



# Kehila Kedosha Janina Synagogue and Museum

## August 2024 E-Newsletter

Dear Friends of Kehila Kedosha Janina,

It has been a busy summer for our community, with multiple successful events and trips to Greece. While we enjoy this warm season, we are approaching the difficult day of Tisha B'Av, the 9<sup>th</sup> Day of the month of Av, during which many tragedies have happened to the Jewish people. Most significantly, both the First and Second Temples were destroyed on Tisha B'Av. We are also concerned on a daily basis with the safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel, over 100 of whom are still held hostage while others are displaced from their homes and face constant threats. We pray that the Jewish nation knows no more suffering and we pray for peace in Israel. Despite these challenges, we are also grateful that the State of Israel exists, and that we live in a generation when Jews can live in freedom and defend ourselves. Am Yisrael Hai.



Prayers at the Western Wall in Jerusalem

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This newsletter, our 184<sup>th</sup> 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](http://www.kkjsm.org).

We now reach thousands of 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 [info@kkjsm.org](mailto:info@kkjsm.org)

We are open for Shabbat every Saturday morning starting at 9:30am. Please email [amarcus@kkjsm.org](mailto:amarcus@kkjsm.org) if you would like to attend, and enjoy a traditional Greek kiddush lunch after services. Our Museum is open every Sunday from 11am-4pm. If you wish to sponsor a newsletter, contact us at [info@kkjsm.org](mailto:info@kkjsm.org)

## Simchas

We wish a big Mazal Tov to Rose Eskononts who turned 90 in July! We wish her many more years of health and happiness surrounded by family.



We celebrate the birth of Nathan Harrison Beirne on June 25, 2024. His Hebrew name is Ben Zion, named after his great grandfather from Salonika. Nathan is the son of proud parents Stella Angel Karcnik and Colin Evan Beirne.

Happy birthday to Alberto Israel turned 97 in the beginning of August. The youngest of ten siblings from Rhodes, Alberto was deported at the age of 17 from the island of Rhodes to Auschwitz Birkenau. He now lives in Belgium dedicating all his energy to the younger generations. Below are some snippets of his Testimony collected by the historian Marcello Pezzetti: "The Kippur fast of 1944 came to Auschwitz Birkenau. That Yom Kippur I will never forget. On the eve of the eve, the wise men said, "eat and tomorrow when the coffee comes, you won't have it. You will have soup in the evening. The old people were the ones who were ten years older than us, they were twenty five, twenty eight years old. In the morning nobody had coffee; the Germans wondered "what's going on?" They feared it would be a riot. The old people all started saying a prayer, the teffilah of Kippur, they said it by heart. In the evening, around four o'clock, a senior official arrived and made a selection." - Alberto Israel, from the Italian Book of the Shoah



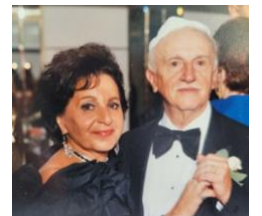
We wish a happy birthday to Sami Modiano, who also survived the Holocaust from Rhodes, who turned 94 in July. Sami returns to Rhodes every year to greet visitors and tell his story and the story of the Jews of Rhodes.



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## Passings

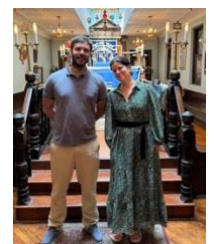
We mourn the passing of Doris Levy who we learned passed away on April 17, 2024. Born in Brooklyn on May 23, 1930, Doris was the only child of Pearl and Mac Levy. She raised her three boys in Flatbush with her husband Morris, who was a WWII Navy veteran. In her later years she and her husband worked at Erasmus high school, and they subsequently retired to Delray Beach, Florida. She was predeceased by her husband of 66 years in December 2019 and her oldest son Jeffrey in Feb 2007. Doris is survived by her two other sons both in Delray Beach: Eric and his sons Ben (NJ) and Don (MD); and Edward. Her daughter-in-law Joan (Jeffrey), Grantham, NH and her children Morris, Martin and Madeline. She also leaves behind three great grandchildren Charlotte, Emmett and Georgia. Doris was the granddaughter of one of KKJ's original rabbis, and she was proud of her family's connection to the synagogue.



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## Visitors to Kehila Kedosha Janina

Among the many visitors and new friends we have made over the past month, we were excited to welcome Einat Katav and Pavlos Evmorfidis who manage the natural mattress boutique [COCO-MAT](#) a few blocks away from our Kehila. Einat is originally from Israel and Pavlos is from Xanthi, and they were both fascinated to learn about our community and the history of Greek Jewry, including from Xanthi. We look forward to collaborating with them in the future.



## Upcoming Events at Kehila Kedosha Janina

### **Greek Jewish Shabbat with Scholar-in-Residence Theo Canter – August 24 at 9:30am**

**Please RSVP to [Amarcus@kkjasm.org](mailto:Amarcus@kkjasm.org)**

Join us on Saturday morning August 24 at Kehila Kedosha Janina for services, lunch, and Torah insights with special guest speaker Theo Canter. Shabbat morning services begin at 9:30am, followed by a delicious traditional kiddush lunch at 12:30pm. After lunch, we are excited to hear from Theo Canter who will offer inspiring words of Torah and lead an exciting class. Theo Canter graduated from Oberlin College in 2023 with degrees in Comparative Literature, Cinema Studies, and Mediterranean Studies. He spent the past year as a Fulbright scholar in Athens teaching music, filmmaking, and creative writing, while reconnecting with his Romaniote heritage as a member of the Athens Jewish community. Theo is a versatile musician, playing guitar, bouzouki, and accordion in a variety of genres including Rembetiko and Klezmer. He has also worked as a literary translator and multimedia journalist in Israel, Europe, and the US. Theo is passionate about Greek Jewish culture and traditions, and is excited to share his experiences with our community.



 **KEHILA KEDOSHA JANINA**  
SYNAGOGUE AND MUSEUM

INVITES YOU TO A

# **GREEK JEWISH SHABBAT**

**SATURDAY AUGUST 24**  
**KEHILA KEDOSHA JANINA**  
**280 BROOME STREET NYC**

**9:30AM - SHABBAT MORNING SERVICES**  
**12:30PM - KIDDUSH LUNCH**  
**1:30PM - SPECIAL CLASS LED BY THEO CANTER**

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**MEET OTHER COMMUNITY MEMBERS AND  
ENJOY A DELICIOUS TRADITIONAL GREEK JEWISH LUNCH**

**HEAR INSPIRING WORDS FROM THEO CANTER,  
WHO WILL DISCUSS HIS ROMANIOTE HERITAGE,  
HIS RECENT FULBRIGHT FELLOWSHIP IN  
GREECE, AND TORAH INSIGHTS.**



**RSVP TO [AMARCUS@KKJSM.ORG](mailto:AMARCUS@KKJSM.ORG)**

*GENEROUSLY SUPPORTED BY MICHAEL MINTZ*



**"In the Footsteps of the Jews of Greece"**  
**New Book Presentation by Author Anastasios Karababas – Sept 15 at 1pm**  
RSVP to [Amarcus@kkjism.org](mailto:Amarcus@kkjism.org)

KEHILA KEDOSHA JANINA SYNAGOGUE & MUSEUM  
IS HONORED TO WELCOME

**ANASTASIOS KARABABAS**

FOR A SPECIAL PRESENTATION  
OF HIS NEW BOOK

**IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF  
THE JEWS OF GREECE**



**SUNDAY SEPTEMBER 15 AT 1PM**

**KEHILA KEDOSHA JANINA  
280 BROOME STREET NYC**

This pioneering book presents a unique detailed historical overview of the history of Greek Jews from antiquity to the present day, including the period of the Holocaust when nearly 90% of the community was annihilated. Beyond this historical landscape, the book also highlights the contributions of Greek Jews to the economic, cultural, intellectual and political life of the country, and reveals the golden times and the darkest days in the coexistence between Jews and Christians in Greece.

Anastasios Karababas is a French-Greek historian, teacher and political analyst. He was a guide and lecturer at the Shoah Memorial in Paris from 2014 to 2020. In 2011, he began his research on the Jews of Greece, and his latest book is based on historical archives from Europe, Israel and the US. His research mainly focuses on genocides of the 20th century, the preservation of memory, and its transmission to younger generations.

**SIGNED BOOKS WILL BE AVAILABLE FOR PURCHASE  
REFRESHMENTS WILL BE SERVED**

**PLEASE RSVP TO [AMARCUS@KKJISM.ORG](mailto:AMARCUS@KKJISM.ORG)**

**Greek Jewish & Sephardic Young Professionals Network**

Young Professionals Greek Shabbat Dinner – August 23 at 7:30pm  
RSVP to [GreekJewishYPN@gmail.com](mailto:GreekJewishYPN@gmail.com)



Greek Jewish & Sephardic  
Young Professionals Network  
Κοινότητα קהילה Komunita

# GREEK SHABBAT DINNER

AN INTIMATE EVENING FOR JEWISH  
YOUNG PROFESSIONALS

Friday August 23  
Kabbalat Shabbat 7:30PM  
Dinner 8:00pm  
280 Broome St NYC

JOIN US IN A HISTORIC SPACE TO MEET OTHER  
YOUNG COMMUNITY MEMBERS, ENJOY A  
DELICIOUS SEPHARDIC DINNER, AND ELEVATE  
OUR WEEK BY CELEBRATING SHABBAT

FEATURING GUEST SPEAKER THEO CANTER

Hear inspiring words from Theo Canter,  
who will discuss his Romaniote heritage,  
his recent Fulbright Fellowship in  
Greece, and Torah insights.



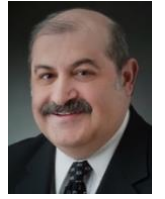
OPEN TO YOUNG ADULTS IN THEIR 20S AND 30S  
SPACE IS LIMITED. \$50 PER PERSON  
RSVP TO [GREEKJEWISHYPN@GMAIL.COM](mailto:GREEKJEWISHYPN@GMAIL.COM)

*GENEROUSLY SUPPORTED BY MICHAEL MINTZ*



## Past Events

On Saturday June 22 Kehila Kedosha Janina held a special Shabbat service when we honored Chaim Kofinas with the Hy Genee Legacy Award. The Hy Genee Legacy Award was established by the KKJ Board of Trustees to acknowledge individuals who, over a long period of time, have preserved Hy's legacy by going above and beyond to ensure the survival and vibrancy of Kehila Kedosha Janina Synagogue and Museum. Marty Genee and Lois Genee Ledner presented Chaim with the award on behalf of the Board of Trustees. The award acknowledged Chaim's many decades of volunteer service to our Kehila by leading our services, preserving our Romaniote traditions, and managing our finances as Board Treasurer. A delicious kiddush was enjoyed by all after the services.



In June the Association of Friends of Greek Jewry held their annual Tour of Jewish Greece and it was a moving experience. Participants traced their families' roots in Ioannina, Thessaloniki, and Corfu. It is always special to bring Yaniote families to Kahal Kadosh Yashan synagogue where their ancestors once prayed.



