population was mixed. We had Romaniotes, Sephardim and a few Ashkenazim. The Romaniote tradition prevailed in some areas, for example, in the fact that most of our cantors were Romaniotes, and even prayers were chanted with the Romaniote accent. In recent decades, the Community’s rabbis have been Sephardim,” he said.

“We operate on all religious holidays. The Community and the Synagogue have maintained their consistency and have vigorously avoided any schism. The Synagogue is open to all Jews of any community or perception. We all pray together in the same unique Synagogue of Athens. We also welcome non-Jews and present to them a religion which is close to Christianity, but sometimes unknown to them. We are a Greek community – in the history, prayer and behavior of the members,” he continued. “What is it like to see the changes of an entire community and to lift the burden of a new life that comes to the world or a life that is lost?” I asked.

“What moves me is the trust of the people who accept me. They accept a rabbi who works hard and devotes himself to the community. What matters to me is the human being. Each person separately. You know, at the end of every sermon, the wish is ‘Be strong and blessed.’ The power and patience that we need to cope with the difficulties of our lives,” he said.

How does he imagine the future of the community?

“I suppose that the members of the community will become fewer but the community will be lively, active and even more extrovert.” You can learn more about the Jewish Community of Athens on its website.

Georgia N. Gleoudi is a religious scholar and blogger.

Another Unfortunate Anti-Semitic Desecration in Athens



Photo taken on May 25th of the vandalism of the plaque in Plateia Paphou in memory of the 13,000 Greek Jewish children who were lost in the Holocaust. It is believed that the desecration took place some weeks before.

We report, we mourn, and we question the mentality of those who do such unspeakable things. The bigger question is “how do we stop them?”

Thessaloniki

New film "Heroes of Salonika" Makes Debut on Israeli TV Full article [here](#)

A fascinating new documentary film called "Heroes of Salonika," which sheds light on the practically unknown destruction that befell Jews in the Greek city of Salonika during the Holocaust, will be broadcast on the Israeli Channel 12 (*Keshet*) on TV and on its website this Holocaust Remembrance Day. Showings will be on Wednesday, May 1st at 10:30 pm and on Thursday, May 2nd at 10:05 am.

Known as "the Jerusalem of the Balkans," the Jewish community of Salonika (Thessaloniki) was the largest Sephardi community in Europe prior to World War II. Over 50,000 Jews lived in this coastal city, the second largest city in Greece — but less than 2,000 of them survived the annihilation wrought by the German Nazis in the Holocaust.

"Heroes of Salonika," produced by Yigal Yosef Pomerantz and Sol Levy, depicts the pre-war thriving Jewish community of Salonika, which was home to over 40 synagogues and schools.

The film follows the war years of six survivors who were ages 15-20 when they arrived in Auschwitz. Filmed in 2015-17, when they were in their late 80s or 90s, the survivors relate events and zoom in on details as if they happened yesterday. Historical footage is interspersed throughout the documentary, as is a musical score with some Ladino melodies reflecting Salonika's heritage of Ladino culture.



Pomerantz, a teacher from Jerusalem, got the idea to make the film after reading an article in 2015 in the Hebrew Makor Rishon about Jacob Jacob Maestro, who saved hundreds of Jews in Auschwitz. As a youth in Salonika before 1939, Maestro learned German by selling trinkets to German soldiers. When Maestro was taken to Auschwitz, his knowledge of German and ingenuity helped him become an assistant to Righteous Among the Nations Jerzy Pozimsky who headed the prisoners' labor office.

Maestro's daily job was to place prisoners in various labor commandos or task forces in the Auschwitz complex. He had access to the prisoners' files and was able to place Salonika Jews and some Polish Jews in easier jobs, thus saving their lives. Greek Jews who worked in the "Canada Camp" would smuggle him diamonds and gold currency, with which he would bribe the Germans.

