



Kehila Kedosha Janina

Synagogue and Museum

April 2019 E-Newsletter

Dear Friends of Kehila Kedosha Janina,

In April Jews celebrate Pesah, and Christians celebrate Easter. While the coinciding dates might change for those who celebrate the Catholic or Protestant Easter, for Greek Orthodox Christians, the dates always coincide because on the Greek Orthodox calendar, Easter is set on the first full moon after both the Spring Equinox and the beginning of Passover. In Greece, Jews and Christians share many of the same customs and foods for the holidays of Pesah and Easter. We both eat lamb and while Christians dye their eggs red and Jews eat Huevos Haminados colored brown during the cooking process, both have the custom of hitting the eggs together to see who has good luck. Finally, in Greece, the expression Kalo Pascha means both Happy Easter and Happy Pesah (Passover).



Passover at the Matza Family in Bensonhurst, Brooklyn 1960s

This newsletter, our 121st 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

A pillar of our community passed away in March and was laid to rest at Beth David, in a Janina Brotherhood plot on March 26th. Ralph Battino was in his 100th year, born August 5, 1919 at 70 Orchard Street on the Lower East Side of New York. According to the 1930 census, the family was living across the street from Kehila Kedosha Janina, and Ralph was one of the few who could remember the Talmud Torah in the basement of the Romaniote Synagogue (only open for 2 years). In the 1940 census the family was living in the Bronx at 1932 Crotona Parkway, the same address given on the card from the National Jewish Welfare Board, where he was listed as being injured in Okinawa. Ralph received the Purple Heart for that injury but, when asked about it, would say, "It was nothing." That was Ralph, always humble, always full of life, always the first on the dance floor, a true "Pasha."



Ralph was the son of Zadick Battino and Anna DeCastro Battino, both born in Ioannina and married in New York in 1917. Ralph was the grandson of Raphael Battino and Lula (Leah) Cohen, both also of Ioannina. After returning from combat in WWII, Ralph married the love of his life, Rita Samuels. After Rita's passing in 1980, he married Doris Brown in 1985. Ralph had left behind his brother, Rubin, his other siblings (Lillian, Manny and Abe) having preceded him in death. He is also survived by his children, Eileen Bowman (Gary), Richard (Iris) and William (Maribeth), his grandchildren, Risa and Eric (Richard), Dana and Lara (Eileen), and Tyler (William) and one great-grandchild (Conner Young, the child of Dana and Matt Young). Ralph was all about family.



We know Ralph is dancing in heaven. He left us with so many memories that his presence will always be felt. Dance on Pasha.

It was with great sadness that we learned of the passing of Barbara Mione Rubin, daughter of Murray Mione and Sylvia Cohen, granddaughter of Abraham Mione and Rachel Mazza. The Miones were a vital part of our Lower East Side community, living across the street from Kehila Kedosha Janina on Broome Street. Barbara leaves behind her children, Sheryl, Michelle and Brian, and her grandchildren, Jordan and Sophia. Our condolences to her family.



We were saddened to hear of the passing of Nissim Joseph, a Salonikli who passed in Milan at the age of 100.

"Greek-Born Jewish Entrepreneur Joseph Nissim Dies At 100" article [here](#)

Joseph Nissim, the Thessaloniki Jew who escaped from the Nazis, fought in WWII and later created the "Bolton Group" business empire in Italy, has died in Milan at the age of 100.

Nissim's name is not very well known to the general public, and neither perhaps is even the group he founded, which he named Bolton. Behind the corporate name, however, there are brands that everyone has at home: Neutro Roberts, Omino Bianco, WC Net, Smac, Bilboa, Borotalco, Brioschi, Chilly, Rio Mare, Simmenthal. Nissim was born in Greece in 1919, one of the fifty-six thousand Jews people who once lived in Thessaloniki. Nissim managed to escape from his home city just before the arrival of the Nazis, who by the end of the war had deported and killed almost the entire Jewish community of Thessaloniki. After his escape, he joined the British army, fighting in the battle of El Alamein, earning a medal for his military valor. Nissim later settled in Italy in 1949.

And it is there that his great entrepreneurial story begins, starting from his creation of a small import-export business dealing in consumer goods.

Nissim leaves behind an empire of fifty brands of household goods, twelve factories, forty-four offices and over five thousand employees.



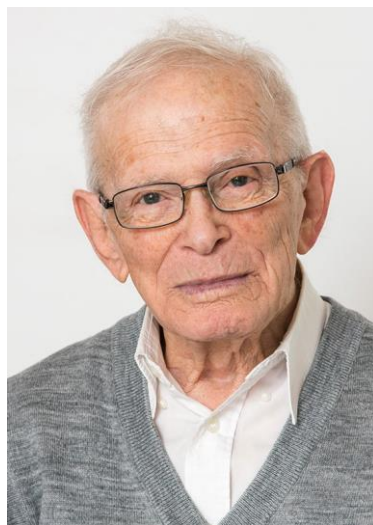
Just as our e-newsletter was going to print, we learned of the death of Esther Benjamin, a proud member of the Board of the Sisterhood of Janina, serving as a Vice President and Treasurer. Esther was born into a traditional Sephardic family (Reinah) from Canakkale. Esther died on April 1st. She was the widow of Murray Benjamin and is survived by her children, Karen and Albert, her grandson, Michael and her brother, David. May her memory be for a Blessing.

Simchas

We wish the following congratulatory wishes on their landmark birthdays: Victor Levy 95, his wife, Ruth Levy 93, the grandparents of Eric Levy, and Moshe HaAelion 94, a survivor from Thessaloniki, who is the President of Greek survivors in Israel.



Victor, Eric, and Ruth Levy



Moshe HaAelion

We celebrate the birth of the newest member of the Jewish Community of Montenegro, Yehudah Ovadia ben Eliahu Naim, son of Leah and Shahin Naim. Mazal Tov!