Asser branch of the Colchamiro Family

## Greek Jewish & Sephardic Young Professionals Network – Past Events

On June 26 the Greek Jewish Young Professionals hosted a special conversation with Israeli Deputy Consul General Tsach Saar. They discussed his experience serving in Greece, Albania, and Germany, his work coordinating sending supplies from NYC and travel for reservists immediately after October 7, and insights on Israeli diplomatic strategies. They look forward to hosting more roundtable discussions with community members and other diplomats soon.



On June 19 the Greek Jewish Young Professionals hosted a successful Pool Party and BBQ. They had a wonderful time with more than 50 young community members enjoying great food and drinks, swimming, music, and amazing vibes.





## Young Professionals Tour of Jewish Greece & The Balkans – Recap

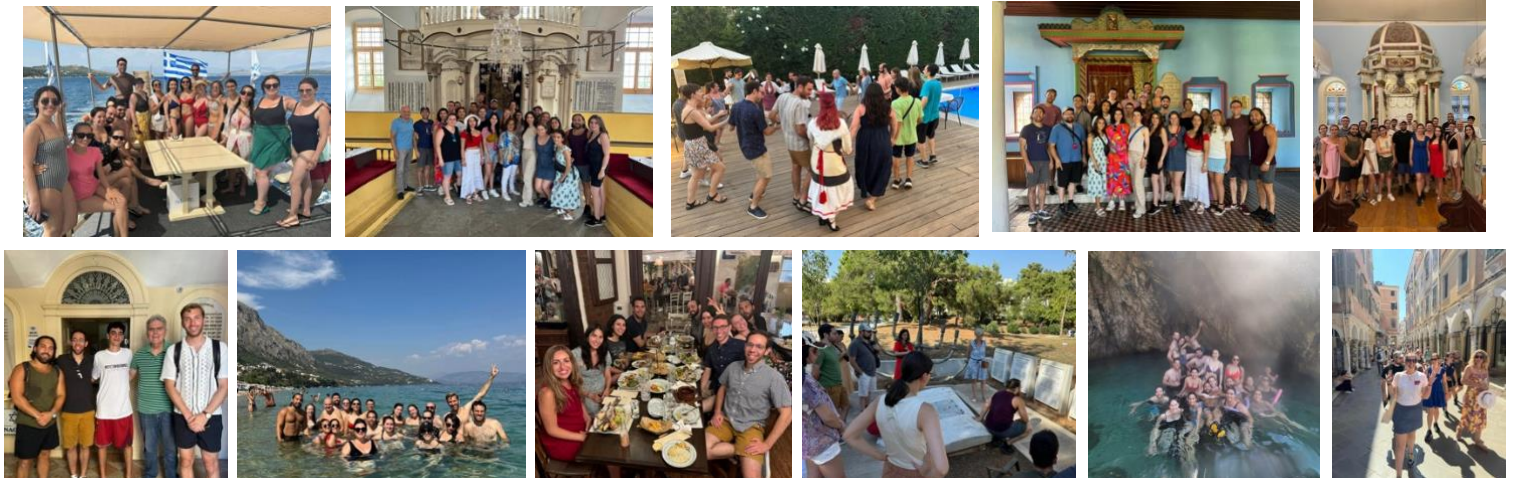
What an incredible trip! The Young Professionals Tour of Jewish Greece & the Balkans wrapped up last month and was such a meaningful experience for 25 of our young community members. The group spent 10 days traveling to 3 countries and 8 cities throughout the Balkans and Greece on a whirlwind schedule. The tour began in Sofia and Plovdiv in Bulgaria, including visiting the beautiful synagogues, Jewish community centers, historic sites, and even meeting young Jewish community members & leaders. Special thanks to the Bulgarian Jewish community for their warm welcome, we hope this is the beginning of many more collaborations.



Next, they visited the North Macedonian cities of Skopje and Monastir, where they had a moving tour of the Holocaust Memorial Center for the Jews of North Macedonia, visited the city's Jewish community center and synagogue, and walked the streets where our ancestors are from in Monastir/Bitola. Participants' families came from the Alcala, Alboher, Aroeste, Camhi, Faragi, and Nahmias families. They also took in the fun local sites and explored the old bazaar.



The tour then went through the heart of Northern Greece, including Thessaloniki (Salonika), Veria, Ioannina, and Corfu, where they visited historic synagogues and connected with Jewish community members over our shared heritage. They celebrated a special Shabbat with the Sephardic community in Salonika and sang Ladino songs together with Sepharadim from around the world. They walked the streets and even found the houses where our ancestors once lived, with participants hailing from the Aboulafia, Covo, & Habib families from Salonika; Mordehai family from Veria; Colchamiro, Koen, Levy, Matsil, & Negrin families from Ioannina; and Mustachi, Nacmias, Nacson, Salonichio, & Yesua families from Corfu. We remembered all those we lost in the Holocaust and recognized the beauty of our Romaniote and Sephardic traditions and the importance of continuing our community. Finally we enjoyed the gorgeous beaches of Corfu and took an amazing boat tour. Special thank you to Jewish community leaders and tour guides Hella and Elias Matalon, Allegra Matsa, Zacharias Matathias and Sephardic Balkans: Jewish Heritage Trips.



## News from Jewish Greece

### Rhodes & Kos

#### 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Holocaust in Rhodes & Kos – Special Program and Events Held

With a week of major cultural events held between July 16-21, 2024, the Jewish Community of Rhodes commemorated the 80th anniversary of the deportation of the Jews of Rhodes and Kos by the Nazis in July 1944 and their annihilation in Auschwitz. Rhodes and Kos lost 89% of their Jewish population; of the 1,900 Jews, only 200 survived the Holocaust.

In this year's program hosted by the Jewish Community of Rhodes - which is now an institution for Jews with Rhodesli heritage who maintain unbreakable ties with their birthplace – more than 250 people gathered from every corner of the earth, including Africa, across the US, Europe, and all over Greece.

The events culminated with the official memorial ceremony, which took place on Sunday 21.7.24, at the Synagogue of Rhodes.



The event began with the lighting of candles in memory of the 6 million Jewish victims of the Holocaust, which were symbolically lit: the Rabbi of Athens Gabriel Negrin, the survivor of Auschwitz Sami Modiano, the President of the Rhodes Jewish Community Claudia Restis, KISE President David Saltiel, Rabbi Owen, and on behalf of the new generation of Rhodians Idan and Yaniv Pressman.

Following the lighting of the candles, the Most Reverend Rabbi of Athens Gabriel Negrin chanted the memorial service and were followed by addresses from: His Eminence Metropolitan Kyrillos of Rhodes, the President of I.K. Claudia Restis of Rhodes, the Deputy Governor of N. Agaios Christos Michalakis, the MP of N.D. Vasilios Ypsilantis, the Mayor of Rhodes Alexandros Kolliadis, the Ambassador of Germany Andreas Kindl, the Counselor of the Embassy of Israel Doron Lebovitch, the President of KISE David Saltiel, the representative of the Diaspora Rhodians Giovanna Cohen, and the survivor of the Holocaust Sami Modiano.



A musical break followed with Sephardic songs, performed by American singer and composer Sara Aroeste, accompanied by guitarist Stathis Skandalidis.

As part of the event, the late Gavriel Charitos, the first elected mayor of Rhodes after the Italian Occupation, in 1946, was honored, on whose initiative the Jewish Martyrs' Square in the Jewish quarter was named "Juderia". At the same time, in 1949, Mayor Charitos hosted in Rhodes the historic negotiations between Israel, Egypt & Jordan, which led to the signing of an armistice between Israel & Egypt.

In a special ceremony, Daniel Benardout presented an honorary plaque to the Haritou family, emphasizing the late mayor's contribution to preserving the memory of the island's Jews.

Mr. Benardout, after referring to the work of Mayor Haritos, concluded his speech by pointing out: "'Man is his choices,' said Jean-Paul Sartre, and Gabriel Haritos had made his own choices - neither easy, nor self-evident for his time... and for every time. Choose MEMORY and PEACE. And he framed these choices with actions! May his example inspire us, and may it lead us to our own choices and our own actions."

Receiving the plaque on behalf of the family, Mr. Ioannis Charitos, son of the mayor, thanked I.K. Rhodes. Then the grandson of the mayor, Professor Mr. Gavriel Charitos, a well-known lawyer, writer and journalist,



who was also the keynote speaker of the event, spoke about the personality and contribution of his grandfather, but also about the importance of preserving the Memory.

The event continued at the Holocaust Memorial with the laying of wreaths and religious hymns performed by the Choir of I.K. Thessaloniki.

The anniversary events concluded on the evening of Sunday 21.7.24, at the Palace of the Knights of Rhodes, with the concert on the theme "Unknown musical treasures of Greek Jewish traditional songs", by the band Pellegrinaggio Al Levante, with the performance of soprano Mariangela Hadjistamatiou.

Inauguration of the renovated Jewish Museum of Rhodes

One of the most important events of the week of anniversary events was the opening of the renovated Jewish Museum of Rhodes, which took place on Thursday 18.7.2024, by Aron Hasson, founder of the Rhodes Jewish Historical Foundation. The President of I.K. Claudia Resti of Rhodes, during her speech, also announced the establishment of the Bella Resti Research Center - in honor of the long-term work of Bella Resti's mother as president of the community. The new Center will operate within the framework of the Museum and will promote historical research and the documentation of the history of the Jews of Rhodes.

Speakers at the event were Aron Hasson, founder of the Rhodes Jewish Historical Foundation and Anthony McElligott, Emeritus Professor of History at the University of Limerick, scholar of the history of the Jews of Rhodes and Kos and author of the forthcoming book *The Last Transport: The Holocaust in the Eastern Aegean*.

From the rich program of the anniversary week of events, we mention: the Saturday services in the Synagogue, performed by the Rabbi of Athens, Gabriel Negrin. The screening of the film "Behind These Walls, Journey to the Past", produced by I.K. Rhodes, narrated by Isaac Habib, as well as the screening of the documentary "Samuel Modiano, The Mission: From Rhodes To Auschwitz", with an introduction by the historian and writer Anastasios Karabambas, at the outdoor theater RODON. Sephardic-themed cooking classes by chef and author Sibel Pinto. Tours of the Jewish quarter and the Synagogue of Rhodes. The lectures on the Rabbinic tradition of Rhodes by Rabbis David Benchlouch and Benjamin Owen from Seattle, USA.

Each year one day of the program is dedicated to Memory and History workshops. Aimed at the dynamic Rodite Diaspora, the workshops, conducted in English, are designed to strengthen ancestral ties and the new generation's ties to family and local history. Older people reminisce, younger people learn! This year the workshops, under the general theme "Families, Cultures and Communities: Rhodes and Kos", took place on Wednesday 17.7.24, at the Museum of Modern Greek Art. After the introduction by Professor Anthony McElligott, the workshops followed: "The Ladino Legacies of the Rhodeslis", with Dr. Devin E. Naar. "The Afterlives of Objects: Finding Meaning (and Magic) in Sephardic Family Treasures", with Dr. Hannah Pressman and "History of Sephardic Songs", with ethnomusicologist Maria Papavasilopoulou.



## Report from Rhodes from the Sephardic Brotherhood:

What an extraordinary experience! Our Sephardic Jewish Brotherhood of America National Delegation Tour of Jewish Rhodes and Kos wrapped last month with over 35 Sephardic leaders from our communities in New York, Seattle, Atlanta, Los Angeles, and Florida. We joined a global summit and commemoration of the Jews of Rhodes and Kos with more than 250 Participants from Communities around the world, including South Africa, Belgium, Israel, Canada, and the United States from Rhodesli and Sephardic diaspora.