After reading the article, Pomerantz met Maestro and filmed an interview with him. This inspired him to find other survivors from Salonika, a community lacking documentation.

"There are almost no survivors from Greece who were teenagers or adults during the war, who were also able to communicate well at their advanced age," says Pomerantz. "When I began these interviews four years ago, I knew and sensed I'm capturing them at their last moments." Indeed, Maestro passed away a year after meeting Pomerantz.

The film's crew includes well-known Israeli filmmakers including director Tom Barkay, cameraman Yochay Rosenberg, and production consultant Itay Ken-Tor; the original music is by Boaz Schory. Prof. Dr. Gideon Greif, an expert on Auschwitz who serves as the film's historical and academic advisor, regards Maestro's rescue efforts as unique.

In 2016, Pomerantz and the crew travelled to Salonika with Greif to interview two survivors on site. One of them, Moshe Ha-Elion, read from his Bar Mitzvah portion in the impressive Monastir Synagogue, which remained intact from before the war due to its use as a warehouse by the Red Cross. Ha-Elion lives in Israel and is active in educating about the Salonika community.



Jaco Maestro, Heinz Kounio, Benico Djahon, Moshe HaAelion, Sevy Dario and Yavonne Razon

Heinz Kounio, the second survivor, still resides in Salonika. Some of the film's photographs are from his father's photography business — which was the largest in the Balkans. Kounio is also filmed in the Jewish Museum near its memorial wall.

Other survivors were interviewed in the film; Yvonne Razon, who passed away in March 2019, sang a haunting song that the women prisoners would sing in Auschwitz. Derio Sevi and Benico Djaghon highlighted how the Greek Jews were further humiliated in Auschwitz because they did not speak Yiddish or Polish, and as a result they were ridiculed by other Jewish prisoners, some of whom doubted their Jewish identity. Without Yiddish, they could not understand the Germans' orders and were targeted by them.

Dilemmas of family loyalty, faith, and survival at all costs come up in this film, which is also intended for a wider non-Jewish audience that is less familiar with the Holocaust. "Heroes of Salonika" has been translated into English, and Pomerantz hopes to raise funds to translate it into other languages.

Production of the film was supported by the Salonika and Greece Jewish Heritage Center, the Claims Conference, and Sol Levy.

Note: we are hoping to see the filmmaker fulfill his dream of raising funds so that this film can be shown to young people throughout the world, as part of Holocaust Education programs.



In Thessaloniki, additional Stolpersteine (Stumbling Blocks) have been placed in memory of Jews who were rounded up and sent to the concentration camps, designating the former Kambell neighborhood from where Jews were deported. In addition, 68 stones were placed to accompany the 81 formerly placed, outside the former High School for Boys, from where the young boys were rounded up to be sent to their deaths at Auschwitz-Birkenau in the Spring of 1943. The stones were made possible through the efforts of David Saltiel, President of the Jewish Community of Thessaloniki and the German Council General, Walter Stechel, along with Gunter Demnig, the German artist who created the Stolpersteine. More information (in Greek) is available from the Central Board of Jewish Communities of Greece KIS [here](#).

Hania

On Sunday, June 2, in the synagogue of Hania, there was a service in memory of the victims of the ship Tanais, at 19:30. The memorial took place at the port of Hania at the site of the memorial to the victims.

Rabbi Gabriel Negrin led the prayers and a representative of the Metropolitan Bishop was present, along with a representative of the Catholic Church.

At 20:00, the names of the victims were read in the synagogue Etz Hayyim. The Tanais was bombed by the British on the evening of June 8, 1944 and sunk near the island of Santorini. The British thought that the ship was carrying ammunition and no human cargo, but in fact the Germans had rounded up 263 Jews from Crete and forced them onto the ship. There were no survivors.