Visitors Flock to Kehila Kedosha Janina

It is always a delight when one of our tours has a surprise visitor from our extended community. Such was it on Sunday, March 31st, when Kornblitt Tours stopped by, and one of the participants was Joel Russo, who was familiar with our synagogue and community.

Another delightful visit was that of Heather Elliot-Famularo, now a professor at University of Connecticut, who joined me in Greece with a special group from Bowling Green State University, as we delved into the Holocaust story of Al Negrin from Trikala. Heather's daughter Felicia, and her friend Esme, created a website on the Righteous in Greece for their 8th grade project. The most important part of their visit was interviewing our Sol Kofinas.



ΔΙΚΟΙ ΜΑΣ – Dikoi Mas – Los Nuestros

It is always a joy when "our own" visit us. It might be a first visit, or a repeated visit, but it is always an important visit. In March, we were visited by Seth, Dylan and Madison Myones, Jesse Levy (grandson of Rabbi Jessoula Levy) and our precious Lilia Ledner and her mother, Melissa. Lilia is the great-granddaughter of Hy and Lil Genee.



Melissa and Lilia Ledner



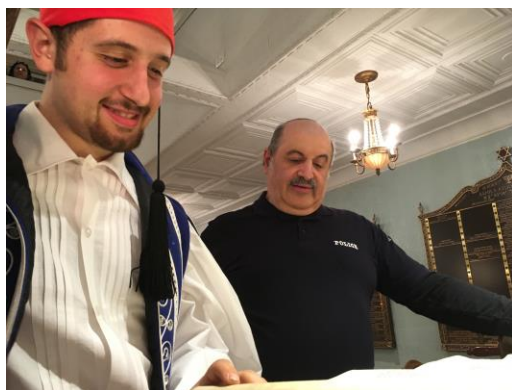
Seth, Madison and Dylan Myones



Jesse Levy

Past Events at Kehila Kedosha Janina

Purim



Romaniote & Sephardic DNA

On March 31st we were treated to a fascinating presentation by Adam Brown on Romaniote & Sephardic DNA.



Upcoming Events at Kehila Kedosha Janina

Pesah

Full Spring Holiday Schedule available [here](#)



5779

2019

**KEHILA KEDOSHA JANINA
SYNAGOGUE AND MUSEUM**

WISHES YOU A

HAPPY PESAH

מועדים לשמחה

Χρόνια Πολλά

PESAH ALEGRE

YOU ARE WELCOME TO JOIN US FOR SERVICES ON

FRI APRIL 19	MINHA, ARVITH 6:30PM
SAT APRIL 20	SHAHARIT 9:15AM
	MINHA, ARVITH 7:00PM
SUN APRIL 21	SHAHARIT 9:15AM

**"THIS IS THE BREAD OF AFFLICTION WHICH OUR
ANCESTORS ATE IN THE LAND OF EGYPT..."**

KEHILA KEDOSHA JANINA 280 BROOME ST NYC
FULL SCHEDULE AT KKJSM.ORG

Opening of New Art Exhibit – April 4 at 6pm

KEHILA KEDOSHA JANINA IS HONORED TO HOST A SPECIAL

ART EXHIBIT OPENING

FEATURING THE WORK OF

STEWART NACHMIAS



THURSDAY APRIL 4TH FROM 6-9PM

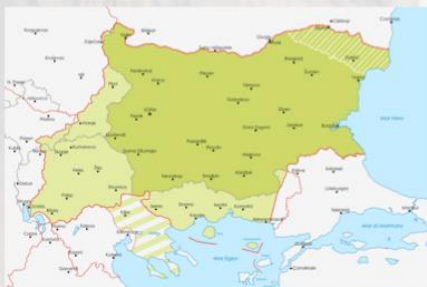
**OPENING RECEPTION INCLUDES REFRESHMENTS AND
LIVE GREEK MUSIC**

**KEHILA KEDOSHA JANINA
280 BROOME STREET NYC**

THE ARTIST, STEWART NACHMIAS, IS THE SON OF MAX AND EVE NACHMIAS (BOTH OF BLESSED MEMORY) WHO WERE BOTH BORN ON THE LOWER EAST SIDE. THE NACHMIAS FAMILY WERE FOUNDING MEMBERS OF OUR COMMUNITY. THE EXHIBIT FEATURES CAST PAPER AND PRINTS, AND WILL RUN THROUGH JUNE 4TH IN OUR ADA FINIFTER COMMUNAL ROOM AND EDUCATION CENTER. VIEWINGS ON SUNDAYS OR BY APPOINTMENT DURING THE WEEK.

PLEASE RSVP TO MUSEUM@KKJSM.ORG OR 516-456-9336

KEHILA KEDOSHA JANINA IS HONORED TO WELCOME
DR. JOSEPH BENATOV
FOR A LECTURE ON
BULGARIA AND THE HOLOCAUST



SUNDAY APRIL 7TH AT 2:00PM
KEHILA KEDOSHA JANINA
280 BROOME STREET NYC

In 1943, Bulgaria complied with German demands and deported nearly 11,400 Jews from occupied territories in northern Greece and Yugoslavia (Macedonia). At the same time, Bulgaria successfully resisted German pressures to deport the 50,000 Jews living in Bulgaria. Dr. Benatov will offer an overview of the facts surrounding these historical events and will focus on the conflicting opinions about the role played by King Boris III, church officials, and politicians in the deportations of Greek and Macedonian Jews as well as the rescue of Bulgaria's Jewish population. Dr. Benatov will focus on new scholarship on the topic and will also discuss the international debates over the way in which this historical moment should be interpreted, remembered, and commemorated.

Dr. Joseph Benatov holds a doctorate in comparative literature from the University of Pennsylvania, where he teaches Hebrew. Every summer Dr. Benatov leads Sephardic trips to the Balkans and is hoping to lead a joint tour in the future with Marcia Haddad Ikononopoulos.