The amazing program has included the rededication of the newly renovated Jewish Museum of Rhodes, Sephardic cooking classes with Chef Sibel Pinto of Istanbul, a Symposium on the history and culture of the Jews of Rhodes, walking tours of the Juderia (Jewish Quarter), visit to the Jewish Cemetery, and a special talk on the Rabbinic Leadership and Perspectives of Rhodes (taught specially by Rabbi Benjy Owen, Rabbi David Benchlouch, and David Behar of Seattle, WA). We joined a packed Kehila that was standing room only for Shabbat services, led by members of our Delegation in the Rhodesli Sephardic minhag, with powerful moments and renditions of songs like Bendicho Su Nombre and Ein Kelokenu in Ladino. This included a massive Sephardic Shabbat Dinner together with all the different visitors from around the globe.

On Sunday, we joined representatives from the Jewish Community of Rhodes and Jewish Communities throughout Greece for the formal Commemoration memorial program, again in the synagogue that was standing room only. This was followed by a communal walk to the Rhodes Holocaust Monument with a special Wreath Laying Ceremony, with wreaths laid by State Officials, Church Officials, Jewish Community representatives, Rhodesli Holocaust survivor Sami Modiano, and our own Delegation's David Behar (on behalf of the Rhodesli diaspora). The program wrapped up on Monday with a day trip to the Island of Kos, where a special memory program was held at the synagogue and cemetery in honor of the small Jewish Community of Kos that perished in the Shoah.

We want to give a special thank you to the leadership of Claudia Restis and Carmen Cohen from the Jewish Community of Rhodes for making all of these events possible, as well as all our tour delegation participants for joining us for this first time delegation experience. Si Kere El Dio - to many more Sephardic communal gatherings ahead.





## Letter from Israeli President Isaac Herzog to Jewish Community of Rhodes



נשיא המדינה

رئيس الدولة

THE PRESIDENT

Jerusalem, July 23, 2024

**Carmen Cohen**  
**Director of the Jewish Community of Rhodes**

Shalom Carmen,

As the Jews of Rhodes mark 80 years since the Nazi expulsion and transport to Auschwitz, I write to commend the extraordinary efforts to commemorate the history and celebrate the heritage of this unique Jewish community.

Precisely eight decades after Jewish men, women and children were rounded up at the port and forced on boats, which would lead to the near annihilation of the Rhodeslis, this extraordinary community has proven strikingly formidable and inspirationally vibrant. Rhodeslis scattered throughout the globe remain deeply committed to their Sephardi traditions, to their culinary customs, to their cultural rituals and most notably- to the deepest communal fabric.

As President of the Jewish, democratic State of Israel, I extend my warmest wishes to the Jews of Rhodes. I applaud your collective dedication to our past, and I am confident in the future we continue to build. **יֵשֶׁר כּוֹחַ!**

Yours in friendship,

*and Shalom!*

  
Isaac Herzog

President of the State of Israel

## Corfu

### Award of Righteous Among the Nations given to Greek Women who Rescued Corfu Jews during WWII

The title of "Righteous of Nations" of the Yad Vashem Foundation was awarded to Greek heroes who rescued Jews in Corfu during the Occupation, by the Ambassador of Israel to Greece, Noam Katz, in a special ceremony held on 27.5.2024 at the Mantzaros Philharmonic Society in Corfu. The medal and title of "Right of Nations" awarded posthumously to Greek heroes Thomas and Antonis Kyriakis for rescuing the Jewish family of Shem Cohen during the Occupation.



The award was given in the presence of members of the Kyriaki and Cohen families. The medal was received by the granddaughter of Thomas Kyriakis and daughter of Antonis, Spyridoula Kyriakis, and the certificate by Marina and Eleni Kyriakis, the two daughters of Dimitris Kyriakis, the other son of Thomas.

"Today we remember the six million souls lost in the Holocaust, including 67.000 Greek Jews who perished in Nazi camps, a staggering 87% of Greek Jews. We remember the 1.600 members of the historic Jewish Community of Corfu who were sent to Auschwitz, where their fate was tragic. But today we also remember those brave people who defied the brutality of the Nazis to do the right thing. We pay tribute to their courage. Their virtue and bravery shined like a beacon of light in the darkest times," noted, among others, Ambassador Noam Katz, stating that the Jews are an ancient people with a great memory and never forget the people who helped them.

As the ambassador stated, Israel and Yad Vashem instituted our duty to remember those who saved the Jews. He stated that the bravery of the Righteous should serve as a model for us all. "By highlighting their courageous actions, we not only honor their bravery, but also promote the values of empathy, understanding and moral integrity. Their stories demonstrate the profound impact individuals can have in the face of hatred and prejudice. A Jewish proverb says that "he who saves one life is as if he saves the whole world." The actions of the Righteous really changed history, as evidenced by all the members of the Cohen family who are with us today, thanks to Thomas and Antonis Kyriakis," said the Israeli Ambassador.

#### Thomas and Antonis Kyriakis

After the entry of the Nazi Germans into Corfu in 1943, Thomas and his son Antonis Kyriakis from the village of Valaneio in the highlands of the island, provided shelter and protection to the family of Semos Cohen, his wife Beatrice and their four children Diamantina, Dora , Moise and Ety. They did so with altruism and self-sacrifice, risking their lives in a true expression of solidarity and humanity.

#### Title of "Righteous Among Nations"

The title of "Righteous Among Nations" is awarded by Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Memorial Center and Museum established by the State of Israel after World War II in memory of the six million victims of the Shoah. The award is given to non-Jews who risked their lives to save Jews during the Holocaust. The award requires a thorough investigation by Yad Vashem and approval by Israel's Supreme Court. It is considered the highest honor that can be bestowed by the State of Israel.



The awardees receive a special medal and diploma, while their names are inscribed on the "Wall of the Righteous" and a tree is planted in their memory in the "Garden of the Righteous" on the grounds of Yad Vashem.

It is recalled that 369 courageous Greeks have been recognized as "Righteous Among the Nations" to date. Among them, the late Archbishop of Athens and All Greece Damascenes, the former Mayor of Zakynthos Loukas Karrer, the late Metropolitans of Zakynthos and Dimitriadou Chrysostomos and Ioakeim respectively,



the late head of the Greek Police Angelos Evert, the heroine of the National Resistance Lela Karagianni, as well as many other WWII heroes. Today they are joined by Thomas and Antonis Kyriakis. May their memory be eternal.

### The Rescue

According to a related announcement, the Italians occupied Corfu in October 1940. Under their rule, the Jews suffered nothing. After the surrender of Italy in September 1943, the Germans occupied Corfu and in June 1944 the Gestapo began to operate there. About 400 Jewish women were transported by ship to the concentration camp of Haidari, in Athens. A group of men and women were taken through the port of Piraeus to a concentration camp, after first being gathered in Lefkada. In March 1944, 1.600 Jews were sent to Auschwitz, of which only 180 survived. On June 9, 1944, approximately 1.600 Jews from Corfu were deported to the Haidari concentration camp and from there to Auschwitz, among them the brothers of Semu Cohen and their families.

Semos Cohen, his wife and children fled to the mountainous area to the north and reached the village of Valaneio. They knew that their relative Esther Hatzopoulou and her mother-in-law had found a hiding place with a certain Dimitris Kosteletos. Semos Cohen and his wife were sure that Dimitris Kosteletos would accept them. But that didn't happen and they didn't know what to do, since they hadn't informed anyone else in the area. By chance they met Thomas Kyriakis and his 13-year-old son Antonis, who also lived in Valaneio, who offered help to the Jewish refugees.

The six survivors lived under the protection of Kyriakis until the end of the War. Their first hiding place was a cave in the forest and then a hut near the monastery belonging to the family of Antonis Kyriakis. Kyriakis supplied them with food and newspapers. Antonis befriended Moise Cohen and sometimes stayed to sleep with the Jewish family in the cave or the hut. The Germans were patrolling the area, as there was guerrilla activity from EDES. Antonis mentions in his testimony that once the Germans almost shot him, when they met him and members of the Cohen family in the forest. Fortunately for everyone, Semos and his wife had identity cards with Christian names and set them all free in exchange for food.

The two survivors Dora and Moise Cohen mention in their testimonies that their father's clothes once raised the suspicions of the Germans and they asked the villagers about him. No one revealed that he was Jewish. When asked if there were any Jews in the area, the answer was given that a Jewish family passed through the village on their way to Albania and drowned in the sea.

After the war, the survivors returned to Corfu. Later Moise immigrated to the USA. His three sisters and his parents remained in Greece. Both the survivors and the family that rescued them testify to the friendly relations between the two sides over the years.

Source: [LIBERAL](#), 27.5.2024

## The Lost History of the Jews of Corfu

In memory of an ancient community snuffed out by the Holocaust. Full article [Here](#)

On March 22, 1946, the Sephardic Jewish newspaper *Hed HaMizrach* ("Echo of the East") published a [pained Hebrew letter](#) written by Haim Mizrachi (1901-1969), a resident of the island of Corfu and a Revisionist Zionist activist, parts of whose personal archive are kept at the National Library of Israel. The Jerusalem weekly didn't make the letter a front-page affair, instead tucking it in between pages 9 and 10 of a 12-page publication, but the content remains difficult to stomach.



In the text he wrote and published, Mizrachi mourned his community's destruction in the Holocaust. He told of how on June 9, 1944, the Nazis, with the aid of Greek police officers, arrested most of the Jews on the island of Corfu and sent them to the Birkenau death camp. Of some 1,700 Jews on the island, only 200 survived – 80 of them managing to escape the Nazis altogether and 120 surviving the camps. The rest were murdered. Mizrachi issued a desperate plea for aid to help for the remnant of Corfu Jewry – the orphans, widows, sick, and unemployed. They needed clothes, blankets, funds and assistance in rebuilding the one remaining synagogue, which was left "half-demolished."

Mizrachi added that of the 200 surviving Jews, 30 had already made Aliyah to the Land of Israel and many more intended to follow "for they do not see any hope of rearranging their lives in the exile". Thus did an ancient Jewish community, which had survived for over 700 years, come to an end. The story of the Corfu Jewish community, especially its final years, is not widely known to the public, and deserves elaboration. The island of Corfu rests in the eastern Mediterranean, near the western shores of Greece and Albania, and not far from southern Italy, occupying a militarily and economically strategic point. As such, it has been conquered many times: by the Romans, the Byzantines, the Goths, the Venetians, the Kings of Sicily, the Ottoman Empire, and the armies of Napoleon. In 1815, it was occupied by Britain, which handed it over to the Kingdom of Greece in 1864.

Jews are known to have been present in Corfu since the Middle Ages. The famous traveler Benjamin of Tudela mentions visiting the island in the 12<sup>th</sup> century and encountering a Jew named Yosef, who worked as a dyer of fabrics. Two major communities lived on the island – one composed of Romaniote Jews and the other of Italian Jews.