Auschwitz-Birkenau

This year, at the annual March of the Living, held from April 28th to May 3rd, the decimation of Greek Jewry was highlighted, with a special performance by Yehuda Poliker, the son of a survivor from Thessaloniki. Present were representatives of the Jewish communities of Greece. This year's March of the Living is dedicated to the memory of the Greek Jews who lost their lives in Auschwitz-Birkenau. Rabbi Gabriel Negrin, Chief Rabbi of Athens and Patriarch Bartholomew, represented Greek Jewry and Greek Orthodox Christians.



In the photo, from left to right: President of KIS Mr. David Saltiel, Parliament Speaker Mr. Nikos Voutsis, Patriarch Bartholomew, President of the Jewish Museum of Greece Mr. Makis Matsas and Syriza MP Mr. Ioannis Amanatidis.



Prayers at the railroad tracks at the station in Auschwitz-Birkenau

Belgium

On May 25th at Henri Chapelle Military Cemetery in Belgium, a special Kaddish was said in memory Jewish men who are buried there, including Abraham Matza and Nissim Attas, two young men from The Yanniote community of New York City who made the ultimate sacrifice at the Battle of the Bulge in the winter of 1944-1945. May their memory be for a blessing. The Kaddish was made possible by two dear friends, Aimee Gagnon Fogg and Bob Konings.



Gershon Harris
Hatzor Haglilit, Israel



The holiday of Shavuot (June 9th in Israel and June 9th and 10th in the Diaspora), in historical terms, celebrates the giving of the Torah to Moses by God on Mount Sinai. Just a relatively short time after Israel's exodus from Egyptian slavery to freedom, God and Israel forge an irrevocable and unbreakable covenant, with Israel committing itself to being God's chosen people for receiving the Torah, and in exchange, God committing Himself to remain with Israel forever, through thick and thin, and for better or for worse. Indeed, our classic commentators see Shavuot and our accepting the Torah from God as a marriage, with Israel the symbolic bride and God the groom. In fact, one of Sephardic Jewry's most ancient and beautiful customs is to read a special "Ketuba" – Jewish marriage contract- of the "marriage" between God and Israel, composed by Shlomo Ibn Gabirol of Spain. Unfortunately, the custom of publicly reading this Ketuba is becoming less and less common for various reasons, but it does appear in all Sephardic 'mahzorim' (holiday prayer books) and it is highly recommended 'reading' on one's own.

Another time-honored Shavuot custom is the reading of the Book of Ruth – one of the five "megillot" in the Bible. While the most famous of these is the Book of Esther, whose public reading is one of the mitzvot of Purim, the other four were associated by our Sages with other festivals or fasts: Kohellet (Ecclesiastes) on Sukkot, Shir Hashirim (Song of Songs) on Pesah, Ruth on Shavuot, and "Eicha" (Lamentations) on the 9th of Av. This was instituted because of many parallels and symbolism between each megillah and its respective festival.

The Book of Ruth symbolizes Shavuot in both historical and spiritual terms, and its study and recitation during Shavuot is considered part and parcel of the festival's celebration. Ashkenazim usually read it aloud after the Torah reading, while Hassidim and Sephardim usually read it in groups or individually. Either way, Ruth and Shavuot are intrinsically connected in several ways.

1. According to Jewish tradition, King David was born and died on Shavuot, and the Book of Ruth records his ancestry, with Ruth and her husband Boaz being King David's great-grandparents. More on this later
2. Shavuot is considered the Festival of the Harvest. The emphasis and descriptions on harvesting described in Ruth correspond to Shavuot, and most likely occurred around that time.
3. Ruth's sincere and heartfelt conversion to Judaism and acceptance of the Torah symbolized the Israelite nation's "conversion" at Mount Sinai, since they accepted the Torah and all the commandments from 'scratch' if you will, which is considered by any standard to be a type of conversion. In fact, according to the great commentator, Rashi, Ruth's "speech" to her former Jewish mother-in-law Naomi where she refuses to leave her is actually the model for conversion. Ruth's statements to Naomi like "where you go I will go", "your God is my God" are seen by Rashi as being Ruth's formal acceptance of Judaism out of her own free will and sincerity.