REFRESHMENTS WILL BE SERVED. RSVP TO MUSEUM@KKJSM.ORG

KEHILA KEDOSHA JANINA IS HONORED TO WELCOME

DR. KATHERINE FLEMING

FOR A SPECIAL PRESENTATION ON
GREEK MUSIC IN ISRAEL



SUNDAY APRIL 14TH AT 2:00PM

**KEHILA KEDOSHA JANINA
280 BROOME STREET NYC**

Katherine E. Fleming is the Alexander S. Onassis Professor of Hellenic Culture and Civilization in the Department of History at New York University. In April 2016 she was named Provost of NYU.

Beyond NYU, Dr. Fleming has been an associate member of the History Department of the École Normale Supérieure, Paris, and served as the president of the Board of the University of Piraeus, Greece. A specialist on modern Greece, the Balkans, and the Mediterranean, she is most recently author of "Greece: A Jewish History," which won several prizes, among them the National Jewish Book Award and the Runciman Award.

Dr. Fleming is a good friend of Kehila Kedosha Janina. Her iconic book, "Greece: A Jewish History," will be on sale during this event.

The presentation will take place in our Ada Finifter Communal Room and Education Center, and is sponsored by the Ada Finifter Endowment Fund.

REFRESHMENTS WILL BE SERVED. RSVP TO MUSEUM@KKJSM.ORG

KEHILA KEDOSHA JANINA INVITES YOU TO OUR ANNUAL
**YOM HASHOAH
HOLOCAUST REMEMBRANCE DAY
CEREMONY**

WITH A SPECIAL SCREENING OF THE FILM
“MEMOIRS OF A HIDDEN CHILD”



**SUNDAY APRIL 28TH AT 12:00PM
KEHILA KEDOSHA JANINA
280 BROOME STREET NYC**

THIS YOM HASHOAH WE ARE HONORED TO HOST FILMMAKER RITA SARA COHEN FOR A STIRRING PRESENTATION OF HER LATEST DOCUMENTARY FILM “MEMOIRS OF A HIDDEN CHILD.” OUR PROGRAM WILL START IN THE SANCTUARY FOR OUR TRADITIONAL LIGHTING OF THE CANDLES IN MEMORY OF THE VICTIMS OF THE HOLOCAUST. AFTERWARDS WE WILL SHOW RITA’S FILM IN OUR ADA FINIFTER COMMUNAL ROOM AND EDUCATIONAL CENTER.

**REFRESHMENTS WILL BE SERVED
PLEASE RSVP TO MUSEUM@KKJSM.ORG**

YOUR CONTRIBUTION

Greek Jewish Festival – May 19 from 12-6pm

Full Festival Program [here](#)



KEHILA KEDOSHA JANINA
SYNAGOGUE AND MUSEUM

FREE
ADMISSION

PRESENTS THE
FIFTH ANNUAL



GREEK JEWISH FESTIVAL

SUNDAY MAY 19, 2019
12PM – 6PM

280 BROOME ST BETWEEN ALLEN ST AND ELDRIDGE ST
LOWER EAST SIDE NYC

DELICIOUS FOOD

LIVE MUSIC

KIDS ACTIVITIES

SYNAGOGUE TOURS

DANCING

VENDORS & GIFTS

- FESTIVAL SPONSORS -



- COMMUNITY PARTNERS -



GREEKJEWISHFESTIVAL.COM



AXION ESTIN FOUNDATION'S
PANIGYRIS PROGRAMMING
IS MADE POSSIBLE BY THE
NEW YORK STATE COUNCIL
ON THE ARTS WITH THE
SUPPORT OF GOVERNOR
ANDREW M. CUOMO AND
THE NEW YORK STATE
LEGISLATURE

Events of Interest in the New York Metropolitan Area

Mercer County Community College - NJ

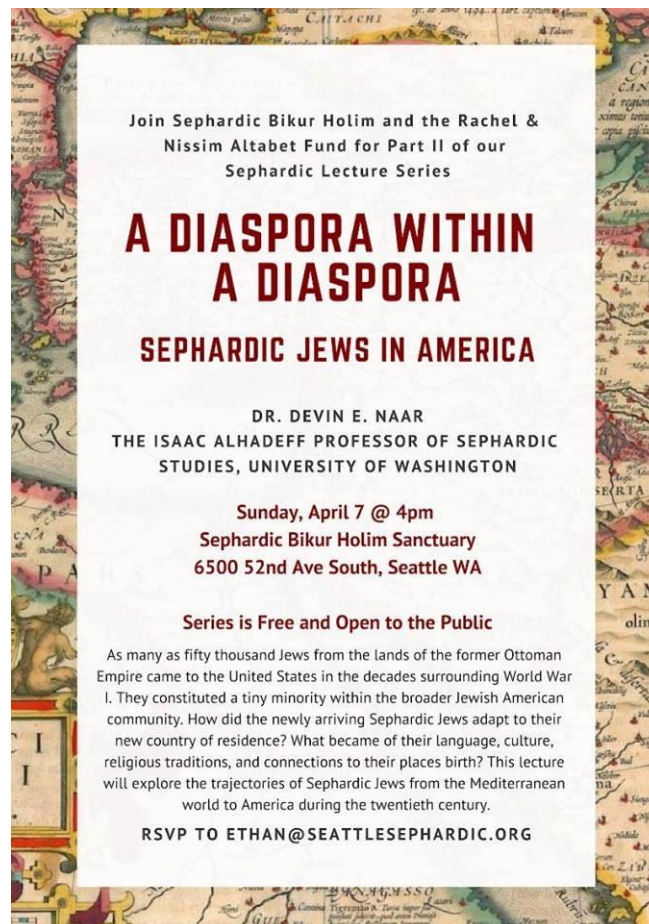
Our Museum Director, Marcia Haddad Ikonomopoulos, will be speaking on the Holocaust of Greek Jewry at Mercer County Community College on April 10 at 7pm at the Holocaust, Genocide, and Human Rights Education Center.