In a [letter](#) published in the Berlin-based Hebrew weekly *HaMagid* on September 24, 1891, a Corfu Jew named Halevi said the following of his community:

"...the Jews of Corfu separated here into two communities regarding matters of worshipping God. The first, the smaller of the two, includes the descendants of the first exiles from the time of the exile of the First Temple, and it has a synagogue built according to tradition in the first year of the Christian calendar, and the second community includes the children of the exiles of Spain and Neapol (Naples – N.G.), and it has three synagogues and its prayer is according to the Sephardic rite. The two communities conduct themselves according to special committees, which occasionally meet when needed in matters regarding the public."

The community of Corfu is mentioned in rabbinic literature, and some of its pinkasim (community ledgers), piyutim (liturgical hymns) and songs have survived. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a Jewish printing press operated in Corfu owned by the Nachmoli family, which printed religious books.

The Jews of Corfu dealt primarily in trade, and some of them became prominent in trading in etrogim (citrons) grown on the island, which were considered particularly aesthetic and beautiful and therefore appropriate for the holiday of Sukkot. The Jewish traders tended to acquire the etrogim from Christian farmers and then export



*Sefer Arvit and Hagaddah*.  
Joseph Nachmoli  
Publishing, Corfu, 1876,  
the Rare Books Collection  
at the National Library of  
Israel



them throughout the Jewish world. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a religious debate raged across Jewish communities worldwide regarding the kosher status of these etrogim, and some communities preferred to acquire etrogim from other sources, instead.

In 1864, after Corfu was handed over to Greece, local Jews were emancipated and received civil rights. They lived in relative freedom and comfort, and made great efforts to be on good terms with the majority Christian population. Nevertheless, from time to time they did suffer from both overt and covert expressions of antisemitism.

A particularly serious incident happened in 1891, when a blood libel was spread against the local Jews. The story began shortly after Passover, when a young Jewish girl named Rubina Sardas, the daughter of a tailor, went missing and was eventually found dead in a sack. A report that her father was seen with other Jews while carrying the bloody sack in the middle of the night caused a firestorm.

A rumor spread among local Christians that the girl was actually a Christian orphan named Maria Desylla, who worked for the Sardas household, and that the Jews murdered her as part of their religious rituals. Although the legal investigation produced no damning evidence against the Jews, not all the Christians were appeased and some began to attack Jewish homes and businesses. The local police made little effort to stop the rioters, and even helped to spread the rumors that the murder victim was Christian.

On May 12, 1891, the Warsaw-based Hebrew daily *HaTzifira* reported that

“from the day of April 14 until today the Jews of Corfu sit imprisoned in their homes as if in jail, for their windows are also closed, and none go outside out of great fear. They are forced to purchase their vital provisions early in the morning from cruel merchants who demand triple the price. Poverty has greatly increased among these miserable souls. From the day of April 23, all the houses of prayer are sealed shut. When one of the Jews died, they could not bring him to a grave but sixty hours later, and twenty soldiers went beside the bed to guard it. Commerce has ceased. The common folk’s hatred of the downtrodden has greatly increased, and the soldiers born of the city help the masses incite evil against the Jews.”

22 Jews were killed in the pogroms.

Eight days later, *HaTzifira* reported that in response to these events, Austria, France, and England sent warships to the area to protect their citizens. In addition, representatives of France, the Ottoman Empire, and other countries were instructed to protest the Greek government’s failure to rein in the riots, with the German central bank even warning Greece that continued unrest could harm the value of its currency.

In the end, the authorities in Athens sent military units to Corfu, driving away the rioters with gunfire. The Greek government stressed that

“the Jews have since then shared one constitution and one law with all the residents of the country. The government is very saddened by the incidents, but its heart is confident that its actions will prove to all nations that the good of all its servants under its wing is close to its heart” (*HaTzifira*, May 21, 1891).

The events took the Jewish world by storm. On May 21, 1891, *HaMagid* published an editorial full of harsh words for the Greek residents of Corfu, who made a fortune selling etrogim to the Jewish world while libeling and murdering the local Jews. The article claimed that the Jews’ main problem was their lack of any defensive force: “And our hands are powerless to save them from their oppressors by force, for our hands do not pull back the bowstrings of heroes and we have no ships and no war stratagems to avenge the spilled blood of our brothers, for Israel is weak among the nations and its power is but in the mouth.”

Following the blood libel events, which Corfu Jews called “the evil decree,” about half of the Jews residing there left the island. Most of these were the wealthier sort, with many of them immigrating to Italy or Egypt. The Jews remaining in Corfu were mostly poor.

In the years following the “evil decree,” the lives of Corfu Jews were mostly peaceful. They loved life on the picturesque island, and author Albert Cohen, a native of Corfu, described it in longing terms in some of his works. Nata Osimo Gattegno (1923-2019), another Corfu native who survived the Holocaust, attested in her Hebrew autobiographical work *From Corfu to Birkenau and Jerusalem* (Jerusalem: Aked, 1999), that the

community rabbi and the local Greek bishop had mutual respect for one another, with the bishop being invited to the synagogue on Jewish holidays as a guest of honor. However, when the dates of Passover and Easter fell in close proximity, tension between the two sides increased. In the week before Easter, the Greek Christians would shutter their windows, before later opening them and tossing ceramic vessels out into the street while crying out "On the heads of the Jews! On the heads of the Jews!"

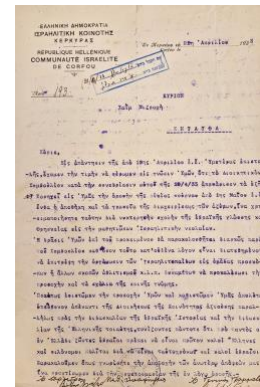
On March 22, 1914, the Jerusalem daily *Moriah* reported on Greek rioters who smashed up the Corfu Jewish cemetery. On April 21, 1930, Haim Mizrachi published a report in the Jerusalem daily *Do'ar HaYom* on another blood libel against the Jews of Corfu. Mizrachi told of how on Monday, April 7, 1930, a great panic arose in the Jewish neighborhood. The Jewish merchants who set out to sell their wares suddenly returned to their homes in fear. Local Christians had threatened to murder them in revenge for the alleged Jewish abduction of a Christian child, whose blood the Jews supposedly sought to use in a Passover ritual.

Community leaders responded by quickly appealing to the authorities to intervene. The situation became even more tense the next day, and some Jews were beaten by their Christian neighbors. The police and the Greek bishop, who Mizrachi called a "friend of the Jews," intervened, and overnight guards and detectives were sent to protect the Jewish neighborhood. The police published a special pamphlet to calm the mob, explaining that an anonymous individual had tried to kidnap the child to sexually assault him.

Unfortunately, not all the Greek residents believed this statement and some continued with their attacks. Mizrachi claimed that the Jewish community attempted to conceal the incident so that it would not become widely known and damage Greece's international reputation. He noted that the local educated public and press in Corfu strongly condemned the blood libels, which did not do credit to Greece.

During the 1930s, despite expressions of nationalism and antisemitism in Greece, Jewish life in Corfu went on as normal. The community had a rabbi, synagogues, a Hevra Kadisha burial society, charity associations, mikvah ritual baths, and even an elementary school with a modern curriculum which included the study of the Greek language.

In April 1933, Haim Mizrachi was given permission to use the matza-baking floor in the community building to set up a night school for young members of the community so that they could study Judaism and Hebrew. The community leadership demanded that Mizrachi, a Zionist activist, ensure that the children were studying both Jewish and Greek history, stressing that Jews living in Greece needed to be both law-abiding Greek citizens as well as "good Jews".



Approval by the Corfu Jewish community for Haim Mizrachi to establish a night school to study Judaism and Hebrew. April 21, 1933

The community also contained social organizations, one of which was the "Phoenix" association of Corfu Jews, founded in 1931. There was also Zionist activity, of course. A number of Zionist organizations operated on the island from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Haim Mizrachi himself worked on organizing Revisionist Zionist activity. As a youth in 1913, Mizrachi organized a Zionist youth group called Tikvat Zion (Zion's Hope), which operated for a few years before disbanding. In 1924, he established another movement named Theodor Herzl, which he later merged with the Revisionist Betar movement. He kept in regular contact with the global Betar movement, and had close ties to his colleagues in Saloniki and the Land of Israel. He died in Corfu in 1969.



The community of Corfu was wiped out in the Holocaust. In the letter published in *Hed HaMizrach*, mentioned at the start of this article, Haim Mizrachi described his community's last moments: In April 1941, fascist Italy conquered Corfu, but the Italians made no distinction between Jew and Gentile and took no special steps against the former.



Things took a turn for the worse in October 1943, when the Italians left and the Nazi Wehrmacht took over. SS units under the command of Jurgen Stroop – who had previously served in Poland, ruthlessly putting down the Warsaw Ghetto Rebellion – ordered the Jews to be registered in a special book and present themselves before a town official three times a week. The Jews were also burdened with a heavy tax to serve the Germans' needs.

In May 1944, a delegation from the Gestapo arrived in Corfu, tasked with planning the deportation of the Jews to the death camp in Birkenau. On June 9, 1944, all Jews were concentrated in the city square, and the Nazi soldiers, with the aid of Greek policemen, herded them into the local fortress at gunpoint. At the same time, pamphlets were published on the island declaring that "Corfu has been liberated from the Jewish monster" and demanding those hiding Jews or Jewish property to immediately surrender them or be executed. Consequently, another 100 Jews hiding among their Christian neighbors were handed over to the Nazis. Nata Osmo Gattegno attested that at the same time, Greek Christians invaded the Jewish neighborhood and looted it. The Jews were deported from Corfu in boats to the Haidari concentration camp near Athens, and from there they were very quickly sent on trains to the Birkenau death camp. Most were murdered there. Of some 1,700 Jews living in Corfu at the time of the Nazi occupation, only 200 survived.

After the Holocaust, the Greek government ordered the governor of Corfu in 1946 to return all property to the Jewish community and residents without delay, including public buildings used by the community and private property such as homes and stores (*HaMashkif, January 17, 1946*). But much of the property was in ruins. On the eve of the Holocaust, there were four synagogues. After the war, only one was left standing, and that barely. It was later restored by local authorities together with Jewish organizations.

The ancient cemetery was also seriously damaged. Haim Mizrachi told of how after the war, the Greeks destroyed the cemetery's fence, desecrated the graves, and turned it into a "place of trash and an abandoned field," as he put it. In 1960, media outlets in Israel and around the world reported that the Jewish community in Corfu sold the cemetery land to the local authorities, which demolished it.

The Central Council of Greek Jewry denied this (*Herut, January 1, 1961*), explaining that in 1939, under pressure from local authorities, the community management had to give up a third of the cemetery plot for the sake of a children's home and a hospital. The site was badly damaged during the war, most of the gravestones were destroyed, and one could only barely discern that this was indeed a cemetery. After the war, the authorities expropriated the territory, began to level it, and even tossed bones into the sea. The community asked the authorities to stop their work, and in the end both sides reached an agreement to fence off a small part of the original cemetery and leave it alone.

In an [article](#) published in April 1978 in *BaMa'arachah* magazine, author David Benvenisti reported on his visit to the community of Corfu. He wrote that the old cemetery was being destroyed, the building once used for the Jewish school now stood desolate, and the few Jewish children living on the island were receiving no Jewish education. As of the 2020s, just a few dozen Jews live there; the desolate synagogue is now more a tourist attraction than anything else, and it is mostly active on weekends and holidays.