These reasons are certainly sufficient to show why the Book of Ruth is read and studied on Shavuot. But there is a fourth reason, which may be the most relevant and important of them all.

As mentioned above, the Book of Ruth records that Ruth, the wife of Boaz, was King David's great-grandmother. Yet the very fact of her conversion and marriage to Boaz would seem to have been forbidden acts, since it says in Deuteronomy, Chapter 23, Verse 4: "An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter into the congregation of the Lord; to their tenth generation shall they not enter into the congregation of the Lord forever: "So how was Ruth allowed to convert altogether, not to mention marry Boaz and become the beginning of the Davidic dynasty? The answer comes from the Oral Tradition, which Moses received at Sinai along with the Written Law. Our Sages noted that the original Hebrew verse is very careful to use only the masculine form of Moabite, making it apparent that the prohibition does not apply to Moabite women. And though there were those in Ruth's day who questioned this interpretation, and in David's time even questioned the legitimacy of his rule because of his "tainted" genealogy, the law was set according to that Rabbinic tradition. This was the ultimate validation of the Oral Law in holiness and importance and on equal footing with the Written Torah. In fact, without the Oral Tradition, the Written Torah and all the commandments it contains would be virtually useless, which is as true today as it was in Ruth's time. Hag Sameah!

Rabbi Nissim Elnecavé
Sephardic Jewish Brotherhood of America



Parashah of the Week – Behukothai

Reward & Misvoth
By Rabbi Nissim Elnecavé

As we conclude the Book of Vayikra, Leviticus, G-d speaks of the blessings that will come to those that observe His laws and statutes, but then He also relates the consequences that will come to those that fail to abide by them. At a first glance one would conclude that the scripture does imply reward and punishment, but still our Sages wondered, is there a real reward in this world for keeping the Misvot of the Torah?

Rabbi Yishak Magriso in his commentary to the monumental work Meam Loez, writes that one is not rewarded in this world for keeping the commandments. Rather he states, that when we observe the Misvot properly, G-d brings stability to the world in order for people to be able to observe His commandments in peace and harmony. One is only to strive to fulfill the Misvot because they have been commanded by G-d.

It is important to remember that one should not do the service of G-d expecting rewards, but rather, one is to observe the laws in order to fulfill the will of G-d. It is inappropriate to observe the commandments for an exterior motive or just for personal benefits. The goal must clear at all times and one should have in mind to strive for a higher purpose.

But one might still wonder, is there any reward for keeping the Misvot? Rabbi Magriso writes that indeed we are to be rewarded, but our reward will not come to us during our lifetime, rather the real reward awaits us in the world to come. Those individuals that excel and do what is right will be deserving of a great payment. Yet the question still remains, why was it that the reward was not stated in the verses of the Torah? Rabbi Magriso explains that the payment of the Misvot in the world to come is a spiritual matter and being so, it is too great for the human mind to comprehend it and therefore it is not explicitly stated in the Torah. Indeed, a very deep concept.

Still, a question still remains, how are we to understand the verses of the Torah that seem to imply reward and punishment? To this last question, our Sages teach us that the Torah serves as a blueprint, a map that can guide us to excellence. Following its instructions will give us multiple benefits, and with that, at the same time a reward which we cannot comprehend awaits us at the end of the road. Indeed, the Torah is the guide that will allow us to strive and achieve much good, our greatest goals.

Shabbat Shalom

1. Rabbi Isaac ben Moses Magriso (18 Century) of Turkey was the foremost compiler and contributor to the Me'am Loez (the important Ladino anthology of Torah commentary and related Midrash aggadah in Ladino) after its initial author, Rabbi Yaakov Kholi, died in 1732.