International Ladino Day in Forest Hills

Our friends in Forest Hills will be celebrating International Ladino Day on May 5 (appropriately Cinco de Mayo). Tickets available [here](#)



Another Excellent Lecture by Dr. Devin Naar in Seattle Full details [here](#)



News from Jewish Greece

Ioannina

We proudly announce that Moses Eliasaf, president of the Jewish Community of Ioannina, has announced his candidacy for Mayor of Ioannina, representing the New Epoch Party.



Gani Foundation in Ioannina

New Photography Exhibit at the Gani Foundation on Soutsou in Ioannina:

Joseph and Esther Ganis Foundation

Exhibition of photographs Panagiotis - Dimitrios Develegka

"A casual stroll in Ioannina"

"... The endless walks in our city beautiful narrow streets, the impressive corners full of castle history and the timid ripples of our storied lake became for me a great inspiration and source of creation, from the first moments of my return to Ioannina ..."

Duration: 04/01/2019 - 04/30/2019

"Joseph and Esther Ganis' Foundation. Soutsou 26 . Phone: 2651036517

Email: idrymagani@gmail.com

Opening hours: Monday to Friday 9.00p.m to 14.00m.m

Every Wednesday afternoon: 6.00 pm to 9.00 pm.



Develegkas Panagiotis Dimitrios

Athens

Last month, March 2019, was filled with positive signs for the future of Greek Jewry. So much has to do with the Community's vibrant young rabbi, Rabbi Gabriel Negrin, as he engages the present and future generations. We also applaud the Lauder School, and the successful efforts to save Jewish education in Athens. All this, along with the recent events at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, where Judaism was highlighted along with other religions, bodes well for the future of Athenian Jewry and, by extension, that of Jews throughout Greece.



Rabbi Negrin at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

14:30 – 17:00 2nd SESSION: INTER-RELIGIOUS DIPLOMACY

Coordinator: Konstantinos Danassis, Minister Plenipotentiary,
E2 Directorate for Religious and Ecclesiastical Affairs.

14:30 – 14:45 Judaism – Rabbi Gabriel Negrin: *"The centuries-long presence of Hebrews in Greece as a paradigm of religious stability"*.

14:45 – 15:00 Roman Catholic Church, Apostolic Nuncio, Archbishop Savio Hon Tai Fai: *"Pontifical Diplomacy"*.

15:00 – 15:15 Society of Evangelical Churches – Mr Filimon Tillianakis: *"A few ideas for a country open to the world"*.

15:15 – 15:30 Syrian Orthodox Church – Archimandrite Zakheos, representative of the Antioch Patriarchate of the Syrian Orthodox in Greece: *"Antioch Patriarchate of the Syrian Orthodox in Greece, mission towards a true society among peoples"*.

15:30 – 15:45 Intermission

15:45 – 16:00 Metropole of Orthodox Armenians - Metropolitan Keham Hacherian: *"The Armenian Church among the pioneers in inter-religious and inter-ecclesiastical dialog"*

16:00 – 16:15 Copt Orthodox of Egypt – Metropolitan Pavlos: *"Copts and Greek heritage"*.

16:15 – 16:30 Islam – El Sayed Ehab: *"Muslim migrants in Greece: friendship bridges among countries of origin"*.

16:30 – 16:45 Assyrian Christians – Mr. Kyriakos Batsaras, President of Panhellenic Association of Assyrians: *"The Assyrian Church in Greece and its relation to the Greek Church"*.

16:45 – 17:00 Archimandrite Ignatios Sotiriadis, Secretary of Synodical Committee for Inter-orthodox and Inter-Christian Relations of the Church of Greece: *"The contribution of the Church of Greece to building inter-orthodox, inter-Christian and inter-religious relations."*

17:00 – 17:15 Discussion

Finally, Rabbi Negrin at the Greek Independence Day Parade in Athens on March 25th. Rabbi Negrin was accompanied by the Ambassador of Israel to Greece Ms. Irit Ben-Abba, and the Defense Attaché Captain Tzvika Shahr.



Thessaloniki

On March 17th, over 2,000 citizens of Thessaloniki marched in memory of the Jewish Community of the city, a community that was almost completely eradicated during the Holocaust. This year, the 76th anniversary was made even more poignant, since shortly before the march, the memorial placed on the site of the former cemetery (where the University of the City, Aristotle University, now sits) was severely vandalized.



Balloons from the event read "ΠΟΤΕ ΞΑΝΑ" – "Never Again"

2,000 people held a silent march in Greece's second city Thessaloniki on Sunday, marking the anniversary of the departure in 1943 of the first train taking members of its Jewish community to the Auschwitz death camp, *AFP* reports.

Participants held white balloons bearing the message "Never Again". They gathered at the city's old railway station where that train pulled out on March 15, 1943.

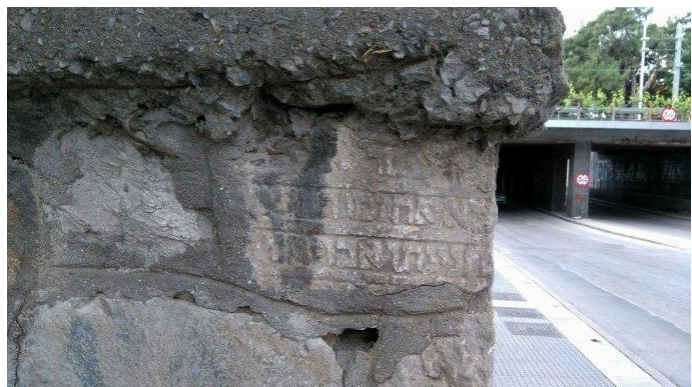
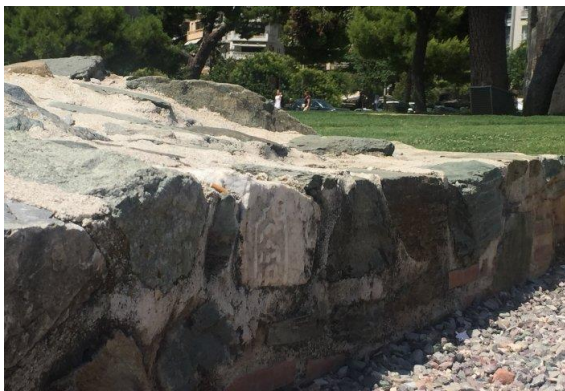
Among those present for the 76th anniversary commemoration was Jurgen Haus, grandson of a German soldier, who expressed his "deep regret" for the actions of his Nazi forebears. "I am here to break the silence... I love Israel, I cannot remain silent in the face of antisemitism," he said in a speech, according to *AFP*.