The community now uses a new location for its cemetery in place of the old one. In it one can find a memorial plaque commemorating those murdered in the Holocaust.

The Corfu Jews who made Aliyah established a monument in the cemetery of the Israeli city of Holon, which is dedicated to the memory of their brethren murdered in the Holocaust. Every year, on the 8<sup>th</sup> of the Hebrew month of Tammuz, they conduct a ceremony in memory of the ancient Corfu Jewish community, which was wiped out.

## Athens

### **Greek police arrest 7 over attacks in May on Israeli hotel and synagogue** Full article [Here](#)

Four suspects, including two Iranians, accused of racially-motivated arson attack; another three arrested for throwing flammable materials at Athens synagogue

July 4, 2024

ATHENS, Greece (Reuters) — Greece's anti-terrorism police have arrested seven people over arson attacks against an Israeli-owned hotel and a synagogue in central Athens this year, police said in a statement on Thursday.



A 25-year-old Greek woman, two Iranians, aged 46 and 36, and an Afghan accomplice, 44, were arrested over a May 15 attack with a makeshift incendiary bomb on a building housing an Israeli-owned hotel and restaurant.

The four were accused of arson that could potentially put human lives at risk and of causing damage to foreign-owned property in a racially motivated attack.

In another incident on June 18, a 44-year old Greek man and a 26-year-old Afghan rode near a synagogue in Athens on a motorcycle and threw flammable material at its entrance causing fire, police said. A police official said a 30-year-old Iranian had been arrested as their accomplice.

The three were accused of arson, gun possession and robbery among other violations, the official added. Police have seized evidence including mobile phones found in a residence in Athens and a prison.

Five of those arrested have been detained and two have been released on restrictions while awaiting trial.

In March 2023, Greek police arrested two men suspected of being members of a group that planned an arson or bomb attack against an Israeli restaurant and the same synagogue in Athens. The Mossad praised Greece for foiling the attack, accusing Iran of orchestrating the operation.

Since the October 7 Hamas attack on southern Israel, which saw terrorists kill some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and kidnap 251, sparking the ongoing war in Gaza, antisemitism has been on the rise throughout Europe. Even prior to October 7, antisemitism has not been unheard of in Greece, where Holocaust memorials have been repeatedly vandalized, and public officials and lawyers have made antisemitic remarks.

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### **"The Songs of the Holocaust of the Greek Jews" presentation by Marianzela Hatzistamatiou** [Here](#)

The book by Mariangela Hadjistamatiou "The songs of the Holocaust of the Greek Jews", was presented at an event co-organized on 29.5.2024, in Athens, by the publishing house Alexandria, KISE and Public, at the event space of Public.



The book is the second stage of the soprano's doctoral thesis and complements the CD "Unknown musical treasures of the Greek Jews" (released by the Jewish Museum of Thessaloniki and IKTH). And while the CD offered a global picture of Greek-Jewish music, the book, focused on the songs of the Holocaust, gives a new dimension to the subject of Holocaust studies and reveals to us valuable information about the Greek-Jewish prisoners in the Nazi camps.

In her preface to the book, Maria Farandouri writes: "The bloody songs of the Holocaust of the Greek Jews, which with their publication today are also known to the younger generations, are yet another memory tile of



a barbaric period that we must never forget - on the contrary it should always inspire our continuous resistance against those who, relying on oblivion, seek even today to wrap the world with the black veil of Nazism-fascism, which 80 years ago devastated Europe and tarnished the name of man".

The event of the book launch was prefaced by the President of KISE David Saltiel, who emphasized the importance of the artist-researcher's work saying that "through the songs she collected and recorded we discover less recognized aspects of the Holocaust period, as the song texts act as testimonies of both survivors and victims". Mr. Saltiel concluded his speech with the characteristic lyrics of Iacov Levis, which contain many meanings and messages about the Greek-Jewish identity: "I am from Rezy Vardari, the old settlement, Levante Jewish children saw the light there. I shout it and boast that I am a Thessalonian and I will be a genuine and faithful Roman until the end."

Her speech followed Mariandzelas Hadjistamatiou, who talked about her research, searching for information on the melodies and lyrics of the songs, while referring to the richness of the messages they convey. G.G. of KISE Victor Eliezer in his speech he referred on the one hand to the completeness of the study, on the other hand to the relationship of the language with the national identity of the Jews of Thessaloniki and to the ties with the homeland. "M. Hadjistamatiou is commendable because she not only records the songs of the Jewish tradition in Greece, but interprets them in a way that brings the authors of these songs closer to us," said G.G. of KISE.

The lawyer and musician George Konstantinidis, President of the " Philanthropic Brotherhood of Men of Thessaloniki", praised the methodology of the experienced musician, emphasizing especially the experiential experience of her visit to the death camps, through which she completed her approach to the songs. Mr. Konstantinidis presented the contents of the book and recorded the information that the songs give to the reader. As he said, "these songs, among other things, express the pain, the lamentation, and the terror in the reflection of the chimney of the crematoria, the anxiety for the fate of their families, but also the nostalgia and love for their homeland".

G.G. of religion George Kalantzis underlined the special relationship of the author with the songs of the Holocaust and her work, which is reflected in the way she interprets it, demonstrating a deep bond. Mr. Kalantzis pointed out that the essential contribution of the book lies in the fact that, for the first time, this material is gathered in a work in a way that makes it accessible and understandable. At the same time, the Secretary General of Religions mentioned that the use of the book in the music schools of the country is being studied in order to become an educational tool.

The writer Evangelos Hekimoglou, who as Curator of the Jewish Museum of Thessaloniki contributed to the research of M. Hadjistamatiou, examined the work museologically, stating that the songs of the Holocaust, being completely different from the music played by the orchestras of the death camps, constitute a new field of research. Ev. Hekimoglou pointed out that ultimately a museum must present research on music. The event ended with the soprano M. Hatjstamatiou, who, after thanking the speakers and those who helped her in her work, sang two characteristic songs. One written in Auschwitz and sung by the Greek Jewish prisoners and the iconic "Goodbye candle".

## Thessaloniki

### Work Team Prepares to Begin Construction for the Holocaust Museum in Thessaloniki

A breath before the start of the work is the Holocaust Museum, a much-discussed and emblematic monument for Thessaloniki and the world community as it will be a point of reference against fascism and racism. According to the latest information and as can be seen in the photos of "Radio Thessaloniki", the installation of the construction site has begun with the officials cleaning the area, burning and removing the dry grass while at the same time sheets have been placed around to avoid accidents.



The building permit has been issued and the subcontractor has been found for the first works, those of excavations and supports. However, for work to begin in the coming weeks, electricity and water supply must be secured.

"We are at the stage where the construction site has been set up and the area has been cleared. I know the contractor wants to start right away, he wants to put in electricity and water. Without these benefits they cannot start. I can't wait to hear and see the machines in action too. It has been more than seven years, I think the time has come," said the president of the Israeli Community, David Saltiel.

The preliminary works will last approximately seven months, during which time the tender documents will be prepared for the tender of the next phase, i.e. for the main part of the construction.

The museum will have a total area of approximately 9.000 sq.m. and will consist of six above-ground and two underground floors. It will also grow around a small urban grove. In addition to the permanent exhibition spaces, it will include spaces for periodical exhibitions, archives, education and research, multi-purpose and leisure spaces and administrative offices, while the open-air parking area will be created on the adjacent property.

It is estimated that every year it will attract more than 500.000 visitors, while it is estimated that it will strengthen the position of Thessaloniki on the world tourist map.

Source: [Website thessnews.gr](http://www.thessnews.gr), 10.6.2024

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## Volos

### Election of New Board of Directors of the Jewish Community of Volos

The Community Assembly, which resulted from the elections of July 10, 2024, in its meeting, held on July 17, 2024, elected the new Board of Directors of I.K. Volos, which was formed into a body, as follows:

President: Mordecai (Marcel) Solomon

Vice President: Michael Sabetai

General Secretary: Haim-Victor Philosofof

Treasurer: Markos I. Maisis

Auditor-Member: Haim-Victor Sakkis



## Ioannina

### "The Jewish Presence in Ioannina" Exhibition

The photographic exhibition "Jewish Presence in Ioannina" by Diamanto Matsa is presented by the "Joseph and Esther Gani" Foundation from Wednesday, July 3 to August 23. Diamanto Matsa dedicates the exhibition to the memory of her father Joseph Matsa, who saved, recorded, studied and researched many elements from the Jewish tradition of Ioannina, but unfortunately passed away before he could complete his work. Its aim is to record what today proves the existence of a Jewish element in the city, but also what existed and suddenly disappeared.



"Jewish presence is the graves of more than 500 years, which are monuments of cultural heritage. They are the inscriptions and doors of Jewish houses, suddenly found empty trunks, without their inhabitants, but carrying their heavy history. A large part of the exhibition refers to the Holy Synagogue of Ioannina (Kaal Kantos Yasan), where several religious relics, inscriptions and special building elements are preserved. My effort was to include representative elements, so that the visitor has an overall picture of the Jewish life of Ioannina. Some photos of Jewish homes that I took in 2014 were part of an exhibition organized by Isaac Dostis entitled "Exodus", for 70 years "since the houses were emptied".

Already today, many of the photos from recent years do not show the current image, due to demolitions. People also fade over time... The Romaniot tradition is evident throughout the old town, it is part of the town and I hope it continues to be for many years to come. Many thanks to Isaac Dosti, who gave color to my English, and to my sister Allegra, who enlightened my knowledge", says Diamanto Matsa in her note. Diamanto Matsa was born in 1954 and grew up in Ioannina by Greek-Jewish parents (mother from Karditsa and father from Ioannina). He studied surveying engineering at the National Technical University of Athens and specialized at the Tehnion Institute of Technology, Israel, as a transportation specialist. He initially worked in the private sector and later taught for 25 years in the Topography department of the TEI of Athens. He deals with photography as an amateur. At the age of 20 he attended photography seminars at the Polytechnic. At the age of 40, she studied for only one year, in the Photography Department of TEI of Athens. At the age of 60, she held her first solo exhibition on the subject of "ZOOM" at Gavrielides publications. She is the mother of 38-year-old Ilias.

The "Joseph and Esther Gani" Foundation is housed at 26 Soutsou Street and its opening hours are Monday to Friday, from 9 am to 2 pm, as well as 6 to 9 pm every Wednesday. Information on phone 2651036517 and email: [info@kis.gr](mailto:info@kis.gr) SOURCE: [agon.gr](http://agon.gr) website, 1.7.2024

## **Greek Couple Return to Roots After Living American Dream** Full article [Here](#)

Mike Daniels was a staple at the Pashas and other Greek Jewish community celebrations

A Greek couple married for seventy years that has lived the American Dream has recently returned to their village near Kozani in northern Greece. This is where they first met and fell in love.

Mike Daniel (Michalis Daniil), ninety-five years old, and his wife Eleni Nanopoulou returned to the village of Morphi Voiou, where they were welcomed as stars. After all, Daniel is the founder of the legendary "Mike Daniel's Orchestra," the band that thrived for decades, entertaining the Greek-American community seven days a week.



Mike Daniels (Michalis Daniil) and his wife Eleni Nanopoulou

Daniel was honored by the Cultural Association of the village for his contribution to culture and performed a song he wrote and sang to his future wife for the first time in 1953 outside the door of his grandmother's house, where he confessed his love to her. This was also where they shared their first kiss.