2. Meam Loez, Vayikra, Parashat Behukotai, Kapitulo 1.

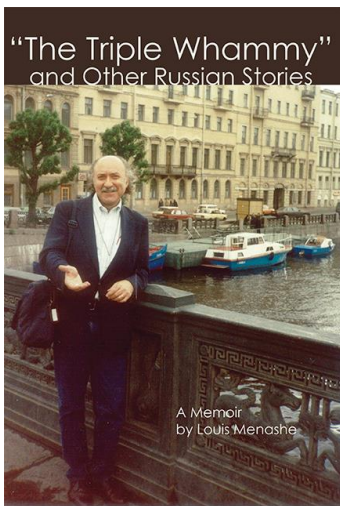
As always, we applaud the accomplishments of our community. Louis Menashe, a Salonikli who grew up in Brooklyn and is Professor Emeritus, at Polytechnic Institute of NYU, where he taught Russian History and Film and Contemporary World History and published widely in those areas. Dr. Menashe has been a consultant to the Film Division of the Museum of Modern Art and ABC Television and is a longtime contributor to, and Associate Editor of, the distinguished film magazine, *Cineaste*.

Therefore, we are honored to help promote his latest work:

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At a time when Moscow is front-page news, the portrait of the author that comes into view makes this engrossing Memoir a striking timely effort in Russian studies and American politics. Menashe's writings and teachings on film are presented as a way to understand the sometimes mystifying history and behavior of Russia and the Soviet Union.



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Photo of the Month

Thank you Shirlee Paganetti for this photo of your father's parents and sister. The photo was taken in Ioannina and depicts David and Sarina Cabillis (Kabilli) - the parents of Moses Cabillis and grandparents of Shirlee Cabillis Paganetti - and their daughter Esther.



Greek Travel

For those of you who plan to travel to Greece this summer (as we do!), good news. Athens Airport was voted one of the top three in the world and plans to rebuild part of the Parthenon has been announced.

The Eleftherios Venizelos International Airport in Athens is considered to be among the best three in the world, according to recent survey by Air Help, an air passenger rights specialist.

The survey is based on several parameters. On-time performance, which calculates how likely it is that the flights will be on time; service quality, based on the opinions of thousands of passengers regarding customer service; and queues are also considered into the rankings. The cleanliness of the airport's food and shops, based on the rating passengers give to each airports' eating and shopping options, is also taken into account.

According to the survey, Athens' international airport came in third in the entire world behind the international airports in Doha, Qatar and Tokyo.

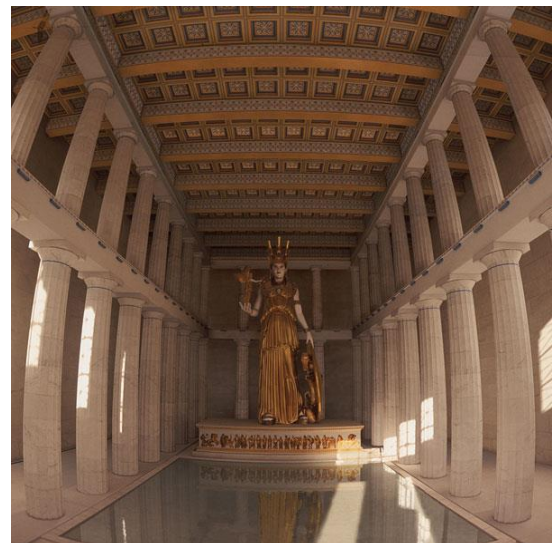


The Greek Central Archaeological Council (KAS) decided on Wednesday that a part of the Parthenon, now in ruins on the Athens Acropolis, is to be rebuilt using mostly materials which are now lying on the ground.

It is believed to be the first time that a section of the ancient monument will be rebuilt to reflect its former glory.

The KAS has decided to rebuild the "cella" of the Parthenon, which once housed the chryselephantine statue of Athena Parthenos, sculpted by Phidias and dedicated in the year 439 or 438 BC.