Holocaust survivors Heinz Kounio and Achileas Koukovinos were honored during the commemorations. Thessaloniki had a thriving 50,000-strong Jewish community before World War II but there now remains only around 1,000 Jews. About 96 percent of the city's 50,000 Jews were murdered in Nazi camps. Before the deportations started the community in the city, which mainly comprised Sephardic Jews chased out of Spain in 1492, had developed to the point where it earned the nickname the "Jerusalem of the Balkans". In recent years, Thessaloniki has held commemorations in mid-March, initiated by mayor Yannis Boutaris, to remember the first of the convoys of Jews rounded up and sent off to the camps from Thessaloniki's railway station. Sunday's turnout was the biggest yet, noted *AFP*. Before that the fate of Greek Jews had become something of a taboo subject. It was only in 2004 that teaching about the Holocaust became compulsory in Greece and ten years later that a monument would be erected at the site of the former Jewish cemetery which the Germans razed and where the city university now stands.

There are also plans to build a Holocaust museum in the city, funded in part by Germany. Last year, President Reuven Rivlin visited to lay the first stone of the 7,000 square meter (75,000 square feet) Holocaust Museum.

However, anti-Semitism showed its ugly face again in January when the Jewish Memorial Cemetery in Thessaloniki was vandalized two days before Holocaust Memorial Day. That marked the third time in half a year that the monument was vandalized.

Leon Saltiel, a young, promising scholar of the Holocaust, wrote a commanding article for *ETHNOS*, the local Greek newspaper, where is lamented the destruction of memory and, especially, the confiscation of Jewish tombstones from the former cemetery that can now be found throughout the city in buildings, many of them church owned.



Chalkis

Chief engineer of ESJF (European Jewish Cemetery Initiative) Grigoriy Arshynov and ESJF national coordinator for Greece Kostas Stathopoulos started ground survey work in Greece.

The Jewish cemetery in Chalkida is among the first locations they worked at. The Jewish community of Chalkida considers itself to be among the oldest in Europe, with written testimonies that testify Jewish presence in 700 AD. The first synagogue was built here in 1270. The cemetery is located in the centre of the city, maintained by the municipality. It is a large, fenced burial site with altogether around 750 matsevot, 500 in the old part and 250 in the new part. During the survey, the oldest gravestone we identified dates from 1716, the newest from 2017.



Cyprus

Cyprus, Greece, Israel Alliance Serves US Interests

Growing cooperation on counter-terrorism, search-and-rescue, and maritime security among these Mediterranean countries makes the whole region safer.

Long ago, the Mediterranean was known as the Middle Sea because for centuries, it provided the principal means of communication between empires and civilizations. Today's Mediterranean is reclaiming much of that historic legacy.

The limitless potential of the region was on full display during the sixth trilateral summit among Cyprus, Greece, and Israel that took place in Jerusalem last week. The gathering was especially noteworthy because the United States, represented by Secretary of State Pompeo, also participated for the first time.

American strategic interests face challenges around the Eastern Mediterranean basin. The Shia-Sunni divide that has helped put the Middle East in even deeper turmoil is playing out on its shores, with the involvement of both state and non-state actors.

Turkey — once a paragon of stability and a source of great optimism for many in the West — has become increasingly authoritarian and unreliable. President Erdogan's strong-arm leadership has turned a "zero problems with neighbors" foreign policy into one where Ankara has zero neighbors with which it doesn't have problems.

And two interlocking crises, one economic and the other involving migration, have roiled the European Union, starting with its member states along the Mediterranean.



Facing an unprecedented number of foreign policy flashpoints, the US risks being spread too thin to adequately address the challenges in the region and protect American interests. This is precisely where Israel, Greece and Cyprus come in.

First, there's values affinity — it is in American national interests to support like-minded societies. For too long, Washington has had to look to states with questionable democratic credentials as its "go-to" partners in the region. This tripartite alliance of solid Western democracies breaks the mold.

Second, Cyprus, Greece, and Israel provide important assets for Western security interests. Each state has already made substantial contributions on its own but taking their growing cooperation and coordination on counter-terrorism, counter-proliferation, search-and-rescue and maritime security to the next level will make the Eastern Mediterranean and southeast Europe safer.

Souda Bay Naval Base in Greece and the British bases in Cyprus make these countries especially valuable for Western security interests, and expansion in both could allow the US, if needed, to decrease its reliance on the Incirlik base in volatile Turkey. Meanwhile, the US-Israel strategic link is both deep and wide-ranging.

Finally, there are the recent major discoveries of natural gas and ambitious plans for new underwater pipelines. American companies — Noble and ExxonMobil— are already the most significant players in the Exclusive Economic Zones of Israel and Cyprus. Just three weeks ago, ExxonMobil announced the world's third-biggest gas find in the last two years off the coast of Cyprus.

Combining this discovery with existing Noble finds in Israel and Cyprus, the Zohr field in Egypt, and anything resulting from upcoming exploration in the region by ExxonMobil, TOTAL, and ENI could have important geopolitical, environmental, and economic consequences. That these resources may be delivered to European markets through the planned East Med Pipeline makes Western democracies primary players in the region's energy politics.