Speaking to the Athens-Macedonia News Agency (AMNA), Daniel says that he has two loves in his life: Eleni and music. "It was really tough to be away from home almost every night for 70 years," he said. "How Eleni kept me, I don't know."

Ever since he was young, Daniel had a great passion for music. "During the German occupation, Michael hid in a water collection tank in the cistern to practice the violin," said Kostas Tsonis, an educator in Morphi Voiou. "After the occupation, in the rocky years of the civil war, he fled to Tsotili, where he studied privately with a Greek-American music teacher."

In 1949, Daniel went to Thessaloniki to study at the Conservatory and spent two years working in nightclubs. The demands of the job forced him to leave the violin and switch to a more popular instrument, the accordion. However, the money he earned was too little. In 1954, he married his beloved Eleni.



"We were married for two years," he said. "I [said] to Eleni, aren't we going to America? We have no life here. My father-in-law and son-in-law were also there. Of course, we didn't know what to expect. There was fear. I spoke little English, but there was no other choice. We couldn't live in Greece."

**Greek couple lives the American Dream**

Hence in 1956 in search of a better life, Daniel and Eleni made the decision and with the violin under their arms and fifty dollars in their pockets, they left for America. They settled in Astoria.

Eleni, an accomplished seamstress, got a job sewing in a New York factory. There, Daniel met a young woman whose husband worked in a nightclub on New York's 8th Avenue called Britannia. He was offered a job playing the accordion there.

"Since then, for seventy years, I have never been without a job," he tells AMNA.

After two years at Britannia, he was hired by the Egyptian Gardens, a famous nightclub in New York. He also played at weddings and baptisms in the Greek-American community.

In 1963, Daniel formed Mike Daniel's Orchestra. Following the popular Big-Band Era style of the 1940s and 1950s, the first version of the band had twelve to sixteen musicians with a repertoire of European, American, Greek traditional, and folk music.

As the demands of Greek music changed in the late '60s, Daniel left the accordion and took up the then-dominant instrument, the bouzouki.

It was the beginning of a forty-year successful career for one of the most beloved orchestras of the Greek-American community. The band, which was at its peak in the '70's and '80's, worked non-stop with an average of five to nine gigs per week. "I used to close the job for 6,500 to 7,000 dollars," recalls the 95-year-old.

Mike Daniel and his orchestra accompanied many great artists, such as Nana Mouskouri, Jeni Vanou, Giorgos Zambetas, Yiannis Papaioannou, Nikos Gounaris, Andreas Barkoulis, Doukissa, and Michalis Violaris among many others. He also developed a close friendship with bouzouki virtuoso Manolis Chiotis, with whom he worked for a while at several venues.

A big moment for Daniel was when he was hired to play for Nana Mouskouri in her first show with the legendary American singer Harry Belafonte. In 1967, he recorded his first LP, which was a huge success. Soon after, he and his orchestra were regulars for many years on Maria Papadatou's Greek TV show on Channel 47 in New York.

During the summers at the Catskill Mountain resorts of New York, Daniel's orchestra was in demand. The local Greek communities of all the surrounding states flocked to Monte Carlo, Starlight, Nea Olympia, Kallithea, and other nightclubs where he performed. Until the coronavirus pandemic, he continued to work in the summers on cruise ships, taking advantage of the opportunity to travel to beautiful places with his beloved Eleni.

Today, Mike and Eleni live in Bergen County, New Jersey. This year was possibly the last summer they returned to the village where they fell in love, as their children say they will not allow them to make the long and tiring journey from the USA to Greece again.

Mike's fellow villagers, however, continue to hope for an anniversary celebration in the square of the village in 2025, which would be eighty years after his first musical appearance in the village. He had appeared at a dance festival with the small band he had set up with his friends at the time.

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## **The Minoans Who Served King David in Ancient Israel** Full article [Here](#)

The Minoans are most famously known for their connections to Bronze Age Greece and the legend of Atlantis. However, they also had a very surprising connection with King David, the famous king of ancient Israel. In fact, the evidence shows that there may have been groups of Minoans who actually served this ancient king. How do we know this?

### King David's foreign warriors

King David is a very significant figure in the Bible, and historians widely agree that he was a historical figure. He ruled over the land of Israel in approximately 1000 BC. The vast majority of his warriors, needless to say, were fellow Israelites. However, the Biblical record also reveals that he had warriors from other nations.



The Minoan Phaistos Disc, displaying evidence that the Philistines of King David's time were Minoans

Within David's retinue of soldiers was an Israelite man named Benaiah. The Biblical record describes him as being in charge of the Cherethites. Elsewhere, it describes Benaiah as being in charge of King David's personal bodyguard.

This suggests that the Cherethites served as King David's bodyguard. In other words, the Cherethites apparently had a role somewhat similar to the Praetorian Guard in ancient Rome. Notably, these Cherethites were apparently not Israelites.



## The Sea Peoples and the Minoans

There is good reason for linking the Cherethites with the Minoans. Let us consider some important facts. In the twelfth century BC, the Sea Peoples invaded the region, including as far south as Egypt. One notable group of Sea Peoples were the Peleset, the Philistines of Biblical history. There is good reason for identifying them with Cretans. By this period, Crete had already come under the power of the Greeks. The Mycenaeans had conquered the island in the fifteenth century BC, bringing an end to the Minoan trading empire.

Despite this, the Minoan civilisation continued on for quite a few centuries. Although they no longer had control over the island, a distinct Minoan culture is still discernible in the archaeological record until at least the early first millennium BC. Therefore, arrivals from Crete in the twelfth century BC would very likely have included Minoans, not just Greeks. Strongly supporting this is the fact that Egyptian reliefs picture the Philistines as wearing a type of helmet which is essentially identical to a helmet shown on the Minoan Phaistos Disk. Therefore, it is very likely that Minoans composed a large part of the Philistines.

## The Minoans of David's time

After their invasions in the twelfth century BC, Pharaoh Ramesses III defeated them and settled them in southern Canaan, the land of the Philistines. However, despite popular belief, there is evidence that the Philistines (that is, Minoans from Crete) had already been in the region for several centuries. How do these facts relate to the Cherethites who served King David in ancient Israel? Many scholars have suggested that 'Cherethite' is a form of the Hebrew word denoting a Cretan. In fact, the Greek Septuagint replaces this word directly with the Greek word for 'Cretan'.

However, why does the Bible not use this term all the time when referring to the Philistines? Some commentators have made the reasonable suggestion that the Cherethites was the name given to a second (and therefore, less significant) wave of arrivals. In view of the evidence that there were already Philistines living in southern Canaan long before the twelfth century BC, the arrival of the Sea Peoples was evidently this second arrival. Therefore, the Cherethites who served King David were very likely descended from this more recent group.

As we have already seen, the evidence shows that the Philistines who arrived in the twelfth century BC were largely (perhaps even predominantly) composed of Minoans. Thus, this would mean that David's Cherethites were essentially Minoans, although likely mixed with Greeks as well. In other words, this means that Minoans apparently served as part of King David's personal bodyguard in ancient Israel.

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## Muestras Konsejas 'Our Tales' - International Sephardic Essay Competition

The winning submissions from "Muestras Konsejas 'Our Tales'" the first international Sephardic Essay Competition have been published. Presented by The Sephardic Jewish Brotherhood of America and Sephardic Studies at the University of Washington, the 2023-2024 "Muestras Konsejas" writing contest opened a new space for the telling of Sephardic stories. Writers were asked to share an original work of prose (fictional or memoiristic) that gives voice to the experiences of the Ladino-speaking Sephardic Jewish communities (whether from family lore, lived experience, community heritage, life stories, etc.)



Stories were submitted from all over the world and a panel of judges selected four finalists (across both "General" and "Student" submission categories) as the inaugural winners.

We hope you enjoy reading 'Muestras Konsejas' from these accomplished writers! Read the winning essays here: <https://jewishstudies.washington.edu/tag/muestras-konsejas/>

## A Turkish Jew in Nazi Germany: A family's incredible story of survival, and a museum in a suitcase

Full article by Joana Bürger [Here](#)

In the summer of 2022, I spent some weeks in Jerusalem conducting research at the [Central Archives of the History of the Jewish People](#), an important archive on the campus of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem that houses a cache of documents from global Jewish communities. While the scorching sun was burning outside, I crouched over files from the Jewish communities of Turkey, looking for traces of central European Jewish refugees who fled to the region around the Aegean Sea (in present-day Greece and Turkey) due to the Nazis' rise to power in Germany in 1933.



Suddenly, my gaze fell on a curious document. I was holding a typed letter in my hands sent by Alfons Eskenasy from Munich, Germany, to the chief rabbi of Istanbul, Turkey, in 1942. Writing in a mix of broken Ladino (Judeo-Spanish) and fluent French, Eskenasy was asking the chief rabbi for help in regaining his former status as a Turkish citizen.

In the letter, Eskenasy explained that he had been born in Vienna (in present-day Austria) in 1881 to a family of Sephardi Jewish immigrants from the Ottoman Empire, and that he had moved to Munich in 1909. Despite this connection to the Ottoman world, the Turkish consulate in Berlin had renounced his status as Turkish citizen in 1936, after he tried to apply for a Turkish passport to leave Nazi Germany with his wife and his two daughters.

I was intrigued by the fact that this letter had been sent from a Sephardi Jew living in Nazi Germany to Istanbul at the height of the Holocaust. Scholarship on the lives of Ottoman Sephardi immigrants in central Europe and their fate during the Holocaust is very limited. Nonetheless, the story of Eskenasy losing his Turkish citizenship was not unique.

Ottoman minorities, the loss of Turkish citizenship, and the vulnerability of stateless Jews



Alfons' parents, Jacob Avram Eskenasy & Elizabeth Sussin Eskenasy.

The Ottoman Empire, which controlled the region of the eastern Mediterranean for many centuries until it collapsed as a result of World War I, was characterized by social segregation along religious lines (the [millet system](#)). While it was a Muslim empire, Christians and Jews enjoyed certain protections as "people of the book" (followers of other Abrahamic religions).

In the 1920s, the new Turkish state — which succeeded the Ottoman Empire and was established in the region of Anatolia — started to replace the Ottoman identity papers of former Ottoman citizens living abroad with modern nationality certificates. With the goal of creating a religiously and ethnically homogeneous group of citizens, Turkish officials used this process to slowly strip non-Muslim Ottomans of their status as Turkish citizens — a common process in nationalist movements in this era. While initially affecting all religious minorities, by the 1930s this policy of revoking citizenship [increasingly targeted Turkish Jews](#).

While reading this letter, I also knew from the literature that most stateless Jews in Nazi Germany — those without confirmed citizenship in any other country — were among the [first people to be deported](#) to concentration camps. Hence, after finding this letter, I assumed that the Eskenasy family did not survive the Holocaust. But the database of Yad Vashem, the world Holocaust Remembrance Center in Jerusalem, revealed that Alfons Eskenasy and his two grown-up daughters had been deported to Theresienstadt Ghetto — located in modern-day Czechia, close to the eastern border of Germany — in January of 1945. And against all odds, they survived!