"Today's meeting is of great importance, because by utilizing research concerning the restoration of the cella we will be able to reconstruct its appearance, a very important event for the later history of the Parthenon," a statement by KAS said.



Finally, a moving appeal from a dear friend of ours, Anna Garty, from the Bakola branch of the Colchamiro family, now living in Israel, who laments the lack of acknowledgement of Romaniote Jews, both in their history and their losses in the Holocaust. Anna's lament concerns Israeli Jews, most of whom only think of Salonika when discussing Greek Jewry.

"Dear Marcia

I have wanted to write to you for some time now , but it didn't happen .

This time I decided to address you due to an article published on Jerusalem Herald soon after the Shoa Memorial Day in Israel. I'm also sending part of a chat on fb to which I made a comment / clarification.

This pretty much is a very brief illustration of a very big issue we are facing here in Israel .

The issue is the almost complete ignorance of Israelis in general about the History of Jewish Greek Communities, the Holocaust Tragedy of Greek Communities and the extend of the loss and destruction. This would have been less painful had this big void of general ignorance not been taken advantage by the big and strong community of the Ladino Greek Community who have been working in a way that doesn't leave any space for the History, Heritage, Commemoration, etc. of any other Community except that of Thessaloniki . A few other communities such as Veria and Kavala are slowly gaining some space and volume but still, not as a part of the whole picture but as a 'second best.

At first I thought that this can change if we, Romaniotes start being more actively involved, willing to devote time and effort for the preservation of our Heritage, History and Culture. It is obviously our responsibility, not one else's to tell our story. I'm not blaming anyone for this but ourselves.

It has been two years since I got seriously involved in the Greek Jewish Heritage here in Israel. I got to meet people who have been in this kind of 'business' for years. Most of them think in terms of Thessaloniki. I have been regularly volunteering for over a year at the Recanati Jewish Heritage Center of Shaloniki and Greece (yes that's the name and logo of this Center which doesn't make any sense other than stating: Saloniki always comes first and will always stand out as the one and only example of Greek Jewish Heritage, Jewish culture, heroism, tragedy, etc).

This really reflects the attitude and way of thinking of 90% of the people with influence, connections, financial means or motivation to promote a personal interest. Thus, 90% of each event, ceremony, seminar, lecture, convention etc. with the word Greek or Greece in its theme, ends up being exclusively about Thessaloniki.

It is a very good example of a successful campaign in promoting the History of one Community. But this doesn't serve History or give a correct picture of what used to be the Jewish Communities of Greece. My aim is to make the story of the Romaniote communities and culture known. I want Israelis to know about both cultures Romaniot and Sefaradic with full respect and understanding of all their similarities and differences.

I need advice on how to handle this situation. I wish we, here in Israel, will also be able to combine the words 'Jewish' and 'Greek' as you do in Kehila Kedosha Janina."

I, as Museum Director of Kehila Kedosha Janina, am bringing this to the attention of our readers because I agree with Anna about how important this is. I, personally, pledge myself to work with Anna on changing this present outlook and look for others who wish to work with us.

Marcia Haddad Ikononopoulos

So many of you have applauded our efforts. We thank those who have sent in contributions.

If you would like to make a contribution to Kehila Kedosha Janina, please send your check (in US dollars) made out to *Kehila Kedosha Janina*, to us at 280 Broome Street, New York, NY 10002 (attention Marcia). Your donation will enable us to continue to hold services and preserve our special traditions and customs, and to tell our unique story through our Museum.

Some of our major donations have been generous bequests, which have enabled us to complete major work in our synagogue/museum. Do remember us in your will. Your legacy will be present in our legacy.

When you are in New York, visit us on Broome Street. We are open for services every Saturday morning at 9:30am and all major Jewish holidays and our Museum is open every Sunday from 11am-4pm and by appointment during the week.



Kehila Kedosha Janina E-Newsletter – Number 123

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Kehila Kedosha Janina

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