In the short term, these natural gas finds will help Eastern Mediterranean countries transition away from crude as a source of electricity generation and could provide economic stimulus for countries such as Cyprus, Egypt, Greece, and Jordan that are emerging from economic crises or, in any case, sorely need a boost. Moreover, they provide an alternative to risky dependence on Russian gas, not only for Eastern Mediterranean countries, but also for the Balkans and Italy.

In the long term, energy diplomacy has the potential to transform the Eastern Mediterranean from a mere geographical designation to a vital political and economic entity. We have long argued that Eastern Mediterranean natural gas could be the "steel and coal of the 21st century," recalling the founding basis of what is today the European Union.

Just as the interdependence of coal and steel helped end centuries of conflict in Western Europe, energy and electricity could begin to move the Eastern Mediterranean away from an era of wars, terrorism, and insecurity. That potential was evident when the first annual Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum took place in Cairo at the beginning of the year, forming an OPEC-like institution encompassing Cyprus, Egypt, Greece, Israel, Italy, Jordan, and the Palestinians.

The US needs reliable allies, and for the first time in the region's history can look primarily to those who share both interests and values. Greece, Cyprus, and Israel are strong partners that can check malign influences in this region and the broader Middle East.

Washington should deepen American participation in these trilateral summits. And both the administration and Congress, which already has a Congressional Hellenic-Israel Alliance, should explore transforming the trilateral cooperation into a quadrilateral partnership.

A more stable, energy independent and integrated Eastern Mediterranean will be a game-changer in this vital part of the world and could serve as a model for future cross-border development far beyond.

Endy Zemenides is Executive Director of the Hellenic American Leadership Council and David Harris is American Jewish Committee (AJC) CEO.

Articles of Interest

Israel's Secret Founding Fathers

Full New York Times article by Matti Friedman [here](#)

Everyone knows the name David Ben-Gurion. Why don't we know about the spy Jamil Cohen?

JERUSALEM — Late on the night of Nov. 11, Hamas soldiers in southern Gaza stopped a van near the town of Khan Yunis. Inside were a group of Arabic-speaking men and women who said they were aid workers. The soldiers were suspicious. When the passengers understood that they couldn't talk their way out, they dropped the pretense and drew guns. In the ensuing firefight, seven Hamas men and one of the passengers died before the intruders were extracted by an Israeli rescue force.

The van's passengers were undercover agents, but in Hebrew their profession has a unique name: They were *mista'arvim*, which translates as "ones who become like Arabs." The work of the *mista'arvim*, who serve in Israel's Army and police and are meant to move around Palestinian areas undetected, has gained some international renown recently thanks to the success of the TV series "Fauda," a fictionalized version of their exploits.

But the odd term has roots older than Israel — and deeper than the world of spies. Its origins have much to tell us, not just about the history of covert operations here, but also about the complicated identity of this country.

Israel tends to tell a European story about itself — Theodor Herzl, socialism, the Holocaust — and many Israelis and many of our enemies like to imagine that this country doesn't quite belong where it exists. But even if we set aside the one-fifth of Israel's citizens who are Arab Muslims, half of the Jewish population here has roots in the Islamic world. They're the children and grandchildren of people like Jamil Cohen.

Who is Jamil Cohen? He isn't famous, and his name was new to me when I began researching a book about Israel's first spies. But his story is a window onto some crucial and forgotten Israeli history.

Cohen was born in 1922 in Damascus, Syria, and grew up in the alleys of that city's ancient Jewish Quarter. The existence of such a quarter seems unimaginable today, with the Arab world's old ethnic mosaic largely destroyed by state persecution, religious violence and civil war. But when Cohen was growing up, there were about one million Jews native to Islamic countries, most of them Arabic speakers. Baghdad, the Iraqi capital, was one-third Jewish in those days.

At 21, facing an uncertain future amid the Muslim majority, Cohen decided to run away to join the Zionist pioneers forging a new Jewish future in the country next door: British Mandate for Palestine. He crossed the border on foot and joined a group of idealistic young people working the land at a kibbutz. It was the beginning of 1944, with World War II still raging and the creation of the state of Israel still four years away.

In oral testimony recorded in the 1990s, Cohen remembered what the experience was like. He was exhilarated by the comradeship and ideology of pioneer life. On the other hand, he was different from the others and found the difference hard to escape. Although Palestine had an old community of Jews who spoke Arabic, the native tongue of most Jews in the country at the time was Yiddish: They had come to the Middle East fleeing abject poverty and oppression in Poland and Russia.



To the kibbutz pioneers, Jamil Cohen was mystifying. He seemed Arab — in his appearance, in his Hebrew accent, in the music he loved, like that of the Egyptian diva Oum Kalthoum. He stopped using the Arabic name of his childhood, Jamil, and instead used his Hebrew name, Gamliel, but that didn't resolve the problem. Cohen made friends but didn't talk about his old life in Damascus; they weren't interested. "Because I was the one who wanted to join them, and not the other way around," he remembered much later on, "I was the one who was worn down, who had to round his edges to fit the machine that spins around, sparing no one." The ability to "round your edges" is useful for a spy, as he'd soon find out.

The course of his life was changed the following year when someone came looking for him. Not for Gamliel, but for his earlier incarnation — Jamil. It turned out that the Arab identity he was trying to escape was precisely what the Zionist movement needed.

Understanding that the Jews in Palestine would shortly face a war for survival against the combined might of the Arab world, a few officers in the Jewish military underground were running an ad hoc intelligence unit called the "Arab Section." Its members were tasked with collecting information in Arab areas: How big was the local militia? What were the imams saying in the mosques? They needed people who could pass.