Searching for the Eskenasy family in the United States

My detective spirit roused, I continued looking for traces of the Eskenasy family after the war and eventually discovered that they had moved to New York City in the United States in 1947. And not only that, Louise

Eskenasy – Alfons’ older daughter – fell in love with an American soldier who was stationed in Munich after the war. This soldier, Lloyd James McGaughey, was originally from the town of Leavenworth, Washington. After arriving in the United States, Louise moved to Leavenworth to marry Lloyd, and she brought her daughter, Inez — who was born in Nazi Germany in 1938 — with her.

Through some Internet digging, I found a phone number. The eighty-five year-old Inez McGregor, granddaughter of Alfons Eskenasy, whose letter I had found in Jerusalem, lived in a small town only an hour drive away from Seattle, where I was sitting at my laptop doing research. I couldn’t believe the coincidence! So one day, full of excitement and not at all sure that I had found the right person, I picked up the phone and called Inez. And indeed, I spoke to Alfons’ granddaughter.



Inez shows Turkish flags contained in the suitcase of Eskenasy family history

Not only did she invite me to lunch, but she also literally opened up her past in front of me. After we ate, drank and talked, her husband brought out an old trunk. The family had used this suitcase when they were immigrating to the United States almost 76 years ago. Inside, Inez kept a family photo album with pictures going back to her great-grandparents, who had moved from the Ottoman Empire to Vienna; the yellow star that her mother had been forced to wear; and old family documents. From the documents and Inez’s account, I pieced together the story of the family’s survival.

#### A cosmopolitan, multicultural family in 20th-century Munich

Alfons Eskenasy had moved to Munich in 1909 to work as an opera singer. There, he married Louise Lea Hafner, a Catholic German woman, and they had two daughters, Louise (born in 1911) and Carmen (born in 1923). Besides singing at the opera, Alfons was a talented photographer with his own studio, and he took pictures of famous German singers and actors during the period between World War I and World War II.

The family’s photo album exhibits his great sense of humor and his talent for capturing intimate family moments. Through these pictures, I gained a glimpse into the pre-Nazi life of an extraordinary, cosmopolitan, open-minded family. While they celebrated Christmas and decided to baptize their children, they also organized a bat mitzvah for their oldest daughter. While German language and music filled their home, they also had a portrait of the Turkish revolutionary hero Atatürk and Turkish flags hanging in their living room.

Following Hitler’s rise to power, Alfons was deported to the concentration camp in Dachau, close to Munich, because of his Jewish background. According to the [Nazis’ racial laws](#), which came into effect in 1935, a person was considered Jewish and lost their political rights if they had at least three Jewish grandparents. Shortly after his incarceration, however, Alfons was released, probably due to his marriage to a non-Jewish German woman. (Initially, the Nazis hesitated to deport members of mixed families because they were afraid to cause an uproar in German society.)

#### Attempted escape, forced labor, and deportation to a concentration camp

After his release, Alfons tried to get his family out of Nazi Germany, but the Turkish state refused him a Turkish passport. So the family bought tickets to travel by boat to Tangier in Morocco instead, but before they could embark to safety, World War II broke out.

Despite being baptized, the Nazis considered Louise and Carmen as half Jewish and forced them to work at a battery factory in Munich. Their mother, who refused to divorce her Jewish husband, was also forced into hard labor. During their time at the factory, Louise and Carmen engaged in clandestine resistance activities, providing imprisoned forced laborers from Ukraine with extra food and even helping an English prisoner of war to escape.

At the same time, Louise was worried for the safety of her four-year-old daughter, Inez. With the help of a French engineer who periodically traveled to Munich to work at the factory, she managed to find a hiding place for her child in a Bavarian village a few hours away from Munich. They brought little Inez to Bad Schliersee, close to the Austrian border, where she stayed



Louise (left), her young daughter Inez (middle), mother/grandmother Louise Lea (middle), and Carmen (right), 1938.



with a Mrs. Schneider from 1942 to 1945. In January of 1945, Alfons and his daughters were deported to the [Theresienstadt Ghetto](#). Miraculously, they managed to survive, and upon liberation they returned to Munich, where the family was reunited.

An incredible story, a museum in a trunk: The Eskenasy family's "mosaic" of experiences

My archival research in Jerusalem, which initially focused on the fate of Jewish refugees in Turkey, revealed a case of the Turkish state refusing former Ottoman Jews Turkish citizenship and thus blocking their way to safety in Turkey. The story of the Eskenasys' survival exemplifies not only the understudied trajectory of Ottoman Sephardi immigrants in central Europe, but also gives us valuable insights into the fate of stateless Sephardi Jews during the Nazi period.

Furthermore, this research offers glimpses into the pre-war life of a mixed Jewish and non-Jewish couple in Imperial (1871-1918) and Weimar Germany (1918-1933) and shows how they negotiated the different aspects of their identity. For the Eskenasys, being culturally German, affiliated with Judaism and proud of their Turkish origins did not create any contradictions.

The Eskenasy family trajectory links Istanbul to Vienna, Munich, Theresienstadt Ghetto, New York City, and Washington state. The family crossed state borders, switched religious categories, and changed citizenship several times. Born as a Sephardic Jewish Ottoman subject in Vienna, Alfons Eskenasy lived as a Catholic Turkish citizen in Germany – though the Nazi racial laws still counted him as a Jew and the Turkish state pushed him into statelessness – before immigrating to the United States. Eventually, he died as a resident of New York City and was buried in a Jewish cemetery.

Today, an old trunk full of family photographs and documents, which traveled from post-war Germany to Washington state, opens a window into the past of this Sephardi-Catholic-German-Turkish family and their incredible survival during the Holocaust.

The story of the Eskenasy family, which defied any clear national, religious or ethnic categorization, constitutes a mosaic of both the Jewish and non-Jewish experience of political and racial persecution during the Nazi regime.



**Joana Bürger** is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of History who studies Jewish refugees in the eastern Mediterranean in the interwar period. After receiving a B.Sc. in Psychology at Potsdam University in Germany, she completed an International Research M.A. in Middle Eastern History at Tel Aviv University in Israel. Her M.A. thesis focused on Greco-Jewish identity formation in early 20th century Corfu and Athens. Joana became familiar with digital approaches to Holocaust remembrance while working as a translator for the oral history project "Memories of the German Occupation in Greece," conducted by the Freie Universität Berlin and the National Kapodistrias University of Athens. Her research interests are modern Mediterranean Jewish history, migrations in the Eastern Mediterranean in the interwar period and comparative Holocaust memory. For her Ph.D. dissertation, Bürger is researching the Aegean (Greece and Turkey) as a multidirectional transit space for Jewish refugees in the 1930s and 1940s. She is the 2023-24 Mickey and Leo Sreebny Memorial Fellow in Jewish Studies.

**Gershon Harris**  
**Hatzor Haglilit, Israel**



Tisha B'Av – the fast of the 9<sup>th</sup> of Av, falls on August 13<sup>th</sup>. Originally instituted by our Sages to commemorate the destruction of both the First and Second Temples and unlike all other Rabbinically instituted fast days from morning to night, Tisha B'Av is a 25-hour fast, just like the Biblical commanded fast of Yom Kippur. This was instituted to demonstrate the level of tragedy, trauma and mourning we feel at the destruction of the Temples. In addition, and again unlike all other fast days, several customs of mourning are kept from several days before Tisha B'Av, through Tisha B'Av itself.

But beyond the tragedies of the destruction of the Holy Temples, on or in close proximity to the 9<sup>th</sup> of Av, major tragedies that significantly and terribly impacted the entire Jewish occurred. Even special dirges were composed over time lamenting not only the destruction of the Temples, but also many of these other events:

- The spies return from 40 days of scouting the Land of Israel with evil reports about the land, leading to the Israelites to cry in despair and giving up hope of entering the Land of Israel, on 9 Av, 1312 BCE (Hebrew year 2448).
- Destruction of First Temple by the Babylonians, under Nebuchadnezzar on 9 Av, 421 BCE (Hebrew year 3340). About 100,000 Jews killed during invasion. The remaining Jews were exiled to Babylonia and Persia.
- Destruction of Second Temple by Romans, under Titus, on 9 Av, 70 CE (Hebrew year 3830). Over 2,500,000 Jews die as a result of war, famine and disease. Over 1,000,000 Jews were exiled to all parts of the Roman Empire, and over 100,000 sold as slaves by the Romans. Jews were also killed and tortured in gladiatorial "games" and pagan celebrations.
- The Bar Kochba revolt was crushed on the 9 Av, 132 CE (Hebrew year 3892). The city of Beitar was destroyed and over 100,000 killed.
- Turnus Rufus complete ploughs the site of Temple on or around the 9 Av, 132CE (Hebrew year 3893), and the Romans build the pagan city of Aelia Capitolina on the site.
- The First Crusade officially commenced on 15 August 1096 (Av 24, Hebrew year 4856) by order of Pope Urban II. 10,000 Jews were killed in first month, and Jewish communities along the Crusader route in the Rhineland and France were obliterated.
- The Jews were expelled from England on 18 July 1290 (Av 9, Hebrew year 5050).
- The Jews were expelled from France on 22 July 1306 (Av 10, Hebrew year 5066).
- The Jews were expelled from Spain on 31 July 1492 (Av 7, Hebrew year 5252).
- World War I began. In the morning of August 1, Germany declared war on Russia, and that afternoon Russia declared war on Germany. This led to Russia persecuting its Jews with massive deportations, tens of thousands of Jewish hostages, and bloody army-organized pogroms along the entire front line. This devastation resulted in more than 300,000 Jewish civilian deaths.
- On 2 August 1941 (Av 9, Hebrew year 5701), SS commander Heinrich Himmler formally received approval from the Nazi Party for "The Final Solution," which marked the beginning of the Holocaust, during which almost one third of the world's Jewish population was ruthlessly exterminated
- On 23 July 1942 (Av 9, Hebrew year 5702), the mass deportation of Jews from the Warsaw Ghetto to Treblinka began.
- The deadly bombing the building of the AMIA (the Jewish community center in Buenos Aires, Argentina) which killed 86 people and wounded some 300 others, on 18 July, 1994 (10 Av, Hebrew year 5754).

- The 2005 Israeli disengagement from Gaza on August 15th, 2005 (10 Av, 5765) according to some Religious Zionist rabbis like Yaakov Ariel and Dov Lior. Dirges have been composed about the withdrawal. However, many other Rabbis, while seeing this as a tragedy, did not feel it warranted being included in the same category of the foregoing Tisha B'Av calamities.

It is no wonder, then, that the 9th of Av is the most tragic day of the year for the Jewish people. Can this be simply a coincidence, or was the day somehow destined to be so? In fact, in relation to the first tragic event presented above – when the spies returned with their evil reports – The Torah records in Sefer Bamidbar, chapter 14, verse 1, that “*All the community lifted their heads and cried out – that night the people wept.*” On this verse Midrash Rabbah quotes God as saying about this event, “*You cried before me pointlessly, I will fix for you [this day as a day of] crying for the generations*”, alluding to the future misfortunes which occurred on the same date.

As a result, the fast of Tisha B'Av has taken on much greater meaning than just mourning for the destruction of the Temples, making it perhaps more relevant to modern times. But just as tragic as this day is, Jewish tradition teaches that the Messiah will be born on Tisha B'Av, and the final redemption will begin, turning this sad and tragic day into a joyous holiday. As a sign of this belief, in the afternoon of Tisha B'Av, though we continue to fast, we cease the customs of mourning, and in Sephardic communities, even recite a series of many liturgical poems that begin with the words “*Nahamu, nahamu Ami*” – ‘*Be comforted my people, be comforted*’.

May we merit seeing this prophecy be realized speedily in our days!



**Rabbi Marc D. Angel**  
**What Unifies the Jewish People? Thoughts for Tisha B'Av**  
[JewishIdeas.org](http://JewishIdeas.org)

Elias Canetti, a Sephardic Jew who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1981, offers some interesting observations about Jews in his book, “Crowds and Power”: “Fools may tell stories of their sameness everywhere, but anyone who knows them well will be inclined to think that there are more varied types among them than among any other people...Jews are different from other people, but, in reality, they are most different from each other.”

Given the tremendous diversity among Jews, what is the unifying factor that makes us consider ourselves to be one people? Canetti writes: “One is driven to ask in what respect these people remain Jews; what makes them into Jews; what is the ultimate nature of the bond they feel when they say “I am a Jew”....This bond...is the Exodus from Egypt.” Canetti suggests that the Israelites’ formative experience as a vast crowd leaving Egypt is the key to understanding the nature of Jewish peoplehood. As long as Jews—however different they are from each other—share historical memories of the Exodus from Egypt, they continue to identify as members of one people. We are bound together by the shared experience of redemption.

While Canetti touches on a vital point in Jewish identity, his explanation is incomplete.



In his magnificent Haggadah, the artist David Moss has provided another vital ingredient in the mystery of Jewish peoplehood. The Passover seder is, of course, the classic recounting of the Exodus experience. Yet, early in his Haggadah, Moss incorporates a dirge chanted on Tisha B'Av, the quintessential day of Exile and tragedy for the Jewish people. The dirge contrasts the feelings of elation at the Exodus with the sense of despair at the Exile. (On a related note, the evening service of Tisha B'Av at Congregation Shearith Israel in New York features a poignant elegy—"Mah Nishtanah"—which highlights the contrasts between Passover and Tisha B'Av.)

Thus, the Jewish people are unified by two great national experiences: Redemption and Exile.

These experiences are not merely singular historical events, but are prototypes that imbue the entire span of Jewish history—past, present and future. We are supposed to experience the Passover seder as though we ourselves were redeemed from Egypt. We are supposed to experience Tisha B'Av as though we ourselves witnessed the razing of our Temples in Jerusalem and were forced into a long and distressing Exile. Our thousands of years of history are marked by periods of elation and mourning, redemptions and exiles. It is the personal connection with both of these themes that serves to unite us as one people. If one ceases to feel connected to the shared experiences and ramifications of Exodus and Exile, he/she ceases to identify as a Jew.

Just as we recall Tisha B'Av on Passover, so we remember Passover on Tisha B'Av. Even as we mourn the sufferings of Exile, we maintain perfect faith in our ultimate Redemption.

If Exodus and Exile are unifying factors in defining our Jewishness, the Torah itself is the ultimate source of our peoplehood.

In Parashat Devarim, read on the Shabbat before Tisha B'Av, we are told that Moses took it upon himself to expound the Torah to the Israelites (Devarim 1:5). A Midrash suggests that Moses explained the Torah to them in seventy languages. But why would Moses need to explain the Torah in seventy languages, since the Israelites could not possibly have known all these tongues?

The Midrash is obviously alluding to something of deeper significance. Perhaps it is suggesting that the Israelites would ultimately find themselves scattered throughout the world, and would learn many new languages. The scattered communities would become very different from each other, unable even to communicate clearly with each other. Moses explained the Torah in seventy languages so that the Israelites would know that they had a unifying foundation in the Torah. No matter what language they would speak, the Torah would be accessible to them in that language. No matter how separate they seemed to be from other communities of Jews, the Torah bound them together as one people.

As we prepare for the observance of Tisha B'Av, let us take time to ponder the mystery and the wonder of Jewish peoplehood. The Exodus was the formative experience that propelled our people into history, with the principles of freedom and human dignity. The Exile was the experience that underscored our national courage, resilience, compassion and determination. The Torah was—and is—the foundation of our spiritual teachings, our ideas and our ideals.

Those who shed the mournful tears of Exile will ultimately shed the joyful tears of Redemption. And the Torah is, and will be, our light.

## This Easy Rice Dish Is a Sephardi Staple

Arroz kon tomat (aka tomato rice) has a long Jewish history. Article by Susan Barocas [Here](#)

Little did I know growing up that when my family made what we called “tomato rice,” we were actually fixing a dish with a long history. I just knew that my father ate it as a child, and it was simple to make by mixing some tomato sauce into the rice pot, along with water and salt before cooking. Sometimes we also added a box of defrosted frozen spinach if my mother or I had remembered to take it out the freezer in advance.



This beloved and seemingly simple dish, like so much food, has a complex history.

The Moors [introduced rice](#) to Spain in the 8<sup>th</sup> century, making it part of the cuisine that the Jews shared. In the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, conquistadores brought [the tomato back](#) from the New World to Spain. From there it spread eastward across Europe, reaching the Ottoman Empire and beyond, although when is disputed, ranging from the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Since all the modern countries that were part of the Ottoman Empire — including Turkey, Greece and the rest of the Balkans, Lebanon, Iran and Italy – have some form of rice with tomato as part of their cuisine, I’m with those that say the tomato traveled eastward from Spain with the conversos or secret Jews who fled Spain in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. In fact, when the tomato reached Italy later in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, one name for it was “the Jew’s apple.”

So it’s no wonder that tomato rice, most often called arroz kon tomat in Ladino, is very much a part of Sephardic cuisines. Jews were welcomed into and thrived in the Ottoman Empire as they fled Spanish persecution beginning in the 14<sup>th</sup> century and in great numbers following the expulsion in 1492. Stella Cohen, writing about Jewish food from the island of Rhodes in “Stella’s Sephardic Table,” notes that “for the Sephardim in Turkey this pilaf made with ripe fresh tomatoes is also known as arrosito a la Judia (rice the Jewish way).

There are variations, of course, from country to country and family to family. Fresh tomatoes or tomato sauce? If using fresh, are they chopped, crushed or grated? Onions or no onions? Peppers or no peppers? Versions of the Italian recipe are made with tomato paste, sauce or crushed fresh tomatoes and might add garlic, bell peppers, fennel seeds and/or capers. A Persian version called “dami gojeh firangi” is made with diced potatoes and turmeric in addition to crushed fresh tomatoes. Turkey’s iconic dish of tomato pilaf is often made with medium or coarse bulgur instead of rice. And then there’s the recipe in Vefa Alexiadis’ “Greek Cooking Kitchen” that uses fresh tomatoes and ketchup, clearly an Americanized version.

For Aylin Edelman, who grew up in Izmir on Turkey’s western coast, it’s her favorite comfort food. Her mother uses grated fresh tomatoes cooked oil to intensify their flavor before adding the rice.

“It’s a dish that brings back childhood memories of hot summers with juicy tomatoes grown under the Aegean sun. Whenever I go back to Turkey, this is the dish I ask my mother to make.”

Ninety-year-old Paulette Nehama also has fond memories of the dish they called “summer rice” in her childhood in Volos, Greece.

“It was most often served cold or at room temperature in late spring, summer and early fall. although my family ate it year-round.”

In my family, too, tomato rice was always in season, warm in winter but cold or room temperature the rest of the year, making it perfect for summer cookouts and picnics. It’s a dish that makes me feel connected to my family’s [Sephardic heritage](#), with both of my father’s parents coming from the Ottoman Empire.

Recently I decided to try making an updated version of the dish incorporating roasted tomatoes because I so love them, along with onions and roasted garlic. Instead of the tomato sauce of my childhood, I use tomato paste cooked a bit for richer flavor. I also added cardamom, a popular ingredient in many rice dishes, and

thyme for a more complex flavor. In fact, it has so much flavor, I recommend making it with water instead of broth so you can really taste the tomatoes and other ingredients.

As good as this dish is freshly made, it is delicious leftover and will last in the refrigerator for five or six days, so make the full recipe even if you're not serving eight people.

### **Arroz kon Tomat Recipe**

This simple dish works year-round.

Total Time: 1 hour 45 minutes Yield: Serves 6-8

#### **Ingredients**

- 1 ½ –2 lbs grape tomatoes
- 8–10 cloves garlic, unpeeled
- 1 ¼ tsp salt, divided
- 4 Tbsp olive oil, divided
- 10–12 sprigs fresh thyme or 1 tsp dried
- 2 cups long-grain rice, preferably basmati
- 1 medium onion, diced in ¼-inch pieces (about 1 cup)
- 2 Tbsp tomato paste
- 3 ½ cups water
- 1 tsp ground cardamom



#### **Instructions**

1. Preheat the oven to 425°F. Cover baking sheet with parchment paper. The baking sheet should be large enough to hold the tomatoes in a single layer.
2. Put the tomatoes and unpeeled cloves of garlic on the baking sheet. Sprinkle with ¼ tsp salt and drizzle with 2 Tbsp oil. Use your hands to mix the tomatoes and garlic, making sure everything is coated in oil, then spread out on the parchment. Tuck sprigs of thyme around the mixture. Roast for 25-30 minutes until the tomatoes are very soft and charred a little. Set aside to cool.
3. Remove extra starch from the rice by putting it in a fine mesh strainer. Set the strainer over a bowl and fill with tepid water, covering the rice with a few extra inches of water at the top. Let soak for 15-20 minutes, then rinse under cold water and set aside to drain.
4. Once the tomatoes are cool, take a few minutes to peel each one, which will mostly slip easily from their skins. Discard the skins. Run your thumb and forefinger from the top to bottom of each stem of thyme to remove the leaves, letting them fall onto the peeled tomatoes. Scrape the tomatoes into a bowl with all the juices from the pan and set aside.
5. Gently squeeze each clove of roasted garlic out of its skin. Mash well on a small plate and set aside.
6. Heat remaining 2 Tbsp oil over medium heat in a 4- or 5-quart pot with a tight-fitting lid. Add diced onion with a couple pinches of salt and cook about 8-10 minutes, stirring occasionally, until onions are soft and translucent, but not brown.
7. Add tomato paste and mashed garlic to the pot and mix together. Cook 3-4 minutes, stirring often, as the tomato paste darkens a bit in color. Be careful not to burn the mixture.
8. Add the rice to the pot, stirring the mixture together very well to incorporate. Let cook another 3-4 minutes, stirring occasionally and scraping the bottom to keep from browning.
9. Add water, cardamom and remaining 1 tsp of salt to the pot. Turn up the heat to bring to a boil, stir, turn the heat down to low and cover. Simmer gently for 12-14 minutes until all the water is absorbed. The rice cooking time will need to be adjusted if other kinds of rice are used.
10. Remove from heat and let stand, still covered, for 10 minutes before fluffing gently with a fork. Gently stir in about 2/3 of the roasted tomatoes.
11. Spoon the rice onto a rimmed platter or into a wide bowl. Add the remaining tomatoes to the top of the rice and drizzle with the pan juices. Serve hot, cold or at room temperature.



**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.

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When you are in New York, visit us on Broome Street.



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**280 Broome Street, New York NY 10002**

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