The people who could do this did not want to be called "spies" or "agents," names which were seen as dishonorable. Another term was needed to describe their service, and one was found in the long history of the Jews of the Arab world. In Aleppo, Syria, for example, there had always been two Jewish communities: One was the Sephardim, who had been expelled from Spain after 1492, and the second consisted of people who had been in the metropolis since before Christianity or Islam, and who had adopted Arabic after the arrival of Arab conquerors in the seventh century A.D. Those Jews called themselves, in Arabic, *musta'arabin* — "ones who become like Arabs." The word in Hebrew is nearly identical.



The mastermind of the *mista'arvim* endeavor in the embryonic Israeli intelligence services was an educated Jew from Baghdad who went by the Arabic name Saman. (His Hebrew name was Shimon Somech, but no one used it.) The ideal recruit to the Arab Section, he once explained, "isn't just a young man with dark skin and a mustache who knows how to speak Arabic." A successful candidate, he wrote, "must be a talented actor playing the part twenty-four hours a day, a role that comes at a cost of constant mental tension, and which is nerve-racking to the point of insanity."

With that in mind, Saman set off at the end of the war to recruit young arrivals from the Arab world. One of the recruits was Cohen, who would operate as a Palestinian Muslim with the name Yusef el-Hamed.

The scope of their adventures has preoccupied me for much of the last seven years: their dramatic, overlooked role in the 1948 war; their creation of Israel's first foreign intelligence station in Beirut; how some evaded capture and lived, and how others were exposed and killed; how those Jewish refugees from Arab countries experienced Israel's birth while pretending to be Arab refugees from a Jewish country; how they witnessed the violent collapse of their world, the Jewish world in Arab lands; and then the flood of those newcomers into the new state, which wasn't expecting them, and which was transformed by them into a place different than its founders had planned.

The members of the Arab Section were one part of what later became the Mossad. When Cohen died in 2002, having spent much of his life under an assumed identity, he was described by a military historian as one of Israel's most successful agents: "We never heard of him because he was never caught." Saman, the mastermind, eventually ran Eli Cohen, Israel's most famous spy, who penetrated the Syrian regime as the businessman Kamal Amin Thabet before he was exposed and hanged in 1965. But the point I'd like to make

here is not about what they did, but instead about who they were and what it says about the country they helped create.

Were they the "ones who become like Arabs"? Or was that identity real?

This is an important question beyond the particular case of these spies. The divide between Jews from Christian countries (known as Ashkenazim) and from Muslim countries (generally called Mizrahim) has always been the key fault line in Israeli society, with the former clearly on top. But in recent years it has become more acceptable to admit or even celebrate the Middle Eastern component of Israel's Jewish identity. The Hebrew pop style known as Mizrahi, long scorned, now rules the airwaves. The dominance of the political right in recent years comes far less from the settler movement, as foreign observers tend to think, than from the collective memory of Israelis who remember how vulnerable they were as a minority among Muslims and grasp what this part of the world does to the weak. In the country's official view of itself, it might still seem as if the Jews of the Islamic world, by coming to Israel after the founding of the state, joined the story of the Jews of Europe. But in 2019 it's quite clear that what happened was closer to the opposite.

Italy

Mutiny In Milan: Meet Italy's First Orthodox Woman Rabbi-To-Be. Full Forward article [here](#)
By Simone Somekh

Gershon Harris Hatzor Haglilit, Israel



Pesah, which begins this year with the Seder on Friday night April 19th, is a holiday filled with miracles. From actually accounts in the Bible to Midrashic and Talmudic texts that form a major part of the text of the Haggadah, the countless miracles commemorated include what is arguably the greatest miracle witnessed and experienced by all of the Children of Israel after the Exodus from Egypt: God's splitting of the Reed (Red) Sea. As evidence of its impact, our daily morning prayers 365/7, weekday, Sabbaths and holidays, include the Song of the Sea: Moses and the Israelites breaking out into spontaneous song – "*Az Yashir Moshe ub'nei Yisrael*".

But how do we define a miracle? Based on the splitting of the Reed Sea as almost the prototype of the term, I might say that a miracle is a wondrous, and supernatural and divine act whose primary purpose is to overcome a difficulty or danger of "Biblical" proportions, so to speak, that would be impossible via human effort, no matter how strong.

Given this definition, it would seem self-evident that the "beneficiaries" of said miracle will indeed be thankful to God, which is how ultimately the Israelites reacted with their spontaneous singing of praises and thanksgiving. However, an amazing Midrash provides a very different, and even disturbing, perspective. The Midrash analyzes the end of Verse 7 of Psalm 106: "**.....and they [our fathers in Egypt] rebelled against You [God] at the Sea, at the Reed Sea.**" The Midrash asks why the repetition of the words "at the Sea"? The Midrash concludes that the implication of the repetition is that the Israelites 'rebelled' twice at The Sea. The first time was on the shore when they were not willing to enter the water at God's command to Moses out

of fear, until a member of the tribe of Judah saved the day by taking the first plunge, thereby sanctifying God's name and triggering the actual splitting of the Sea by God. As for the second 'rebellion' "at" the Reed Sea, this occurred once the Sea split. As they began walking on the seabed, they obviously found it muddy and wet from the Sea water as the Prophet Habakkuk 3:14 says: "*You have trodden the Sea with your horses, in the mud of mighty waters.*" So as they walked, they became annoyed, with some of the tribes complaining to one another: "***In Egypt mud, and in the sea, also mud; mud and bricks in Egypt, and mud of many waters at the sea***".

Incredible! Despite being literally in the midst of a miracle, with the waters of the Sea providing two huge walls and a pathway on the seabed, they seem totally unaware of what they are experiencing. All they care about is their muddied feet and sandals! Their lives are being saved by a supernatural act of God, and yet their human nature and conduct does not change. Instead of standing in awe and appreciation of God's lovingkindness, they can only think of their muddy and soiled feet and shoes, which certainly endangers any perception or memory of this event as a miracle. The fact that when they reach safety and look back and see the death of the Egyptians by the mighty waters returning to their natural state did they break out in song as they began to comprehend the immensity of the miracle, cannot be taken for granted. Obviously, there were more Children of Israel who appreciated the miracle than those who did not. Had the detractors had their way, who knows if this event would have even been remembered as a miracle. This is what we commemorate on "*Shvi'i shel Pesah*" – The Seventh Day of Pesah - when the miracle of the Sea occurred. And perhaps this is the reason that the Song of the Sea is recited in every morning service, weekday, Shabbat or holiday 365/7: so that no one will ever question or forget what great a miracle God wrought for his people, no matter how 'mundane' it may seem in certain people's eyes.

Another fascinating aspect of this miracle is God's own attitude as to what had to be done. The Torah mandates that the first and last days of the festival be full holidays, as opposed to the five intermediate days, Hol Hamoed, when creative work, driving, etc. are permitted. As such, the proper custom would be to say the full Hallel prayer on both the first and seventh days of the holiday. However, on *Shvi'i shel Pesah*, we do not recite the full Hallel prayer, but rather the shortened version like what is said on Rosh Hodesh. The Talmud explains why: Indeed, once the Israelites were safely on the other side of the Sea and the Egyptian pursuers drowned by the returning waters, the Angels did begin reciting the full Hallel as a celebration of God's great miracle. But God himself stops their singing and reprimands them angrily: "The work of my hands [human beings] are dying and you are singing praise?!" God's message here is clear and strong: True, I performed a great miracle out of my love and commitment to the People of Israel. But the cost was the tremendous loss of life of Egyptians, who, with all they have done to my people, are no less my creation and worthy of respect." The miracle may have been great for His people Israel, but at the price of His having to sacrifice other human lives, who God also sees as His children. Subsequently, though Jews will indeed celebrate the miracle of the splitting of the Reed Sea, its joy will be perpetually tempered by reciting a shortened version of Hallel and praise, since others of God's children died in the process.

So while Judaism obviously recognizes, celebrates and commemorates miracles as part and parcel of our faith, their very essence, recognition and celebratory framework are affected by how they are perceived, as well as the consequences and circumstances of their occurrence. They cannot be taken for granted or dismissed, but neither should they be placed on some high pedestal as something to be worshipped or idolized on its own. In fact, the very existence and prosperity of the Jewish People can certainly be perceived as miraculous, and even the most skeptical find it impossible to explain how we have outlived every attempt to obliterate us by the mightiest of empires and the cruelest and most despicable national leaders that have ever existed. The price has been high, and at many times hope almost totally obliterated, but not only are we still here, the Jewish people and State of Israel thriving, and there can be no doubt that God is with us all the way. May everyone enjoy a wonderful, peaceful and happy Pesah, and may we see the final redemption speedily in our days!

Other online articles of interest:

The Bureka Ladies of Or VeShalom Maintain Tradition – Full article [here](#)

Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue in Jerusalem – Website [here](#)

We love how impassioned our Romaniote Jews are about their special heritage. Two members from the extended Colchamiro family show us how it is done.

Elliot Colchamiro has been very busy down in Florida as our ambassador, speaking at a number of Jewish clubs, always on the Romaniotes, very appropriate since he is the grandson of one of our founding fathers, Leon Colchamiro.

"Marcia, these are photos taken of me doing my presentation last Fall on "The Jews of Greece" to the Sephardic Federation of Palm Beach County. The last picture shows them presenting me with a check to KKJ for their participation in our May 2019 Greek Jewish festival. I hope that you can use these photos for the next KKJ newsletter. Elliot"



Elliot's cousin, Leon Weintraub, took issue with the Washington Jewish Week and wrote a letter to the editor. We love it! Read the full letter [here](#)

"Focus on Yiddish culture ignores many other Jews"

I doubt that Saul Axelrod had any malicious intent when he wrote a recent op-ed ("The spark of the pintele yid," Feb. 14). But he and your readers should know that his references throughout the essay, effective as they were, essentially ignored a sizeable portion of world Jewry.

My mother came from a very religious family (her father, in fact, was one of the founders of Kehila Kedosha Janina, which still exists on New York's Lower East Side), but I have no doubt that "My Yiddish Momme" was not written for my mother. My mother's family emigrated to the United States from Greece, not from Central or Eastern Europe, and Axelrod's piece seems to forget about all those Jews that are generally characterized as Sephardi or Mizrahi.

But, in fact, my mother's family is a minority within a minority. Her family were Romaniote Jews, in the Balkans from the Roman times, though in many respects their cultural influence was swamped by the large number of Sephardi Jews who went to the Eastern Mediterranean following the expulsion from Spain. The Kehila mentioned above survives today as the only remaining Romaniote synagogue still functioning in the United States (see KKJSM.org).

So, Professor Axelrod and others, enjoy "My Yiddish Momme," your Jewish deli food and the Yiddish music wherever you hear it, just as my father did. But please don't write off the millions of Jews around the world that have no antecedents in the world of European Ashkenazi Jewry.

LEON WEINTRAUB
Washington, D.C."

With the opening of Stewart Nachmias' art exhibit, we created a small exhibit in our Museum in memory of his parents, Max and Eve Nachmias. We are looking to see if anyone can help us identify some of the other students in the 9th grade photo.



The Association of Friends of Greek Jewry has closed the Italy-Greece Tour and the Young Professionals Tour. There is still very limited room on the last tour that runs from July 17-July 31. Full itinerary [here](#).

Summer
2019
Itinerary



The Association of Friends of Greek Jewry

Tour of Jewish Greece featuring Rhodes

July 17 – July 31, 2019

Includes Athens, Rhodes, Thessaloniki, Ioannina, & Mykonos

Also includes the Commemoration of the 75th Anniversary of the Deportation of the Jews of Rhodes

For more information email Museum@kkjsm.org

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 121

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Kehila Kedosha Janina

280 Broome Street, New York NY 10002

Website: www.kkjsm.org

Email: museum@kkjsm.org

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